

Hallucinating Colours: Psychedelic Film, Technology, Aesthetics and Affect

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Words [...] are static, whereas the psychedelic experience is fluid and ever-changing.

(Timothy Leary, *The Psychedelic Experience*)

Abstract

Within the context of the ERC Advanced Grant *Filmcolors* I investigate subjectivity, affect and aesthetics from an historical perspective, drawing on ideas developed within the field of the history of emotions. However, while most of this research is of a synchronic nature, my work contains a strong diachronic component, based on Fernand Braudel's concept of the 'pluralité des durées' (*La Méditerranée*, 1966). Following Braudel, I distinguish three layers: 1. the layer of slowly changing affects and connected 'topoi'; 2. the foundational layer of culture and discourse; and 3. the film under investigation. In this essay, I lay out my theoretical and methodological reflections by focusing on colour patterns used in films that represent hallucinations. I will lay out several examples of hallucinatory scenes (level 1) and explain their common (biological) grounds. Further, I will zoom in on 1960s psychedelic culture characterized by hallucinating drug use as entertainment and as therapeutic tool (level 2). The film of interest (level 3) is *The Trip* (Roger Corman, 1967), which precisely represents this culture. A combination of the analyses of the three levels brings interesting new perspectives on the 1960s, its psychedelic film culture, and how this relates to the topos of colourful hallucinations.

A flowery pink cloth drops to the floor, unveiling the back of a dark-haired woman as she walks towards a man lying on a bed. Coloured patterns dance over their bodies as they start kissing. The camera moves to the right, panning across the room to a fireplace covered in multicoloured projections of moiré patterns. It then moves back to the bed where we suddenly see a blonde woman sitting next to the couple, watching them make love. The film cuts to a series of shots of the embracing couple from various angles, focusing on different parts of their bodies that are covered in shifting psychedelic colours and patterns, accompanied all

the while by pulsing music. Throughout, the two women repeatedly alternate, taking one another's place. Towards the end, the frame is split into several parts that circle around each other, giving the impression of a kaleidoscopic insect-eye view of the scene.

This three-minute sequence, which I will call the 'rainbow love scene', comes from Roger Corman's film *The Trip* (1967). It shows the film's main character Paul Groves in the grip of an LSD hallucination in which he appears to be making love to his ex-wife (the dark-haired woman) who is repeatedly replaced by the blonde woman. The sequence is simultaneously sensual, erotic and abstract. Its colours are also hallucinatory, in a way that is characteristic of the 1960s. Yet, the idea of creating a surreal atmosphere with the help of disconcerting colour sequences is a cinematic tactic that has frequently been used throughout film history to represent hallucinatory experiences on screen. As such, what gives this fragment such a strong 1960s look while at the same time remaining effective as a representation of a hallucinatory, dream-like event? In other words, in what ways does the representation of hallucinations in film follow more general aesthetic strategies, and which of its elements are specifically characteristic of a certain time period?

This question is part of a larger research project on the history of colour in film, with a focus on technology, aesthetics and subjectivities that I am conducting in the context of the ERC Advanced Grant project *FilmColors*.¹¹ The research team first analysed a large number of films to discover if distinct patterns could be discerned in their colours, surfaces, texture and lighting. My own research interest lies in how this relates to the representation of affect, emotion and subjectivities in film, and one area that I examine closely is the depiction of hallucinations.

One of the first problems I encountered in this research was the question of whether I could historicise affect and subjectivities. Over the past twenty-five years, media studies has witnessed the development of a variety of methodologies to examine affect and emotion in film and other moving images with the help of theoretical perspectives adopted from phenomenology, cognitive psychology and branches of philosophy concerned with the concept of 'affect'. Scholars engaging in this work include Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker, Carl Plantinga, Julian Hanich, Raymond Bellour, Eugenie Brinkema, Scott Bukatman, and Steven Shaviro. However, most of these studies tend to investigate affect ahistorically.²² This is problematic because, like every other element of culture, the visual representation of affect and emotion is historically determined.

¹¹ This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant agreement No. 670446, *FilmColors. Bridging the Gap Between Technology and Aesthetics*. Primary Investigator: Professor Barbara Flueckiger: <<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21207.htm>> [accessed 25 January 2019].

