Beyond New Age
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Introduction

This volume of original essays grew directly out of our frustration with the cavalier use to which the label ‘New Age’ has been put in recent decades, both in the popular media and by many scholars of religions. A vast range of ‘alternative’ or ‘spiritual’ phenomena may sport this label, which – however convenient it may be as a shorthand device – is far from exact phenomenologically (cf. Bednarowski, 1991; York, 1997). It is used to cover everything from well-established New Religious Movements to contemporary popular spiritualities and recent developments in specific religions, and may be applied with comparatively little historical and structural specificity (Sutcliffe, 1998). In short, it seems to us that it is high time to problematise the term, while simultaneously beginning more thorough and wide-ranging excavations of, and differentiations between, the kinds of religiosity that the label has sought to identify. The ‘beyond’ of the title, then, carries no moral or theological judgement, but simply points to the historical dimension of the field in question, which both predates and will survive the term or emblem ‘New Age’. That is, ‘New Age’ turns out to be merely a particular codeword in a larger field of modern religious experimentation.

We have chosen the loose term ‘alternative spirituality’ to describe the subject matter of the essays in this volume, although with some reservations and qualifications, as we briefly explain below. In most cases, the contributors were asked to restrict their focus to mainland Britain, our intention being that the British experience over the last century or so might act as a small case study for the growth and development of a genre of alternative spirituality in the modern world.

The subject-matter reflects recent historical currents and contemporary manifestations of this genre. Clearly our choice is far from exhaustive, but we think these papers identify some key features. In claiming that a more or less distinctive field of phenomena is indicated here, we are aware that we are positing a degree of homogeneity amongst disparate phenomena over
and above that often argued for by activists and practitioners within particular constitutive currents. However, without wishing here to enter into the debate concerning the relative merits of etic/‘outsider’ versus emic/‘insider’ categorisation, we simply see a host of similarities and interconnections between emic modes and structures of discourse and praxis which suggest a common stance and attitude. This is avowedly and selfconsciously one in dynamic tension with – if not outright opposition to – the hitherto dominant ideas and structures of ‘official’ religion and secular science alike. Put simply, these currents invariably understand themselves to be ‘alternative’, either strongly (they are explicitly dissenting) or weakly (they are merely variant or optional). Finer differentiations – which in due course will certainly be required – we leave to others. At the same time, we think that these kinds of individualistic, flexible and acculturating spirituality are now of considerable cultural significance.

Inspection of this collection’s contents reveals a variety of topics and approaches. Sociological, anthropological, historical and ethnographical perspectives mould often overlapping accounts of Theosophy (Tingay), the seminal reduction of religion to psychology by Jung (Segal), seekers, gurus, artists and other virtuosi (Sutcliffe, Green), the allure of certain landscapes and settlements (Bowman, Monteith, York), alternative healing modes (Hamilton, Hedges and Beckford), the dynamics of contemporary magical and Pagan identities (Greenwood, Harvey) and humanistic and secularised spirituality (Bruce, Heelas, Puttick). Since each chapter is effectively a self-contained and self-explanatory essay, we do not propose to spend time here on formal introductions. Rather, we wish to propose a handful of themes and frames through which to approach these intertwined episodes in the growth and development of alternative spirituality.

**Epistemological and Methodological Issues**

We envisage this book not only as a valuable and thought-provoking resource for those studying and teaching in the field of contemporary religion, but as a stimulus for epistemological and methodological debate. The chapters in this volume reflect an increased scholarly interest in the experiences and perceptions of the growing number of religious practitioners whose spiritual lives in industrial and post-industrial society have lain, and lie, in less established, informal groupings. The need to review and reflect on how we talk about religion and spirituality in the light of late-twentieth-century trends – especially the growth of ‘privatised’ or ‘customised’ forms, and ‘seeking’ – is amply demonstrated here. A reappraisal is taking place, both within academia and more generally, of how we think
about, classify and study religion. Many aspects of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality fall outside the traditional purlieu of academic studies of religion, to the detriment of a rounded understanding of religious and spiritual culture(s). However, as scholars in a variety of disciplines have become aware of the changes in belief and praxis, it is becoming increasingly difficult to characterise what is 'mainstream'. To see religious experimentation, customisation and change as 'deviant' behaviour is no longer appropriate.

Methodologically, more cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches are being developed to take into account the changing forms and expressions of religion. Some traditional means of information-gathering, such as counting numbers in churches or on membership lists, for example, are simply inappropriate for many of the looser, more personal, uninstitutionalised forms of contemporary spirituality. Indeed, it might be argued that such methods have always been problematical as measurements of individual belief. If Davie (1994) has argued that an important trend in contemporary religion is 'believing without belonging', implicit in this is the comparatively under-explored corollary of 'belonging without believing'—through custom and social pressures—which suggests that there are limitations in 'number-crunching' alone. Hence the contributions to this volume reflect a spectrum of information-gathering techniques, including historical, textual and archival studies, quantitative research and qualitative approaches such as interview and participant-observation.

