

Roasting the Cartesian-Newtonian Paradigm in the **Brazilian Rainforest**

Richard Yensen and Donna Dryer

MANY DOMESTIC FLIGHTS IN Brazil take place at odd hours, late at night and very early in the morning. In the wee hours our plane descended to an airport surrounded by an amazing number of city lights in the midst of the earth's largest rain forest. We didn't know that Manaus is a city of two million people. We touched down at two a.m. By the time we found the bus that was coming to meet us, loaded our luggage aboard and registered at the Hotel Tropical it was nearly sunrise. At dawn we walked with a bellhop down endless corridors of darkly stained hand-carved hardwood floors, walls and ceilings. Our room was about 10 minutes' walk from the registration desk, the immensity of the hotel boggled our tired minds.

Much about Brazil was startling, beautiful and remarkable. The people are lovely blends of the races that prejudice keeps distinct in other parts of the world. The attitude toward life is that love of family, joy and celebration of life itself are the central values that unite communities despite economic barriers.

I (Richard) had dreamed of visiting this savage and beautiful country ever since I enjoyed my first Carnival in Panama as an eight year old boy. As I grew, I heard increasingly tantalizing stories of Amazonian explorers encountering bird eating spiders and drinking jungle brews that temporarily gave them telepathic powers. Whenever Brazil was mentioned a flood of vivid scenes would flash, from the films *Black Orpheus*, *That Man From Rio* and *The Emerald Forest* along with imagined scenes of *The Wizard of the Upper Amazon*, Manuel Cordoba Rios' account of being kidnapped by an Indian tribe.

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Talk of Brazil in later years was also associated with the tragic death of Walter Pahnke who, after completing his "Good Friday Experiment" at Harvard University, headed the psychedelic research team at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. He died, in a tragic scuba diving accident, the day that I first visited the MPRC. During the years that I worked there I came to know that around the time of his death he had been planning an expedition to a small town in Brazil to visit a phenomenal healer, Ze Arigo, the surgeon of the rusty knife.

All this and more flooded my consciousness when Stan Grof first told me he was planning to hold an International Transpersonal Association meeting in the heart of the Amazon.

Psychedelics highlighted

The highlights of this extraordinary conference included more cross cultural discussion of psychedelic substances than has ever occurred at an ITA. This is especially

overdue because Stan Grof is both a luminary psychedelic theoretician and one of the founders of the ITA. Brazil offered an extraordinary forum for such a presentation because there is a long history of psychedelic use among Amazonians and because of more recent political developments in which the government recognized ayahuasca as a sacrament in many religious groups. This ground-breaking religious freedom establishes a more open context for discussions of matters transpersonal and psychedelic than exists anywhere else in the world today.

Gary Bravo gave a warm and self-revealing presentation about psychedelics and their relationship to transpersonal psychology. He went into depth about therapeutic orientation in psychedelic therapy. The powerful, innovative techniques of our friend Salvador Roquet of Mexico, who died last year, was covered in a lively discussion of psychedelic therapies. The

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presentation compared and contrasted the elements of psychedelic, psycholytic, shamanic and other models of psychedelic use for therapy and research.

We gave a presentation entitled *Psychedelic Awareness and the Conquest Mentality*. We explored the conquest mentality as a pervasive belief about human relationships, interactions with nature, knowledge and spirit that is fundamentally paranoid and focuses on the dynamic of power and domination. This cognitive stance, deeply embedded in modern thought, has colored scientific research and spiritual conceptions of psychedelic substances and their use since the time of Christopher Columbus.

Other conference topics

David Sonnenschein, a North American film maker who now lives in Brazil, presented a startling nine minute film preview, *Dr. Fritz: Healing the Body and Spirit*. David is finishing this 45 minute documentary on Rubens Farias, a Brazilian computer engineer, who has been channeling the spirit of Dr. Adolph Fritz, a German doctor who died in World War I. Dr. Fritz claims to be the same spirit that originally possessed Ze Arigo in the 1960's. The preview showed amazing shots of Dr. Fritz/Rubens Farias performing surgery without anesthesia using instruments that were not sterile. David reported that no patient has ever become infected through these mind-blowing operations and many have been healed from cancer and other serious ailments. By the time you read this David's film should be finished and available in English. He can be reached by email at: crystal@ax.apc.org. The tape is available for

\$60 from David Sonnenschein, 18212 Kingsport Drive, Malibu, California 90265. We highly recommend viewing this film as a treatment for the conquest mentality that infects us all with the idea that we have or are about to explain everything with currently accepted scientific paradigms.

