



## Carlos Castaneda and New Age Anthropology

Among American anthropologists a raucous minority believe firmly in the reality of ESP, PK (psychokinesis), precognition and other psychic wonders, especially in the paranormal powers of the shamans or sorcerers of primitive cultures. Last March a section of the American Anthropological Association, calling itself the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness, sponsored a five-day conference at the University of California at Berkeley. It was their nineteenth spring conference.

I did not attend, nor have I sent \$140 for tapes of the fifty lectures by counterculture speakers, but I do have a copy of the meeting's 27-page program sent to me by my friend Jim Breese. "A few issues back," he said in a letter, "you deplored some current agenda at Temple University. Well, if you think that's bad, have a look at the enclosed program."

I was indeed appalled by what I saw. What startled me most was the number of speakers who enthusiastically praised the late bogus anthropologist Carlos Castaneda.

Not much is accurately known about Carlos because he was known to fabricate information about his life. He so successfully evaded efforts to photograph him that the only photo published in the U.S. that shows his face clearly was taken at a college graduation in 1959. It is now known that he was born in 1925 as Carlos Cesar Arana Castaneda, in

Cajamarca, Peru (not in Brazil as he often claimed). After finishing high school in Lima, he married a few years later, but deserted his wife and child to come to California in 1951. For a few years he lived in San Francisco, then moved to Los Angeles where he took courses in journalism and creative writing at Los Angeles City College. In 1960 he married Margaret Runyon. They lived together for only six months, but were not divorced until thirteen years later.

A photograph of Margaret accompanies her article "My Husband Carlos Castaneda," in *Fate* (February 1975). She describes him as five feet five, dark eyes, curly black hair, and with thighs and legs "disproportionately short." His face was round and cherubic, his skin nut-brown.

Carlos had a habit of suddenly vanishing, to return unexpectedly without telling Margaret where he had been. Phone calls were always made from public booths. There were periods, she writes, when he drove a taxi, kept accounts for a ladies apparel shop, and clerked in a liquor store from which he would bring her "wonderful wines." These jobs may or may not have been real because it was never possible to know when Carlos was telling the truth. Letters to his wife were unsigned.

In 1968 Carlos was an anthropology student at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) when the university's press published his first book, *The*

*Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. The book hit the New Age market like a bombshell. Sales went through the roof and Castaneda became instantly rich and famous.

The book tells how Castaneda, on a field trip to Mexico in 1960, met Don Juan at a dreary bus depot in Arizona. He turned out to be an elderly Yaqui sorcerer with vast magical powers and a habit of giggling even more often than the Maharishi of Transcendental Meditation. Castaneda became Don Juan's apprentice. His progress involved the frequent taking of such drugs as peyote cactus, Jimson weed, and various hallucinogenic mushrooms. The book's main theme is that beyond our ordinary world is an extraordinary realm in which one can talk to animals, even become animals, and experience all sorts of wonderful miracles. This other world, so familiar to Yaqui shamans, is just as real as this one.

Castaneda followed his first book with nine others, all best sellers, which were translated into some twenty languages. In order of publication they are: *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan*; *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*; *Tales of Power*; *The Second Ring of Power*; *The Eagle's Gift*; *The Fire From Within*; *The Power of Silence*; *Further Lessons of Don Juan*; and

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*Martin Gardner's latest book is Visitors from Oz.*

*The Art of Dreaming.*

In 1972 the UCLA, in a fit of self-deception, gave Carlos a doctorate in anthropology. His thesis was based on *Journey to Ixtlan*. Although the public, smitten by New Age fantasies and the pleasures of mind-altering drugs, gobbled up Castaneda's books, mainstream anthropologists were outraged. Careful investigations found his books riddled with contradictions, outright errors, and rafts of material pilfered from other authors. Don Juan existed only in Carlos's imagination. As sociologist Marcello Truzzi was the first to say, Castaneda's books were the greatest science hoax since the Piltdown Man. Irate anthropologists demanded that the university withdraw Castaneda's Ph.D. It refused. Professor Walter Goldschmidt, then chairman of the university's anthropology department—who wrote a fulsome forward to Castaneda's first book—said in 1978: "We possess no information that would support the charges. . . . I am not going to say *mea culpa*."