Additionally, the scholar's role in the research process and her or his impact on the area researched continue to be areas for exploration. In the arena of contemporary spirituality, where the spiritual search is in part a literary activity, a significant proportion of informants are also avid readers of both emic and academic works. Informants may double as conscious representatives or academic scholars of their chosen path; the same person may be not only an informant, but the researcher's academic or public audience. The issue of reflexivity is thus becoming increasingly complex, and researchers must remain aware of their evolving role within the research 'ecosystem'. Furthermore, the traditional assumption of many scholars outside departments of theology that disbelief or scepticism constitutes an 'objective' stance in relation to belief studies is being challenged increasingly (Hufford, 1995). Hence the representation of 'reality' in a cultural context which acknowledges multiple possible realities is not just an 'academic' issue, for there are issues of legitimacy and power involved in whatever definition of 'normative' is counted as authoritative—and in who makes that judgment.
There is in fact very little in contemporary spirituality that was not already present and available in the 1920s and 1930s, in the Edwardian era, at the fin-de-siècle or even earlier. Certainly there are exceptions: the 'secular myth' of flying saucers (Segal), and witchcraft/Wicca (Greenwood), for example, both emerge only in mid-century. But 'seeking' (Sutcliffe) has long been an established spiritual modus operandi, particularly amongst the more leisureed and financially comfortable. Indeed, a strong case can be made for the urban Victorian fin-de-siècle as a seedbed for seekers: think of the metaphysical and geographical wanderings of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), who proclaimed a 'new aeon' in 1904, or of H.P. Blavatsky (1831–91; see Tingay, Chapter 2). Similarly, sites such as Glastonbury and Iona (Bowman, Monteith, Chapters 5 and 6), and colonies for art and lifestyle experiment (Green, Chapter 3), have been foci for adventurous groups throughout the twentieth century, as have Druidry and ad hoc nature worship (Harvey, Chapter 9) since the Romantic era. Vernacular therapies and heterodox healing systems (Hedges and Beckford, Chapter 10; Hamilton, Chapter 11) have a similarly lengthy historical pedigree (Cooter [ed.], 1988). For example, the London publisher Rider had a series entitled 'Mind and Body Handbooks' in print before World War I, with titles like Nature’s Help to Happiness, The Power of Self-Suggestion, How to Keep Fit: an Unconventional Manual, and Studies in Self-Healing, or Cure by Meditation (Colville, 1911: end pages). And its journal the Occult Review (published for some fifty years from 1905) was concurrently addressing most of the subject-matter to be found in contemporary magazines like Kindred Spirit (founded 1987), or on ‘New Age’ and ‘Mind Body and Spirit’ bookshelves today:

Occultism, Hypnotism, Magic, Psychic Phenomena, Telepathy, Reincarnation, World Memory, Planetary Influence, Dreams, Multiple Personality, The Occult in English Literature, Religious Mysticism, &c., &c. (advertisement in Colville, 1911: end pages)

The same point could be made by reference to the Findhorn community in Scotland, a rural colony of several hundred seekers (Sutcliffe, forthcoming, 2000). All of Rider’s themes and more featured, and feature, in the eclectic religiosity which informs this famous experiment in alternative spirituality begun in 1962. Predominating interests at Findhorn since the founders first came together in the mid-1950s have veered between gnostic meditation and mediumistic contact (including UFOs), positive thinking, the study of occult philosophies and healing and ‘growth’ activities. In the 1960s Find-
horn was known chiefly for its organic – even magical – garden; in the 1970s, as a ‘New Age’ centre; and more recently, as a ‘spiritual community’. Whatever its official title, Findhorn’s underlying concerns remain more or less constant, only taking on different nuances and impressions according to shifting trends in spirituality and contemporary culture.

Historical perspective shows that the prevailing stance in all cases – amongst fin-de-siècle seekers and post-Sixties therapists alike; in the Edwardian journalism of the Occult Review as in today’s Kindred Spirit; in diverse enclaves and centres – concerns the exploration and application of personal religiosity. Typically termed ‘spirituality’, such religiosity can be seen as a practical and flexible resource for the everyday world that is simultaneously goal-oriented action, re-sensitisation to the realms of the ‘magical’ and ‘unexplained’ and a label for a popular psychological–expressivist hermeneutic.

VERNACULAR RELIGION

Some very helpful insights in relation to alternative spirituality can be found in the study of vernacular religion. Related to ‘folk’ and ‘popular’ definitions of religion, this broad field has been delineated in different ways in different academic disciplines (Yoder, 1974), but more often than not it has simply been ignored. Ignoring a field of study is a way of demoting it, making value judgements as to what constitutes ‘worthy’ objects of study. We feel that it is important to question some of the implicit and explicit assumptions both generally and in the academy as to what constitutes ‘real’ or ‘proper’ belief, both in relation to vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

Some of the neglect of popular belief has sprung from a rather ‘literalist’, text-oriented attitude that suspects or dismisses material culture, ritual or custom. Academic studies of religions, or religions as taught in schools and colleges, for example, sometimes tend to be ‘bookish’ versions of traditions. While this may be seen as a necessary pedagogic device, both students and the traditions themselves are done a great disservice if we give the impression that this skeletal form is all there is to it. The diversity within religious traditions, the role of vernacular religion and the individual ‘spin’ on religion are all there and deserve to be acknowledged. That converts to belief systems as varied as Buddhism, Islam, and Paganism consistently say ‘It’s not a religion, it’s a way of life’ speaks volumes about a previously impoverished understanding of what ‘religion’ is and how it functions in everyday life. Meanwhile, more functionalist studies of religion have largely ignored aspects of belief and praxis which have not obviously promoted
their presuppositions concerning the purpose of religion. Religion is as likely to be divisive as cohesive; individuals shape religion as well as being shaped by it.

Academic studies of religion, then, have tended to concentrate on 'official' religion, concerned primarily with theology, philosophy and group ritual. 'Popular' and 'folk' views and practices outside this fairly narrow focus have been treated as quaint, mistaken, superstitious or deviant, depending on the context. However, the reality and diversity of religion resides in 'the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion' (Yoder, 1974: 14): a convenient definition of 'folk' religion. Some have used this term in a derogatory sense, but it might more positively be seen as a way of designating an integral aspect of religious culture which acknowledges the practice as well as the theory of religion.

