

**Twin Telepathy: The Psychic Connection** by Guy Lyon Playfair. Vega, 2002. 160 pp. £8.99/\$9.95 (paper). ISBN 1-84333-686-3.

There are two themes in this slim volume. One is that twins provide especially good evidence for telepathy and the other is that this fact has been and continues to be ignored by parapsychology researchers. The first is not a new idea. Researchers have often simply assumed this to be the case based on a few anecdotes, but Playfair provides us with the most comprehensive survey of the anecdotes and the limited experimental evidence to date. The second theme is also true, but I am less sure that Playfair's arguments (and occasional harangues) are likely to change that. Ultimately the best case that can be made is that twins seem to be incrementally better than non-twins, but they do not provide a royal road to understanding telepathy. Most twins are not especially telepathic, and many non-twins are quite telepathic. While the lay reader (to whom this book is primarily aimed) will find ample information to confirm his or her suspicions about twins, the professional researcher is not likely to be persuaded that the study of twins will speed our understanding of how telepathy works.

There are 10 chapters in the book, most of which deal with twin telepathy as such, though there is much on telepathy and ESP research in general. There is the obligatory obeisance to quantum mechanics in the final chapter, which adds little to the general thesis. As one expects with Playfair's books, the research behind *Twin Telepathy* is formidable, and even if one is not persuaded by his arguments, his scholarship, coupled with the notes and bibliography, once again provides an invaluable contribution to the field.

*Twin Telepathy* is an easy and entertaining read for the layperson, but the professional as well will find much that he or she did not know about twins and telepathy in this book. I certainly did; perhaps others will, and they may be tempted to pick up the gauntlet that Playfair has thrown down before the research community.

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**The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience** by Benny Shanon. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 487 pp. £23.50 (paper). ISBN 0-19-925293-9.

*The Antipodes of the Mind* is a great book. It is a great book because it makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of consciousness through a detailed account of the phenomenology of experiences that occur during intoxication with the psychedelic ayahuasca.

Ayahuasca is a beverage normally prepared and consumed in the Amazon basin whose psychoactive ingredients are usually beta-carbolines, obtained from the woody *Banisteriopsis* vines such as *Banisteriopsis caapi*, and N,N-dimethyltryptamine, often obtained from the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* bush. In some cases other psychoactive compounds have been added.

Benny Shanon, a professor of psychology at Hebrew University in Israel, has spent considerable time in South America studying the effects of the brew. He has conducted structured and unstructured interviews of 178 participants and has taken the brew himself more than 130 times over the course of 10 years. He has collected data from indigenous and non-indigenous people, and from both independent drinkers and those who belonged to groups using ayahuasca such as the syncretic religious sect, the Church of Santo Daime. Shanon has estimated that his data represent about 2,500 ayahuasca sessions.

The book is in three parts. In the introductory remarks of chapters 1 to 3, Shanon lays down the groundwork for a cognitive-psychological study of ayahuasca. In chapters 4 to 17, he describes the phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience. Finally, in chapters 18 to 23, more general psychological and philosophical issues are addressed. Most of Shanon's data analyses are qualitative, although quantitative analyses of the contents of ayahuasca visions are described in an appendix.

The strength of this book lies in the rich descriptions and analyses of the ayahuasca experience. In the second part of the book, Shanon starts with a description of the atmosphere and general effects created by the drugs, then works his way through the characteristics of visualizations, interaction of the drinker with her visions, semantic and narrative aspects of visions, the contents of visions, the themes of visions, the nature of ideas occurring during intoxication, non-visual perceptions, characteristics of consciousness during intoxication such as changes to agenthood and intentionality, transformations of personal identity, changes of temporality, meaningfulness and semantics, paranormal and mystical experiences, psychopathology, and the manifestations of light. This is followed in the first four chapters of the third part by analyses of the stages of events during a session, long-term developments, the role played by the context in ayahuasca experiences, the reasons for drinking ayahuasca, and global cognitive changes induced by ayahuasca.

And what did Shanon find? While both physical and psychological distress frequently occur during ayahuasca sessions, in general the drugs precipitate an atmosphere of beauty, enchantment, deep meaningfulness, and sanctity. A feeling of "coming back home" (p. 97) may be present. There can be visions of serpents, Egyptian temples, and floating, disembodied eyes. Patterned geometric designs can mark the end of one stage of inebriation and the beginning of another. The style of the visions can be cartoon-like. Drinkers' perception can enter a mode of operation that does not distinguish between sensory modalities. There is increased salience of the semantic medium. Music is homomorphic under perceptual distortions. Ayahuasca is a school with different classes. And "ayahuasca can reveal truths, but it can also lie" (p. 246). These were some of the observations that

struck me but that may not make much sense to the reader of this review without the substantial elaboration provided by Shanon. In the end, basic cognitive changes brought about by ayahuasca, according to Shanon, include loosening up that which is fixed, thereby providing the drinker with the opportunity to see the world with new eyes, and increasing the creative ability of the mind, with the resulting rich images and insights that constitute the ayahuasca experience.

