

The Garden of Paradise

Establishing the first school for Structural Integration in Spanish-speaking Latin America

Richard Wheeler and Norrie Huddle

Richard Wheeler is a Certified Advanced Rolwing® Practitioner and Rolf Movement® Practitioner. Norrie Huddle is an author, consultant, and Advanced Voice Dialogue Practitioner. They now live in Ecuador where they are working to establish a new school for Structural Integration within a new healing and retreat center called the Garden of Paradise. They can be reached through their website at www.gardenofparadise.net.

The Vision

Our vision for the new school for Structural Integration we are creating in Ecuador includes being in a beautiful, temperate (non-tropical) natural environment that offers not only excellent instruction in Structural Integration but also ample opportunity for reflective immersion in nature as well as richly diverse participation in a highly creative learning community.

Our intention, both with our school and with our community, is to offer a socially transparent experience of constructive engagement that forms a base from which we can inspire and influence the global process of transformation in the direction of a sustainable, peaceful and enjoyable human civilization. We seek to do this by doing our best to “live our dream”: joining with others of like mind and, together, building an innovative community that emphasizes high-level communications, artistic expression, experiential teaching, and creative use of the internet and other modern telecommunications tools. We recognize that the world is in a state of transformation and want to do our part to “walk our talk” while helping to build the new world in a variety of constructive ways described later in this article.

The Reality

In organically building our project, our emphasis is on learning and growing. We are constantly climbing up the learning curve, ever encountering new challenges and opportunities, and seeking to do our best to handle whatever situation shows up, while holding our vision clearly. This process seems to be working well. With regards to the infrastructure, no one can believe how much we’ve accomplished in the

almost two and a half years we’ve been building the infrastructure—most people think we’ve already been here at least five years! In addition to building the healing center, the music recording studio, a restaurant, three very nice short term rentals, animal stables, and most of the spa, we’ve also planted about 1600 trees, 300 coffee plants, and large flower and organic vegetable gardens. On the other hand, much remains to be done, including completing the spa, carpentry and metalworking shops, and building the art studio. (For more specifics on this and on “why Ecuador?” see www.gardenofparadise.net.)

How We Found the Garden of Paradise

In early January of 2009, we (Norrie Huddle and Richard Wheeler) went to Ecuador for a six-week vacation. Norrie had been to Ecuador twice before and liked it so much she persuaded Richard to come check it out. Richard (as usual) was skeptical, but disillusioned by a long visit to Costa Rica, he went along with the plan. He was pleasantly surprised by the beauty of the area, good climate, good food, and nice people.

Towards the end of our stay we were invited to see a farm that was for sale. Neither of us had any intention whatsoever of buying land in Ecuador but we were curious to see what sort of land was being sold— and, besides, we’d heard that it was on a river and was very pretty. However, almost as soon as we stepped foot on the property, we turned and stared at each other with mutual astonishment: we had just been emotionally and spiritually hijacked. This was the perfect place to manifest our dreams—including creating a school for Structural Integration, Voice Dialogue, and a number of other healing modalities—to create a world-class healing cen-

ter and focal point for various kinds of courses to uplift and transform the human condition.

Abundant Water Resources

The Rio Vilcabamba (also known locally as Rio Chamba) that forms our mile-long southern border originates in a cloud forest rather than the rapidly diminishing glaciers of the southern hemisphere. This means we are blessed with an abundant source of water that, with simple filtration, is easily made potable. This river is now included in a multi-million dollar project to clean-up rivers that flow south through Ecuador into Peru.

In 2010, we are fortunate to be welcoming into Garden of Paradise a scientist-inventor-businessman, now living in Australia, who has developed a number of technologies to purify water and to stabilize river banks and other steep embankments, a major problem all over mountainous Ecuador, including one small area on our property. Consistent with our commitment to integrate our vision into the larger community, Norie has been making useful connections at a local, regional, and national level, so that he can hit the ground running when he arrives early in 2010.

Given that water is so important for survival and thriving, we are also looking into creating multiple water sources, including catchment areas in the higher elevations of our property for irrigating in the dry season.

Bright Future for Introducing Structural Integration

With regard to Structural Integration, we have thus far found Ecuadorians very open to new types of bodywork and other alternative treatment and healing modalities. Everywhere we turn we find great acceptance and genuine interest—including from the doctors we've met, who all express interest in learning more, particularly once Richard gets his paws on them or does a short demo. In addition to producing immediate results that can be directly viewed and experienced, Structural Integration has the mystique of being an exotic import.