While Yoder’s definition developed in a Christian milieu, it can be applied in any tradition in which there is a sense (emically or etically) of there being a hegemonic official or authentic ‘version’ (Vrijhof and Waardenburg, 1979). Furthermore, as Primiano (1995: 41) has commented, ‘One of the hallmarks of the study of religion by folklorists has been their attempt to do justice to belief and lived experience’. Particular aspects of folklore studies which complement the study of religion and alternative spirituality include: the refusal to privilege written over oral forms; the understanding that ‘folk’, ‘popular’ or ‘unofficial’ beliefs are an integral part of people’s conceptual world and not simply wilful aberrations; the recognition that belief spills over into every aspect of behaviour; and the appreciation of the dynamic nature of ‘tradition’, which has been characterised by folklorist Henry Glassie as ‘the creation of the future out of the past’ (1995: 395).

In addition, folklorists’ attention to the use of narrative in various forms, particularly as legend (stories which are told as true) and memorate (stories based on personal experience), are invaluable in relation to alternative religious phenomena, providing insights into the world view of groups and individuals for whom there is no official spokesperson or recognised ‘canon’ of literature. Particularly helpful here is Bennett’s (1989: 291) characterisation of the multifunctional ‘belief story’ as an informal story which enunciates and validates the current beliefs and experiences of a given community. Here, the ‘grand narrative’ which frames different world views is refracted through many little, everyday, not-so-grand narratives: aetiological legends (how the robin got a red breast; how the stones got to Stonehenge; ‘Karma!’), corroborative legends (‘Twas only the statue on his dashboard
saved him'; 'Synchronicity!'; 'When the Pupil is ready the Master appears'), or personal experience narratives ('we had a miracle down here just the other week'; '... and then I realised I had been a Scot in a previous life').

It might be argued that the term 'folk' religion, precisely because of its possible negative or judgemental connotations, should be abandoned in favour of 'vernacular' religion (see Chapter 5) – 'religion as it is lived: as humans encounter, understand, interpret and practise it' (Primiano, 1995: 44). But whatever precise term is chosen – vernacular, folk, popular – it is evident that subject-matter and theory overlap considerably with those of the scholar of alternative spirituality.

RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

There is much talk of the contemporary 'privatisation' of religion. Undoubtedly, the outward appearance of religion has changed and there is – in Britain, Western Europe and America – more consumer choice in religion than ever before. One of the features that has made the twentieth-century tapestry of religion so interesting is that more people have greater access to more forms of religion simultaneously than at any other period. While some use 'spiritual supermarket' as a derogatory term, it can be seen as an accurate reflection of the current situation, with the emphasis on variety and choice. Thus, in our fin-de-siècle emporium, Irish Catholic nuns are enhancing their devotions with Buddhist meditation, Anglicans are learning spiral dances and Druids are teaching Neuro Linguistic Programming. Individual religion or spirituality in the modern world can be a very personal package, and this must be taken into account in formulating a useful model of religion. One such working model (Bowman, 1992) understands 'religion' as the sum of 'official', vernacular or folk, and individual cultural forms and expressions. It is a dynamic interaction of beliefs, practices, attitudes, rationales, narratives, perceptions of efficacy and personal experience.

The language of alternative spirituality in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised 'taking responsibility for your own spiritual life', 'doing what feels right', 'seeing what works for you'. But we should not assume that such 'picking and mixing' is anything new: several essays in the present collection demonstrate quite the reverse. Nor is this phenomenon limited to 'alternative' spirituality. Realistic observation suggests that this is precisely what people always do – or at least incline towards – in their splicings and conjoinings of deities, saints, calendar customs, doctrines and rites (Thomas, 1971; Hempton, 1988; Hutton, 1996). As always, efficacy and personal experience form the empirical basis of people's faith. Hence what is different
about contemporary spirituality, it might be argued, is not the role of individual or vernacular religion, but the relative strength and social significance of official religion. In the most customised developments, the individual is fed by and feeds upon a gamut of traditions, old and new, in line with the decline of any one widely accepted or recognised official form.

'SPIRITUALITY'

Spirituality . . . has become a kind of buzz-word of the age . . . 'I'm trying to cultivate my spiritual side', people say; or, 'I'm learning to connect with my spirituality' . . . The spiritual search, whatever that may mean – and it means myriad things to different people – has become a dominant feature of late twentieth-century life. (Brown, 1998: 1)

By now it should be clear that what is articulated in the following pages is less a matter of 'religion', officially conceived, than of 'spirituality'. Certainly this term is now in common use: A. King (1996: 343), for example, remarks upon its 'extraordinary popularity . . . and . . . proliferation . . . in courses, conferences, discussions, journals and books'. Spirituality – at least in the alternative and vernacular forms portrayed in this volume – can be understood as an emic repackaging of popular and vernacular religion to suit the peculiar conditions of industrial and post-industrial societies. In broad terms, what characterises its discourse and practice?

To begin with, a historical–comparative perspective reveals the absence – or at best, the merely weak presence – of the kinds of empirical feature associated with 'official' religion (and also the 'new' religion embodied in New Religious Movements), such as distinctive buildings, a dominant founder-figure, a foundational book or a uniquely authoritative 'canon', an acknowledged creed and determined body of ritual, and a more or less clear and unambiguous self-presentation. Only diluted versions of these various institutions are present in alternative spirituality: special rooms and 'spaces', multiple pioneers and gurus, a spectrum of texts, small groups and workshops, flexible ritual work. Self-presentation is a perennial issue: Pagans refute the 'New Age' tag, Heathens refute the 'Pagan' tag. Few wish now to be associated with generic labels like 'occultism', a pursuit endorsed by early influential figures such as Dion Fortune or Alice Bailey, say; but many happily embrace 'Celtic'. Perhaps a common feature is the preference for ideals of self-determination and agency over more 'official' constraints of institutional membership and ideological boundary.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of spirituality tends to spurn religion(s).
Recalling his early adulthood, one prominent writer and workshop leader writes: ‘I had little respect for the religious institutions and priestly hierarchies’ (Bloom, 1990: 2), and remembers his school vicar as ‘an extraordinarily boring man!’ (Bloom, 1993: 18). One activist even speaks of religion as ‘one of the greatest forces for evil at work in the world today’ (Thompson, in Spangler and Thompson, 1991: 176). By way of contrast, Shallcrass (1996: 65) notes that ‘many druids have preferred to portray Druidry as a philosophy, an ethical code, or a way of life, rather than a religion’ (1996: 66), his own preferred term being ‘spiritual path’ (idem). Indeed, from Hodgkinson’s (1993: 108) self-help perspective: ‘You can be genuinely spiritual without ever going near a church or place of worship and, conversely, go to church, synagogue or mosque several times a week without ever understanding what spirituality is all about.’

