
PSYCHOSIS OUTSIDE THE BOX

*First Person Accounts of
Visions, Visual Changes,
Felt Presences, Alterations
of Space & Time and
Strategies for Making
Meaning and Addressing
Distress*



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*Compiled by
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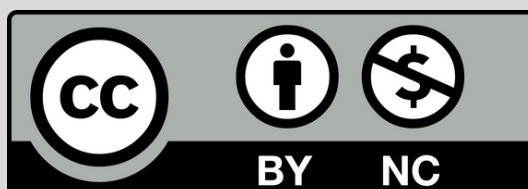
FOREWARD

Over the past century, unusual perceptual, sensory and existential-spiritual experiences have been conceptualized in many different ways. In contemporary mental health contexts, providers are much more likely to ask about certain kinds of experiences--voices and paranoia for example-- while others remain very much in the shadows. The goal of this narrative compilation is to bring together first person accounts focused on three domains of experience that tend to be particularly neglected: visions or quasi-visual experiences, 'felt presences,' and alterations of time, space or spatiotemporal qualities of objects and things.

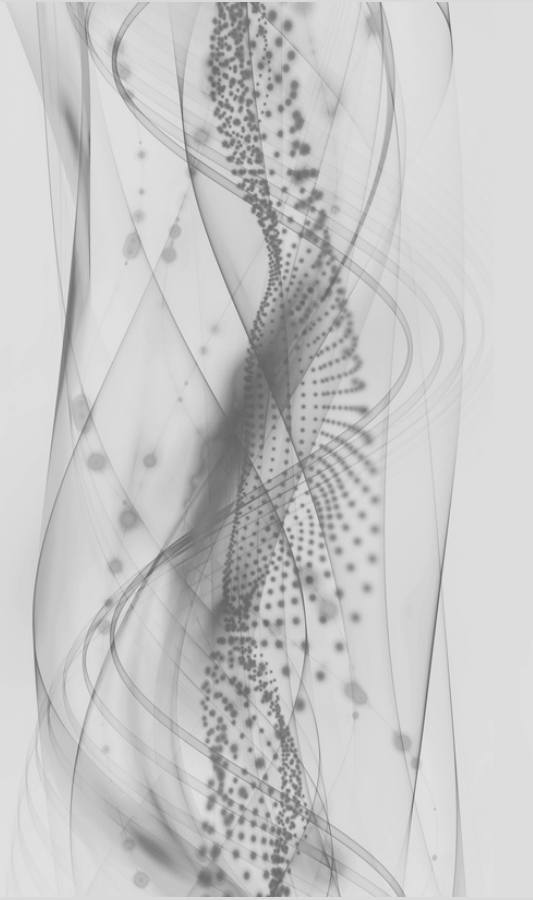
The narratives represented here were gathered through an anonymous online survey (see questions on p. 3), and are presented here unfiltered and unedited. This was not a research project but rather an attempt to compile a large account of narratives that speak directly to the contours of the above experiences. Our hope is that people who experience phenomena like those described in these pages and who read these accounts will feel less alone, and that supporters without personal experience will gain deeper insight into the range and richness of these experiences, and the strategies that might be used to navigate them.

This compilation will be updated as new narratives are provided. To participate anonymously, please navigate to https://spagdon.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7WWB-ro0UP0Fux1k or scan the QR Code below

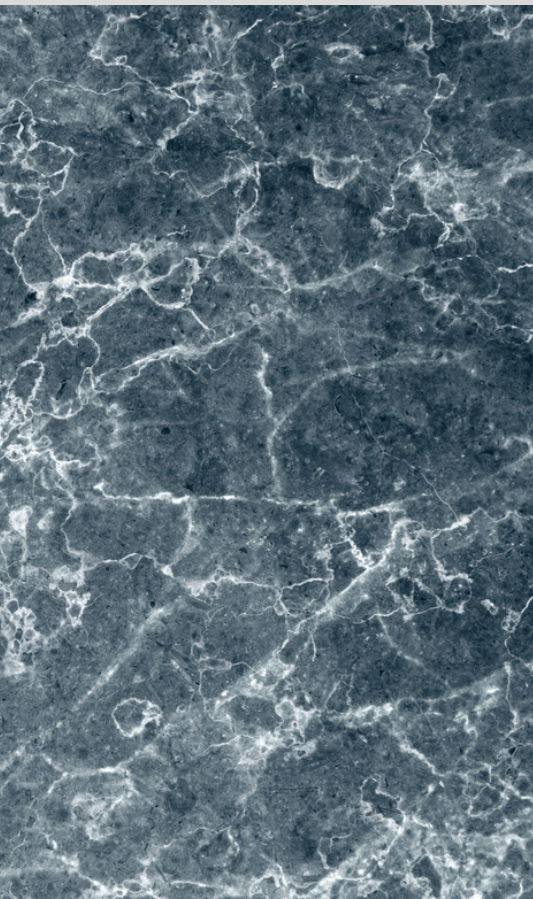
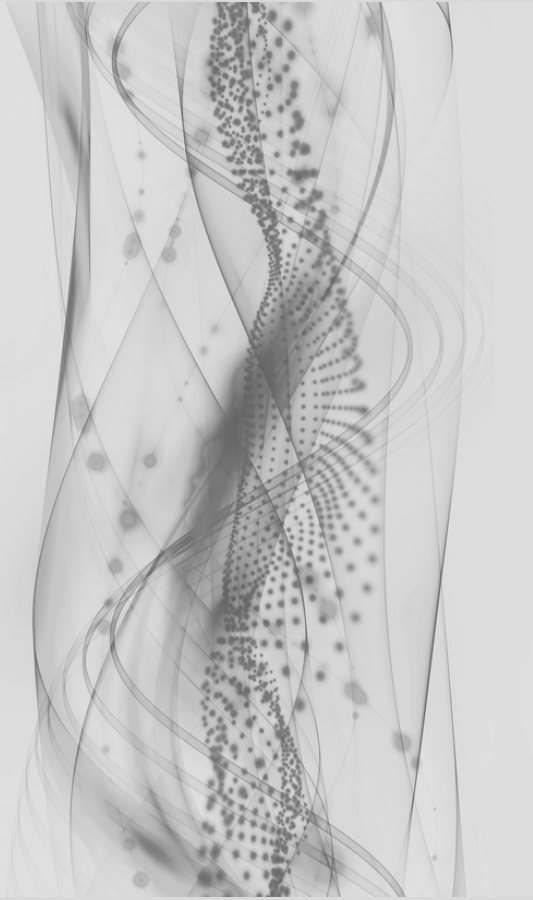
- Shannon Pagdon & Nev Jones