²² Eugenie Brinkema does give general historical overviews at the beginning of her chapters of the concept under investigation. However, in my opinion, the film analyses as such remain rather

Fortunately, this issue has been addressed through the framework of ‘media archaeology’. In his book *What Is Media Archaeology*, Jussi Parikka explains that what distinguishes the approach from other methodologies in affect studies is its historical account of embodiment and its focus on technological conditions.³ As such, media archaeology combines formal film analysis, technological and material history and the history of ideas.

Another approach is that of E. Deidre Pribram, a film and television studies scholar who focuses on media and emotion in a historical context.⁴ Her work is part of a relatively recent movement in cultural history known as the ‘history of emotions’. Jan Plamper lays out the ground principles of this approach in his book *The History of Emotions*.⁵ As Plamper notes, various theories and methodologies have been introduced into the domain to analyse in particular the socially constructed nature of emotions.⁶ Another problem Plamper approaches in his book is the question if affects and emotions are culturally or biologically determined. However, even though the question of ‘nature vs. nurture’ is constantly brought up in the debate, it seems that the questions whether emotions and affects can also be biological, relatively stable entities remain unanswered. In fact, the entire nature vs. nurture — or cultural vs. universal — discussion is mentioned and discussed, but not structurally taken into account when analysing the history of emotions and affects.

In order to address this problem of nature vs. nurture, I draw from the concept of the ‘*pluralité des durées*’ in historical time introduced by Fernand Braudel. Braudel’s study consists of three parts. Each part describes and analyses a specific temporal layer in the history of the Mediterranean. He distinguishes a history that is ‘quasi-immobile’ meaning that it hardly changes over time, the history of groups and groupings that manifest a slow rhythm of change and a rapidly changing history, that of individuals and individual events.⁷ I use these ideas as a template for my study of affect and emotion in film, introducing a similar but slightly modified distinction in layers of historical temporalities.

Braudel’s layer that covers the quasi-immobile milieu, is related to nature

ahistorical in their nature. See: Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³ Jussi Parikka, ‘Media Archaeology of the Senses. Audiovisual, Affective, Algorithmic’, in *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp. 19–40.

⁴ Deidre Pribram, *Emotions, Genre, Justice in Film and Television: Detecting Feeling* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵ Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 68.

⁶ Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What Is the History of Emotions?* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2018); Monique Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion’, *History and Theory*, 51 (2012), 193–220; Anna Parkinson, *An Emotional State. The Politics of Emotion in Postwar West German Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

⁷ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II* 9th edn, 3 vols (Paris: Armand Colin Éditeur, 1949), i, 16–17.

and the way the environment influences human behaviour. This layer partly corresponds to Plantinga's idea of 'direct affect'. In his book *Moving Viewers*, Plantinga argues that '[s]pectator responses to movements, sounds, colours, textures, and manifestations of space are in large part automatic and pre-reflective', and that their reactions to what happens on screen are partly rooted in 'natural perceptual responses that have developed over long periods of human history'.⁸ In other words, these more physiological reactions change at a very slow (quasi-immobile) pace. In my opinion, the physical component of colour perception and the way it affects the body is such a constant factor. This provides a good starting point from which to investigate the quasi-immobile history of colour perception and how it relates to film and affect. In a study on affect and colour, this gradual pace of change corresponds to the slow evolution of human perception and the human visual system — the eye and optical nerves.

However, the concept of 'direct affect' as a direct bodily response to the filmic representation is not exclusively governed by these 'natural perceptual responses'. Plantinga explains that films can also affect spectators according to social conventions and cultural constraints. This brings us to another temporal layer — that of cultural and social discourses relating to colour and affect in film. This layer is determined by the aesthetic and cultural context in combination with the technological possibilities and constraints of the period. Finally, my proposal is that a last temporal layer should cover the filmic events and structures that propel them in the direction of affect. The attempt to address this problem needs to be grounded in the close reading, formal analysis and interpretation of individual films and their colours.

