

## THE BIOPSYCHICAL SCIENCES UNIT IN PARANA, CURITIBA, BRAZIL

ALEJANDRO PARRA

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KNOWN AS THE Ecological City, Curitiba is part of one of the most forested regions of the world. It could serve as a model for the ideal city of the future, not only for its singular architecture, but also for the cleanliness of its streets, and the cordiality of its people, along with the rich cultural variety of a Europeanized city, which is home to almost two million inhabitants.

Curitiba also reflects a rich mix of different cultural currents that have converged upon this part of Southern Brazil. That's the reason why, among other initiatives, education is priority in this region, and a number of different universities have been established in order to cultivate and maintain this intercultural balance. A notable example is the Free University of the Environment which is housed in an ecological building that rises fifty meters, trunk on trunk, overlooking a beautiful and gentle lake. It embodies the university's motto, which is "to educate to conserve. It is our nature". They offer a range of courses on such topics as environmental education, gardening, biodiversity, ecology, ecotourism, among others. Not very far from there, in Saint Inácio, a few kilometers to the west of the city, sits the Bezerra de Menezes Universitarian Center, that is characterized as providing a rather special focal point for culture and for a different kind of education that has its basis in a new paradigm in science. Founded thirty years ago, by Dr. Octavio Ulysséa as an annexe of the Spiritist Culture Institute of Paraná, this university has become one of the most noted educational centers because of its ethical values, its approach with and acceptance of new paradigms.

Octavio Ulysséa is a Sociologist, a professor of History and Geography, and a man of vast wisdom. He describes himself as a 'universalist spiritualist' because, put simply, he conceives human health, the health of the earth, and the health of society as an integral whole. Thus the Bezerra de Menezes Universitarian Center embodies principles of interconnectedness and ethical obligation that

serve as codes of conduct. Without such a philosophical foundation it is not possible to make pedagogy, or a coherent education with doctrinal principles. But, how does it incorporate the Universitarian Center's own philosophy? Ulysséa answers saying that, in fact, it should coincide with the construction of one's dialectic and dynamic balance of opposing forces, that is to say, material life and spiritual life. The equidistance and simultaneity between these two active poles of one system result, according to Ulysséa, in the convergence of both to be complementary tendencies, "In this sense", he suggests, "the things are worthwhile not in reference to the person's own specific interests, but in reference to the evolution process".

Although openly spiritualist in philosophy, the University attracts students and professors who may not share their ideology, including, for example, Marxists and agnostics. Such individuals find that while in the broader society they may face obstacles to their personal development, the University has helped to open doors for them as it reflects Ulysséa's own belief that education should not be the preserve of the few with economic resources, but should be available to all equally.

With almost five thousand students and three hundred professors, the Institution offers, at the moment, 27 courses, not only at undergraduate level, but also for postgraduate qualifications. Among these is a professional Masters course in Chinese Traditional Medicine, a course of Specialization in Studies of Consciousness, Transpersonal Psychology, and Jungian Psychology. The Institute of Health also provides a free course in Acupuncture, in collaboration with China's University of Zen-Jiang as well as courses in Masotherapy, Fitotherapy and Applied Naturology. I should admit my astonishment (and at the same time my admiration) for the work of the Biopsychical Sciences Unit within the Universitarian Center, that has for the last 18 years boldly taught Parapsychology as a

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field of study with a deep critical sense and scientific rigor. Although courses have been validated by the Paraná's Education Board since 1973, it is only recently that the Unit has been authorized to work with free courses for the Educational Federal Board.

Since 1996, the Engineer Carlos Alberto Tinoco — a veteran parapsychologist and university professor — has served as Course Leader. Professor Tinoco is specialized in Physics and has offered introductory courses on Quantum Mechanics and on Electromagnetic Theory. He has conducted research in Physics, but his true intellectual passion is Indian philosophy, particularly the Vedic literature and its relationship with western physics (as seen for example in his recent translation into Portuguese of the Upanishads, one of the oldest texts in the Eastern literature). He has also been concerned with the investigation of poltergeist and haunted houses — his book, *Poltergeist: Fenômenos de Psicocinesia Espontânea* (*Poltergeist: Spontaneous Psychokinesis Phenomena*), originally published in 1978 was reissued a few years ago.

The course on Parapsychology that was originally administered by Dr. Ulysséa is the only one of its kind in the country that qualifies professors and lecturers in the area, and possibly has no equal in Latin America in terms of the breadth of its integral program for educating potential future parapsychologists. Lasting four years, the course seeks to create the necessary conditions to create a new generation of investigators: "That means, basically, to qualify the student for investigating paranormal phenomena," explains Tinoco. He stresses that the course is not intended to develop or awaken the psi abilities of those who attend the course, indeed Tinoco hopes that graduating students will "not be a sensitive or endowed with psi abilities, but rather will be scientifically-oriented researchers of paranormal phenomena, because that's the final objective of the course". The hope is to shape the educational development of students so as to produce investigators in Parapsychology who would be capable of making an empirical contribution to the field, including being able to differentiate between the psychic and the psychopathological. Tinoco believes that the course in Parapsychology that they offer is unique in the world; "while there

are, evidently, other universities that have an interest in these matters, they tend to only be at the doctorate level. In terms of undergraduate provision, the experience of our students is possibly unparalleled", he observes.

