

Institut de Prospectiva Antropològica
Las III Jornadas sobre **Enteógenos** y
Estados Modificados de Consciencia

Third International Conference on **Entheogens** and Modified States of Consciousness
May 30-31, 1998, Barcelona, Spain



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GORDON WASSON long ago suggested that both individuals and cultures can be neatly divided into those who love mushrooms and those who hate them—mycophiles and mycophobes (Wasson, 1957). Here in northeast Spain, mushroom hunting is a popular family-oriented weekend activity at certain times of the year and there are several restaurants that serve three-course meals consisting of nothing but various mushroom-based dishes. In fact, Catalans are reputedly the most mycophilic people on earth.



GIVEN THIS CONTEXT THEN, it is perhaps no surprise that Josep Maria Fericgla, Ph.D., a true Catalan, has once again succeeded in organizing an excellent conference oriented toward sharing recent research concerning entheogens. The list of presenters in this weekend conference (May 30th and 31st, 1998) included chemists, pharmacologists, anthropologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and the occasional ethnobotanist. The conference was held in a sea-front building belonging to the Municipal Institute of Medical Investigation (IMIM) which

was, interestingly, originally formed to run anti-doping tests on athletes in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona and is now one of two places in Spain in which government-funded research into hallucinogens is being conducted.

The conference began with a presentation by Dr. Esther Martínez Ibars, a radiologist and homeopath, entitled "How can entheogens support our contemporary vision of life?" (all titles awkwardly translated from Spanish or Catalan by the author). Dr. Martínez is especially interested in ayahuasca, and spoke of her seven years of experience working with the substance here in Spain.

Dr. Josep Manuel Barbanoj, a well-known pharmacologist in Europe and director of Institut de Recerca de St. Pau, in Barcelona, delivered a presentation entitled, "A bridge between molecular biochemistry and subjectivity: a neuropsychophysiological hypothesis of the active mechanism of psychotomimetics," which was every bit as dense and informative as it sounds.

After a short break, ethnobotanist Jonathan Ott took the stage. Well-known to MAPS readers and to virtually anyone else interested in psychoactive plants, Jonathan delivered a wide-ranging yet consistently focused presentation on the history of human interaction with sacred plants (based upon his new book, *Pharmacophilia*). His talk was spiced with asides on the role "serendipity" has played in research, as well as lines like the following: "The main problem with drugs in today's world is that there aren't enough of them." The wit and erudition of his presentation, delivered in impeccable Spanish, left the audience quite impressed.

After lunch, Dr. Joan Obiols gave a historical presentation on the all-but-forgotten Dr. Moreau of Tours, France. Dr. Obiols is a psychiatrist and professor at the University of Barcelona as well as the General Director of Mental Health in Andorra.

Another man familiar to readers of MAPS, Richard Yensen, Ph.D., then presented "A transcultural comparison of the use of entheogens for psychological growth," which included a very moving account of his first visit to the famous Maria Sabina in Hualtla de Jimenez. Yensen was young at the time (22 years old), and he met a man who'd seen his wife and children murdered by bandits. He had come to Maria Sabina for help. Having had the good fortune to witness the beginning of this unfortunate man's recovery seems to have impressed Yensen very much. Like Ott,



Josep Maria Fericgla and Jonathan Ott

Yensen delivered his presentation in flawless Spanish.

Dr. Alexander (Sasha) Shulgin then took the stage by storm. In a rush of energy and passion which left his translator gasping for air, Shulgin commenced a high-speed tour of some of the better known psychoactive molecules. After ten minutes, Jonathan Ott came to the rescue of the assigned translator, who was quite understandably in need of some assistance with Dr. Shulgin's highly technical vocabulary and free-association thought patterns.

Sunday began with a presentation by Drs. Jordi Camí and Sandra Poudevida, clinical pharmacologists who are conducting clinical studies of various street drugs used in Barcelona, with particular attention to MDMA. Dr. Camí is the Director of IMIM, and an important figure in the study of entheogens in Spain.

The organizer of the conference, anthropologist Dr. Josep Maria Fericgla, then presented a gripping account and analysis of his own shamanic initiation among the Shuar (Jívaro) in Brazil, his question being: "Is it possible to translate this experience to our cultural context?" Dr. Fericgla shared his allotted time with an unscheduled speaker, Mauro Bilarhinho, a psychiatrist who serves as a medical consultant to the União do Vegetal church in Brazil. Dr. Bilarhinho discussed the history of the UDV and gave a brief review of the relation between the UDV and the Brazilian government.

After a short break, Ann Shulgin, spoke about the use of MDMA in psychotherapy (giving her translator a much easier time than her husband had). Her passionate yet careful presentation covered the inherent dangers as well as the extremely positive applications of MDMA in clinical use.

After lunch, Dr. José María Poveda, a clinical psychiatrist and researcher based in Madrid spoke about "Modulation of the entheogenic journey: the shamanic model." In a presentation peppered with wit and irony, Dr. Poveda ranged over a great deal of material relevant to contemporary psychiatry, including some fascinating thoughts on his use of kittens to establish contact with autistic patients.

The afternoon continued with a round-table discussion about "The new ways drugs are being taken." At the table were the writer, Fernando Sánchez Dragó (who moderated), Felipe Borralló (president of ARSEC, and organization working to legalize the use of cannabis in Spain), Dr. Oriol Romani (anthropologist), Dr. Josep Maria Febregas (psychiatrist and director of the Center for Investigation and Treatment of Addictions), and Dr. Joan Colom (director of the Program for Addicts run by the government of Catalunya).

Afterwards, Luis Paniagua closed out the conference with a concert of world music played on various instruments he'd collected and made. •