

# Book Reviews

**Stanislav Grof** *"Realms of the Human Unconscious"*. Dutton 1976.

The researches detailed in this book are significant as a contribution to the phenomenology of the LSD experience as well as being a valuable addition to our understanding of certain psychoanalytic concepts - in general, as to the nature of unconscious memory-structures and the process of regression.

Not much research has been done with LSD, one of the main reasons being the difficulty of obtaining government permission for such work. Stanislav Grof has been giving LSD to patients since the early fifties, first in Czechoslovakia and recently in the USA. Most researchers have had great difficulty in detailing the results of LSD experiments because there are few, if any, consistent physiological or psychological 'effects' caused by ingestion of the substance. What has been frequently observed by researchers is that a great deal depends upon psychological set and environmental setting.

Grof shows in this book how the powerful internal forces affect the experience, and examines the nature of these internal forces. Grof noticed a consistent alteration of time-sense in LSD subjects, and explored this. In the book, he details the reports of some subjects who experienced themselves as being in another time, generally 're-experiencing' vividly an unresolved traumatic life-event, generally from their childhood years. In the case descriptions, we are taken on an archeological venture into the individual's past, pausing to examine the areas where the person experienced again past traumatic events. Grof noticed how frequently these life-traumas followed a basic template or matrix. He refers to the initial trauma and subsequent re-lived transformations of it as systems of condensed experience (COEX system).

The nature of the COEX system is examined in detail and compared with the concepts of psychoanalytic writers. Digging even deeper, and tunnelling further into past history, the question is raised as to the nature of the initial traumatic life-experience, what might give the basic shape to the individual's consciousness. It is proposed that in general our unconscious structures are shaped as a result of and during the birth and pre-birth experiences. Grof outlines 4 basic perinatal matrices.

The first is associated with pre-birth experiences, an oceanic blissful state. The second occurs during the initial birth contractions, it being proposed here that this is experienced as a crushing, a closing-in. In later life, this would be experienced (mapped onto) feelings of claustrophobia, depression, a feeling that the world is collapsing around one, for example. The third matrix involves our passage through the birth canal, involving a feeling of suffocation, a struggle for survival. The fourth matrix is created in the last stage of birth, involving separation from the mother, the culmination of the agonising birth experience.

Grof suggests how these various experiential matrices are mapped onto adult life experience, how when someone is re-involved with a particular perinatal matrix, their whole experience of the world is suffused with it, including their taste in art, their views on politics and society, and their experience of those around them. This makes fascinating reading.

In the final section of the book Grof describes the possibilities for a person who has resolved these birth experiences and their consequent colouring of existential experience. He suggests the possibility of being in touch with previous incarnations, and other 'transpersonal phenomena', such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, ESP abilities and so on. Again, he gives fascinating accounts of people being able to become more in touch with their powers during LSD sessions.

These claims can only be dismissed if we forget that many psychiatrists would consider the claims Grof makes in the first section of the book to be totally absurd. A psychiatrist who sees behaviour not considered to be in line with prevailing social conventions as aberrant, as mental illness, the effect of biochemical states of the being, to be 'treated' with chemicals and electric shock, would in all probability not read Grof's descriptions of COEX systems and perinatal matrices sympathetically. Grof claims to have gained an insight into psychotic experiences and claims cures of patients considered to be long-term hospital inmates.

This book offers us a fascinating glimpse into a world of time-travel (or regression) with important implications for our understanding of individual psychology and the possibilities for all of us if we can be "re-born", and come to some understanding and resolution of our first, often traumatic, experience of life, the movement from blissful symbiosis to independent individual experience.

**Murray Gordon.**

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**Jose Silva & Phillip Miele - *The Silva Mind Control Method.***  
Souvenir Press £3.95.

I picked this book up to wile away a half hour during lunch expecting it to be one of the routine "positive thinkers" with stories of successful salesmen and fantastic examination results. In fact, there were some successful salesmen and children learning much faster than average and a very good word for "every day and every way I am getting better and better" Coué, but the difference is that Silva's method is based on what seems to be a very seriously researched use of the alpha wave brain state and a carefully thought out method of training.

Moreover, this is a do-it-yourself book and it is possible to achieve this method of mind control just by reading the book and doing the exercises, he claims. In fact, I tried the first exercise and this seemed to work very well. You can try it too. Get into a relaxed state, close your eyes and look upwards at an angle of  $20^{\circ}$ , and then count slowly back from a hundred, two seconds for each figure, and by the end you may well be in an alpha rhythm level. How do you know? Because it feels good I suppose. I felt calm and relaxed and slightly floating. This can be the starting point for new ideas, creative leaps, universal love and extra sensory perceptions. If you get even part of the way there, it would well be worth your while getting this book. If you don't, it might still be worth while getting it in order to try some alternative exercises.

Jose Silva was born in a small Mexican town, made his own way up in the world to running a very successful television and radio repair business which financed a 15-year research programme into better ways of learning, memorising, and the practice of esp and telepathy, diagnosis and healing, and successful planning.

Dr. Clancey D. McKenzie, a prominent Philadelphian psychiatrist trained 28 of his patients suffering from various types of depression and of these 26 "felt pleasantly better after the course". He now uses the Mind Control techniques for all his new patients and claims that this may shorten the length of therapy by up to two years.

Used in everyday situations, Mind Control is claimed to retrieve forgotten memories and aid in comprehension and retention of new material. It can also be used to programme dreaming to solve problems and clear up confusions in the life situation.

Although the system can be learned on one's own, it is obviously quicker with a trainer, and also somewhat quicker with a group learning together. If anyone would be interested in having a look at this as a possibility, please send a quick note to the editor.

**Vivian Milroy**

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