

## 2. An Experiment in Hallucination

- written May 15, 2022 with my then partner, pseudonymously, Subject-09<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Here's to all the lost loves parted by national borders 🇺🇸.

### Prelude

-Weaver:

For a long time now, I have wanted to experiment with visual hallucinations. So far, most attempts had been lackluster when done with traditional hypnotic means. A while back, I had the idea of using some less than traditional means, namely, the pareidolia, Ganzfeld, and Troxler effects.

- Pareidolia refers to seeing shapes and faces where there are none, usually in ambiguous visuals such as clouds, textures on walls, shrubbery, etc.
- Ganzfeld effect is a step up from that, and uses a visually homogenous field, such as ping-pong balls cut into half and stuck over someone's eye to create a uniform visual stimulus where there are no patterns. Like sensory deprivation but with colored blindfolds. This causes visual hallucinations quite reproducibly and reliably to various extents in different people.
- Troxler effect is a general effect, but the particular case of use in mirrors is interesting. When you stare at your reflection in the mirror and focus on your eyes, the Troxler effect sets in. And as it does, you might find that parts of your face begin to disappear, blend and morph.

Of these, Ganzfeld was the one I was most interested in; it both has a setup that lent itself to ritual and was not as tied to the context. (Troxler too, I think, can have interesting applications in depersonalization and playing with identity. It's in a weird spot for me of being fine if you don't make it too serious and meaningful but feels wasted if you don't. I am keeping that in the back pocket still.)

And I had the chance to do this experiment with the ganzfeld effect recently. Subject-09 was nagging me about editing my thesis, which I wanted to procrastinate on, but we both knew I couldn't afford to. Still, I didn't want to waste the little time with her and told her we might as well do the experiment while I was working. I will admit having her in sensory deprivation while I worked was perhaps petty since I wanted to get her back for the grievous crime of holding me accountable. .

### Ganzfeld Experiment with Weaver

-Subject-09 (April 23rd, 2022):

Weaver set up the experiment by taping my mouth and handed me a pair of earplugs and a nasal strip (deviated septum issues). He walked me over to the bed, secured my wrists and ankles, placed a weighted blanket over my body, and blindfolded me. For the blindfold, we needed something white rather than dark. It was a bit challenging to find something suitable. We opted to use one of those disposable face masks with a white side. He also set up a Shepard tone audio track, which I did not realize until later. The stillness was comforting at first. However, the room's brightness against the whiteness of the makeshift eye mask made me feel somewhat restless. Yet, what ended up being an hour felt like 30 minutes at most. At first, I started seeing yellow and orange splotches. It reminded me of the time I almost passed out one hot summer afternoon as a child. I was walking toward my teacher in a feverish daze, and I somehow knew it was her because of those yellow and orange splotches were her silhouette. However, there was no silhouette my vision could latch onto this time. I was only able to see whiteness, and the splotches remained formless.

In the middle of the experiment, Weaver entered the room to make sure I was awake. At this point, I was feeling slightly floaty. I was not focusing on my body in particular, nor did I feel the need to. My thoughts went from thinking about randomness to focusing on what I was seeing in the whiteness. He spoke to me, but I am not sure of the exact details. However, I knew he mentioned a red dragon of sorts. I imagined what it would be like to see the yellow and orange splotches take on that form. He exited the room, and I stayed in the stillness. The frequency of the Shepard tones became more apparent. Eventually, clearly formed indigo circles joined my vision. They were smaller than the splotches and clustered in a way that reminded me of irises. When I concentrated on the thought of flowers, the circles took on the form of those petals briefly. The indigo circles would also flicker like a flame sometimes. At one point, both the petals and stems formed and then reverted into indigo circles with only stems attached to them.

Weaver entered the room once more. He removed the tape and the restraints and spoke to me; I can't remember the exact words since it was a while ago. There was a distinct suggestion to be unable to see him. When I opened my eyes, he was gone. I could hear him walking around the room. The creaking of the floor and the direction of his voice gave me a sense of where he was. Even when I scrambled for my glasses, he was still gone. He told me that I would only see his hands. They were cupped and held in front of me; disembodied and nearly inconceivable. He made flower arrangements in them. I mainly saw roses; and the colours would fade into other colours at his whim. The same dragon I struggled to imagine initially came to life as he spoke of it. It looked like a hybrid of Mushu and Shenron. He moved on to touching my arm and my face. This started throwing me off because I did not know when his touch would come. Sometimes his hands were there, and sometimes they were not. This part becomes a bit foggy; I think I became confused about something and froze. He made himself reappear at this point, which gave me a small sense of relief. He also suggested to see an aura around him. I saw what appeared to be a bright light behind him, but his body covered the "source" of light. One of the last suggestions I can recall was to feel a chain around my neck. I saw this thin gold chain that grazed around my neck. As he pulled on it, I felt the urge to slide my fingers under the chain to give my neck space. I could feel the thin chain across my fingers; and the strength and fragility of it all.

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## Analysis

-Weaver:

A bit of background, a lot of the setup was mostly witch doctoring<sup>2</sup>. The mouth taping, the hand tied with a Velcro strap, and the nasal strip were all probably unnecessary but added to the ritual of it. Little touches that should be functionally inert but act to increase the meaningfulness of the experience.