Nor is this kind of juxtaposition a recent phenomenon. Findhorn founder Dorothy Maclean (1980: 12–13) opted for ‘spiritual unfoldment’ as the focus of her life in the late 1940s, and went on to explore many ‘spiritual’ groups (the inverted commas are hers) of the day. One 1930s editorial in the *Occult Review* proposed setting up a ‘Spiritual League’ to ‘weld together . . . scattered spiritual units’¹ (meaning groups and individuals); another noted the increasing popularity of ‘the type of literature which deals with the spiritual quest’². And H.P. Blavatsky’s former secretary, G.R.S. Mead, included a chapter entitled ‘On the Track of Spirituality’ in his book *Some Mystical Adventures* (Mead, 1910: 148ff.), published before World War I.

These early thoughts chime well with a certain strand of gnostic-psychological experience within the field:

By ‘spiritual experience’ I do not mean abnormal happenings – these may or may not occur – but a life of rest, of poise and balance, of peaceful understanding, an inner recognition of the great truths and great powers which are hidden all around us, and which, when brought within the immediate consciousness of a man, lead to his co-operating with them in the divine scheme of things. (Mead, 1910: 297)

U. King (1997: 667–8) has continued in this vein, understanding ‘spirituality’ to be a ‘universal codeword’ with ‘emphasis placed on the subject, on the discovery of the self and a more differentiated understanding of human psychology’. This is hardly the language of ‘official’ religion, and indeed it is a moot point if there is traditional theological content at all in the more secularised spiritualities discussed here (see Puttick, Bruce and Heelas, Chapters 12–14), which – as King suggests – wrap what little ‘god
talk' they contain in strategies and explanations from the worlds of psychology and therapy.

Hence 'spirituality' implies a kind of 'halfway house' between on the one hand 'official', heavily institutionalised religion, and on the other, the variegated lifestyles and niche cultures of modernity. It promises its exponents the best of both worlds – the religious and the profane – while remaining always somewhat equivocal and contingent with regard to 'ultimate' allegiances. That is, a particular 'spiritual path' might just as easily take in bodywork and psychotherapy as, say, more fully-blown denominational rituals, serially or even concurrently. The determinant factors in each case stem from the interplay between the personal tastes and inclinations of individuals, 'softer' cultural trends, and 'harder' socio-economic forces. Precisely because of its adaptation to this vortex of influences, spirituality represents not only a pragmatic, but a strategically powerful, resource for mobile individuals in the modern world.

But just as 'religion' as an abstract category is open to critique (McCutch-eon, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1997), it might be as well to problematise our representation of 'spirituality' from the beginning. Is it not more accurately the case that, rather than a monolithic 'spirituality', there are actually any number of variegated 'spiritual cultures' abroad in the modern world? Finer analysis will in due course certainly be required, but several of the more prominent varieties – if we take this line – are already addressed in one way or another in this book: Theosophical, Jungian, 'New Age', Pagan, Celtic, Expressivist, Humanistic and Holistic. These categories in turn beg the final question: in what way can the spirituality portrayed in this collection be said to be 'alternative'?

**CONTEXTUALISING ‘ALTERNATIVE’**

One of our aims in this book is to put 'alternative spirituality' in perspective, both in terms of where it has come from and where it seems to be heading. For assuredly, these spiritual trends have not appeared from nowhere; their seeds were planted long ago. A number of chapters (e.g. Green, Tingay) show how late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century ideas and praxis have 'trickled down'. What in recent scholarly history has been frequently considered marginal or eccentric (be it Theosophy, Jungian psychology, vernacular religion, or the idea of 'spiritual growth' and 'personal development') can be seen at the end of the twentieth century to have contributed to the world views of significant numbers of practitioners. Considerable acculturation has ensued.

Hence any talk of 'alternative' spirituality begs the question of norma-
tivity in contemporary religion. But the older model of 'mainstream' religion(s), based on a particular view of 'official', 'real', 'proper', 'legitimate' or 'functional' religion, has been widely problematised – for reasons we have in part indicated above. It is now inappropriate to regard such phenomena as vernacular religion, New Religious Movements, alternative spirituality and the individual spiritual quest either through the lens of one version – the official version – of one religious tradition, or through the lens of a sociology of deviancy. They are all part of the contemporary religious scene, and as such equally worthy objects of study.

The flip side of the coin is that we must review the boundaries of what can now be considered 'alternative'. Certainly, from Theosophy to 1990s Paganism, everything carries to some degree a charge of emic dissidence and opposition vis-à-vis prominent cultural formations, whether religious or secular. But there is also a weaker sense of 'alternative' as that which is merely 'variant' or 'other', an interpretation which highlights issues of choice and option noted earlier. Modern expressions of alternative spirituality can usefully be situated on a continuum between these different stances, where 'alternative' represents at one pole opposition, and at the other, option. Charted chronologically, it might even be possible to detect periods of ebb and flow between respective tendencies. With regard to the present situation, burgeoning scholarly teaching and research interests in New Religious Movements, New Age, Paganism and contemporary spirituality would seem to bear out the claim that, contrary to predictions that 'New Age' would 'go mainstream', 'now it's as if the mainstream is going New Age' (cited in Ferguson, 1994: 16). Genuine challenge or creeping acculturation? Time will tell.