DEVELOPMENT TEAM

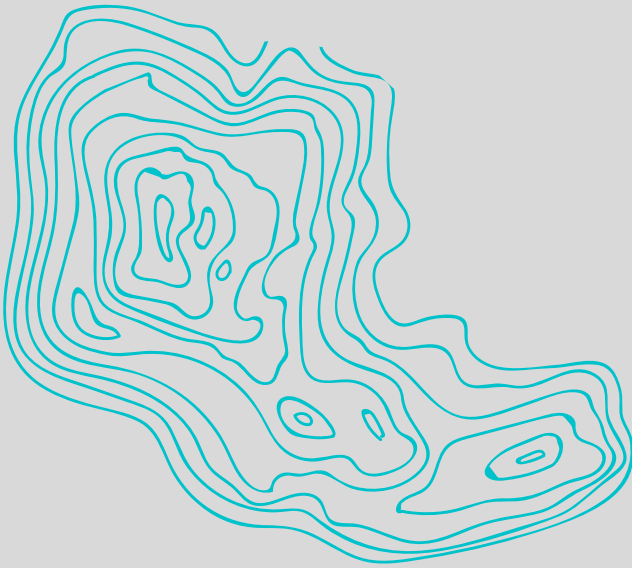


Shannon Pagdon (she/they) is an early career researcher and mental health advocate currently living in California and working at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. Shannon is someone living with psychosis and identifies as a voice hearer. Current research interests include the intersections of trauma and psychosis, and participant experience of early intervention in psychosis services.

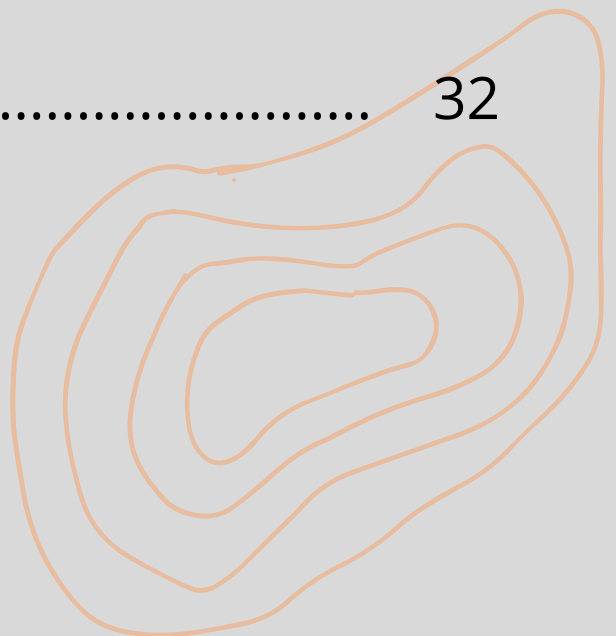


Nev Jones PhD is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh, a mental health services researcher and individual with personal experience of psychosis. Her work has spanned early intervention in psychosis; public sector mental health services; identity in the context of disability and healing; and phenomenology. In addition to her academic research, Nev has co-led two regional hearing voices networks, worked as a consultant and trainer on meaning-centered approaches to psychosis and developed national technical assistance materials on service user involvement and leadership.

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THE QUESTIONS ASKED TO ELICIT NARRATIVES

- In the context of psychosis, have you experienced visual or quasi-visual changes or phenomena? These might include visions, 'seeing' voices or figures in your mind's eye, and changes in the way that faces or objects look or appear. Please describe what you experience.
- If you experience or have experienced visions or visual/quasi-visual phenomena that are at times challenging or distressing, what strategies have you developed for navigating these experiences?
- Have you ever experienced 'felt presences' or the presence of a force, entity or spirit either within your body, in a room or nearby, or in an external object like a tree or building? Please describe.
- If you experience or have experienced distress or challenges related to 'felt presences', please describe any strategies you have developed for navigating these challenges.
- Have you experienced any alterations of the "feeling" of objects, of the distance between things, or of space or time? For example, feeling like your hands or feet are sinking into or merging with solid objects, feeling like hard surfaces have become permeable or feeling like you might fall through the floor? Please describe.
- If you experience or have experienced distress or challenges related to alterations of the feeling of objects, distance, time or space, please describe any strategies you have developed for navigating these challenges.

VISIONS

I experience a range of visions and distortions at different [times]. The frequency ranges from pretty much daily to much rarer experiences that occur only during periods of extreme stress. The most common are visual distortions such as visual snow that resembles the snow from out of tune TVs fuzzing across my vision. I also regularly see colours as ultra bright and intense and the flattening of perspective to the world appears like something out of a glossy magazine or as if instead of looking through a window I am gazing at a screen on the wall. When I am particularly stressed, distance and perspective becomes even more distorted, corridors lengthen and bend in strange ways, walls move in and out as if they are breathing and the carpet might move in waves across the floor. When under intense stress my visions have become stronger. Most recently, I had a couple of weeks when all the grass outside looked like astroturf, right down to seeing the mesh showing where grass had been rubbed away. Trees, plants and bushes were all made from plastic, silk or paper with elaborate and beautiful flowers or fruits. On a previous occasion everything appeared to be made of paper including building, clouds and animals. Everything was one dimensional and painted with inks like a Victorian cut out. As with the plastic and silk plants it was, in its way, extraordinarily beautiful and quite interesting even as I was aware that this was really not a normal thing to be seeing.

STRATEGIES

For the most part I'm very lucky my visions and distortions don't distress me as such. In fact I often feel a sense of euphoria associated with them. I think it helps that they tend to be protective during periods of stress and when I become worried by them I remind myself that this is my mind trying to help me out. The world has become too much for me and my brain is doing its best to protect me from it by changing the scenery. For the most part I am always able to realise that what I am seeing is not real. The only time I have become upset was when I was in a situation where I couldn't tell by context if, for example, the grass really was astroturf or if I was just seeing it as such. However, once I had established the truth I am usually fine again. the best coping strategy I have is to remember that this is not real, that it is a result of my brain having a moment, and that it to shall pass. Grounding activities such as writing (I journal a lot) can often help to reduce my visions if they are becoming too intense.



VISIONS

I have experienced spatial altering, where space seems to shrink. I have also experienced shadows seeming to move as well.

STRATEGIES

Since being on an antipsychotic these experiences have not recurred.

VISIONS

I had intense thoughts that felt so real i could almost see them. I had times when I thought I could see a heavenly surrounding and perhaps even God despite not being religious. I also thought I was experiencing my own birth and the death of my child by my own doing

STRATEGIES

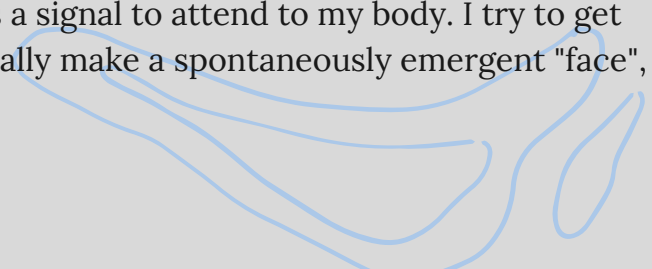
I had support from loved ones which helped me refocus on the present. This only helped in the very short term, until i got to hospital and took medication, and got plenty of sleep.

