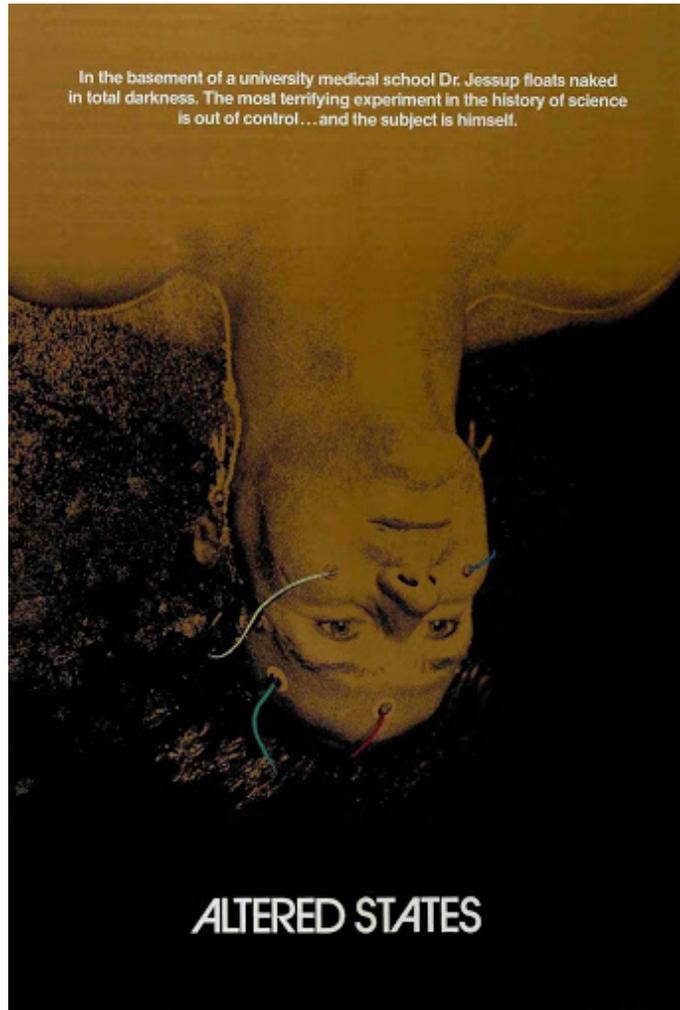


Altered States

In 1980, William Hurt's film debut "Altered States" introduced the idea of the sensory deprivation tank to the consciousness of popular culture. Hurt's character Edward Jessup uses a combination of hallucinogens obtained from a Mexican tribe with the tank to explore deep memory states and altered states of consciousness. Since this is science fiction his experiments go awry, and (what is the statute of limitations on spoiler alerts?) his experiments take on a physical form, causing him to devolve into a primordial state. Sensory deprivation has profound effects on the brain, and has been used for everything from addiction therapy to interrogation. While no one has physically mutated into a prehistoric hominid (yet), sensory deprivation can cause structural, physical changes. According to a study led by NEI (National Eye Institute) funded researchers at Massachusetts Eye and Ear "the brains of (people) who are born blind make new connections in the absence of visual information, resulting in enhanced, compensatory abilities such as a heightened sense of hearing, smell and touch, as well as cognitive functions (such as memory and language). The report, published online in PLOS ONE, describes...the combined structural, functional and anatomical changes in the brain evident in those born with blindness that are not present in normally sighted people."



Selective Sensory deprivation/alteration

Up to this point we have dealt with alterations of perspective from primarily a psychological standpoint (e.g. choosing how you contextualize or interpret experience). Our brains thrive on novelty, and constant unaltered stimulus can numb us to the presence of distinctions that might otherwise be obvious. Anyone who has gotten stuck on a word-search game knows the feeling of hitting a wall, only to immediately find the missing combination of letters after taking a short break. A commonly used strategy of sensory alteration (although not commonly perceived as such) would be using a mirror while practicing. The mirror gives you a perspective on your playing and physicality that is not possible under “normal” circumstances. Audio/video recording is another way to (literally) view your playing from another angle. Not coincidentally, these 2 methods address the senses of sight and sound (I have not experienced performance/practice enhancement by altering my sense of smell or taste, but I am open to the possibility..).

Another very powerful way to shift focus is to remove a sense entirely, thus mimicking the “enhancement” effects of the NEI study, at least in the short term. Practice for an extended period using some variation of a blindfold or a sleep mask. At first you may notice that you are not able to perform up to levels to which you have become accustomed. Have patience, and stick with it. Start with scales or passages in one position and gradually move to more complex repertoire if this is a new experience. If you are used to visualization, you should notice that mental preparation becomes a necessity rather than a luxury. Pay attention to how the absence of sight focuses you on the sound and feel of what you are playing. You can use a simple bandana or a sleep mask. I use something called a Nitehood (nitehood.com, use offer code “fractal20” for 20% off and free shipping! Chivalry not included) that is the best, most comfortable, and most completely dark sleep mask that I have ever found (yes, I use it to sleep as well). In an ensemble, it can be enlightening to rehearse back-to-back rather than facing your colleagues so that you are forced to rely on non-visual cues along with testing your knowledge of the parts of the composition other than your own.

Even though ours is an aural medium, you can derive great insights from altering or muting your sense of hearing as a practice tool. Foam earplugs or over ear headphones of any type can suffice. Use the time to focus on the heightened effect it has on your sense of touch. Feel the bow vibrate in your hand. Notice the quality of the contact between the hair and the

string. You may find that the reduced volume and stimulation makes it easier to perceive areas of excess tension and helps to mitigate the desire to force the sound.

These suggestions are solely a starting point and will hopefully spark further trials and exploration of the concepts. Just keep your self-experimentation firmly in the Cenozoic Era. The author is not responsible for “Pleistocenic” regression due to Altered States practicing protocols.



FRACTAL FRIDAY TOPICS!

Please submit comments or suggestions for future topics to davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com

FRACTAL FORUM: Friday Forums are on “pause” for the moment

NO FORUM ON 1/24

NEXT FORUM:

SPECIAL GUEST Robin Kesselman on “Bow Speed Geometry”

1/31 10 AM PT

We will continue our multi-week “deep dive” into Fractal Fingering on February 7.

Every SUNDAY on Zoom at 10AM PT!

Visit www.fractalbassist.com to get the invite(s). Everyone is welcome.

FRACTAL BASSIST Channel on YouTube (Coming Soon!)

This invite-only YouTube channel will be a continuation, development and place to share these ideas and principles. Although the entire Fractal Fingering course and samples are available online and at DiscoverDoubleBass.com, this channel will provide a forum for more in-depth content and to address questions on a more individual basis.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

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