It is also noteworthy that children studying at the 5th to 8th grade are also offered an introduction course to Parapsychology, conducted by professionals who have previously graduated from the undergraduate course. According to Fabio Eduardo da Silva, one of the teachers, the purpose is to "stimulate in this way an appreciation for scientific investigation in Parapsychology and an expansive ecological conscience and love for nature. The result of that interaction brings to the youth a sense of internal ecology." Also, the school offers an education whose foundation is in the Jungian, Humanist and Transpersonal psychologies, which seeks through rich experiences and self-development to foster an appreciation of human values.

Naturally, being accepted onto the parapsychology programme is not easy; candidates must have completed high school and must take a selection exam. "At the moment, we have 125 students registered with the Biopsychical Sciences Unit, of which 108 belong to the Parapsychology course. Besides the undergraduate courses, we have postgraduate and specialist courses that, here, we call *Latu Sensu*, that require 445 hours of study", says Prof. Tinoco. The course has an extensive series of parapsychological, psychological, biological, and philosophical matters. It also comprises Teaching and Education Techniques and the so-called Exact Sciences (such as Physics and Applied statistics). But, in the College, it is not a mere theoretical teaching. The students can choose their own specialty inside a certain context, for example, the Psi investigation. Not all have an interest in laboratory investigations; in fact, because Brazil is a country with a culture that is sympathetic to spontaneous phenomena, a high number of spiritism practitioners take the course. "It is known that, in some cases, spontaneous phenomena gain the general public's acceptance - Prof. Tinoco points out -, "and this is reflected throughout the mainstream press, particularly the tabloids." To respond to such situations, we have created the Centre of the Investigation of Spontaneous Phenomena in Parapsychology (CIFEP), which

has the support of diverse segments of Brazilian society. Within this Institution, permanent teams have been formed in each centre that are very well trained, and able to always investigate spontaneous cases in the places where these happen, producing dossiers on each case that contribute to an overall database.

In 1997, Prof. Neusa Ponchielli Lustosa and Prof. Carlos Tinoco, along with their collaborators (Divanir, Lúcia, Reginaldo, and Rosangela — all of them probationers or advanced students at the third year), officially opened up the Centre for RSPK (Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis), which has its own physics structures and project supervised by Prof. Tinoco, who is responsible for carrying out an exhaustive report on poltergeist cases in Curitiba and neighboring cities. Neusa explains to us that: "One of the problems we face in having cases to investigate, is the difficulty in identifying causes. Although Brazil is a 'paradise' in terms of the occurrence of such phenomena, it is difficult to locate and study them." Neusa and her team have recently reached an agreement with the Paraná State Military Police and the Fire Brigade, as well as with Catholic priests, and other religious groups to collaborate on cases when they occur. "They are usually the type of people that receive in first hand reports from people that suffer with these phenomena. People contact these authorities, scared by what is happening to them, and sometimes even think that it is caused by some enemy, or malevolent neighbour who is, for example, throwing stones at them. In other cases, they believe they are the victim of spirits or entities who are harassing them, and they look for help and protection from religious authorities." Neusa adds: "My husband is a military policeman and we have talked a lot about this topic. Then, with their help, we have decided to offer conferences on the subject for police officers. Naturally, some officers are sceptical about our work, but acting under orders they should still report those cases to us."

The Centre of Haunting, which has the support of those mentioned probationers (Adriana, Aguida, Claudia and Martha), occupies itself on a similar phenomena. In Parapsychology, there is a basic difference between cases of Poltergeist activity and Hauntings; phenomena in the former are

generally associated with a particular target person, who seems, perhaps because of unresolved emotion, to produce uncontrolled psi energy; in the latter the anomalies seem to be associated with places, such as abandoned houses, cemeteries or churches. "Here also the military police and the forest police cooperate with us. There are places where phenomena are reported to the police as occurring in abandoned or knocked down houses, and they appeal us to treat these cases."

Other studies include a Centre for Psychokinesis, where the subject matter are cases of distant healing, produced by traditional religious groups from Brazil, such as the Pentecostal Church "God is Love", the Kardecist Centers or the Japanese oriented sect "Seicho-no-Iê". "We have found the leaders of these groups to be very cooperative. More recently, a group of students and Neusa have created the Centre for Reincarnation Studies, which seeks to conduct studies of reincarnation cases, applying the methodology of case-collection developed by Professor Ian Stevenson and Hemani Guimaraes Andrade. Nadir Martins Ganz, together with Neusa, coordinates the Centre of OBE studies, dedicated to investigating these experiences scientifically, although this is handicapped by a lack of specialized literature in Portuguese, on one hand, and the limited economic resources on the other. "There is neither time, nor enough equipment to investigate all the cases", complains Nadir.

