

**WORLDS OF CONSCIOUSNESS
THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE
EUROPEAN COLLEGE OF THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

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ABOUT 500 people attended a remarkable conference in Gottingen, Germany September 24-27, 1992. The European

Conference for the Study of Consciousness, the sponsor of this gathering, was developed by some of the members of the old European Psycholytic Association. The original group was made up of pioneers in research with psychedelics as adjuncts to psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy, its membership roster was a who's who of researchers in the late 50's and early 60's. In Europe as in the United States, psychedelic work fell on hard times in the 1970's. What we consider remarkable about this conference is that it emerges like a phoenix from the ashes of past repression! The College was founded in 1985 as a multidisciplinary forum for advancing research and exchanging experiences in the area of altered states of consciousness whether they stem from psychoactive substances or psychological methods. The disciplines spanned include chemistry, psychopharmacology, psychology, medicine, psychotherapy, ethnomedicine and anthropology.

I (RY) had the pleasure of meeting the founders of the College first in 1988. I met with these luminaries of the European scene in a tiny conference room in Frieburg. This first conference for me was a whirlwind of seasoned leadership from people like Hanscarl Leuner MD, Albert Hofmann PhD, C. Scharfetter MD and Jan Bastiaans MD, all guiding younger colleagues like Christian Ratsch PhD, Peter Hess MD and Rolf Verres MD. These folks were joined by the members of the Swiss Psycholytic Association, a group of seven Swiss psychiatrists who, in 1988, were just granted permission to use psychedelics in therapy buy their government, and an ever changing troop of graduate students from psychology, anthropology and other relevant disciplines.

These early conferences were an exercise in sensory overload with most presentations lasting between 15 minutes and 45 minutes and the schedule completely full from early morning to late evening. The work presented was of excellent academic quality and reminded me of a true University of Consciousness with graduate students presenting their work before an august faculty. The special element was always the combination of intellectual rigor and excellence with an orientation toward the study of consciousness, something I have rarely encountered at other conferences. These folks are more than cheerleaders for a new age, they are the dedicated researchers attempting to understand the real inner frontier that consciousness studies confront. By 1990, the room became a hall and attendance burgeoned to 200 people. It was decided that the time was right for an international gathering.

The most significant aspect of this year's meeting was that it accomplished its goal of going beyond conventional scientific exchange by informing participants about experiences concerning the different domains of consciousness and perception.

Pre-conference workshops offered people the opportunity to become acquainted with or deepened their experience with the influence of sound, music, dance, breathing, meditation and the imagination. Plenary sessions each morning consisted of expert panels discussing: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (with Albert Hofmann, Christian Ratsch and Marlene Dobkin de Rios); Scientific Bases (with Alexander Shulgin, Karl A. Kovar, and Alfred Maelicke); Significance for Psychotherapy (with Hanscarl Leuner and Ralph Metzner); and a final panel of all the College's founders and directors discussing Extraordinary States of Consciousness-Perspectives for the Future.

¹ (Note: Richard and Donna have been approved by the FDA to conduct research into the use of LSD in the treatment of substance abuse — more on this is subsequent newsletters.)

Translation for these sessions was excellent and well organized for the plenary sessions and made it possible for real exchange among all the participants. Yet the translators could not be everywhere and most of the smaller afternoon sessions were only in German. The broad range of areas covered were: Experimental Psychology and Systematic Description of Altered States of Consciousness; Near Death Experiences and Out of Body Experiences; Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology; The Therapeutic Applications of Altered States of Consciousness; Traditional Healers, Ethnobotany; Music, Sound, Rhythm, Dance, Body; and On the Chemistry and Neuro-Biology of Psychoactive Substances. In some of these sessions we attended we found the caliber of the information was excellent and discussion was full and often intense. We participated by presenting a paper on the history of our psychedelic research team, *Thirty Years of Psychedelic Research: The Spring Grove Experiment and its Sequels*.

THE conference was a dialogue between the objective and subjective aspects of studying human consciousness that achieved synthesis in its best moments. An example of this was the music therapy session we attended one afternoon. The team of music therapists was advanced in their cross cultural integration of methods and techniques. They explained the underlying theory then gave us a spontaneous experience using gongs, didgeridoo, monochord, and tabla. This amazing integration included an example of Korean shamanic trance dancing by Hiya Park. This experiential panel was an example of how to integrate various approaches to altered states including the wisdom of understanding human development that psychoanalysis brings us while grasping the immediacy and depth offered by trance and shamanism.

An example of the difficulty in achieving a synthesis between the subjective and objective was illustrated to us by a PET scanning study about Ketamine HCL (see story on page 24). In the power of this new technology for observing the inner dynamics of cerebral metabolism,

we found that our colleagues seemed susceptible to the blindness of ignoring subjective experiences. There was much data presented on metabolic events as revealed by the differential emission of positrons, yet no report on the experience of the subjects. Were they terrified or transfixed, happy or sad? In this most enlightened arena we saw that it is still a challenge to combine awareness of consciousness as a variable with the collection and reporting of objective scientific data.

PARTICIPANTS were mostly from Germany and Switzerland but also from as far away as Brazil. The setting was a large hall of the University of Gottingen and was buzzing with continuing discussions between sessions. For many participants this conference was a very complete introduction to a field of study in its pioneering stages. For others it was a heart-warming reunion with many old friends. It made clearer to us how much work we (all of us interested in this field) need to do yet in developing tools to describe experiences that in our languages and cultures are brought acknowledged once again as valid subjects for scientific study.

The larger questions of how to examine consciousness as a scientific field of knowledge that includes both subjective and objective worlds, and how to integrate this knowledge into our societies in a way to enrich our culture were discussed in the last session. The conference concluded with Dr. Hofmann's hope and vision for a culture informed and enriched by experiences and research in consciousness that surely will manifest in the world as peace.

Proceedings of the conference will be available. For information contact Michael Schlichting, ECSC, Judenstrasse 33, D-3400 Gottingen, Germany, Phone 49-551-484463. ■

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