In my opinion, one of the main problems in studying affect and emotion in film is that the implicit *durées* show relatively large variations depending on the elements under scrutiny. This is precisely why it is necessary to investigate all three layers in order to gain a clearer understanding of how colour and affect in film function at different moments of history. To explore this, it is worth returning to the representation of hallucinations in film and specifically to the psychedelic visual culture of the 1960s, taking Roger Corman's 1967 film as a starting point. This brings me back to the questions I formulated in the beginning of the essay: in what way does *The Trip* fit 1960s colour and psychedelic visual culture and what are the characteristics that also speak to more *longue durée* characteristics of hallucinatory imagery?

I started my investigation of hallucination in colour films by searching our analysis database and indeed found a large number of hallucinatory scenes where the distortion of perception was represented by colours that deviate from those that humans 'normally' perceive. Some of the examples include *Nerves* (*Nerven*, Robert Reinert, 1919); *Warning Shadows* (*Schatten eine Nächtliche Halluzination*, Arthur Robinson, 1923), *Blanche Fury* (Marc Allégret, 1948), *Vertigo* (Alfred

⁸ Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 117.

Hitchcock, 1958), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976), *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), and of course *The Trip*.

The correlation between the use of colour and hallucinatory scenes is clearly discernible in each of these films. In *Nerves*, for example, the scenes that show hallucinations are tinted pink, and in *Blanche Fury* the hallucination is represented through the image turning red, while Hitchcock's *Vertigo* presents a close-up of the main character of Scottie as he breaks down and hallucinates while the image turns monochrome red, purple and blue. This technique is also used in *The Trip* where the image of the main character Paul Groves as he hallucinates turns monochrome yellow, red, green, blue and purple. The correlation between hallucinations and the transformation of everyday colours into uncanny and unexpected hues is an aspect often remarked on in the literature on the subject. In his book *Hallucinations*, Oliver Sacks gives multiple examples of testimonies of hallucinatory experiences that mention strange, bright, saturated colours.⁹ For example, Sacks quotes Daniel Breslaw, a subject in the LSD experiments undertaken at Columbia University in the 1960s, who claimed to have experienced colours that he had never seen before in real life.¹⁰ The use of colours that deviate from the common experiential norm to represent the hallucinatory and imaginary is something we encountered over the entire corpus of films studied from 1895–1995 in our research and is corroborated by many of the testimonies recorded in the literature beyond film history. Therefore, it is plausible that this combination is similar to a topos, which can be loosely defined as a reoccurring theme in cultural utterances.¹¹ At the same time, this topos moreover shows strong connections to the quasi-immobile or slowly-changing pace of the physical experience of hallucinations.

Even though hallucinations occurred over the entire period we investigated, the 1960s showed an extra-colourful interest in this type of imagery. Films such as *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964), *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, 1968), *Psych Out* (Richard Rush, 1968) are films from the decade that particularly stood out. We also encounter a more indirect reference to hallucinations, tripping and drug use in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The film ends famously with a colourful sequence in which we witness the astronaut Dave Bowman's experience of dying and rebirthing in an astral form.¹² Whereas this final scene is not narratively embedded as relating to a psychedelic hallucination, it was perceived as representing one, quickly drawing large numbers of pot-smoking 'hippies' into the cinema in

⁹ Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations* (London: Picador/Pan Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 143

¹¹ Erkki Huhtamo, 'Dismantling the Fairy Engine. Media Archaeology as Topos Study', in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications*, ed. by Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 29.

¹² Douglas Trumbull, 'Creating Special Effects for *2001: A Space Odyssey*', *American Cinematographer*, 49.6 (1968), 416–19 and 451–53 (p. 452).

1968. A year later, the aforementioned scene became known in these circles by the epithet 'the trip'.¹³

The special effects for this sequence were the work of Douglas Trumbull, who used the slit-scan technique to produce the impression of fast forward movement through a corridor of abstract coloured images. He was inspired to use slit-scan technology by the work of experimental filmmaker John Whitney. However, whereas Whitney moved the slit across the frame to produce abstract coloured images, Trumbull made it travel in depth by moving the camera towards the slit while photographing moving images behind it.¹⁴ The result is a sequence with extremely coloured movement giving the impression of flying with great speed through a space corridor. This sequence is intercut with still images of Dave Bowman's face.