In any case, forms of religion and modes of religiosity continue to change and evolve. The 'novelty' of much of what is happening is to some extent illusory. Some aspects were simply unobserved or not thought worthy of comment in the past. Media exposure, global communications, popularisation and commodification are presenting beliefs, groups, practices, ideas and artefacts to a new and wider audience, as well as putting a fresh 'spin' on them. In this regard it is location and profile, rather than content and structure, that have changed. The existence of a New Age Foundation Diploma in Tasseography (teacup reading) which is said to 'further your development as a New Age Counsellor'; the repackaging of spiritual healing as Reiki; the popularisation of shamanic, magical and other virtuoso techniques and roles: these and countless other strategies are indicative of the trend towards formalising and marketing traditions that were previously informally or privately transmitted and practised, or pursued in quite different cultural contexts.
Notes


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Part 1: People
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I was born under a wanderin’ star
(Lee Marvin, 1969: Paint Your Wagon)

INTRODUCTION: THE HINTERLANDS OF RELIGION

Lee Marvin’s paean to the wandering life reflects an American expansivity – or restlessness – of spirit, as common to the Pilgrim Fathers as it is to the cowboy movie. Veteran ‘New Age’ protagonist David Spangler is describing something similar when he says that ‘it’s restful for the eye to move from up close to a receding horizon, which draws the spirit out’. In the post-war period such behaviour typifies the wanderings of the Beats – whom Prothero (1996: 19) calls ‘wandering seekers of mystical visions and transcendence’ – as well as the ‘freaks’ and hippies, for whom life ‘on the road’ – to invoke the title of Jack Kerouac’s late-1950s novel – could now unfold just as well psychologically (and chemically) as geographically. Ken Kesey, for example, roamed the USA in the 1960s with his Beat/Dada ensemble ‘The Merry Pranksters’, travelling in a bus with the word ‘Further’ rather than any particular placename on its destination board (Webb, 1976: 444–6). Others preferred to head east in significant numbers, leading one activist, Michael Murphy, founder in 1962 of the Esalen Institute in California, to describe a ‘third wave’ of post-war seekers after the Beats and hippies: the orientalised sadhak (from sadhu/ Sanskrit, ‘holy person’), whose focus is now less drug-aided ‘inner’ exploration than meditative consciousness (cited in Brown, 1998: 194).

Seeking, sampling, exploring – or, more bluntly, ‘shopping’, ‘touring’, ‘scavenging’: whatever the precise term used, these kinds of spiritual bricolage have become increasingly commonplace, even mainstream, strategies in post-1960s America and modern cultures in general. Roof (1993) even characterises a whole generation in these terms: the post-war ‘baby boomers’, he claims, are a ‘generation of seekers’.
As in the USA, so in Britain (and elsewhere in Europe), where post-war countercultural and popular cultural developments have stimulated latent currents of 'seekership'. Consider two brief British examples. At the end of the 1960s, 'Gandalf's Garden' in Chelsea, London, described itself as an 'experimental, spiritually hip community evolving a lifestyle and producing a mystical scene magazine' (Strachan [ed.], 1970: 20). It included a:

shop and meeting place selling hand-made goods, occult books, exotic teas and health snacks; also free food and free notice board, yoga classes and weekly mantra meditations, talks, gurus, occultists, yogis, seekers for the miraculous. (ibid.: 20)

The excited jumble of phenomena in this entry from an early directory of multiple religiosity in and on the fringes of the British counterculture reflects the fierce cultural flux of the day, in which multiple realms and identities were flung together in a blitz of cultural mix-and-match. A little later, in the counterculture's wake, ordered - even serial - explorations became commonplace. Consider my own serendipitous quest of the 1980s:

I became a regular reader of Peace News... and the anarchist periodical Freedom. Under the influence of books by the dissident psychiatrists R.D. Laing and David Cooper, I moved [from Bristol] to Edinburgh to work as a volunteer in a community house... I adopted a wholefood and vegetarian lifestyle, and lived in communal and co-operative households. I consulted... the I Ching and Tarot cards, I undertook a sporadic Zen meditation practice, I struggled with T'ai Chi Chuan. I seriously considered converting to Tibetan Buddhism. I became apprenticed to a craft shoemaker who followed Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy. Later still I investigated Gestalt therapy, assertiveness training and men's consciousness-raising groups... In short, I sought. (Sutcliffe, 1998: 1-2)

In the 1990s such hypersyncretic splicings of ideas and techniques scarcely raise an eyebrow. The annual 'Mind–Body–Spirit' festival, for example, has writ large the themes and activities of 'Gandalf's Garden', while a dizzying range of vernacular variations upon my own psycho-spiritual samplings is daily enacted, in both strong and weak forms, amongst the population at large. Some practitioners congregate at specialist sites, such as the Findhorn community, 'a sort of spiritual supermarket, where you can pick and mix and try to find something which suits you', or they may have felt themselves 'drawn' mysteriously by the 'spiritual magnet' of Glastonbury (Bowman, 1993: 29-30); or they may congregate at St James's, Piccadilly, London, for 'Alternatives' evenings (York, 1995: 230-1, 234-5). Others browse the bookshops, where nearly one-fifth of all religious titles published
in the UK in the 1990s has been classified as ‘occult’ (Bruce, 1996: 199).
There is also plenty of opportunity to attend lectures, learn specific
techniques of visualisation, meditation and other ritual work in small
groups and through sympathetic networks, and sample workshops – some­
times residential – in a plethora of skills, from Reiki healing to firewalking.\(^5\)