Ecuador has a simple licensing procedure for massage that does not look as if it will be applied to Structural Integration. There are no onerous, largely irrelevant, massage-licensing requirements or accreditation harassments of the sort that, alas, you can anticipate in most parts of the United States. (I'll point out that

because Ecuador has legalized and licensed prostitution there don't seem to be any anti-massage law enforcement issues to deal with.) Additionally, the use of Richard's tools (hand-grips, straps, and curved-surface treatment table) will help us to achieve the long-term, sought-after goal of professional independence and dissociation from massage. After all, if it doesn't look so much like massage, it is less likely to be thought of as massage!

Our strategy for creating a school for teaching Structural Integration is to start inspiring local and regional interest by doing work on a variety of local people who have suffered injuries, letting the word get around. And, this has been happening in quite a serendipitous fashion, as the following stories suggest.

"Don L.," the gardener: During our first visit to Ecuador, Norie arranged for Richard to work with a number of artisans who had a variety of hand, arm and shoulder problems that were related to their trade. While Richard did the short sessions on the various artisans, using his grips and straps, Norie noticed that the hotel's chief gardener, Don L., was standing off to the side, watching intently. Norie saw that his eyes had a kind of brightness and intensity that she had come to associate with people in pain. "Interesting work, isn't it?" she said. He then told her that three months earlier, he had slipped on a banana peel (which truly isn't funny) while carrying a 60-pound canister of propane gas on one shoulder. The canister landed on his neck, leaving him dizzy and with constant intense headaches that still persisted. Richard did two short sessions on Don L. After the first one, the dizziness was gone; after the second, he was pain free, his mobility restored.

"Don C.," the farmer: Our neighbor in Ecuador, Don C. is 72 and built like a small but very solid tank. We first encountered him the day we first visited "this farm for sale along the river." He was in the process of plowing a large flat field near the river, using a traditional wooden plough pulled by two massive oxen. Later, as we got to know him, we learned that 13 years earlier, he had fallen over 100 feet down a cliff, splitting open his head on a large boulder at the bottom. In great pain, he dragged himself slowly down the mountain, where friends got him to a hospital in Loja. There, he received 80 stitches in his head. For 13 years, he suffered such severe headaches that no analgesic gave him relief. After one hour of Richard's work, he could take one as-