In addition, and maybe more importantly, Kubrick (and Trumbull) seem to have been inspired by experimental film in a more aesthetic way. Especially the abstract images and sounds after the corridor show great similarities to the work by Jordan Belson so much so that Pauline Kael did not hesitate to call it theft.¹⁵ Since Belson is known for having used peyote and other hallucinogens for his visions, this might explain why spectators interpreted the *2001*-scene as a trip.¹⁶ This level of our investigation relates to the second layer, which is that of the cultural context.

In order to delve deeper into 1960s psychedelic culture, hallucinations in film and their relationship to colour, I will take the film *The Trip* as the individual level of the event. The analysis as such will move through the temporal layers, from the 'event' or, in this case, the film, to the layer of cultural and technological context, to that of the quasi-immobile perception of colours, and back. *The Trip* centres on Peter Fonda in the role of Paul Groves, a director of advertising films, who is going through a painful divorce. In an attempt to heal himself, he decides to take LSD in a therapeutic setting. The film mainly shows the actual trip Groves experiences. Another actor involved in the film was Jack Nicholson, who presumably wrote the scenario, although Chuck Griffith is also mentioned as the author of the 'original' script.¹⁷ Both Nicholson and Griffith had taken LSD and were writing from experience. Dennis Hopper, another actor who dabbled in LSD, appears in the film as a hippy passenger in Groves' reality and in his hallucinatory trip.¹⁸

¹³ Trumbull, 'The "Slit-Scan" Process as used in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and beyond', *American Cinematographer*, 50.10 (1969), 998–1001, 1012–13, 1016–17, 1020–22 and 1024–26 (p. 998).

¹⁴ Ivi, pp. 998–99; Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), pp. 151–56.

¹⁵ Pauline Kael, 'Trash, Art and the Movies', in *Going Steady. Film Writings, 1968–1969* (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 124.

¹⁶ Youngblood, p. 159.

¹⁷ Beverly Gray, *Roger Corman: Blood-sucking Vampires, Flesh-eating Cockroaches, and Driller Killers* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004), pp. 87–88.

¹⁸ Nicholson, Fonda and Hopper are also known for their appearance together in the film *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper) that was released two years later, in 1969.

According to Corman, everyone involved in the production had taken LSD, including Corman himself, who tried it specifically for the film.¹⁹ Apparently Corman had travelled to a picturesque seaside cliff in Big Sur, California, with his assistant Frances Doel as a 'guide'. Whereas Corman took the drugs his assistant did not, and was merely present to witness and assist with the 'exercise'. It appears that Corman had a magical experience, seeing spellbinding images; however, because he felt he owed his audience an obligation of truth, he also talked to those who had experienced 'bad trips' and included their testimonies in the film.²⁰ To transmit these experiences and testimonies through the medium of film, Corman 'relied on hallucinatory visual images in dazzling color'.²¹

Indeed, a brief investigation of Dutch newspapers from 1968 and 1969 resulted in a number of interesting critiques of *The Trip*. Most of them mentioned the colours of the film as extraordinarily beautiful and 'crazy', and claimed they represented the LSD experience quite faithfully.²² One critic even praised the film laboratories for their work in creating such colours.²³ The film's intense colours were also referred to on its poster as 'psychedelic', directly connecting colour to LSD-induced hallucinations.²⁴

In the narrative exposition at the start of *The Trip* we are introduced to the main character, Paul, his wife Sally (Susan Strasberg) and John (Bruce Dern), who is there to guide Paul through his LSD experience. In passing, we encounter (mostly stoned) figures who re-appear in Paul's hallucination, such as the archetypical hippy, Max (Hopper), and the beautiful blonde, Glenn (Salli Sachse). Towards the end of the film's opening sequence, Paul and John enter an apartment decorated in psychedelic colours. It is here that John gives Paul the LSD and makes him lie down on a couch, where he covers his eyes to help induce the psychedelic mode of perception. After a moment of darkness, we start to hear music over the sound of Paul's beating heart. At the same time, multi-coloured abstract shapes follow each other in rapid succession. The 'rainbow love scene'

¹⁹ Constantine Nasr, *Roger Corman: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), p. 88.

²⁰ Pawel Aleksandrowicz, *The Cinematography of Roger Corman: Exploitation Filmmaker or Auteur?* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

²¹ Gray, pp. 87–88.