VISIONS

I experience 2 things. First, objects in the world like a table, become more like geometry and angles that threaten by the intensity of their angularity. These objects lose their utilitarian value at these times. The second experience is that visual patterns organize and "pop" into clarity with no effort on my part. For instance, the natural lines on a pine board floor organize themselves and become, most often, faces. The interplay of leaves and light "pop" and organize, into faces. Random rug patterns organize into faces that quickly change and morph. These experiences are a signal to me that I am triggered and quite anxious and perhaps dissociating.

STRATEGIES

When I have the above experiences, I take it as a signal to attend to my body. I try to get grounded in the present. I also try to intentionally make a spontaneously emergent "face", turn into something else, like a hummingbird.



VISIONS

Yes. It can be a chicken and egg situation a lot of the time: sometimes I start to think about something (that would be considered 'delusional') like the end of the world, or people on the street catching on fire, and then I 'see' it, very vividly, in my mind, and in a way I can't then control or blot out. But it could also be that I start to 'see' these things and then think about them. The more I think about them the more real they start to seem, the more preoccupied I get. I also have really vivid visual dreams (with the same themes as my daytime 'symptoms'). Other times I'm just not sure which sense any given experience is taking place in--I 'feel'/'see'/'sense' things all at once, not in a way that maps onto literal experience of touching and seeing but also not like normal imagination. It's really hard to describe. Lastly, I see patterns in random things, and sometimes things in the world--especially people's faces--just look "off" or "strange" in a way I can't really articulate very well. And it really bothers me and if I think about it too much I go right down the rabbit hole.

STRATEGIES

One major strategy is just having enough structure in my life, and things that I have to do or have to get to, that I simply cannot spend too much time thinking about my experiences. Also, over time I've gotten used to them, so in a mindfulness kind of way, I'm like "oh, there's that happening, no big deal" and then I just move on. Whereas in the beginning it was really hard to not get preoccupied because it all seemed so strange and so alarming. Jogging or running also helps or any other form of really vigorous exercise or physical activity.

VISIONS

Yes I feel presences it's hard to explain. I hear voices and see things other people say aren't real but this is a different type of thing. My brother died by suicide 7 years ago and I see him often but I also often know he's there without seeing him. He touches my hand and hugs me. Or I just know he's there. Sometimes it feels like he is alive and sometimes I can sense that he is rotting and dead. As an incest victim I also get raped as I feel this although no-one is visible. I won't go into details about this but most people know what it feels like to have intercourse and how it feels afterwards. It totally hurts and is terrifying and traumatic, it happens when I'm awake but also wakes me in the night. I can smell aftershave and semen

STRATEGIES

I haven't found any strategies that help.



VISIONS

Words change in front of my eyes on shop signs / road signs / books / text messages. I see it warping. Feels like a message from somewhere.

STRATEGIES

I have learned to accept it is happening and does not mean I am going to hospital again.

VISIONS

Yes during my psychosis I experienced a dense black shadowy shape that I saw - and once followed that led me to a church. I first saw this shape while doing a sceance as a teenager, so thought it might be evil. Also experienced voices of dead people talking to me but in disembodied way - guiding me not threatening. Strong awareness of energies all around.

STRATEGIES

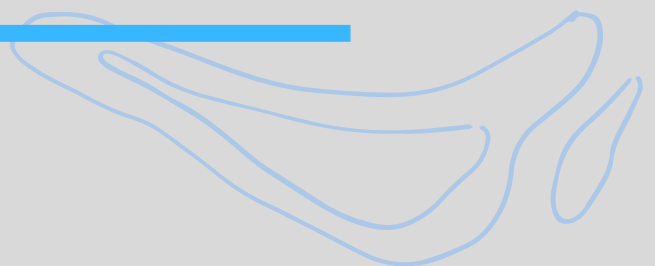
When encountering distressing experiences, I would return to prayers from childhood, or say mantras to protect me.

VISIONS

Ordinary objects half-transforming into bugs (eg. hairs on arms becoming thousands of spiders). Dark shapes and movement out of the corner of the eye. Transformation of people's features into animals.

STRATEGIES

Paying close attention to them so that I can sit with them. Naming what is happening to me and accepting that it is temporary.



VISIONS

Yes. I have experienced 'felt presences', seeing shadowy figures, or feeling disembodied presences, or the touch of a disembodied 'ghost' hand on my body. I have seen figures in my mind's eye or seen them standing over my body. I have seen objects change shape, or seen animals run outside the corner of my eye. I have seen spots move on walls, or bright sharp shapes (usually black or white dots or sharp shapes) on surfaces. I also see a lot of 'white noise' type interference, like television white noise all over walls. Sometimes people's faces distort and look sinister to me. Sometimes this is accompanied by a voice in my head telling me to be cautious, or just repeating my name, or accompanied by commands or running commentary. Sometimes I get the paranoid sense of cameras in the walls and then the felt sense of a disembodied figure in the room watching me or standing behind me or over me, or outside the room behind the window of the house peering in. Sometimes I will see the shadowy figure in the room, or sometimes I 'sense' it.

STRATEGIES

Yes. I often talk back to this experience, that it is an experience I have had before and overcome. That it is a 'fear' talking to me, and I have overcome it, and that I am stronger than this fear. Or that it is old fear or pain talking to me, and that I understand it, and can validate it, and that I am safe now from danger and violence, and can hold space from those very real fears. That those fears are real, but those figures and senses are not real in the way those fears are. Sometimes I use humour to diffuse the experience: I like to imagine that the figures or sense or fear is just a conspiracy theorist or actor or person in the street on a soapbox with a megaphone trying to tell me about an elaborate conspiracy, and then I answer back to the idea that I don't really have time to listen to that at the moment; I acknowledge it, and I'm letting it go, rather than dwelling on it, because I have other things I'd rather do.

VISIONS

It's like the lines delimiting objects and people were blurred. Sometimes the object or person itself was amplified. It seemed closer but not actually closer.

STRATEGIES

Not distressing, just interesting.

VISIONS

Firstly I do not label my experience as psychosis. It is semantically counter productive & does not allow for healing to arise, which is what the process is seeking to bring. In that context I label it C.P.T.S.D. This provides space for me to grasp what is occurring. Psychosis is rigid & fear inducing. This creates secondary compounding ego effects & is deeply damaging socially. I have experienced full immersion into a childhood event, not an hallucination, not a memory, a reliving of a trauma that happened when I was five years old. I hear my own voice at five years old, experience my own body as smaller in relation to the adults present in the event & I hear my own voice at five years old.