As William Bloom (1993a: 82), an activist associated both with Findhorn
and ‘Alternatives’, puts it:

\[\text{Not so many decades ago . . . most seekers would have been limited to what their}
\text{local church or temple had to offer. Today we need not be restricted to the}
\text{teachings of the religion and culture into which we were born. All the spiritual}
\text{traditions and cosmologies are now available to us. (my emphasis)}\]

Nor is this pick-and-mix approach peculiar to alternative enclaves or to
consumer subcultures. Particularly since the 1893 ‘World’s Parliament of
Religions’ in Chicago, hyperecumenicalism has created considerable op­
portunities for inter-faith exchange (Braybrooke, 1992), and the exploration
by ‘singular seekers’\(^6\) of the differing liturgies and lifestyles of various
denominations has become a far from atypical feature of modern Chris­
tianity. To take one popular example, *At a Service Near You* (Gledhill, 1996),
a volume based on the author’s attendance at around two hundred different
church services in the UK, is lightheartedly likened in the foreword to ‘an
ecclesiastical version of *The Good Pub Guide*’ (ibid.: vii).

Elsewhere the discourse of ‘spirituality’ has entered popular culture. In
Sunday newspapers and consumer magazines, Hollywood actress Shirley
MacLaine has spoken of her ‘spiritual search’,\(^7\) and classical musician
Evelyn Glennie has described herself as a ‘spiritual person . . . fascinated
by all sorts of religions’, her strategy being to ‘pick from them what I want’.\(^8\)

In his contributions to a reader on ‘New Age’ which accompanied a
Channel Four television series, William Bloom (1991: 221, xvi) writes of
‘our instinctive spirituality’ and of the ‘right to explore spirituality in total
freedom’.

A marked feature of these developments is that the preferred terms are
‘spirituality’ and ‘spiritual’ rather than ‘religion’ and ‘religious’. Eileen
Caddy, a founder of the Findhorn community, makes this distinction
when she recalls of Peter, her husband-to-be in the 1950s, that ‘“religious”
was not the way to describe him. I knew he didn’t go to church, but I sensed
a commitment to something spiritual’ (Caddy, 1988: 19). Spirituality,
understood as an expressive and holistic mode of personal behaviour
encouraging strategic interaction on the part of the practitioner between
natural and supernatural realms, is an attractive proposition for modern
individualists, since its fuzzy boundaries and malleable praxis allow it to occupy ambiguous, multivalent ground between realms elsewhere more clearly categorisable (and hence potentially open to stigma) as 'religious' and 'secular'.

Thus the way in which religion has been expressed in the modern world by individuals and what we might call 'elective collectives' - specialist groups, communities, enclaves - has gradually become detached both from doctrinal regularity and from strong institutional structure. Increasingly, people wishing to express or practise a style of religiosiety appropriate to the quickened tempo and cultural promiscuity of high modernity might recognise Lee Marvin's popular song as being curiously relevant to their own situation at the counter of pick-and-mix religion - that 'world of options, lifestyles, and preferences' (Bruce, 1996: 233). Indeed, a veritable 'spiritual supermarket' (Bloom, 1993a: 82) is now available, in which hitherto unfamiliar, exotic or avant-garde figures - spiritual teachers and 'gurus' (Storr, 1996; Rawlinson, 1997) - have pitched their stalls alongside more mainstream authorities. Emulating the mythologised lifestyles of the wandering songster on the American frontier, or the post-war Beats and hippies, many contemporary religionists have become peripatetic and hypermobile.

SEEKERS AND GURUS AS 'SPIRITUAL VIRTUOSI'

In its most pedestrian sense 'quest' connotes simply 'seeking' or 'search'; but does it not already . . . evoke an atmosphere of romance, of poetry, of things spiritual? (Mead, 1910: 285–6)

However, these post-war developments, whether countercultural or popular-cultural, were in fact anticipated from around the latter half of the nineteenth century by the careers of individuals involved in the closely interrelated networks of spiritualism, psychic research, theosophy, occultism and ceremonial magic that together make up the core historical constituencies of alternative spirituality. For example, the Theosophist scholar G.R.S. Mead identified a variety of alternative religious functionaries active within what he saw as a 'rising psychic tide' in Edwardian London. These included:

seers and soothsayers and prophets, pythonesses, sibyls and prophetesses, tellers of dreams and of omens, mantics of every description and by every sort of contrivance; astrologists and even alchemists; professors of magical arts and ceremonies; cosmologists and revelationists. (Mead, 1913: 236)
Mead himself founded in 1909 the appropriately named ‘Quest Society’, the motto of which was ‘Seek, and ye shall find’ and the objective ‘To promote investigation and comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science, on the basis of experience’ (Mead, 1910: 285). This last clause was crucial, for Mead emphasised in his inaugural address to the society in Kensington Town Hall that ‘we are not in search of knowledge only . . . our seeking is also for deeper and intenser life’ (ibid., 290).

The Quest Society endured into the inter-war years, ending its days in the early 1930s as the ‘Search Society’. By now much else was afoot: Landau’s (1945; orig. 1935) seminal record of ‘modern mystics, masters and teachers’ active in Europe included such figures as the Theosophical ‘children’ Rudolf Steiner and Jiddu Krishnamurti; the mage/philosopher pairing of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky; and one of the first Indian gurus in Britain, Meher Baba. Tellingly, Landau explains in the new edition of his book that its bestselling success stems from the fact that ‘people are always eager to learn from the spiritual experiences of a fellow seeker’ (ibid.: 7).