This fall the University of California Press, motivated by shameless greed, will issue the thirtieth anniversary edition of Carlos's first book. They will be promoting it, not as a work of pseudo-anthropology, but as a classic still relevant to readers longing to escape from the dull world of ordinary reality to a magical land of Oz.

I don't have the space to relate the thousands of paranormal events described in Castaneda's ten fantasies. I will mention only the funniest. In his first book Carlos tells how Don Juan, high on drugs, transformed him into a crow. Mind you, this was no hallucination. Carlos became a real, live crow. When Don Juan tossed him into the air, he flew away. The sorcerer told Carlos that three crows would signal his death and that after he died he would be reincarnated as a crow.

It is hard to believe that some anthropologists still consider Castaneda to have been a serious, competent researcher into the stupendous wonders of Yaqui Indians. Here are glimpses at some of the abstracts of papers delivered at the March meeting of the counterculture anthropologists.

Amy Smith, of Salt Lake City, Utah, spoke on "A Castaneda Way of Knowledge: Implications of an Anthropological Legacy." She describes Castaneda's work as "personally exploring non-ordinary states of consciousness, addressing the existence of multiple realities and other unusual phenomena, using both emic and etic interpretations, and documenting and reporting these experiences



through a narrative ethnography were ground breaking achievements that remain essential to the field."

Edith Turner, of the University of Virginia, in her paper on "The Teachings of Castaneda," sees his research as a great liberation. "He has taken us—like Dante—through a dark passage out the other side into a state of enlightenment." He has freed us from "capitalism, communism, consumerism, Church rationality and exclusivism; from reductionism, fundamentalist Marxist scientism and its type of elitism, which condemns the folk; and lastly from nihilism, the eternal war of revenge upon the sins of many societies which can never be forgiven." Not only that, but "we are allowed to talk with empathy, for instance, about the Nigerian sacred Bori personage, about the Hindu guru, the Brazilian *mae de santo*, Rumi, the Tibetan oracle, Jesus, the Bal Shem Tov, the Dalai Lama, Black Elk, and at last, Don Juan." Whew!

Roy Wagner, also at the University of Virginia, calls his paper "Consciousness is that Part of Consciousness of which

we are Conscious: How the Ancient Seers and Shamans of Mexico Short-Circuited the Energy-Body." I fail to grasp what he means when he adds: "For having devastated the 'inner' (subjective, imaginal, hence 'heuristic') support for our ability to conceptualize things in the world, Don Juan has turned the whole 'subjectivity' fantasy inside-out: we do not 'think' his lessons except insofar as they think us."

Michael J. Winkelman, of Arizona State University, spoke on "Epistemological Perspectives on Castaneda." His abstract reads in full:

Castaneda's concepts such as "Separate Reality," "stopping the world," and "tonal and nagual" are analyzed from an epistemological perspective. His approaches to the sorcerer's practice were explicitly epistemological, centrally concerned with processes through which human conceptual processes are structured and contribute to the reality known. Central aspects of Castaneda's training involved learning how to suspend the ordinary epistemological constructs and enter into a "natural epistemological mode." These innate constructs of nature and the human brain/mind are revealed by comparing them to similar epistemological systems and practices found in other contemplative disciplines. The nature of the sorcerer's epistemological development is assessed from the perspectives of genetic epistemology.

Other abstracts of papers given at the conference are written in the same murky, mind-numbing jargon. Here are a few samples.

"Insights from anthropological linguistics include indigenous knowledge of telepathy in natural communication, and discovering human languages of wholeness. . . ." (Dan Moonhawk Alford, California State University.)

"In children with MPD [Multiple Personality Disorder], the Original Personality goes for safekeeping from Physicalspace into Thoughtspace, where it is cared for by wise and loving collections of intelligent energy." (Ralph Allison, of Los Osos, California.)

"Cultural manifestation of human consciousness are the result of both immanent and transcendent aspects of a principle of action stemming from a

philosophical tension inherent in the nature of awareness." (Richard L. Amoroso, of the Noetic Institute.)

"The culturally diverse delineation of these experiences will be considered while discussing the posited referencing of the extrasensory experiences in question within the context of an energetic-wave world view." (Renate Dohman, of Goldsmith College, London.)