STRATEGIES

The aforementioned event has arisen twice. The first time I came out of it was due to hearing my own screams taking place in real time. The second time it was familiar so I was not alarmed & as a consequence drew more detail information. I have also experienced what is known as "walk ins" connected to the events, twice. There is a lot of new age consumerist overlay with this are of non-ordinary experience due to the use of the word shaman. I would equate these experiences with a form of latent shamanism. The best strategy I invest is not to invest my ego into the story & not react. The "walk-ins" have disturbed others which I found distressing & I was blamed as having performed something on them. I was just as startled as they were. The best strategy is to observe it as phenomena, avoid stimulants, prioritise the regulation of sleep, washing, eating & not take it too seriously. The relaying of the story of the event is what creates the distress. Some can be jealous or angry at a an altered difference being expressed. be careful who you trust in that regard.

VISIONS

When I experienced psychosis I saw things, and possibly saw things that existed with just a different perception of what I was actually seeing. During my worst moments I never had the hallucinations that people imagine, where things that weren't there at all were there. Though I've gained an appreciation for the legitimacy of those kinds of experiences by practicing magick, and in particular scrying in Enochian magick, which does spur visions.

STRATEGIES

As the years have gone by and I've gained distance from my darkest period, I've learned to use the visions we all have access to. The work of Arnold Mindell, and the Australian aboriginal ideas about "The Dreaming" have helped me appreciate these visions, and the fact that they can be used as a sort of intuition system. Just closing your eyes, no matter how "healthy" you are to modern science, images probably come to mind. And appreciating those things, and finding meaning in them is very beneficial, especially to someone like me that experienced psychosis.

VISIONS

I'm having a very bad night and bad nights with schizophrenia are very scary because you don't know whether you are awake or not because what happens can have the elements of both. I layed down in my bed on my back with ice packs under my damaged right shoulder and took out my hearing aides. I left the TV on for company because I get frightened sometimes- like tonight turned into. I was laying on my back and it immediately felt like my bed was vibrating like it had an engine, but I was trying to calm the pain in my shoulder, so I pulled up a sheet and tried to relax and make sense of the very muffled TV. The next thing I know there is a clown, an unhappy clown, uncovering me and looking me in the face, but I'm okay, because to my right is my high school boyfriend my senior year from Kennedy, Pete. And Pete has just finished climbing under the covers and has closed his eyes and has a relaxed smile on his face and we are on a boat. But when I look back over there are now three clowns examining me, looking me over very carefully and looking at me and scanning me, and one has pulled back the sheet The rest of the way. And I'm trying to yell Pete's name. The TV show is still on right behind them, and I'm in my nightgown and I'm in my bed, which is all based in reality. And I'm unable to yell for Pete right next to me because I'm so scared and he looks so relaxed. Why is Pete relaxed? I finally hear myself screaming his name and the clowns retreat - like they might vanish in a dream. And there is Pete is no longer next to me. I can feel the ice pack under my shoulder. But the bed is still vibrating, I, and the sound from the TV has an eerie feeling - distorted. And it still does right now. Shit this sucks. I get freaked out. I am writing this to help me figure out what is real and what is my mind. My shoulder is hurting much worse and I need more medication. I'm going to try Hydrocodone. I need more ice too. Things are feeling more real.

Schizophrenias like being caught between reality and a dream. It has elements of both. And you are stuck riding it out until it ends, because hopefully your medication is doing its job. Or even better preventing some crap from happening, like hearing your name being called out of nowhere. Or getting paranoid that someone is following you, or that there is a government plot. Some people can't escape these mental states and honestly, this is what truly scares me the most and makes me cry after one of these episodes. Because what if one day I can't escape? When these clowns were examining me they were real and terrifying. Will I one day be stuck in an alternate reality with Channel 9 and Jimmy Kimmel in the background? And I am lucky that I have one person at least that I can call - Chad. Because he gets guests in his living room. And they won't leave. Schizophrenia is a bitch of a disease. I don't know how I got it, other than experiencing trauma. The mind has strange ways of coping with extreme stress. People don't understand it and think we are a bunch of serial killers and societal misfits. It's a horrible misunderstood mental health disease that has the same societal implications of being a leper. I lost a few hours of time tonight, caught somewhere in The Twilight Zone. I'm so tired and now I'm afraid to try to go to sleep. Instead I will probably cry for a bit and mourn the loss of a little bit more of my sanity because every time I think my medication has Schizophrenia beat, it hits me in one of its many forms and let's me know it's in charge.

STRATEGIES

In the experience I described above, I was able to actually capture what was happening to me one night a week ago during the end of a nighttime hallucinatory experience. When I looked back from the time I had posted to the time the psychosis started, it was over three hours. I have no idea where all of the time went while this horrible experience was happening to me. But there was no way to to navigate this experience and no way to escape. And that's what is so scary about hallucinations. You cannot just take yourself out of the picture. It's like being inside a horrible amusement park fun house and you can't get out of it. Your screams can't be heard by the operator. And it feels like it's never going to end. You aren't going to find the door out. And when it finally ends, it leaves me almost as frightened as when it was occurring. Because it was so real. So tactile. So simultaneously set in both reality of what I know is real, and the these intrusive horrible elements that are just as real and tactile. My biggest fear is that one day is will be stuck in both words and unable to escape my real-life nightmare.

VISIONS

I've seen everything from fake spiders falling down from air vents in front of me as I walked down a hall, to a badly injured woman with blood all over her trying to get me to let her in the sliding glass door on my house.

STRATEGIES

I just see it as another level of reality that at times I'm exposed/opened up to, for reasons I might never know.

VISIONS

I see colors very distinctly and vividly when I hear voices: shadows and darkness, fragments of bright light, sometimes abstract shapes almost like what one sees after looking at a bright light and then closing one's eyes.

STRATEGIES

Because they seem more to reflect the voices than anything, it's more about working with my voices, through language and indirectly, maybe, that changes the images and color. Let's light in, for instance, when it's all darkness.

VISIONS

Before I say this I want to say i've been experiencing these lived metaphors and phenomena listed above since I was 14 and I still was able to move out at 19 and have lived on my own ever since working full time. I've seen fish swim through my college class room when I was sleep deprived. I've seen giant floating hands follow me through my house but I know this is not "real" because I can see it is both there and not there at the same time. I was able to ignore it by focusing on my goals for the day. In the past week I have been hearing my alarm go off all day and night and it wakes me up when I try to sleep but I know it is stress related and will likely resolve itself in a few days. I changed the alarm sound that wakes me up so hopefully my brain will allow me to ignore the noises i hear more easily. I sometimes feel like i am not myself and feel i am hovering over my body. I feel like i have lived another life perhaps on another planet or another plane but I refocus by saying "this is the one where i am on earth and happily married and have 3 cats. I'm going to be here now and worry about how strange everything is in the next life."

