

Reports on the 1996 International Transpersonal Association Conference, Technologies of the Sacred

Introduction by Stan Grof THE MANAUS CONFERENCE was a truly extraordinary event. As somebody who was deeply involved in creating the program, I am obviously biased, but I have by now received enough enthusiastic feedback from all over the world to know that many others share that opinion. It was without any doubt energetically the most powerful ITA conference yet. I know that some people might feel that therapeutic and ritual use of psychedelics received too much attention and was over-represented in the program. However, there is no doubt in my mind that properly and responsibly used, psychedelic substances represent a technology of the sacred par excellence. I would like to thank MAPS for its major contribution to this meeting that helped the ITA enormously to create a rich and exciting program. — With warm regards, Stan Grof

Six Days in **Manaus** in May

Charles S. Grob

FROM MAY 16 TO MAY 21, 1996 the International Transpersonal Association held its 15th annual meeting in Manaus, Brazil. Along with the expected array of inveterate transpersonal speakers, this year's ITA also presented numerous lectures and discussions on psychedelic use and research. Together with a variety of stimulating presentations on Brazilian spiritual traditions, the psychedelic "track" offered a fascinating perspective on an area given very little attention in recent years. Indeed, it was heartening to observe the world of transpersonal politics openly acknowledging, if not embracing, this long-neglected field of psychedelic studies, particularly given its critical role during the genesis of the trans-personal field. Special recognition should be accorded the organizers of the conference, and in particular Dr. Stanislav Grof, for their vision and courage in welcoming back into the transpersonal fold open discussion of the science and cultural context of psychedelics.

A particular highlight of this year's program were the numerous presentations on the subject of ayahuasca, the psychedelic plant concoction indigenous to the Amazon Basin, the setting for the conference. Given its relevance to the local region and Brazilian culture, lectures and discussions of ayahuasca were well-attended and enthusiastically received. One of the more exciting and noteworthy of these events was the Psychedelics and Religion panel, chaired by veteran

researcher and theoretician Ralph Metzner, which for the first time brought together under the same roof for open discussion senior representatives of the three major Brazilian syncretic ayahuasca churches, the União do Vegetal, Santo Daime, and Barquiña. Ayahuasca has had legal sanction in Brazil for use within religious contexts since 1987 (an historical precedent of enormous import world-wide).

Because of differences in organizational structure and political sophistication, however, the churches have had significant disagreements among themselves in recent years. The opportunity to jointly participate in the ITA panel was endorsed by these senior church representatives, Glacus de Souza Brito of the União do Vegetal, Alex Polari of the Santo Daime, and Philippe Barroso Bandeira de Mello of the Barquiña, as an essential step in establishing rapprochement and solidarity between the diverse religious organizations.

In addition to providing North American and European conference attendees an opportunity to learn about these fascinating and unique religious structures, the ITA panel has hopefully facilitated a strengthening of the Brazilian ayahuasca movement.

Mention should also be made of the valuable contribution made by MAPS in sponsoring the lectures and discussions on cultural and scientific dimensions of psychedelics. Beyond adding to the substance and depth of the ITA conference, a valuable opportunity was also provided researchers and scholars from North America and Europe to interact with colleagues from South America. The interchange of ideas, research strategies and political perspectives from around the world created a stimulating and refreshing context for discussion and consideration of future directions. Such gatherings as the recent ITA meetings in Manaus are of vital importance in furthering the development of this nascent and only recently revived field of psychedelic studies. Through the ongoing support of MAPS and other generous donors, the necessary foundation for future progress and growth is beginning to be established. •