The conference's keynote address, on "The Varieties of Dissociative Experience," was given by Stanley Krippner, a well-known parapsychologist. Here is how the meeting's program described his speech:

Stanley Krippner will describe a cross-cultural, postmodern, transpersonal model of dissociation based on the work of Ruth-Inge Heinze and Rhea White. Dissociation is contrasted with flow, identification with the ego-self is contrasted with identification with the All-Self, control is contrasted with loss of control. Each of these examples of dissociation and integration is evaluated on the basis of whether it is socially constructive or destructive. Examples will include (among others) dissociative identity disorder, "channeling," shamanic journeying, and acting. First person accounts will be cited; for example, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edgar Bergen, Shirley MacLaine, Chris Sizemore ("Three Faces of Eve"), Maria Sabina, and J.Z. Knight (who "channels" Ramtha).

Unbounded praise of Castaneda by New Age anthropologists can be found in many books. The wildest reference is *Extrasensory Ecology: Parapsychology and Anthropology* (1977), a collection of papers edited by Joseph K. Long. (See Richard de Mille's biting review in *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, Spring/Summer 1978, pp. 108-112.) The book's first paper, by Long, is about Castaneda. He calls Castaneda's first book "one of the most important books in the field of anthropology."

The book's second paper is a vigorous attack on Castaneda by Aeghananda Bharati, but most contributors to this bizarre anthology are great admirers of Castaneda. Margaret Mead, for instance, writes: "Carlos Castaneda has developed a method which makes the American Indian religious experience available to non-anthropologists who would never

be able to get the same experience from rereading interlinear texts."

William S. Lyons's paper defends the ability of psychics to "see" things in nonordinary reality, such as seeing human auras. "If, for example, the director of the National Science Foundation could 'see' what Don Juan claims to 'see', psychical research would be more than likely to be as readily funded as body language research." Long, commenting on this paper, suggests that the pineal gland, or "third eye," is the "point of focus" in the kind of "seeing" described by Castaneda. In a paper on the evolution of psi, Long defends Castaneda's accounts of the psychic abilities of certain animals and birds. On page 261 Long calls Shirley MacLaine an "erudite amateur anthropologist."

Long's ludicrous book must be read to be believed. Jule Eisenbud, who for a decade tried to persuade the world that Ted Serios could project his thoughts onto Polaroid film, writes on "Perspectives in Anthropology and Parapsychology." Long thinks Eisenbud's book on Serios is "one of the best documented cases ever presented for a regular PK effect." Physicist Evan Harris Walker, writing on "The Compleat Quantum Mechanical Anthropologist," assures us that quantum effects explain Uri Geller's ability to bend spoons.

Two leading proponents of psychic archaeology, J. N. Emerson and Jeffrey Goodman, each contribute to Long's book. Goodman tells how a psychic in Oregon went into trances and remote viewed a spot in Flagstaff, Arizona. The accuracy of his visions enabled Goodman to discover deeply buried artifacts.

Goodman believes that the Garden of Eden was not in Africa but in California. He denies that American Indians came here across the Bering land bridge from Asia. They went the other way, California to Asia! From California they migrated to Africa and other parts of the world. And where did these California Indians come from? In Goodman's first book *Psychic Archaeology: Time Machine to the Past* (1977) a map shows how they came, from the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria!

Goodman's second book, *The Genesis*

*Mystery: A Startling New Theory of Outside Intervention in the Development of Man* (1983), rehashes his earlier book but adds surprising new material. He claims that Darwin stole all his ideas from Alfred Wallace. Although our bodies evolved from lower animals, a sharp transition took place when God planted human souls in bestial bodies. Goodman seems unaware that he is defending current Roman Catholic opinion.<sup>1</sup>

Carlos Castaneda died in Westwood, California, in 1998. "His only real sorcery," writes Kathryn Lindskoog in her book *Fakes, Frauds, and Other Malarkey*, "was turning the University of California into an ass." The next time you come close to a crow, try calling out "Hello Carlos!" If you are high enough on peyote, you might hear the bird answer.

## Note

1. See Kenneth Feder's article "American Disingenuous: Goodman's 'American Genesis'—a new chapter in 'Cult' Archaeology," in *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, Summer 1983, pp. 36-48; J. R. Cole's review of Goodman's *Psychic Archaeology*, in *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, Spring/Summer 1978, pp. 105-108; and his review of *The Genesis Mystery in American Antiquity*, Vol. 50, 1985, pp. 692-93.

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