

## Demystifying the Mystical

### the association for transpersonal psychology 2004 conference

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**Transpersonal psychologists gather in Palo Alto to scientifically explore new frontiers of psychological research, and revisit some that mainstream psychology has left behind.**



Transpersonal psychology, a field proud of its openness to inquiry and acceptance of change, is the only branch of psychology that lacks a clear definition of itself. It has traditionally embraced psychedelic therapy along with other marginalized aspects of psychological research: spirituality, peak experience, and paranormal phenomena. In return, the psychedelic experience has been a valuable tool in the field of transpersonal psychology, adding insight into peak experience, pre- and perinatal matrices, ego death, spiritual emergency, and archetypes.

MAPS staff attended “Transpersonal Psychology 2004, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conference,” held in Palo Alto, California on Valentine’s Day weekend, to further reinforce the already strong bond between transpersonal psychology and psychedelics. The event drew psychologists, therapists, educators, health professionals, researchers, scholars, writers, students, and others interested in the transpersonal field.

A large crowd assembled to hear Dr. June May Ruse, lead author of MAPS’ manual for MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Dr. Ruse presented the treatment procedures with the confidence of being only weeks from final DEA approval. The audience, which contained not only attendees, but also a majority of the conference organizers, expressed a supportive attitude and hopefulness for the reinstatement of psychedelic research in the U.S.

In a keynote speech, father of psychedelic therapy Dr. Stanislav Grof passed on his theories developed from a lifetime of working with holotropic states of consciousness. Grof gave a call to action for all of the psychologists in attendance: it is time for the field of psychology to break free from the 17<sup>th</sup> century postnatal view of the psyche and extend studies and practice to the prenatal, perinatal, archetypal/mythical, and transpersonal realms.

Other keynote speakers included Charles Tart, PhD and Jeanne Achterberg, PhD. Tart examined several topics in parapsychology that deserve more research based on preliminary evidence in his presentation titled, “Flaky California nonsense in a scientific age: Is there any scientific support for Transpersonal Psychology?” Achterberg reviewed imagery and healing studies by her students and others in the field.

A special event was held on Saturday night for the film *Making the Invisible Visible: The Life and Work of Stanley Krippner*. A discussion panel featuring Tart, Ralph Metzner, PhD, Stanley Krippner, PhD, and others followed the film.

The conference was held in the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology’s William James Center for Consciousness Studies. The center’s namesake, pioneer of altered consciousness William James, was mentioned often in the lectures, and even featured as the main topic of discussion in others. Cognitive liberty and entheogen law specialist Richard Glen Boire’s mock trial, “In Defense of William James and Other

Users of Psychoactive Consciousness Tools” was one provocative example. When challenged by an audience member with the possibility that freedom of mind will allow people to legally partake in potentially dangerous activities such as glue-sniffing, Boire likened cognitive liberty to freedom of speech: We allow people with racist or other socially-inappropriate beliefs to speak their minds in the practice of allowing free speech for all.

The Institute for Transpersonal Psychology ([www.itp.edu](http://www.itp.edu)) and the Association for Transpersonal Psychology ([www.atpweb.org](http://www.atpweb.org)) jointly sponsored this gathering of consciousness explorers. The Association was originally founded to investigate ultimate states—peak, mystical, being—and enhance these states to change personal and cultural perspectives. The Institute, a graduate school dedicated to exploring the mind, body, and spirit, operates from the unlikely location of a Silicon Valley corporate office park. A large number of students were in attendance both from the Institute itself and from nearby transpersonal psychology programs at California Institute of Integral Studies and Saybrook Graduate School.

From my view of this conference, transpersonal psychology still has some work left to do on changing its image if it will be accepted by mainstream psychology. Its lack of definition, willingness to embrace fields of study that most others deny existence of, and tendency to attract “non-mainstream” people all contribute to a slight air of flakiness. On the other hand, mainstream psychology desperately needs adventurous researchers who are willing to explore these risky areas in order to provide fresh ideas and open new areas of inquiry. By sticking more rigidly to the scientific method, and speaking the language of the traditional psychologists, transpersonal psychologists can earn the respect they deserve as psychology’s brave explorers, pioneering new frontiers in therapy and research. •

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## **Sixteenth International Transpersonal Association Conference**

**“Mythic Imagination and Modern Society: Search for Re-Enchantment of the World”**

**JUNE 11–18, 2004**

**At the fabulous Riviera Resort in Palm Springs, CA**

This conference will focus on the importance of myth in modern society. We will explore how the new understanding of the nature and function of myth revealed by the work of C. G. Jung, Joseph Campbell, James Hillman, Mircea Eliade, and their followers has revolutionized the thinking in many areas of modern life. Like previous ITA events, the format of this meeting will combine lectures, experiential sessions, rituals, music, dance, and visual arts. The conference coincides with the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Joseph Campbell, the greatest mythologist of the twentieth century. For more information, see:

• **[www.itaconferences.org](http://www.itaconferences.org)** •