

The Conscious Universe

Network Conference with Dean Radin, Frenchman's Cove, Jamaica

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What could be better than a Caribbean holiday? The answer of course is a Caribbean holiday combined with a Network conference. This was the second Network event to be held at Frenchman's Cove, thanks to the generosity of the owner, Grainger Weston, who has made the spectacular premises available to us at a fraction of the normal cost. We invited the winner of the 1997 Network Book Prize, DEAN RADIN, author of *The Conscious Universe*, to conduct the week long conference. Dean himself remarked on arrival that it was the first time he had been invited to speak to an audience for seven days! In effect the schedule was very relaxed (for the other participants at least!), the formal sessions being mornings only, followed by lunch on the beach and leisurely afternoons, then local restaurants with rum and reggae in the evenings.

It was very well attended with about 45 participants, mostly from England, a few from the rest of Europe, five from the USA and - regrettably - none from Jamaica. A remarkable range of professions and talents was represented: artists, authors, lawyers and business people as well as scientists and doctors. Many had experience of work in parapsychology and when - soon after arrival - poor Dean succumbed to illness, we soon discovered other resources and expertise within the group to keep us fascinated. I don't feel we covered much new ground at the formal sessions, but the informal discussions were particularly creative. Dean's talks summarised the main points of his book, in a very entertaining way, and left us with profound questions about the nature of time, space and consciousness. He produced evidence that healers can work not only at a distance (6000km) but backwards in time (over two months) to produce measurable effects on unconscious physiological factors such as skin resistance and peripheral blood flow of volunteers. He did some experimental work at the gathering, using similar physiological measures to test unconscious precognition during exposure to a series of pictures, some calm, some shocking. Earlier experimental work suggests that the subjects are subconsciously aware of the nature of the picture they are about to see before it has even been randomly selected by computer!

It has to be said that our experiential work was more at the level of party games than serious experiment. We tried 'remote viewing' a picture each day with little obvious success, and we had a lot of fun messing about with Dean's random number generator without being equipped to interpret the results. LISBY MAYER from Berkeley California, who is involved in musical theatre, routinely has a RNG present at performances and observes peaks of non-randomness at particular moments of focussed attention during the shows. Interestingly an ancient English ritual dance had a much greater effect on the RNG than a highly emotionally charged moment in the show. She felt that involvement in music, especially ancient music produces a large 'field consciousness' effect which can be detected by RNGs. We had a lot of fun trying this out and the results were superficially intriguing, though Dean pronounced them not statistically significant. An interesting theme to emerge from our discussions was the role of the experimenter's intent in linking the RNG to the particular field consciousness effect being studied.

It must be admitted that we were in holiday mood and not particularly intellectually focussed, which probably means we were unusually creative and imaginative. I feel sure that

the connections made at that conference will be far reaching and important. Several people remarked that it was a personal turning point for them. It was also an enchanted time. We all have our individual collage of impressions and memories: I think of the wonderful people such as JULIET HOLLISTER aged 82 who joined in everything with humour and enthusiasm; epidemiologist ROSALIND STANWELL-SMITH, describing the life-history of tropical bacteria and charting the spread of disease around our group (15% lost a day or two to minor illness); Dean looking over-heated sitting at his computer surrounded by tropical foliage and noisy birds with Bisong Guo administering Chinese remedies; Lisby Mayer recounting the extraordinary story of her daughter's stolen harp and how it was located by a map dowser far away; JOHN GRUZELIER, an expert on neurofeedback discussing with inventor Anne Miller the commercial possibilities for toy robots containing RNGs learning to respond to their owners; CHRISTOPHER MOORE busy writing his book in the very same house where Ian Fleming created James Bond some forty years ago (I gather he wrote 40,000 words during his stay!); and an ever-unruffled DAVID LORIMER, coolly coping with an unending stream of demands.

I think of rum cocktails at the Blue Lagoon, singing with calypso and reggae bands, the parties on our patio overlooking the ocean, rafting on the Rio Grande, driving the minivan on ruinous Jamaican roads through scruffy villages with speakers at the side of the road blasting out reggae to entertain the passers by. And I think of the humming birds, mongooses, exotic foliage and creeper hanging from the trees; the warm heavily scented nights with the noise of insects and tree frogs, the blinking light of fireflies, moonlit bathes and dancing. It was outrageously romantic!

But we were also aware that surrounding our charmed and privileged world was an ocean of poverty with desperate social and environmental problems. Of course we supported local restaurants but it was clear that tourism in the Port Antonio area has all but collapsed. Anne Miller, Janine Edge and Alex Sabell went on a three-day hike through the forests staying with local families and supporting Valley Hikes a local initiative in sustainable tourism. But we were all aware that we should be doing more to repay the hospitality of the local community and of Grainger Weston.

After the conference many of us stayed on in Jamaica for a few more days. HERMOD SVERRE from Oslo, and his Dutch girlfriend, ELLEKE VAN KRAALINGEN, went on to Negril beach at the west end of the island . It had been an idyllic holiday for them, a beautiful young couple clearly in love. Then on their last day in Jamaica, while crossing the road, Hermod was knocked down by a car and killed.

This appalling tragedy has shocked us all to the core and our hearts go out to Elleke and to Hermod's family. There is a danger that it will cast a shadow over Network events at Frenchman's Cove. To ensure that this does not happen, perhaps we should devise a lasting Network tribute to Hermod, preferably in Jamaica. Anne Miller and Janine Edge know of a local organisation which would plant a copse of hardwood trees in his memory (at a cost of about \$10 a tree). I favour providing assisted places to Jamaicans at all our Frenchman's Cove conferences. But perhaps a health project in Port Antonio would be more appropriate. We would welcome suggestions.

In all respects this was a landmark Network event and we look forward to another adventure at Frenchman's Cove next February when the conference will be organised around the winner of the 1998 Network book prize, Prof. JAMES AUSTIN, author of Zen and the Brain.

Dates are February 6th-12th, with the main party from the UK travelling out on the 3rd and back on the 15th.

Diana Clift is a Council Member and co-ordinates the Guildford Local Group