Throughout the book, Shanon notes that deep metaphysical questions are raised during ayahuasca inebriation as drinkers encounter an apparently objectively existing non-ordinary reality. Not only are metaphysical questions raised, but under the influence of the brew, insights occur that cohere into a comprehensive view of reality that Shanon characterizes as "idealistic monism with pantheistic overtones" (p. 163) consistent with the perennial philosophy. And it is not just that such insights occur, but they occur as an apparently direct apprehension of the truth rather than as a result of a rational analytical process. In fact, the feelings of reality associated with these insights are so strong that many drinkers have "felt they could know everything, reach everything" (p. 252). In a footnote (p. 401), Shanon cautions against dismissing drinkers' ontological and epistemological claims out of hand. Are they, then, to be accepted as valid? Throughout the book, Shanon says that he will remain within a cognitive-psychological framework within which the contents of ayahuasca experiences are explained as the creative productions of the mind. But in the last few pages of text he speculates that the intuitions of drinkers of ayahuasca regarding the nature of reality may be right after all. There is, in fact, some independent evidence to support such a contention, although, as Shanon himself points out, it is a claim that is difficult to defend scientifically.

Shanon holds an unconventional position in psychology in that he rejects non-conscious computational theories of the mind in favour of establishing lawful regularities of lived experience, thereby placing considerable epistemological weight on phenomena as they reveal themselves. But in doing so, there is a danger of accepting people's accounts of their experiences without further objective investigation where such investigation is possible, at least in principle. Indeed, in previous psychedelic research, a mismatch has often been found between subjective impressions and objective evidence. Sometimes Shanon makes this point himself, for example, when he says that it would be interesting to check experimentally whether the speed of thinking is increased during intoxication as inebriants commonly claim it is. In fact, Shanon does not accept claims of paranormal experiences such as telepathy after having examined the details of reports of some such occurrences. He also gives an example of having listened to a recording of utterances that were supposed to be Hebrew that "were nothing of the sort" (p. 258). I would like to have seen such a critical attitude extended uniformly to the subject matter of the book. For example, Shanon asserts that under the influence of ayahuasca his interactions with other people became more sophisticated. Impressions such as these, including that of telepathy, could well turn out to be correct, but more comprehensive empirical

scrutiny would be needed in order to determine their truth value. The same argument applies to conclusions drawn from the primary data. For example, the notion that ayahuasca is a special energy that perfectly reveals an inebriant's nature is a hypothesis that eventually needs to be more thoroughly tested.

I think that the book could have used a good rewrite. Shanon takes pains to explain the material clearly. But there is considerable repetition as variations of the same ideas are presented numerous times. And while the material in the book is logically laid out, I feel that it could have been shaped more along thematic lines. Such changes to the text could have substantially increased the appeal of the book to a wider audience. And this is a book that, by virtue of its detailed descriptions and analyses of the phenomenology of ayahuasca intoxication, deserves to be widely read by those who are seriously interested in understanding the nature of consciousness and reality.

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**Entering the Circle** by Olga Kharitidi. Harper (an imprint of HarperCollins), 1996. 240 pp. \$13.95 (paper). ISBN 0-06251-417-2.

Nearly 40 years ago, Carlos Castaneda introduced a particular genre of popular non-fiction which continues to evolve and draw our interest. In his series of books about Don Juan, a charismatic Native American shaman who lived in a remote part of Mexico, Castaneda played the role of a Western urbanized seeker of truth who, through a series of seemingly fated experiences and encounters, enters the strange spiritual, psychological, and ecological world of shamanism. At first skeptical, and even slightly patronizing to the materially impoverished indigenous teacher, Castaneda (and those who have followed in his footsteps, including Dr. Kharitidi) is shown the superior internal world available to members of this "primitive" culture, through a series of powerful and transformative experiences mediated by the shaman. The author-investigator-outsider suspends disbelief long enough to experience a sense of wonder, power, and knowledge previously unimaginable by means of his participation in the shamanic world. He then returns to his previous life,