The Shepard tone as generated by a [mynoise.net generator](https://mynoise.net/generator/) had the primary function of making her uncomfortable to ensure she didn't fall asleep. The tone produces an auditory illusion of a scale constantly increasing or decreasing in pitch<sup>3</sup>. There's also some credible reports of creating kinesthetic illusions of floating up or sinking down depending on which way the pitch is going. I used the one that went "up" since I wanted to avoid any associations with sinking or falling asleep. This is a bit more functional than the other touches, so was the weighted blanket, to create a kinesthetic sense of deprivation and keep her in comfortably in place.

Ganzfeld effect requires none of these additional touches, though silence or white/brown/pink noise is often used to create auditory sense of deprivation. The mask was a flash of genius on her part, I was mostly stumbling around to find/make something that would work. The usual DIY way to do this would be to cut ping-pong balls into halves and tape them over the eyes while in research, they use commercial whiteout goggles which cost way more than they are worth.

I should also note, **at no point in this entire thing did I do an induction or trigger a trance**. However, ganzfeld experiences have been speculated to be due to altered states of consciousness by researchers. In reading her account, there also seems to be a brief moment of regression. But most of this was done in the style that I favor where I mostly try to do things via direct tranceless suggestions. You might think of it as permanosis<sup>4</sup> or maybe it helps to think in terms of how posthypnotic triggers work without a trance. Only, suggestions and commands instead of trigger words, and no trance to install them. I sometimes flirt with trance, but this Abracadabra – I-create-as-I-speak style feels more flexible though can be a bit of a pain setting up.

I wanted to primarily see if I could manipulate the ganzfeld experience hallucination themselves at the very least. But I also wanted to see if I could bring the hallucinations out of the context of sensory deprivation. I didn't do much in terms of the former since I was mostly working on my thesis but I think bridging the gap between the hallucinations under sensory deprivation and the more everyday context of the room was the most crucial bit. Before I told Subject-09 to open her eyes, I gave her the direction that I would be invisible, and she will be unable to see me. A crucial part of this, I think, was being out of view, standing pressed against the wall behind her when she opened her eyes. I think this firms up the illusion, as she wouldn't have seen me even if she wasn't hallucinating.

The precursor experience of ganzfeld hallucinations and this brief moment, I imagined, should lend enough plausibility and expectation to have her experience the suggestion. Of course, I started with the negative hallucination due to the community wisdom of it being easier than positive hallucinations. From then on, it mostly happened as she describes it. A key point in giving the suggestions to see new constructs seems to be having her close her eyes and then tell her to see it or discover it. Another thing happened a while later when we were doing other things and the flow of that experience was interrupted. I told her to see my eyes on fire and it **didn't work**. I have brown eyes, and I thought baby-stepping her should be successful. So I told her to see my eyes as black, which worked, and then as if they were voids into eternal darkness, which did too, and finally, see flames flickering in them. Once she could hallucinate a smaller construct, it could be morphed into other more complicated ones. Now she has this permanent ability to hallucinate for me on command though it sometimes needs a slight nudge depending on context, headspaces, etc.

Individual responses to something like this will vary and Dr. Reshane Reeder has an interesting [theoretical model](#) about what those individual differences might be. Subject-09 is very visual in her phenomenology despite the lack of past successes in hallucinating. The mask method may not work for others, she wears glasses, and without them, her vision was more diffused. If you are thinking of trying this, whatever you use, needs to be uniform all over, including the edges of the visual field. The ping-pong method seems to be the most tried and true. The color of the visual field is also thought to matter, green is supposed to be relaxing and red increases arousal and makes you overestimate time.

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## Epilogue

-Weaver, of the future:

<sup>2</sup> It's a word that I inherited from James Tripp, they are actions or questions that are tacit suggestions that imply a deeper meaning that is left to the imagination of the subject.

<sup>3</sup> Famously used by Christopher Nolan in Dunkirk for the [sound of the planes](#).

<sup>4</sup> A term coined by Anthony Jacquin and Kev Sheldrake to describe subjects responding to suggestions without a trance once they had once experienced those suggestions already, implying a learning effect.

I am posting this on the blog with some hesitation, but it is as good a start as any. If anyone tries my ganzfeld protocol in there, I would love to hear about it. However, be careful with this, especially if you have certain pre-dispositions or family history (psychosis, delusions, schizophrenia, HPPD, etc) that would act as risk factors for hallucinations going out of control. The three times I have played with this stuff, once with ganzfeld (referenced in the guide), once with fire kasina meditation<sup>5</sup> (on myself) and once with synesthesia (on a third different person), I have found myself lean towards caution and stopping before it felt like things could go out of control and taking breaks before coming back to it, if at all. Self awareness and knowing when to stop is good.

There are three other reports that are of note if this is of interest to you.

- Daniel Ingram experienced free-wheeling hallucinations as a result of kasina meditation
- Image Streaming as a method has been used to induce prophantasia<sup>6</sup>
- An intervention based on Sensory Deprivation has shown to increase hypnotizability significantly and with an impressive medium to large effect size<sup>7</sup>.

All in all, I think there is something about phosphenes. Though all the three methods to some degree deal in inducing altered states. Which also begs, the question, altered, but altered how?

5 This involves gazing at a fire for a while and then closing your eyes to focus on the afterimage of the light and refreshing it as needed while paying attention to any changes in visual phenomenology.

6 Prophantasia: Imposing visual precepts onto the visual field instead of the mind's eye. Unlike a hallucination, this is volitional.

7 Darakjy, I., Barabasz, M., & Barabasz, A. (2015). Effects of dry flotation restricted environmental stimulation on hypnotizability and pain control. *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 58(2), 204-214.