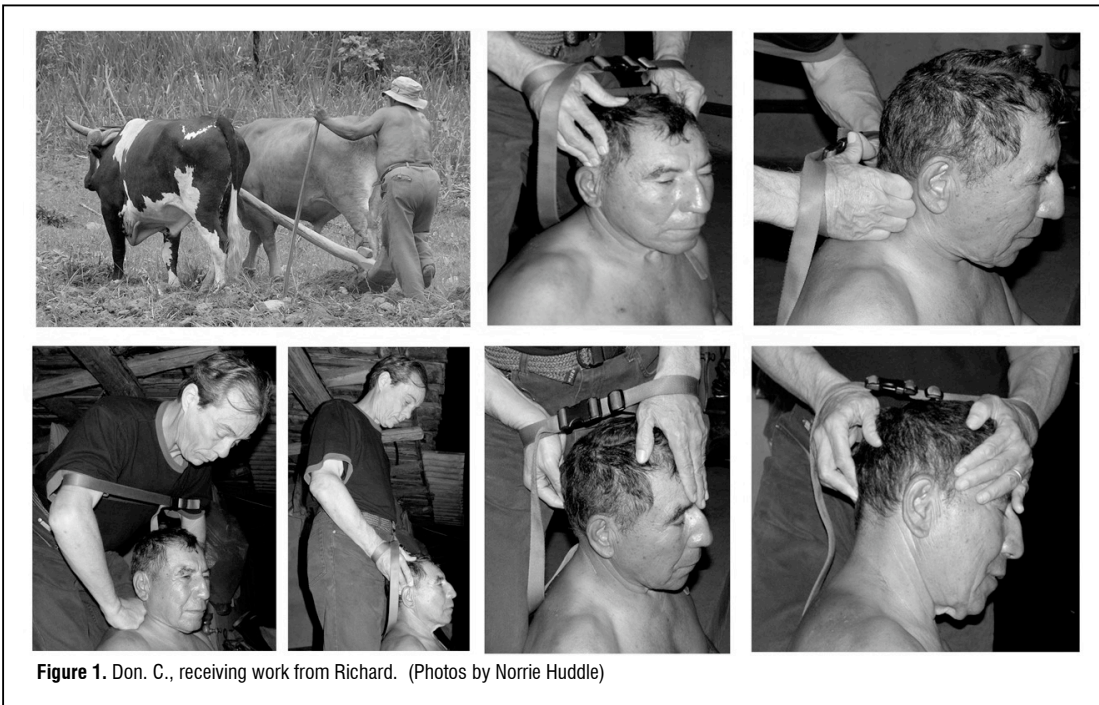


Figure 1. Don. C., receiving work from Richard. (Photos by Norrie Huddle)

pirin and get relief from the pain. A week later, after a second hour of work, Don C. found himself completely pain-free, enjoying flexibility he hadn't experienced for 50 years.

Richard also did two short sessions on our property manager, Jorge, who asked if he could borrow the full-length Spanish translation of Ida Rolf's book. And, he actually read it from cover to cover. A lawyer by training, Jorge's response was an emphatic, "I want to learn this!" He is not alone; quite a number of people who've receive treatments from Richard have expressed strong interest in learning Structural Integration. We're gearing up for launch.

Our plan is to introduce SI by means of presentations and short workshops (the first one has now been scheduled for January of 2010), to familiarize people with the concepts, and to demonstrate the work's effectiveness. We'll soon offer intermediate workshops to teach day-long modules for addressing regions of body that are frequently distressed (e.g., head, neck, and shoulders, as one unit). As interest in SI spreads and as we find local people who have a natural aptitude for the work, we will begin teaching the full range of the work. At that time, we plan to solicit help from instructors who might like to assist in teaching and in spreading the word about Structural Integration and its benefits. As talented practitioners travel to or relocate to the

Vilcabamba area, we plan to work with them to form a talent pool for introducing Structural Integration both locally and in the larger Latin American context.

From the beginning, we also plan to offer seminars to students and to intermediate and advanced practitioners worldwide. In addition, we are extending an ongoing invitation to current teachers, instructors, and innovators who might wish to offer their students their latest workshops at our facility. We believe we can offer a very affordable, worthwhile, and interesting experience to students and teachers alike, all in a very beautiful and pleasant location.

Tools and Technologies

Some practitioners in the Structural Integration community are familiar with Richard's tools and innovative contributions to the field of Structural Integration, although only a few have experienced either receiving or giving treatments using them. Three decades of tool use have convinced Richard (and those who have adopted use of these tools) that tool-supported manual contact for facilitating Structural Integration may well be the wave of future. With this in mind, we plan to teach the concepts and use of tools from the beginning, although practitioners who prefer flat tables and no tools won't be ostracized here.

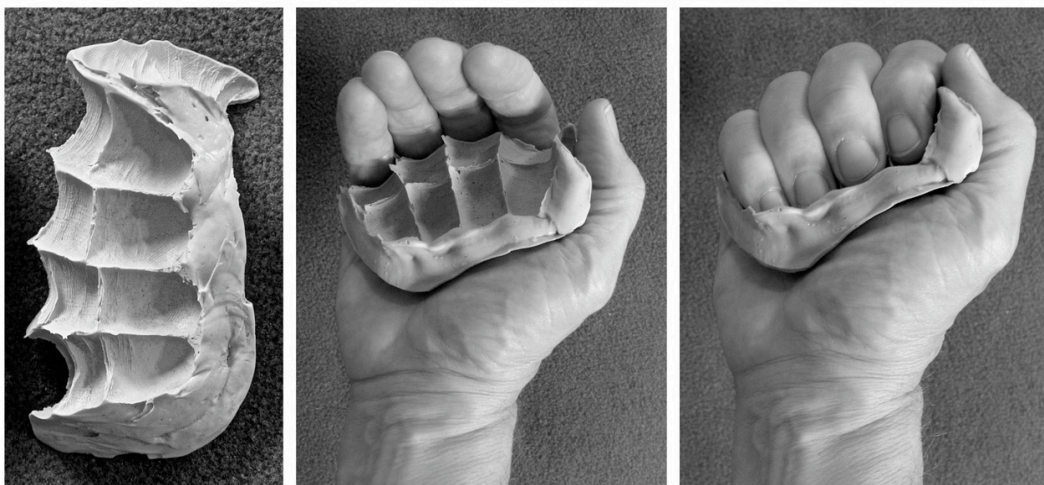


Figure 2. This Silicon Rubber HandGrip is cast to hold the knuckles in proper alignment during application of pressure.

