Explosions in the Mind:
Composing Psychedelic Sounds and Visualisations

Jonathan Weinel

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Explosions in the Mind (EITM) is part of the Palgrave Studies in Sound series, exploring sonic and audio-visual themes. It is Weinel's second book, and can be read as a companion to his earlier *Inner Sound: Altered States of Consciousness in Electronic Music and Audio-Visual Media* (Weinel, 2018). *Inner Sound* explores altered states of consciousness (ASCs) in audio-visual media from a theoretical perspective, and contextualises it with related work, whereas *EITM* focusses squarely on Weinel's own praxis, originating from his PhD studies and extended to the present day. The book is richly illustrated with many full colour images and includes supplementary materials hosted online by the publisher, comprising audio and video samples and working software apps for experimenting with the techniques discussed in the book. Weinel frames his work around altered states of consciousness, specifically psychedelic experiences and how they can be interpreted in sound and vision. Psychedelic theories such as Leary's "seven levels of energy consciousness" (1998), are introduced, in this case explaining how it has influenced the design of *Surfer Stem* (2010); Weinel's audio composition discussed in Chapter 2.

With topics ranging from digital performance through to painting and direct animation techniques, an extensive range of artistic disciplines are represented. Each chapter commences with personal anecdotes revealing the nature of the content ahead and are then interwoven with informative references to popular culture and recollections of Weinel's experiences. After these introductory notes there follows a detailed examination of the individual artworks themselves. As an example, *Cenote Sagrado* (2014), is one of Weinel's audio-visual compositions inspired by his visit to a ritualistic sacrifice centre, the Sacred Cenote in Mexico. After discussing its historical significance the technical realisation of the composition itself is detailed: in this case direct animation on film stock and rhythmic hardware sound synthesis. A recurring compositional technique is also included here: the piece is structured to emulate the onset, plateau and termination phases that one might experience in a psychedelic trip, and this determines the audio-visual qualities in each section.

From a dance music perspective, *EITM* explores some of the more niche, and often more sonically "harder", EDM genres including flashcore—a form of speedcore techno with elements of electroacoustic music—hard trance, acid techno and hardcore rave music. Weinel incorporates some of these EDM styles into his electroacoustic compositions, *Surfer*

Stem using elements from Dubstep for example. Vaporwave is another genre Weinel uses, taking a plunderphonics approach to 1980s and 1990s audio trivia sample loops to create an immersive nostalgia trip in his *Cyberdream* (2019) virtual reality experience. These genres are generally touched on quite briefly but there is a lot of material to cover, and sound is only one component of the many multimedia productions on show here.

EITM introduces Weinel's creative works chronologically with respect to their date of creation, and is sequenced to cover the categories of electroacoustic composition, real-time performance, audio-visual composition, interactive projects, VJ performance and virtual reality experiences, mirroring Weinel's artistic journey. Overall, it is an engaging read and will be of interest to artists, practitioners and academics from the disciplines of electronic music, creative coding, DJing and VJing, composition, performance and related fields. It is highly relevant to those utilising a practise-based approach to research where this can lead to insights into methods for expanding an artist's creative repertoire. A practise-based approach to research is continually rising in popularity across a range of creative disciplines and this volume will provide a useful reference for others to follow. The frameworks provided in the concluding Chapter 8 are particularly indicative and useful in this respect. Introduced here are three design frameworks, specifically: psychedelic journeys in sound, ASC simulations and synaesthetic visualisations of sound, which have been formulated through practise and can be implemented by others desiring to create ASC inspired artworks. The conclusion also discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the development of virtual clubs and dance events incentivising the shift to digital and online experiences, providing motivation and increased relevance for continued study.

References

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Discography

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