Linda Rosa Corazon gave a beautiful cross-cultural survey of sacred medicines and their value in the treatment of addictions, from the Native American Church to ayahuasca, ibogaine and LSD. She gave a heartfelt presentation that included detailed case studies and appropriately framed it with a ritual opening and closing.

The famous actor Jon Voight (*Midnight Cowboy* and many other films) was making a film in Brazil and he addressed the conference as a whole. He eloquently shared with us his concern for the rainforest and the traditions of its peoples threatened by colonization.

There was a Psychedelic Research Panel that included Charles Grob, Rick Strassman, Stanislav Grof and ourselves. Ram Dass served as moderator and did a magnificent job of creating a warm and wise context for our discussion of psychedelic history, present research and future prospects.

Ayahuasca churches and centers

The Santo Daime Community is among many religious groups using ayahuasca in its ceremonies. They invited congress participants to participate in a charismatic ceremony with ayahuasca at a church in the jungle just outside of Manaus. Their visionary songs were performed as a central feature of the ceremony and later, in a rare public performance, one evening at the conference. These songs are directly inspired by transmissions received during ayahuasca experiences. The unusual performance took the audience on an uplifting journey from the earliest songs received by the founder in the 1930's to the very latest hymns.

Some of the most intrepid conference attendees joined Steve and Robin Larsen and their son Merlin for a swashbuckling post-congress adventure in the headwaters of the Amazon where the Santo Daime Community has its headquarters in Mapia.

Along the lines of addiction treatment in a ritual frame Takiwasi comes to mind. Takiwasi is a treatment center in the Amazon region of Peru near Tarapoto that has been partially funded by the French government and the European Union. Dionisio Santos and Michel Mabit are both Frenchmen who have learned shamanic techniques for healing with psychedelic plants and diet that they use in their center along with the shamans who teach them. They shared beautiful slides of the rustic accommodations and described a long-term treatment where patients are isolated in the jungle, given purging diets and psychedelics combined with Holotropic Breathwork and other new age therapies to cure their addiction to cocaine base.

Rick Strassman reviewed his DMT and psilocybin research, Charles Grob spoke of his Hoasca project and Ralph Metzner gave a panel on ritual use of psychedelics. Unfortunately the

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It was a great pleasure to meet Glacus S. Brito, a physician and master maestre in the União do Vegetal church. Charles Grob and Glacus collaborated with Dennis McKenna and Jace Callaway on psychological and physiological studies of long-term ayahuasca use by church members. His church is much more reserved and discriminating about welcoming the curious than the Santo Daime group. Our impression, despite the initial reserve, was that of great warmth and responsibility in the conduct of their ceremonies.

Phillippe Bandera de Melo represented a third alternative amongst the psychedelic religions of Brazil, the Barquiña Church of Rio de Janeiro. This church has blended elements from the Santo Daime group with Candomblé influences which are more oriented towards spirit possession. Phillippe is also a Jungian analyst and director of the Casa das Palmeiras Clinic, a revolutionary psychiatric clinic with a Jungian orientation that specializes in the treatment of psychotic individuals.

All of these groups have many members who were addicted to drugs of abuse and have since become useful members of society as a result of their continuing involvement with ayahuasca in a ritual setting.

duties of parenthood took precedence and we were not able to attend to these presentations as fully as we would have liked.

Women's circle

Susan Seitz led a council circle of over 40 women who discussed their personal experiences with psychedelics. I (Donna) found this an inspiring and heart opening sharing of deep experiences. It is unusual for women to find a forum with sufficient safety and community to allow a deep sharing of experiences that are usually so repressed in our own culture.

This conference was so spectacular in its complexity and variety that we certainly fail to do it justice here. We hope that any friends whose presentations were overlooked will forgive us and that others will share their experiences to broaden the perspective you can gain on a truly significant event in psychedelic history. •