Custom-cast hand grips coupled with strategic strap placement around the arches of the palms, wrists, and forearms (to serve as a fulcrum) enable practitioners to hold manual contact positions far longer, with little or no stress, making treatments more comfortable for both client and practitioner. These tools function to support, align, and strengthen an SI student's hands, arms, and shoulders, making the practice of Structural Integration available to a wider range of potential students and contributing to the longevity of a practitioner's professional career.

Our curved-surface treatment table design functions as a "body-worker's anvil". It can be made here at a relatively inexpensive cost and has attracted a great deal of interest, not only as art furniture (thanks to Norie's revised design) but also as a very comfortable couch-bed to recline on, and as an intriguing "playground" for doing Yoga positions and dance-related (ballet barre) exercises. [For more information on how Richard's grips, straps, and the curved-surface table support the Structural Integration process, see the links at the end of this article.]

As a classically trained scientist, Dr. Ida P. Rolf knew that visual observation and confirmation of subjectively experienced changes were an important part of the Struc-

tural Integration sessions that would help differentiate her work from simple massage. To this end, during Dr. Rolf's late 1960's classes she utilized one of the more high-tech developments of her day, the Polaroid Camera, to produce timely images of somatic changes. Despite the fact that these simple cameras create two-dimensional, black-and-white images, they provided very powerful, convincing evidence and important educational feedback. To this day, four decades later, routine objective verification and evaluation of effectiveness of manipulative strategies remains as one of the challenges of the SI profession.

At the Ecuadorian school for Structural Integration we plan to utilize stereo imaging, which may be achieved by utilizing twin shutter-synchronized, digital cameras or an image-splitter coupled to one camera. Computer-based image processing will enable three-dimensional viewing of stereo-pair, before/after photographs. We expect that the use of this approach will yield new insights into the effectiveness of a range of manipulative protocols, inspiring new understandings useful to students, instructors, and clients.

For example, experienced practitioners have reported that structural changes made in the foot and ankle can affect the contour of the shoul-

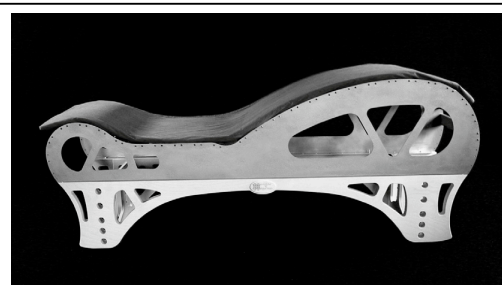


Figure 3. The Butterfly Treatment Table

der, but currently, detailed predictions of what changes may occur as a result of a given manipulation sequence or protocol are virtually impossible to predict. We think that detailed three-dimensional photographs for providing session feedback will enable an enhanced level of treatment planning.

In addition to offering both tool-based and traditional education in Structural Integration, we will provide the option of several learning experiences and therapeutic strategies that complement and enhance the SI process. These include:

Voice Dialogue Process: A brief synopsis

We have found that Structural Integration combines remarkably well with the Voice Dialogue Process, of which Norie is an Advanced Practitioner. Voice Dialogue work, originated by Jungian psychologists Hal and Sidra Stone, and is based on the notion that each of us is born into this world very vulnerable. As we relate with our close caregivers, certain voices (or "sub personalities") get strengthened. Every voice has the same job: to protect the vulnerable child within.

Every voice also has its opposite, so if one voice gets strengthened, its opposite tends to be suppressed. For example, if (as a young infant) you are rewarded to achieve, your Achiever voice becomes dominant and tends to see its opposite, sometimes called "The Beach Bum" voice, as "dangerous". If a voice gets suppressed far enough out of consciousness, it can go "demonic"—by this we mean that the suppressed voice can create spiritual, mental, or emotional imbalance and possibly illness.