²² Bob Bertina, 'Cinemanifestatie Utrecht 68. LSD-trip', *Volkskrant*, 7 February 1968, p. 9; Henk van der Meyden, 'Ontkleed meisje op VPRO-scherm/Start nieuwe stijl maar: Wat gebeurt er met "De Trip" in Nederland', *Telegraaf*, 10 October 1967, p. 15; C.B. Doolaard, 'Corman proeft aan LSD', *Parool*, 1 March 1968, p. 17; 'TRIP met LSD. 't blijft bij een poging', *Vrije Volk*, 8 November 1968, p. 21; A. van O., 'The trip. LSD-reis als te mager thema', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 31 January 1969, p. 14; Henk ten Berge, 'Veel filmgeweld op de Cinemanifestatie. Peter Fonda werd "high"', *Telegraaf*, 7 February 1968, p. 13. All clippings were found in the amazingly rich digital newspaper archive from the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in The Netherlands called Delpher. See: <<https://www.delpher.nl/>> [accessed 25 January 2019].

²³ Doolaard, p. 17.

²⁴ For poster see IMDB: <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062395/mediaviewer/rm3665102336>> [accessed 15 October 2018].

that occurs soon after this first experience also uses such kaleidoscopic patterns. First, the coloured light projections contain patterns that are similar to abstract kaleidoscopic images. Then, towards the end of the scene, the frame splits into four or more different parts, resulting in a multiplication of moving images, giving the perception of the kaleidoscopic effect of seeing the world through an insect's compound eyes.

In 1960s cinema, such kaleidoscopic abstract imagery to stand in for hallucinatory and altered states was not specific to *The Trip*. For example, Eric Duvivier, who made medical films for pharmaceutical companies, also used kaleidoscopic images in some of his films of hallucinations such as *Images du monde visionnaire* (co-directed with Henri Michaux, 1963).²⁵ Other examples are *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut, 1966) in which kaleidoscopic images appear on television sets, hypnotising their viewers. The British film *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (Vernon Sewell, 1968) also shows kaleidoscopic images to simulate the experience of hypnosis.²⁶

These colourful, abstract shapes are what Sacks calls 'simple hallucinations'.²⁷ Psychologist Heinrich Klüver observed that these types of hallucinations are common in a variety of pathological and situational phenomena such as migraine (the migraine's 'aura'), sensory deprivation (the 'prisoner's cinema'), hypoglycaemia, fever, delirium, and the hypnagogic state directly before and after sleep. Of course, psychedelic drug use can also bring about these types of hallucinations. Albert Hofmann, who was the first to synthesize LSD in 1938 and who accidentally tested it on himself, testified to what he saw as 'an uninterrupted stream of fantastic images of extraordinary plasticity and vividness and accompanied by an intense kaleidoscopic play of colors'.²⁸

The persistent recurrence of descriptions of multi-coloured, abstract, kaleidoscopic images over a larger time frame permits us to categorize them as examples of the 'quasi-immobile' of visual hallucinations. Some psychologists and researchers suggest that these visions have a universal biological origin.²⁹ For example, Klüver, in his book, *Mechanisms of Hallucination* (1942), suggests that 'such constants must reflect something about the organization, the functional architecture, of the visual cortex'.³⁰ In other words, he claims that what we are witnessing in such an experience are our own nerves and synapses firing off electricity. Following Klüver, mathematicians and neuroscientists continued

²⁵ This film is based on Henri Michaux writings on his experiences with mescaline and hashish. Henri Michaux, *Miserable Miracle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), Michaux, *L'infini turbulent*, 1968th ed. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957), Michaux, *Connaissance par les Gouffres* (Paris: NRF, Le point du jour, 1961)

²⁶ <<https://eastmancolor.info/2018/10/11/hypnosis-as-spectacle-in-british-horror/>> [accessed 15 October 2018].

²⁷ Sacks, p. 26.

²⁸ Hofmann in Sacks, p. 136.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 190.