STRATEGIES

After my first episode of psychosis I knew it's not a brain tumor and I am used to the idea of these experiences. I work to reduce my stress in my life and know that these troublesome experiences will fade as my home and work life becomes easier and more normal again. I am lucky that I know what something looks like if it's not a part of consensus reality and I know it cant hurt me.

VISIONS

Yes. I can see peripheral images, shadows; I have precognitive things that come in images. I hear things which most don't. This usually happens during times of mania, mixed episodic bipolar depression, or great duress (stressed out). I am training under Shaman Jaes Seis out of Florida and am learning how to Journey. I am a Reiki II also.

STRATEGIES

Not distressing unless it's obviously ghost/spirit activity fucking around with my electrics at home. Flickering lights. Calls dropped. Random voice mail playing.

VISIONS

Starting in 1993 I began to experience reality as having moments of intensified spiritual significance. Synchronicities became more pronounced, normal objects had heightened visual clarity as if they were almost visually reverberating. My first experience of this was at my first attempt at college. I was walking down the block when I suddenly felt a presence and a voice say you are in a hell dimension now the boundaries of the block each had a stop sign which seemed to emanate a warning that I could not pass them as if they were standing watch. There was a bush by the sidewalk that had a swarm of yellowjackets in it. The voice presence suggested that the only way to pass was to grab the yellow jackets to get me out of this hell dimension. I was extremely frightened and I paced between those two stop signs for hours pleading to be released. I spent a lot of time reckoning whether this presence had power because I didn't want to get stung. After much time I got up the nerve to run past one of the stop signs. Nothing out of the ordinary happened when I fled. That was my first of many experiences unpacking elements that were inside me. To this day I seek to understand how certain voices and thoughts arise inside me. I guess I will never know for sure but I have learned over 25 years how to navigate these frightening experiences.

STRATEGIES

Meditation has been a key tool for understanding and reckoning with this aspect within me. These dark biographies and forays into hellish realms has been something I slipped into on and off for over 25 years. There are times when I have had to use pure will power to detach and make a tiny space in my psyche where the person I know I am can exist in lieu of such darkness and chaos. I have also sometimes had to roll the experience over in my mind enough to know its character and what could be the intended lesson of my human evolution in it. Psychiatric Medication was able to reduce some of my anxiety around this and reduce their duration a bit but it didn't remove the experiences. Journaling helped a lot as well. Finding meaningful work giving back to my community and trying to find my power within also seemed to over time reduce my preoccupation and raise my insights about these experiences.

VISIONS

I saw ghosts.

STRATEGIES

I tried to use reason and religious logic to assess how much of a danger the ghosts were to me.

VISIONS

Sometimes when I am stressed, people's faces change, like their eyes or mouth move around their face, of their beard covers their whole face. I also often see people that later turn out to have just been objects.

STRATEGIES

When it is distressing, I remind myself that it is just my brain having a hard time, and try my best to accept it as just how I'm perceiving things.

VISIONS

Outside of my mind, out in the world, i have seen a bunch of different things. Spiders, flying bugs, beetles, and cats. I have seen angels. I have seen someone start to bleed out of their ears. I have seen a headless person holding their severed head in their lap. I have seen geometric patterns. I have seen, but at the same time not seen ("sensed" maybe but in a visual way) fairy creatures and bugs coming out through small rifts in the space time continuum and crowding my visual field and consciousness. I could go on. . .

STRATEGIES

Sometimes they are not scary, they are pleasant or amusing. When they are scary but I don't think I'm in danger I use regular coping skills like self soothing stuff or distraction stuff. . . Like getting into something cozy to wear, listening to music, watching tv, drawing, taking walks, journaling, etc. . Sometimes i ask the people around me if they experience what i do. If I am scared and I think I am in danger or my threat response is activated and my SUDS increases I'm not that good at coping. I'll scream, I'll pace, I'll take a PRN and get into bed. . .

VISIONS

I have had psychosis bipolar disorder for nearly 40 years and is acute and episodic with at least 8 episodes. I consider these a disturbance of perception and perception formation following extensive study at ioppn Kch London. Following work from McReynolds in the fifties. For me, there have been minimal, if distinct, visual perception disturbance. More a disturbance of the synchronisation of conceptual content with visual phenomena producing anomalies, leading to aberrant salience and associated delusion formation and integration into perception.

STRATEGIES

Understanding the above and grounding, allowing and acceptance, with non proliferation of appraisal

VISIONS

I haven't necessarily seen things that weren't there, instead the way things looked changed. Everything around me gets brighter and almost fluorescent. The way things look change as I go through the experience.

STRATEGIES

I usually recognize what's going on and immediately take my prn. I also usually call someone as they might be able to calm me down.

VISIONS

When I was very young, I had visions a lot. I believe now that I somehow induced these by being in a trance-like state, and typically lying down outside. In these visions, I would receive messages from higher beings about my life. I have also felt the presence of others in my space - typically with no personal connection, but most often, animals. Other times, I have heard my name called out - and it woke me from sleep. There are also places that I have visited where I feel a great heaviness - like something traumatic happened there. Other times, I see shadow figures of humans and animals, and believe I have spoken with nature spirits when seeking advice and direction.

STRATEGIES

The most distressing situations have been when I am in a place that "feels hurt". For instance, there is a playground/park I visited once that had a horrible feeling of children being taken there, raped and killed. It felt a little better to talk about with someone, and I imagined a white healing light over the area - releasing the spirits of the children. For me, acknowledging my own feelings and validating the possibility of it being someone's reality (whether or not it actually was real is inconsequential) - allowed me to feel as though I "freed" those children, and did what I could do to make things better. I like to ask myself, "is this a personal thing -or- not about me?" It helps me to realize that most of the time, it "isn't about me" and I can disconnect myself from whatever the negative energy is, and refocus my attention on the positive spiritual guidance I find elsewhere.

VISIONS

I would see colors and figures in my mind's eye and sometimes hear voices when reading things.

STRATEGIES

Sometimes; I've found that thinking words backwards, spelling, singing the thought in my head, finding anagrams in words, etc is helpful.



FELT PRESENCES

Pretty much anything and everything that my clinicians describe as "hallucinations" or "delusions" feel to me like they have invisible presences that I can sense. For example, people who are maybe chasing me, or voices I might be hearing--they're all, in various ways, out there in the world. But not as literal 'visible' figures or people I can reach out to and touch. But also very different to just imaging something in one's head. They have a kind of ephemeral reality.

STRATEGIES

Structure. Not allowing myself to get too preoccupied or caught up in what I'm experiencing. Focusing on other things, exercising, talking to people or friends (and not talking to them about psychosis--that doesn't help! talking about normal things).