In working with clients, the Voice Dialogue practitioner helps the client get to know her key voices (both strong and suppressed) and rebalance the opposites. The client has a powerful experience of separation from specific voices as well as an appreciation for the gifts that each voice brings. The client also discovers areas in which a specific voice has made conclusions about life and values that are now (years or decades later) no longer valid, and as a result, are decreasing the client's quality of life.

The practitioner also assists the client in developing the "Aware Ego," the broader "witness consciousness" that operates outside of the system of voices. Developing this "witness" awareness enables the client to have far greater freedom and range of real choice about what voices will most serve in any given situation. (For more

information on the Voice Dialogue process, click on the link at the end of this article.)

Because of Norie's widely varied background, she draws from a rich pool of experience and intuition in doing this work. One of our (Richard's and Norie's) early experiences in doing back-to-back sessions with a client was with an Ecuadorian woman who first did a one-hour session with Norie. When Norie asked her what she'd like to accomplish in the session, "B." said, "Well, I don't know if anything can be done about this ... but the whole right side of my body feels dead." "How long has that been going on?" asked Norie. "Twenty five years." "What happened 25 years ago?"

B. started to cry. "My brother committed suicide." Norie then worked with different voices, including helping B. hold a conversation in her mind with her dead brother, which yielded some important insights and gave her the experience of reconnecting with him in a meaningful way. Then, Richard did a Structural Integration session with B. The following day, B. called us, ecstatic: "When I woke up this morning, I was talking with my dead brother and suddenly "the life force" flowed back into my whole right side!" She said that both sides rebalanced and, for the first time in two and a half decades, she felt whole and normal again.

Norie, who has been a "Rolfee" since 1978, believes that the Voice Dialogue Process is rather like "Rolfing" the mental and emotional structures of the psyche. In other words, VDP supports the client in rearranging and reintegrating early experiences and beliefs in a more balanced and holistic direction. Whatever the reasons, the combination of both VDP and SI seems to be extremely effective and powerful. In our school, thus, we will be offering training in both Structural Integration and in the Voice Dialogue Process. We recognize that some people may wish to do only one or the other; however, we believe that over time, the benefits of combining these quite different but complementary modalities will become widely recognized.

Sensory Isolation Facility

We are in the process of completing the construction of a sensory isolation chamber into our spa in the Garden of Paradise. The sensory isolation experience was originated by Dr. John C. Lilly, well-known for his dolphin research and explorations of altered states of consciousness. This involves immersive flotation in a small pool

of Epsom-salt saturated water that is heated to a neutral skin temperature in a completely light and sound-proof environment. (See Lilly's book, Center of the Cyclone.¹)

We're eager to get the sensory isolation chamber completed so that we can test our hypothesis that Structural Integration (which V. Hunt's early documentation showed, reduces random neural firing in muscles) and Voice Dialogue (which can greatly reduce mind chatter) will combine with the sensory isolation experience (which enables a deep release of reflex-activated, chronically-held muscle tension patterns) to support people in achieving a much greater sense of peace in everyday life.

Now, imagine a strategic combination of Structural Integration, Voice Dialogue, and the Sensory Isolation experience ... and other modalities of art, color, aromatherapy, music, etc....

University Affiliations

Consistent with our commitment to integrate our work into a larger community, we are exploring a relationship with Ecuador's University of Otavalo (two hours north of Quito) to jointly create a program for "Creating the Human Being of the Future". The University of Otavalo, which began over three decades ago as an institute that had collected a complete library of indigenous wisdom and ethnology, has an impressive vision of becoming the leading university in Ecuador for teaching entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, that are much needed here.

The University shares our interest in playing an active global role in uplifting human civilization. A year ago, we were introduced to the Rector, a delightful man in his mid-70s, who is eager to join forces with us, drawing on our experiments for use in their program offerings. This promises to be an interesting collaboration, particularly as the University has recently wired all of its classrooms with interactive internet capability. When we add a couple of digital cameras, our conversations and demonstrations, etc., will be able to go global, in real time.

