

## MAPS Report from the **World Psychedelic Forum 2008**

*There is an almost sensual longing for communion with others who have a larger vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendships between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality almost impossible to describe.*

—Teilhard de Chardin (found on WPF Web site)



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IN RECENT YEARS WE HAVE SEEN the beginning of a reemergence of psychedelic research. A social change of this sort creates a need for community, a place to gather with others who have similar opinions and to build and strengthen alliances so that we—as a movement—can reach out and present our ideas to the world. The World Psychedelic Forum (WPF) has arisen and established itself as that global gathering. Growing out of the LSD Symposium 2006, this event, also hosted by the Gaia Media Foundation, was held in the same location and with a similar lineup of speakers. Held in Basel, Switzerland—a small art and culture-rich city, where most of the people I encountered seemed to speak at least three languages—this year the WPF drew a crowd of 2000 psychedelic intelligentsia from 37 countries.

MAPS President Rick Doblin, Ph.D. was prominently featured on the conference lineup. During the opening keynote panel he gave a critique of The Good Friday experiment. Doblin spoke about his vision of nonprofit drug development during a group session with MAPS-sponsored researchers Michael Mithoefer M.D., Ann Mithoefer R.N. and Psychologist Sameet Kumar, Ph.D. He spoke about the past, present and future of LSD research in Switzerland on a panel with MAPS-sponsored Swiss researchers Peter Oehen, M.D. and Peter Gasser, M.D. And that was all on the first day! He also appeared on a question and answer panel

titled “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Psychedelics” along with Dennis McKenna, Dale Pendell and Kathleen Harrison.

Last but not least, Doblin moderated a panel with Russian ketamine researcher Evgeny Krupitsky, M.D. and me. This was one of the more diverse panels in its subject matter. The theme of the panel was “From Problem Child to Wonder Child”. It included a very scientific (but playful) presentation by Dr. Krupitsky on his promising research results, using ketamine-assisted therapy in the treatment of heroin addiction. I gave a presentation titled, “Psychedelic Emergency



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MAPS President Rick Doblin, Ph.D. filled the conference hall with eager listeners.

Services: Lessons from Burning Man to Boom to Beyond,” in which I spoke about the history of MAPS work in this area, and shared tips and techniques for working with people who are having a difficult psychedelic experience.

I also presented preliminary results from MAPS’ exploratory outcome study of ibogaine-assisted therapy in the treatment of opiate addiction. This was on a panel with study coordinator John Harrison, Psy.D. candidate and Iboga Therapy House Program Director Sandra Karpetas.

Programmatically, one thing that was unique to this event, and which worked out really well, was the “Rising Researchers” lecture series, held simultaneously in one of the side rooms. This series consisted of ten minute presentations from a variety of fresh voices in the psychedelic scene—from the evolution of salvia divinorum, to ‘xenolinguistics,’ to a forty year follow-up study of psychiatrists who formerly used LSD in their practices.

MAPS staffer Josh Sonstroem, along with volunteers Judith, Jonah, Joey, John, and Martha staffed a MAPS exhibit booth twelve hours a day Friday through Sunday, and kept the Euros, Swissfrancs, and dollars flying. Thanks to all of their hard work, and the generosity of the table

visitors, we came home with thirty new members, over \$6000.00 in donations and sales, and over two hundred new email addresses.

In between presentations and table staffing, we still found time for many meetings during the weekend. In a world where most of our communication is done through the computer or on the phone, it is rare to get so many of our allies together in one place. We have to make the most of our time together whenever these occasions arise.

We took the opportunity to hold some planning meetings with Boom Festival organizers and volunteers about the possibility of MAPS continuing to provide psychedelic emergency services at the event. No decision was made at the conference, but we did gather lots of interest and email addresses from potential European volunteers. I also held a small training session on the principles of psychedelic emergency services work along with Sandra Karpetas, who has much experience in this area through organizing a similar service at events in Canada and at past Boom festivals.

Not only the days, but also the evenings were packed with activities, with a special program guide for “Psychedelic



MAPS Staffer Josh Sonstroem, tables at the World Psychedelic Forum, bringing in over \$6000, 30 new members and nearly 200 new email addresses

Nights.” Many attended a dance party at “Das Schiff” (a docked boat on the river Rhein) on Sunday night that continued until noon on Monday. On Monday night a select group of MAPS researchers, donors and associates attended a birthday party for MAPS patron donor Robert Barnhart, held in the hotel restaurant. Dr. Peter Gasser, who is conducting our Swiss LSD/end-of-life anxiety study, was the special guest and came to meet with Barnhart, who has donated \$75,000 to his study. Other donors to our LSD study were also at the dinner, including Kevin Herbert, Vanja Palmers and Amanda Fielding, as well as MAPS Board of Director John Gilmore. Dr. Stan Grof, Ralph Metzner and Caroline Garcia also joined the dinner celebration.

After the conference was over, Rick, Josh, and I took the train to Paris where Rick and I presented on the first day of another conference, conveniently scheduled the following week. “Hallucinations in Philosophy and Cognitive Science” was a free symposium that drew a smaller, yet very engaged audience of about thirty people, and took place in a conference room tucked away in the Université René Descartes. Our goal was to try to catalyze efforts to start psychedelic research in

France. We are now working with several psychiatrists to explore the possibility of conducting an MDMA/PTSD pilot study in France.

I boarded the plane home from Paris feeling exhausted and inspired from the dizzying amount of conversations and interactions that had taken place. In a community this large, even though we are all on the same side, it was humanizing to see how many differences arose—slightly different opinions, hopes, dreams, fears. What held us all together though was a shared amazement for the wonders of psychedelics, and a desire to come together for the benefit of the movement.

Overall in this trip, I feel that—as an organization—MAPS accomplished a lot more than what was on the agenda or in the lecture series. I’ve often found with these types of events that it is the conversations over hotel breakfast, or the smile in the elevator, that can long after turn out to be the most rewarding or important. It’s too early to say now, but I look forward to witnessing the aftereffects of the butterfly wings that were flapped in Basel that week as the psychedelic research renaissance makes its way into history. •