A high percentage of the Brazilian population is sympathetic to the traditional practices of various African religions. To cater for this demand, a Centre of African-Brazilian Religiosity Studies was established to carry out umbanda rituals in their diverse lines. "This is a wide spectrum of traditions and mythology", points out Prof. Fabio Eduardo da Silva, "that encourage the induction of altered states of conscience, which give us a lot of material for study". In other areas of the College, there are rooms for the practice of Yoga, used mainly for techniques of the Hatha and Raja Yoga; the Consciousness Studies Institute; and a Center of Transpersonal Support and Orientation.

Another fortunate initiative, at least for those interested in experimental investigation, has been the Parapsychology Laboratory, conceived mainly for teaching purposes. For example, the Ganzfeld, which is a technique of

sensory isolation that seems to favor the appearance of paranormal phenomena under controlled conditions. Originally adopted in the United States, by Charles Honorton, in the seventies, and that has been producing good results in some Parapsychological Institutes around the whole world. In Latin America, there are very few Ganzfeld laboratories, just in Brazil and Argentina. This laboratory consists of an acoustically-isolated room that is currently being refurbished to allow us to carry out semi-automated experiments, using video clips as targets. According to Fabio Eduardo da Silva, responsible for these studies in this Laboratory, the idea of creating a Ganzfeld's facility arose at the beginning of 1991 at the initiative of Prof. Joe Garcia, mathematician and specialist in Investigation Methodology. More recently, in 1993, Tarcísio Pallú and Vera Barrionuevo returned from the United States and built a laboratory that was in use up until 1996. "However, -continues the Prof. da Silva- newly in 1997, we rebuilt the laboratory with the financial help of the College and the cooperation of our own students, and, later, with the collaboration of Dr. Kathy Dalton, then of Edinburgh University - who was invited especially to train investigators of the College. We hope to publish some studies in the future." It is also planned to conduct long-distance telepathy studies, for example, with 'receivers' in Curitiba and 'senders' in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Clinical Parapsychology is a relatively new area inside Parapsychology that has its more immediate antecedents in work in the United States, Holland and Brazil. It is concerned with people who have significant psi experiences in their daily life, and who have found the experience perplexing. The Integrated Center of Psi Orientation (CIOP) — another dependent area of the College — has, as part of its remit to diagnose and support people that report some degree of psi manifestation in their daily experiences, distinguishing them from the psychopathologies and integrating the experiences into their 'normal' life. Starting from the notion of the World Health Organization's consultation, Prof. Tarcísio Pallú, coordinator of the CIOP, postulates in his book, *Sonhos, Parapsicologia e Aconselhamento* (Dreams, Parapsychology and consultation) authored together with Ricardo Eppinger, a listing of consultants in

Parapsychology. Pallú and Eppinger consider that the clinical parapsychologist can help people as they are better aware of what psi phenomenological possibilities exist, and so hopefully have a greater insight into their experiences.

Cristina Rocha, by her turn, is a journalist and she has been founder and current director of the Psychobiophysics Research National Institute (INPP), which is dedicated to the study of paranormal and spiritualist phenomena. She acquired her experience in Psychobiophysics through some years of research at the Psychobiophysics Institute of São Paulo, with Hernani Guimaraes Andrade, an illustrious Brazilian scientist and author. Psychobiophysics can be thought of as synonymous with parapsychology, as it is concerned with transcommunication and poltergeists, but also includes Kirlian phenomena. Cristina comments "serious experiments are being carried out in the best centers in the world, within a dualistic vision: spirit/matter, into a holistic, bio-psychical and social-spiritual perspective. In this context, Psychobiophysics arises as a new source of knowledge, aligned with the new paradigms that are breaking through and demanding changes in human beings' behavior as we are forced to adapt to live healthier", she defines. The same Institute has for the last three years offered a course in Psychobiophysics, whose objective is to form multi- and interdisciplinary groups of interest focused on the scientific study and investigation of the psychological, biological and physical phenomena with paranormal characteristics. It is organized around thematically independent modules, and has the participation of the medical psychiatrist Sérgio Felipe de Oliveira, Professor in the University of São Paulo, who takes classes on the integration of the brain, mind, body and spirit fields.

Ulysséa concludes our interview saying: "From man's vision to the world's vision, multidimensional reality, a wide epistemological field settles down and opens a space to the dynamics of the Philosophy, Education and Social Philosophy. The philosophy of the Bezerra de Menezes Universitarian Center is fully heading towards the existential human reality. Corporal and, in a same way, essentially to the spiritual dimension."

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