³⁰ Klüver in Ivi, pp. 141–42.

to investigate and confirmed potential connections between primary visual hallucinations and the way the visual cortex is shaped and functions.³¹

As such, it should be of no surprise that kaleidoscopic images were a popular staple of visual culture (a topos) for a longer period. One example is the well-known nineteenth-century kaleidoscopic lantern slides that were manually cranked to make the colours swirl around and over each other. Interestingly, as film historian Joshua Yumibe explains, these nineteenth-century toys were a form of entertainment ‘to shape the viewer’s subjective perception to an orderly system that rationalized space, time, and color’.³² In other words, they were the result of scientific investigation of optics and perception and were partly meant to test hypotheses on the senses and perception, and partly to re-educate and discipline the observer into a modern one.³³

The fact that the kaleidoscopic, multi-coloured images in *The Trip* were part of a strategy to show the inner perception of a hallucination turns this rationalizing function upside down. Instead of ordering and rationalizing, these images unleashed colours that were out of control, challenging chromatic vision. As such, they fit perfectly with Kirsten Moana Thompson’s description of the psychedelic counterculture’s use of colour in the 1960s: ‘Whereas in Western culture we tried to control colour with the help of colour-cards, colour harmonies, colour consultants, and colour psychology, in the 1960s colour was being unleashed especially in the psychedelic culture.’³⁴ However, placing these insights in a wider perspective entails diving a little deeper into the second level of the ‘milieu’ formed by the psychedelic culture and the use of LSD, characteristic of the 1960s.

The aforementioned poster of *The Trip* not only refers to its colours as ‘psychedelic’, it also announces the film as ‘A Lovely Sort of Death’ (‘LSD’). This slogan refers to *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of Dead* (1964) by Timothy Leary, which Corman read before making *The Trip*.³⁵ In his book, Leary follows the structure and logic of *The Tibetan Book of*

³¹ G. B. Ermentrout and J. D. Cowan, ‘A Mathematical Theory of Visual Hallucination Patterns’, *Biological Cybernetics*, 34.3 (1 October 1979), 137–50, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00336965>> [accessed 25 January 2019]; Jennifer Ouellette, ‘A Math Theory for Why People Hallucinate’, *Quanta Magazine*, 30 July 2018, <<https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-math-theory-for-why-people-hallucinate-20180730/>> [accessed 25 January 2019]; Eric Tkaczyk, ‘Pressure Hallucinations and Patterns in the Brain’, *Morehead Electronic Journal of Applicable Mathematics*, 1 (2001), 1–26; Paul C. Bressloff and others, ‘What Geometric Visual Hallucinations Tell Us about the Visual Cortex’, *Neural Computation*, 14.3 (March 2002), 473–91, <<https://doi.org/10.1162/089976602317250861>> [accessed 25 January 2019].

³² Joshua Yumibe, *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), p. 141.

³³ Ivi, p. 24.

³⁴ Kirsten Moana Thompson, ‘Falling in(to) Color: Chromophilia and Tom Ford’s *A Single Man* (2009)’, *The Moving Image*, 15.1 (2015), 62–84.

³⁵ *The Movie World of Roger Corman*, ed. by J. Philip Di Franco (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1979), pp. 48–49.

the Dead, which describes the travels/experiences of the soul between dying and reincarnation.³⁶

Leary was a psychologist with a doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. After spending time working at universities in various countries, he started lecturing at Harvard in 1959, where he founded the Harvard Psilocybin Project with Richard Alpert. The project's aim was to research the effects of LSD and psilocybin on human consciousness.³⁷ In 1963, however, the project was halted by the university management, and Alpert and Leary were both fired. Although the Harvard Psilocybin Project might seem a strange and dangerous experiment today, the use of LSD in psychology, psychotherapy and psychiatry was well established at the time.³⁸ However, as the 1960s progressed, attitudes changed, and the use of LSD became increasingly less accepted, until the drug was finally declared illegal in 1968 in the United States, except for medical research.