Now, as I have argued elsewhere (Sutcliffe, 1997), the ‘seeker’ is an essential component in modern alternative religiosity: indeed, the inherent fissiparity of seekership both explains the brittleness and extreme changeability of these circles whilst allowing for a minimum collective behavioural norm. Seekers may be broadly defined as ‘popular virtuosi able and willing to select, synthesise and exchange amongst an increasing diversity of religious and secular options and perspectives’ (ibid., 105). Seekers are of course active to a degree within all religions. However, amongst traditional and even new religions, the seeker as a pure type is necessarily in the minority, being merely one amongst several far more structurally embedded models of religious participation (think of the roles of ‘member’, ‘regular’, ‘convert’) within securely institutionalised and firmly boundaried symbolic systems.

It is within the far more fluid and deregulated arena of alternative spirituality that the act of seeking and the role of seeker flourish. Consider two cases briefly. The career of Glasgow-born painter Benjamin Creme (b.1922) exemplifies certain strains of alternative spirituality, its cross-fertilisation of ‘oriental’ and occult sources culminating in supernatural contact of a most heterodox kind:

[Creme] devoured the writings of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, the Swamis Vivekananda, Sivananda and Yogananda; and, of course, Blavatsky and [Alice] Bailey. He studied meditation techniques, and came to the conclusion that he had mediumistic and healing powers . . . One day in 1959 . . . [he] received his first telepathic communication from one of the Hierarchy of Masters. (Brown, 1998: 12)
Since 1982, when Creme placed advertisements in newspapers announcing
the imminent appearance of one of these 'Masters' – 'The Christ', no less –
on the world stage, he has lectured and published extensively on his
'telepathic' contacts. With functional similarity, but considerable difference
in content and outcome, consider the post-countercultural odyssey of Philip
Shallcrass, a Pagan Druid. His story of how he became a 'priest of the
Goddess' (Shallcrass, 1998: 159ff.) takes in 'childhood experience of the
spirit world' and his trials as a 'would-be medicine man' (including use of
hallucinogenic drugs), before describing his exploration of ritual magic,
entry into a Wiccan coven, peripatetic 'solo Druidry' and, finally, his
founding of the British Druid Order.

As is immediately evident, a notable feature of 'seekership' (Campbell,
1972: 123) is a tendency for more experienced seekers to make available what
they have accumulated by way of ideas and techniques to others who – just
like themselves – are exploring alternative emporia where vernacular religion
and alternative spirituality converge. In fact, insofar as seekers become models
for action and a source of advice to others on the scene, they themselves come
to function as 'exemplary persons' – an 'exemplary person' in this sense being
'one who by subtle, often nonverbal means shows he is “turned on” and is able
to “turn on” others just by the radiance of his presence' (Ellwood, 1973: xv).
'Turning on' implies some kind of transmission of wisdom and expertise, the
means of which may vary considerably: for example, 'specific training',
'making a technique of transformation available', 'initiation', and 'passing
on a blessing' (Rawlinson, 1997: 35). In any case, the ‘journeyman’ seeker is on
the way to becoming, in some measure at least, a 'guru', albeit one whose
catchphrase is far more likely to be something like 'try it' (Caddy, 1992: 11) or
'do what turns you on' (Bloom, 1993b: 19), rather than the well-documented
authoritarianism of some fully-fledged religious leaders. That is, the authority
of this variety of guru is likely to be far more attenuated than the latter's.
Nevertheless, such gurus may still engender 'lineages' of their own, offering a
diluted transmission through talks, workshops, retreats and the printed word,
all the time trawling those same networks spun and maintained by seekers
(York, 1995; Sutcliffe, 1997). Joyce Collin-Smith’s experience, for example,
gently exemplifies the situation: serially involved with Ouspenskian circles
and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (amongst others) in the 1950s and 1960s, she
later began to offer her own classes in astrology. She describes herself as 'a kind
of freelance, moving as I thought best, learning and occasionally giving talks,
in the spheres with which I had made myself familiar' (Collin-Smith 1988:
197). And bumping into 'old associates' from earlier stages is part of the
process: 'Clearly we were all joined together on “La Ronde” . . . our pathways
were to cross and recross down the years' (ibid., 111).
As weak forms of institutionalisation periodically crystallise, a tension develops on the part of the seeker between the impulse to seek – that is, to keep on the move both geographically and metaphorically – and the need to stay put long enough adequately to receive the goods – the transmission – on offer in any particular instance. The same applies, in reverse, to the guru, who needs seekers’ attention at least long enough to put across a message – by which time, of course, the different parties may have found a mutual need for each other that survives the powerfully fissiparous impulses of this arena of spiritual transactions.

To help flesh out these skeleton types of seeker and guru, let us consider in a little more detail the mid-century careers of two such ‘spiritual virtuosi’: Mary Swainson and J.G. Bennett.12

THE SEEKER: MARY SWAINSON

Sometimes I was over-critical, so that I rejected a system of teaching because its idiom repelled me; at other times I was not critical enough. (Swainson, 1977: 204)

Mary Swainson (b.1908) grew up as an only child in Somerset vicarages. She studied geography at Exeter University in the late 1920s, and educational psychology at Oxford during the Second World War. Around this time she also underwent psychotherapeutic analysis (Swainson, 1977: 33ff). At Leicester University in the late 1940s she began a student counselling service, amongst the first of its kind in Britain. But alongside this distinguished mainstream career, Swainson had other interests. At Exeter she had become interested in psychical research (ibid., 203), and by the mid-1930s, she tells us, she had begun to ‘read systematically the evidence and theories behind so-called “occult” knowledge’:

Beginning with Steiner, Ouspensky, Alice Bailey and Theosophy, the Christian Mystics and the classical Eastern sources, I studied some of the many different idioms which reiterate the Ageless Wisdom. Steadily I built up my own library. (ibid.)

