

Humane Therapies, Transpersonal Visions

Genuinely new territory in science can only be gained if, at a decisive point, one is willing to abandon the foundation upon which the existing science rests and, so to speak, jump into the void. *Werner Heisenberg*

Divine Lightning

As a brain researcher in Prague in 1956, George Roubiček was one of the first in the Communist Eastern bloc to carry out systematic studies with LSD. He was particularly interested in the effect of LSD on the brain's electrical activity. His approach was to administer a large dose of LSD to each test subject in a dark room and record their physiological parameters throughout the entire experiment. Some three hours after ingesting LSD, subjects were exposed to oscillating flashes of light in varying frequencies from a stroboscope, permitting measurement of how a subject's brain waves were affected. When Roubiček was looking for subjects among his students at Charles University, Stanislav Grof, a medical student, raised his hand. Patience was required, however, because Grof first had to graduate before he could qualify as a subject for these experiments. Nonetheless, since there was a shortage of assistants, he was able to help with several sessions. Soon after he graduated in the fall of 1956 with a degree in medicine and in the philosophy of med-

icine, he was ready. Grof, born in 1931, now a young medical intern, contacted his professor again. His first LSD experience, accompanied by his brother Paul who had also studied medicine, was the turning point in the life of this man who was to become a world-renowned researcher of consciousness. "I felt that a divine thunderbolt had catapulted my conscious self out of my body. I lost my awareness of the research assistant, the laboratory, the psychiatric clinic, Prague and the planet. My consciousness expanded at an inconceivable speed and reached cosmic dimensions. There were no more boundaries or difference between me and the universe." (Grof 2006) This "divine lightning" inspired Grof's career. His first LSD session was enough to convince him that the conventional psychodynamic model he had

Stanislav Grof is one of the world's greatest living psychologists. He is truly a pioneer in every sense of the word and one of the most comprehensive psychological thinkers of our era.

Ken Wilber

studied at university could not satisfactorily explain this experience. "This day marked the beginning of my radical departure from the monistic materialism of Western science.... I felt strongly that the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness, in general, and those induced by psychedelics, in particular, was by far the most interesting area of psychiatry I could imagine. I realized that, under the proper circumstances, psychedelic experiences—to a much greater degree than dreams, which play such a crucial role in psychoanalysis are truly, using Freud's words, a 'royal road into the unconscious.' And right there and then, I decided to dedicate my life to the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness." (Grof 2008)

In forty years, I have never met anyone who has deeply experienced transcendent realms and in spite of that still held on to the Western materialistic scientific world view.

Stanislav Grof

I know of no work that so well incorporates the findings of Freud, Jung and Rank, adding fresh insights which the methods of those psychotherapists never could have achieved.

Joseph Campbell

After graduating, he completed training as a psychoanalyst and was hired by the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague. He investigated the effects of LSD until the mid-1960s and used it quite successfully as a psychotherapy adjunct in over three thousand psychedelic sessions, carefully documenting each case. This invaluable collection of material was the basis for the theories and models he later described in several books. According to his observations, treatment of alcoholics, drug addicts and depressive

patients brought the greatest and quickest success. For patients exhibiting psychoneuroses, psychosomatic disturbances, and character neuroses, lasting improvements were usually not sustainable without a systematic working through the various problem areas during a series of multiple LSD sessions. Grof used LSD in accompanied trials as a means of self-exploration and insisted that all persons involved in treatment, from nurses to physicians or psychiatrists, be familiar with the effects of LSD from personal experience, a requirement that was adopted by many researchers.

Thirty Years of Research

In 1965, Stanislav Grof was invited to the USA for an international conference on Psychotherapy with LSD; after which he embarked on a lecture tour. Upon returning to Czechoslovakia, he received an invitation from Joel Elkes, professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, offering him a research fellowship. Grof was engaged in work in Prague and did not wish to thoughtlessly abandon professional and private contacts at home. Nonetheless, after hesitating a short while, he accepted the enticing offer. When the fellowship ended, he decided to remain in the USA. From 1967 to 1973, he was Clinical and Research fellow, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and later, Chief of Psychiatric Research at Johns Hopkins University.

The program at Johns Hopkins was one of the world's most enduring and influential projects to ever study the therapeutic benefits of psychedelics. The program's first studies of LSD had begun in the early 1950s and ended nearly thirty years later. They were