After his dismissal, Leary became renowned as a public countercultural figure. He continued his experiments and defended the use of drugs as a mind-opening therapeutic method. His catch-phrase, 'Turn on, tune in, drop out', encouraged 'turning on' the psychedelic experience (like a TV set), 'tuning in' to the right experiential wave length, and then 'dropping out' from the experience itself and back into 'normal life', integrating this so-called 'psychedelic perception' into everyday experience. Leary even claimed that it was media philosopher Marshall McLuhan, whom he knew and admired, who inspired him to use a catch phrase to promote his ideas.³⁹

McLuhan was convinced that the ways in which media influences, shapes and perceives the world needed more thorough investigation. As such he considered media to be the message, the source of information for his research, more than the content they distributed.⁴⁰ The premise that external factors had such strong effects on the human mind, dovetails very well with Leary's ideas on LSD. Leary propagated the notion that LSD inspired people to question social norms, and it consequently had the power to transform society: 'LSD rearranged the "imprinting process" in the human mind and allowed people to rethink things they had previously taken for granted.'⁴¹ This discourse was part of the 1960s counterculture, a movement that was defined by its rejection of the establishment

³⁶ The reference to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in relation to hallucinations and drugs is also made in *Enter the Void* (Gaspar Noé, 2009).

³⁷ <<https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/people/timothy-leary>> [accessed 16 October 2018].

³⁸ The Wikipedia page on LSD is a good starting point for those who want to know more about the history of LSD, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_lysergic_acid_diethylamide#> [accessed 16 October 2018].

³⁹ See Lisa Rein and Michael Horowitz, 'Timothy Leary and Marshall McLuhan, turned on and tuned in', *Boing Boing*, 2014, <<https://boingboing.net/2014/06/03/timothy-leary-and-marshall-mcl.html>> [accessed 17 October 2018].

⁴⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* 5th edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964); Rein and Horowitz.

⁴¹ Scott Stephenson, 'LSD and the American Counterculture: Comrades in the Psychedelic Quest',

— LSD use was prevalent amongst those who identified with the movement. The idea was that LSD would help to loosen the grip of existing rules and regulations that limit perception and imprison the body and mind, and to set perception free.⁴²

These beliefs seem to come together in the ‘rainbow love scene’ in which Paul makes love to Sally and Glenn. First of all, the scene represents the 1960s ‘summer-of-love’ theme of free sex, which relates to freedom of mind, imagination and choice of partners. Second, through its edited close-ups on the sensuous movements of Sally’s feet, the sound-track of her moaning and the excessive colours, the scene strongly implies female orgasm, which could be seen as the liberation of the female body and sexuality.⁴³ Especially interesting here is the connection between the female orgasm and colour, which occurs in other films. For example, when Janet Weiss from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) experiences an orgasm during the song ‘Toucha, toucha, toucha, touch me’ she is covered in rainbow coloured light, or the scene in *Barbarella* when Durand Durand tries to kill Barbarella with a colour organ causing deadly orgasms. Third, the scene shows fluctuating colours in constant movement, ceaselessly shifting camera angles and positions, people and shapes, making the ‘psychedelic vision as a burst of freedom and mobility’ visible in a sensuous way, challenging ‘normative modes of perception’ and ‘calling into question the rigid and repressive conceptions of reality and consciousness’.⁴⁴

Not only were society rules and regulations challenged by *The Trip*, but the film also pushed the possibilities of the colour technology. The film’s special effects technician, Bob Beck, wrote an article in 1968 on the making of the film in *The American Cinematographer*. He dwells extensively on the multi-coloured love scene, discussing the technological problems they had in shooting it. The light sensitivity of the film material available at the time was too low to film the gloomy atmosphere created by the projection of the coloured lights onto the moving bodies; there was a risk that when creating the ‘general mood effect’ there would not be enough light to also create the ‘projected psychedelic effect’: ‘Even with extensive modifications, the amount of light on the subjects was only around 24-foot candles, which meant that our film, Eastman Color Negative, had to be processed to an ASA rating of 200 by the Pathé Laboratories.’⁴⁵ The Eastmancolor 5251 negative stock that was available in 1967 had a light sensitivity

Burgmann Journal, III (2014), <https://www.academia.edu/11558803/LSD_and_the_American_CounterCulture_Comrades_in_the_Psychedelic_Quest> [accessed 16 October 2018].

⁴² Andrew Syder, ‘“Shaken out of the Ruts of Ordinary Perception”: Vision, Culture and Technology in the Psychedelic Sixties’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern California, 2009), p. 30.

⁴³ Anna Powell, *Deleuze, Altered States and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 67–68.