FELT PRESENCES

The first time I noticed a different energy was when I was starting to get uncomfortable. It felt like I had to do more things and to do them faster. Sometimes it was just thoughts, then as time progressed it became a force that pushed me away from my usual actions.

STRATEGIES

Music helped a lot. So did talking and moving about. The pacing after a while became peaceful. I learned to go thru some of the ideas I had in my head. Writing my thoughts and feelings down helped as well.

FELT PRESENCES

I have experienced nightmares where I have felt the presence of a foreign being/s externally. I have also experienced sleep paralysis and other sensations like something foreign was touching me.

STRATEGIES

I utilize praying to my Higher Power before I go to sleep at night. These experiences have been much more infrequent as of late.

FELT PRESENCES

There's an evil demon that is inside me. It is me but it isn't me. It is me in my worst form. It is like a Smeagol (reference to Lord of the Rings).

STRATEGIES

I have not. I survived. That's the best I was able to do. I changed topics of focus. Ex. focused on a list of things that I had to do during the day or the next day. I made myself 'forget'. But it doesn't really solve anything. I know it's always there, it always was, and it always will be. I can't run from it.

FELT PRESENCES

Yes, I have felt the presences of human-like entities near me on several occasions. It was as real as seeing a person in front of me, but without the visual. It was intuitive - like I was just perceiving a presence with all senses other than my sight.

STRATEGIES

I don't feel distress anymore, because I've never been harmed by these presences or responded negatively to them. They come very infrequently and briefly. As a child, I was afraid of them, because I thought they were ghosts. Now I just consider them a pleasant mystery.

FELT PRESENCES

Yes many times during this time. The boundary between me and any other spirit world felt very thin. I am very grateful this is all historic for me, living with that sensitivity permanently must be frightening. I sometimes also felt possessed in my body, or presences in the room.

STRATEGIES

When scared I would pray, and just wish it would all go away. Over the years I learned to properly meditate, to ground and calm myself. I changed my lifestyle and prioritised sleep and routine and didn't take drugs and this all gradually subsided.

FELT PRESENCES

Yes. I have felt huge spines (like porcupine quills) growing out of my body, insects and parasites crawling in my body and eating at my flesh, had microphones embedded under my skin, and had lichen and spider webs growing through me and over me and suffocating me, kind of cocooning me. I've also had my body rotting away and turning into rotten, decaying wood, and then fruiting mushroom bodies have begun to break it down and take over.

STRATEGIES

I've used sensory re-direction. Putting weighted blankets over myself, putting small fans on and sitting in front of them so the air blows directly onto my skin and I can feel it and it and feel a different sensation. Getting water and splashing it onto my body, and getting damp cloths and rubbing them over my skin, or taking showers if I feel able to. Tapping on myself. Escaping the area and going to a different environment that is more familiar/feels safer. Reminding myself that I am resilient and have survived many things, including experiences like this. That my illness is loud at the moment, and that the volume will go down again soon. Calling someone I trust (like my sister or psychologist) if I feel able to. Holding myself and rocking if I need to. Listening to music. Talking out loud of the presence if I feel able to: telling it to go away and leave me alone, that I have the right to be safe and left alone, and telling it vanish. Telling myself to stay calm, that this will be over soon. Using humour to diffuse the power of my distress and combating the experience: twisting the imagery into something funny. Like if I can smell petrol, telling myself I'm actually smelling a campfire and probably just wishing I could run away to the Burning Man festival in the Nevada Desert to escape studying for university. Or when I'm feeling some disembodied presence, maybe I just need an invisible friend to talk to right now. And if there really is someone there, they could be lonely to. Or bored of studying. Or if there was someone there, they'd probably be like "what on earth is she even reading right now?" Or if experiencing scary tactile hallucinations like decay or growing spines or having things grow all over me, maybe I'll transform into some kind of awesome spirit demi-god? Then I tend to laugh

FELT PRESENCES

In one of my fairly recent psychosis, I was visited by a Santaria priest. I'm probably only exposed to Haitian Voodoo after living for a number of years in South Florida. In this hellish visit, I was sitting watching an evening network show on ABC, when suddenly my left arm was grabbed and pulled and a Voodoo priest placed feathers, a rooster foot, and a shrunken head into my hand and closed it. This was such a believable felt presence. More horrible things took place with the dead persons I knew visiting me and live persons I know dying at the hand of this priest who then had them carried off on a mattress. And the feeling afterwards in the room has me wanting to leave and never return. These visions seem so real. And this was the first time any of them has ever physically touched my body. I live alone. And I don't know where I'm safe. I only have three rooms. I leave my lights and tv on at night, but it doesn't matter. I call my boyfriend after these events happen. He also has Schizoaffective Disorder. He ends up throwing furniture at people in his living room who won't leave. He is the only one who understands.

FELT PRESENCES

Masculine presences in the room with me, often looking over my shoulder or following me around.

FELT PRESENCES

Sometimes I feel a presence either physically around me or just a mental presence. Usually just out of sight or in an object like a doll or in a container.

STRATEGIES

If it's an inanimate object I try to grasp or touch it to ensure myself it isn't alive. Sometimes when I can't see it (?) I will try to occupy my mind with something else, and sometimes I just wait in fear for it to show itself or go away. We also have three dogs that bark if anyone comes into the house. If I feel a presence I will sometimes check to see if the dogs are barking. If they aren't I will try to assure myself nothing is there as they aren't barking.

FELT PRESENCES

Often have seen/heard/felt little gargoyle-type entities, always up high where the walls meet the ceiling. They constantly laugh at me. Sometimes I'm very scared because there is a presence who's out to do me harm, and I'm afraid that if it kills me no one else will have known what killed me. Have also had a wonderful experience (the exact same experience several times) where I'm somehow transported to a rural village in Africa and a I'm lying on the ground and a healer puts large leaves all over my body. All the people in the village (including children) take turns surrounding my body and laying hands on me and continuously singing 24 hours a day for 7 days. It's a very healing experience, one that I wish I could make happen. But I know that just like the negative experiences, I can't control when/if they happen. It's just something that I was blessed/cursed with.

STRATEGIES

It's just how I was made, what was given to me, how I'm wired, however you want to put it. Accepting that different is not defective and not trying to fight it has helped. If I try to stifle that part of me too much I start to really feel unwell. But it is hard in this society to find a place where I can let those things be expressed without getting locked up in a hospital.

FELT PRESENCES

I've been poked by my voices and felt like a tree was talking to me, lots of things like that.

STRATEGIES

Many times the presence of natural things having a spirit feels comforting and helps me. other times it has been scary. I used to have a special ring I wore to make me feel safer. Now I incorporate my spiritual path of Paganism into practices to help me feel safer and attract positive experiences.