Creating a Small Intentional Community

In the Garden of Paradise, we are in the process of creating a small intentional Community for kindred souls who resonate with the ideas and activities we've been pulling together, as well as those who have their own ideas and activities that will fit with the general template we've set in motion. With this in mind, we've

created attractive accommodations for short term visitors (so that they can come check us out). We will soon be building some longer-term accommodations for those wishing to stay several months. We have already sold four lots to great people and have several more visiting us shortly with interest in joining us. At this time, we still have a few more spaces for full- or part-time Community Members (individuals, couples, or people with children) who would be interested in coming in at close to the ground floor. In about a year, we'll also be opening a second phase of our project: Garden of Paradise Innovation Village. This is described on our website and promises to be an exciting experiment in community living with a strong focus on entrepreneurial activity. In short, we invite mutually beneficial participation from talented and motivated people who resonate with our vision of creating a "seed crystal" for a collaborative, sustainable global civilization.

Our Community vision includes encouraging and modeling such healthy lifestyle choices as organic foods, meditation and spiritual practices, exercise and walking as a way of life, preventive medicine, and a variety of healing and spa services—all in a low-stress and beautiful environment. We are also involved with the local community in the creation of jobs, including the encouragement and financial support of some cottage industries. In the future, we will be launching a series of integrated information-based and eco-oriented businesses, including film and video production, eco-tours, music recording and editing, fine art and handicrafts of various sorts, internet marketing of our educational products, books, CDs, DVDs, etc. We also will offer a variety of seminars and workshops (we're open to suggestions) and offer consulting services of different types.

Initial food products from The Garden will include a wide range of organic produce and dried fruit and medicinal herbs. Our spa facility (nearing completion) will include a sauna, hot tub and treatment room, and the above-mentioned sensory isolation chamber. As a learning community we continually explore, demonstrate, and do our best to model more enlivening social, economic, and environmentally-sound ways of living. While we currently have our internet connection in Vilcabamba, we've recently learned how to get decently high-speed internet connectivity out here at the Garden of Paradise and will get that installed in the near future.

Long-term plans include reforesting our mountains with native species and also planting enough pine and cypress to replace the ones cut down for building purposes. To start the process, last year and this year we planted 1,000 trees; the year before, we planted about 600 fruit trees. Our vision is to make our Community's development "footprint" as light and lovely as possible, with few houses (mostly adobe) and other structures. We will farm the fields organically, working with such soil amendments as rock dust and biochar (a key component of "terra preta," a carbon-rich and very fertile black soil) and other soil-enhancement processes. We are strongly committed to improving the soil structure. To this end, we've introduced a great deal of composted material (more to come) and started worm beds. We've also planted three hundred coffee bushes (which we recently discovered, to our delight, have extraordinary fragrant flowers that smell rather like night jasmine!), a large field each of organic sugar cane and organic non-GMO corn (mainly fed to our chickens), as well as a variety of berry bushes and a couple of types of grape vines. Our large garden supplies a great variety of organic vegetables and herbs, both culinary and medicinal.

In the sustainable and innovative design of our community-use facilities, we are combining a variety of technologies, old and new. We seek to find the balance between a high-quality living

and a low- or negative-carbon footprint, while also aiming to influence the global process of transformation to a sustainable civilization. For example, Norie was actively involved with helping a group of scientist-inventors put together "The Green Disc", a complete suite of innovative technologies that aim to reverse the build-up of CO₂ in the atmosphere and provide clean water, energy, and waste-disposal methods. "The Green Disc" was introduced this December in Copenhagen, at the United Nations conference on climate change and will be more widely available.

The year-round "springtime" climate of our locale lends itself to a wonderful indoor-outdoor style of living that invites a relaxed lifestyle, innovative architecture and great creativity. Our imaginations are the limit—and, as more and more people become involved, there seems to be no limit. We feel that the new school of Structural Integration we are building in this lovely setting, combined with the other modalities we are offering, would have made Dr. Rolf happy. After all, the development of human potential was one of her dreams for the future of her work. With this in mind, we look forward to developing our school and healing and retreat center in the inspiring tradition of the Esalen Institute, Omega Institute, Hollyhock, and other great centers dedicated to the full development of human potential. And, we look forward to your visit!

Notes

- ¹ Lilly, Dr. John D., *Center of the Cyclone*, Random House Value Publishing, 1985. Also: <http://www.johnclilly.com/>.

Links

Garden of Paradise: <http://www.gardenofparadise.net/>

Grips, Straps & Curved-Surface Treatment Table: <http://web.me.com/tarpitboss/>

Voice Dialogue: <http://www.delos-inc.com/>

Sensory Isolation & Dr. John C. Lilly: <http://www.samadhitank.com/>