⁴⁴ Syder, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Bob Beck, ‘Creating “Psychedelic” Visual Effects for “The Trip”’, *American Cinematographer*, 151.3 (1968), 176–79.

of 50 ASA, which meant that the amount of pushing needed for exposure was not extreme but significant enough to potentially increase the visibility of the grain in the photographic image. The result is a sombre, relatively dark though still colourful image, full of movement and fluidity. Because of the increased graininess, the images may have become even more abstract than was originally intended.⁴⁶

Andrew Derek Syder argues that attempts to simulate acid trips on screen in psychedelic films such as *The Trip* also challenged the visual codes and spectator positions associated with classical cinema. Unfortunately, he does not give any direct examples to illustrate this claim.⁴⁷ However, the ‘rainbow love scene’, with its coloured light projections, does come close to challenging what was technically possible. The scene’s colour projections are directly connected to the counterculture party scene of the 1960s. Beck himself was a self-made light engineer, developing and renting out equipment for light shows that were held with the help of overhead projectors, liquids and sometimes film.⁴⁸ The 1960s was the decade of psychedelic music, immersive ‘happenings’, ‘expanded cinema’ and ‘LSD art’, which was not only exhibited in discotheques, night clubs, and other music venues but also in museums and art galleries.⁴⁹ One of the aims of LSD art was to reproduce the sort of psychedelic perceptions that occurred when taking mind-expanding drugs.⁵⁰ For example, the media art collective USCO, which presented so-called ‘psychedelic theatre’, claimed that their art had the potential to function in a similar way to LSD. The group explicitly took as its philosophical basis the theories of Marshall McLuhan who, as I mentioned before, argued that the way media influence how we shape and perceive the world needs more thorough investigation. USCO tried to put McLuhan’s injunction into effect by reproducing the experience of an LSD hallucination in an immersive multimedia event: they employed projection techniques that used the entire space as a screen, including the bodies of the spectators in order to experiment with and study the very ways in which these techniques shape perception.

With its colourful patterns projected on walls, furniture and bodies, the

⁴⁶ This might explain why people seem to miss the fact that Paul is making love to two women instead of one. For example: Bertina, and Powell.

⁴⁷ Syder, p. 7.

⁴⁸ He even wrote a manual for do-it-yourself light shows. See Robert C. Beck, *Color Games Light Show Manual* 3rd edn (Los Angeles: Pericles Press, 1966).

⁴⁹ One of the best-known examples of this practice is the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, a sort of Gesamtkunstwerk installation art by Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground and Nico. In 1967 Ronald Nameth made the film *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* based on registrations made during the shows. He filmed on Ektachrome and had the same problems with the light sensitivity as Bob Beck. He also had the material pushed, which resulted in an increased graininess of the images (source: email exchange with Ronald Nameth, 2017).

⁵⁰ Howard Junker, ‘LSD: “The Contact High”’, *Nation*, 5 July 1965, <<https://www.thenation.com/article/lsd-contact-high/>> [accessed 5 March 2018]; ‘New Experience that Bombards the Senses. LSD Art’, *LIFE Magazine*, 9 September 1966, pp. 60–69; ‘Wild New Flashy Bedlam of the Discothèque’, *LIFE Magazine*, 27 May 1966, pp. 72–76.

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rainbow love scene mirrors this practice. However, whereas in *The Trip* the viewer watched the LSD experience in a more classical way (that is, seated in a cinema, their experience was strongly dependent on their identification and engagement with the character Paul onscreen), USCO tried to replicate the experience by immersing the spectator in the performance itself, ‘bombing their senses’ with light and sound.

Recapping, the close-reading of the film *The Trip* (layer of event) showed several connections and relations to both the layer of culture and discourses, and that of colour perception and hallucinations. As a result, it is clear that the film is strongly rooted in the cultural context of psychedelic culture and its accompanying colour performance culture, which explains why the film has such a strong 1960s ‘look’. At the same time, the film uses reoccurring patterns such as kaleidoscopic images, saturated colours, and moving colours to visually represent hallucinations. These are elements that are part of the ‘quasi-immobile’ way the human body and mind produce internal imageries when hallucination occurs, and which entered our visual culture as *topoi* as well.

The analysis here of hallucinations from the perspective of ‘*pluralité des durées*’ has proven to be very productive. The possibility to jump from one layer to the other, and to be aware of it, allows for interesting comparisons which bring about deeper understandings of colour films and colour cultures.