FELT PRESENCES

I have seen entities in my room or near me, or felt that there are others within me.

FELT PRESENCES

This is a really difficult question because all my experiences, all of them have a presence and force. So this question is almost implying that there's some separate "presence" but the presence is the voices, visions, and the images in my mind.

STRATEGIES

If I'm very grounded in something physical, like running or dancing, I either don't experience it or it all just blurs into one.

FELT PRESENCES

I have felt a dark force in my bedroom at night and I used to get heart palpitations and pain and I used to attribute it to demons attacking me at first this thought lasted about ten years. As my life progressed I learned to listen to my emotions more carefully and see how they often coincided with physical pains i experienced. So I guess I just learned that I am a complex being and that all things simultaneously physical emotional and spiritual experiences I have also less frequently felt a good presence I have felt I experienced an aspect of the divine usually a warm wind or sun breaking through the clouds

STRATEGIES

It took me a long time but meditation has helped me to recognize more factors like physical food diet barometric pressure moon cycles sleep quality how all these things play into how often i feel dark entities

FELT PRESENCES

I saw ghosts dancing in my house. I wasn't sure if it was actually ghosts dancing or malicious ghosts using swords to manipulate light and make me think I was seeing dancing.

STRATEGIES

I told a trusted religious authority. I tried to research whom the ghosts might be.

FELT PRESENCES

During one week psychosis, felt and heard touch on cheek, angelic singing, passed away grandmother.

STRATEGIES

To calm down, hot and cold water in shower; tapping on top of forehead to "balance" brain; breathing in and out forcefully" rubbing belly" use of hot & cold packs on belly, etc (eg socks filled w/ rice & tied in knot at end, heated in microwave or placed in freezer). Other people praying for me.

FELT PRESENCES

I don't know If i have. I've felt infested with bugs before. I've felt animated by a universal force where i don't feel i have control over my movements or what i say—but it wasn't spiritual. It was more mechanical and sci-fi.

STRATEGIES

I just let go and let G-d. in some way, when i feel possessed, i feel like i must have some control, and i have faith that i could take back control of my body if i really needed to. . . I tell myself this. I hope its true, because it's scary.

FELT PRESENCES

Yes, when acutely unwell, generally positive agents

STRATEGIES

Tend to follow them, when acutely unwell, less distress more guides

FELT PRESENCES

Yes. Any time I experience these episodes, my hair stands up and I get chills all over my body. All my senses are heightened. It always happens whenever I miss a dose of my medication. I just pray through it.

STRATEGIES

Praying, talking to my friends about it and taking my prn.

FELT PRESENCES

I feel presences of entities in all sorts of random places - parks, my home, other people's homes, museums, cars, buses. I ask plants permission before havesting, and wait for a "yes". Sometimes it's an inner voice connected, sometimes I can hear an external voice.

STRATEGIES

Similar to the previous experiences, releasing myself of a "need" to interact with the entity in some way - whether helping it, fearing it or ignoring it - remembering that I have a choice in how to handle it - has been helpful. For instance, if there seems to be a malevolent spirit, I can say out loud, "You don't scare me, and you have no power over me. Get out of here, and don't come back!" It's very empowering. If it's a feeling like a family member, I speak more casually - whether out loud or internally - and either try to connect, or just am happy to be visited.

FELT PRESENCES

Yes, sometimes it was real, other times it was a delusion.

STRATEGIES

Sometimes it has been telepathic and I have learned to trust that intuition and that felt presence when I feel it with someone else.



ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

During one week psychosis, felt and heard touch on cheek, angelic singing, passed away grandmother.

STRATEGIES

I look at my watch, my phone, the calendar a lot. Try to get an idea of where I'm at.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I have experienced the vision field kind of melting like a few times riding in a car as a passenger i felt the street lights and car lights loosing form i sometimes see halo like auras things loose there clarity and are unbounded

STRATEGIES

Sleep at these times help me reset I sometimes take like an advil pm breathe deeply lie down and listen to ambient music on headphones till sleep overtakes me

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I'm pretty good about manifesting things in my life. I think that I can "see" and am sensitive helps.

STRATEGIES

I believe that the current time, tight now in time and space, that we can delineate and determine the future and also change the past.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Sensations that my hands have come off.

STRATEGIES

I became an awesome rhythm guitar player because moving my hands really fast helps them reconnect to me.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Yes, maybe....? Like a greater fluidity between things. In and outside my mind, imagined and actually seen or touched, so maybe yes, between the hardness of real, concrete things and the softness of the same thing in one's mind?

STRATEGIES

Just continuing to go about the day to day--waking up, brushing teeth, getting out and doing things, eating, drinking, talking to people. When there is lots of structure to the day the experiences and changes don't disappear but they do recede.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Pretty much all of this--falling through or into objects, solid things seeming like they're liquid or permeable. Space becoming kind of fluid. I also get really paranoid about people being able to access all the thoughts in my head, or the emails I'm writing--I just lose any sense that the obvious boundaries (physical and electronic) are still there. I try to tell myself that they are, that empirically they must be, but it doesn't stop my experience from being an experience of all that having dissolved. This is easily the hardest thing I have to deal with, and when I get really stressed out, it overwhelms me. Having lost all boundaries, having no boundaries around thoughts or my own mind that I can control.

STRATEGIES

Just continuing to go about the day to day--waking up, brushing teeth, getting out and doing things, eating, drinking, talking to people. When there is lots of structure to the day the experiences and changes don't disappear but they do recede.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I have never thought of this as similar to visions and voices. i thought everyone experienced this. Like when you're tired and you feel you might melt into the floor. Are you saying that most people don't experience this?

STRATEGIES

I recognize patterns of stress, such as lack of sleep, jet lag, overwork, lack of food can make these experiences more common for me. I assure myself that I'm OK and will get through it. the earth is not melting.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I have felt space shrink and shadows move.

STRATEGIES

Since taking antipsychotic medications these experiences have been almost totally eliminated.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Many of my stranger experiences happen right before falling asleep. Sometimes when I close my eyes i feel myself grow until i'm 9 feet tall and the room i'm in is expanded to three times it's size. Other times that feeling of growing doesn't stop until I feel like i'm as big as the orbit of jupiter or something and I feel a sense of continual falling. I like the experience of being 9 feet tall; it's interesting. It bothers me when i dont stop. I have had experiences like this long before I ever tried any recreational drug. To date I have only done psybisilin in a sacred context which has helped me develop a sense of meaning and my place in the world. I guess I am saying that my odd experiences are unrelated to mind altering substances.

STRATEGIES

Just continuing to go about the day to day--waking up, brushing teeth, getting out and doWhen I experience the feeling of continual falling or growing I often get up and open my eyes and it stops. I might read or watch TV and try again in an hour. Sometimes I just grin and bear it and use mindfulness exercises like the body scan while laying in bed or listen to a meditation tape to help me sleep.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I felt like I may have entered a parallel universe in which everything looked just as it normally did, but the underlying reality was entirely different (wasn't quite sure what the difference was, though), or, the nature of the universe had always been different and I was the only person who was aware of it.

STRATEGIES

I didn't know exactly how the universe was different, but it was cold, random, arbitrary and relentlessly merciless. I found that the only thing that really beat back these feelings in me was reaching out and connecting with good people who proved, simply with their own simple kindness and caring, that this dimension wasn't devoid of goodness. Gradually, as my social circle widened, the universe became less and less hostile.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I walked home once and thought it was amazing that my house was small enough to fit in the palm of my hand, yet at the same time I could walk into it. I found a little piece of glass on the ground at a bus stop, picked it up and held it up to the streetlight, and it turned into a beautiful kaleidoscope that I could walk into.

STRATEGIES

Over time, I've identified the things that make these experiences the worst. For the thought-boundary issues, it's definitely feeling like I've lied to someone, or am deceiving someone or not being totally honest. So the primary way I deal is by just being really honest with people. If I'm upset about something, trying to let the person know instead of bottling it in and hiding my feelings. I also try to avoid conflict and just uncomfortable social situations in general. And this helps **so** much. If things were as bad as they sometimes get, I couldn't function. So you figure out what you have to do to make that particular experience stop.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I felt alterations of myself. I felt like I was more permeable. Like I had holes and spaces in me, and so through these, words and ideas and people were able to invade me and my thoughts and my being.

STRATEGIES

I wasn't able to. I just rocked my body back and forth and again, went on to the next things I had to do in my life.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Synchrony of space time and thought have been the central aspect of at least six significant periods of psychosis. This involves the experience of a powerful interweave between the content of mental events and external where a thought is intimately linked to a sound, image, or events if they are causal. Watching say the news on TV is terrifying as the consequences of causation is unbearable. This has happened in acute polymorphic psychosis and led to a sequence of delusional beliefs linked to spirituality space time

STRATEGIES

I had CBTp for two years with a leading expert in South London. In 2000 I trained to be a CBTp therapist and developed a neurological explanation for myself of percept formation and synchronised regional activity in the brain.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Yes. I tend to experience a lot of 'melding' and 'melting' and things collapsing. Like that the parameters of the room, distances of a space, or measurements of my body are suddenly getting smaller or shrinking, or suddenly huge. I also experience my skull getting scarily massive, as though the roof of my mouth is expanding and becomes a giant cavern, that there is no jaw left, that my entire head has expanded into the room and then the universe, and my body is melting away. Or that my teeth have melted into butter and then into air. Sometimes time collapses as though it's been sucked through a black hole into another dimension. Or sometimes it feels like I've transcended into light, into energy, into everything and I'm just at one-ness with the gaia-force of nature. This can feel thrilling or terrifying, or sometimes both at once. Sometimes it feels like I'm a satellite receiver for the universe, or sometimes it feels like the reverse: that I've collapsed into the world.

STRATEGIES

I try to remind myself that I am whole and contained, and that I have a body and a physical boundary. That while I am connected to the world, I am also contained within my own vessel.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

The hardness of edges becoming more or less pronounced. Feeling as though my limbs belong to someone else.

STRATEGIES

Sitting with and paying attention

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I felt like i had been sent into the past to witness / re-experience my own birth. I also felt I was being shown visions of the future where I was old and had ruined my life. I felt like I might 'wake up' at any moment and be in one of those horrible futures for real.

STRATEGIES

Support of loved ones to help me realise where and when I was. This helped until I was able to get to a hospital, take medication and rest lots.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I have felt a sinking feeling on the ground/solid surface - almost like the space between the atoms was parting - and I was able to enter that space. Sometimes my hands and/or feet feel disconnected from my body. I have also had out-of-body experiences while meditating or dreaming. More so as a child, less now as an adult.

STRATEGIES

I have learned how to control - more or less - the severity of detachment by grounding myself, doing something physical and/or changed what I was doing. If it was quiet, putting on music is helpful sometimes, too.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

I have felt time go too fast or slow or become disoriented in space and time. I'm not sure if this is what the question is aiming at

STRATEGIES

I look at my watch, my phone, the calendar a lot. Try to get an idea of where I'm at.

ALTERATIONS OF SPACE & TIME

Time becomes obsolete while I'm feeling "high" from the experience. And then time becomes very apparent as the paranoia increases.

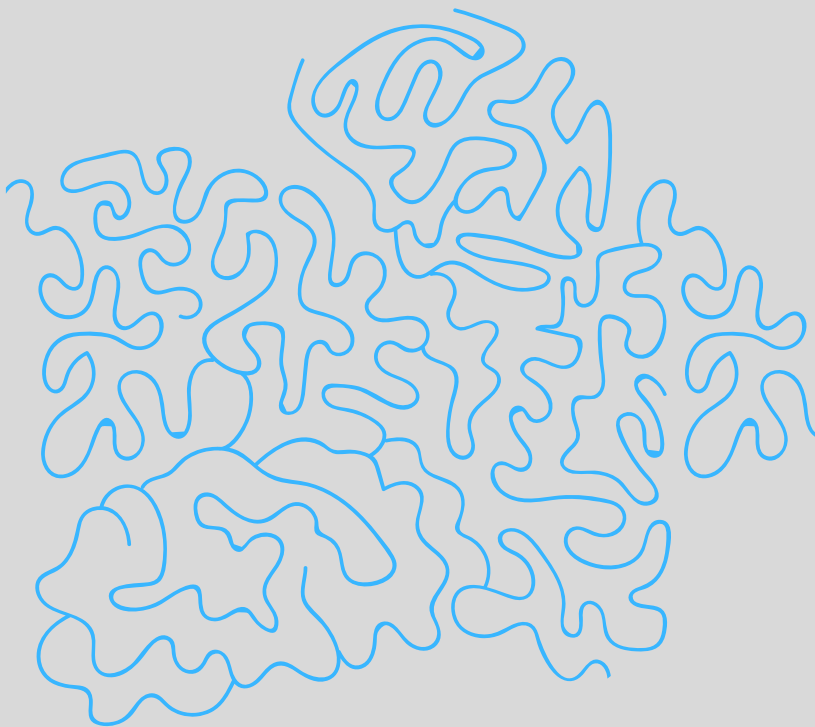
STRATEGIES

During the time where time becomes obsolete, almost as if it doesn't exist, I feel like I'm in complete bliss and one with everything. So at that point I don't want anything to change. When the paranoia increases I go right to my bed and pray.



Psychosis Outside the Box

Version 2.0



For more information about the project, email:
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