As with Benjamin Creme, heterodox reading legitimated and then developed her interests. She recalls: ‘Through reading . . . I found companionship, intellectual validation, and deepening of my previous gropings’ (ibid.). But, as she notes in a remark typical of the folk epistemology of seekership, ‘reading is only head-learning; the wisdom needs to be sifted, applied, and deeply felt’ (ibid.).

And so her search came quietly out of the closet:
After a few years of apparently open-ended exploration, Swainson made a commitment of sorts, if through a remarkably casual train of events:

I was browsing in a public library. Somehow my hand seemed led to touch an unknown book (many seekers have had this experience). It turned out to be the first publication of an esoteric group which, at long last, ‘felt right’ for me. (ibid.)

For some twenty years after the Second World War Swainson went to ‘annual retreats where we were trained carefully in group meditation and spiritual experience’ (ibid., 205). Significantly Swainson remarks that ‘now I was no longer alone; at any time I could contact group members, and some of my most long-standing friendships have come in this way’ (ibid.). In other words, she had balanced the intense solo dynamic of seekership through the peer-group confirmation of a social network.

Yet her commitment to this ‘esoteric group’ is a qualified one:

Quite early I was told (from the higher world) that ‘We would not restrict you in any way’, and always advised to follow my own inner light. It felt inwardly right to branch out, continuing to explore all possible schools and movements. (ibid.)

And branch out she did. She studied a ‘postal course’ called An Introduction to Spiritual Science, and in the 1950s and 1960s frequented the College of Psychic Studies in London, which she calls a ‘gold-mine for all seekers’ (ibid., 206). Like others, Swainson sampled Subud, an Indonesian mystical practice which became available in England through the efforts of the seeker-guru J.G. Bennett (see below), and she also explored systems of alternative healing like Radionics (ibid.).

She also met Ruth White (ibid., 207ff.) and became involved in the 1960s in the extended study of the content and methods of the communication claimed by White between herself and her discarnate spirit guide, ‘Gildas'. A constituency of readers and students of the ‘Gildas’ material grew up over the decade, numbering some three hundred by 1969 (ibid., 214), and comprising a highly de-traditionalised mix of social roles and identities, including ‘academics engaged in psychic research, educationists, psychologists of various schools, hippies, occultists, housewives [and] spiritualists’ (White and Swainson, 1971: 33). In the course of disseminating this material more publicly in the early 1970s, Swainson came into contact with other significant small groups and organisations of the day, such as the Churches’ Fellowship for Psychical
and Spiritual Studies, the Seekers Trust, and Sir George Trevelyan’s various activities (Swainson, 1977: 209–9). Many of these groups had been preoccupied with the idea of a ‘New Age’ and are a prime historical source of the so-called ‘New Age movement’ of the post-1970s (Sutcliffe, 1998). Swainson has continued her interests into the 1990s, when amongst other things she has been an adviser to a contemporary alternative health magazine, Caduceus.

The seeker as guru: J.G. Bennett

The idea of search entered my consciousness. There was something that must be found, before there could be anything to be done. (Bennett, 1962: 46)

Writing of spiritual healing, Mary Swainson (1977: 206) remarks: ‘As is usual in learning any skill . . . it is part of the process to be a patient first’. Translating this methodology, we could say that only those who have themselves sought – and who perhaps still seek – know the needs of other seekers. So we are here chiefly concerned with those gurus who explicitly acknowledge their status as time-served seekers, since it is the symbiotic relationship between seeker and guru that provides a rare element of structural predictability in the arena of alternative spirituality as a whole. Such a guru is J.G. Bennett (1897–1974), the ‘thinker, writer, teacher’ (Hinnells, 1991: 50) and ‘spiritual maverick’ (Rawlinson, 1997: 183).

Bennett’s career must be understood in the light of a distinctive religiosity developed in the inter-war years under the influence of the Greek–Armenian ‘modern-day gnostic and enigma’ G.I. Gurdjieff, who:

determined to find the explanation to various unusual phenomena such as faith-healing, clairvoyance and telepathy, began to search from a very early age, sometimes alone, and sometimes with a group he refers to as ‘the seekers after truth’. (Hinnells, 1991: 137)

A former associate of Gurdjieff’s in Russia, the ‘searcher and teacher’ P.D. Ouspensky (ibid., 313–4) had also travelled widely – in Egypt, Ceylon and India, for example. From 1921, Ouspensky gave public talks in London about his and Gurdjieff’s ideas, to which many writers, intellectuals and liberal socialites of the day were attracted. To these came J.G. Bennett, who had previously become interested in Islamic mysticism while working for British Intelligence in Turkey after the 1914–18 war (Bennett, 1962: 37ff.) and who had already met there both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, en route to Europe.

Bennett dramatically begins his autobiography – appropriately subtitled The Story of a Search – with an account of a near-death experience he
underwent on being wounded towards the end of the war (Bennett, 1962: 13–14). He summarises this experience as ‘as much a birth as a death – though I did not realize until much later that I had indeed died and been born again’. But, invalided out of action, Bennett became ‘troubled’ (ibid., 15): ‘Why was I still alive? So many of my schoolfellows . . . had been killed and not I. Why not?’

Now in Istanbul, and reflecting upon the impression made upon him by devout Muslims, Bennett again became preoccupied with large philosophical questions such as ‘What did I really wish to attain in my lifetime?’ (ibid., 45). Far from being a solution, religion itself seemed to Bennett problematic: ‘Everywhere I could see mutual exclusion, the denial of another’s truth, the rejection of another’s faith’ (ibid.). He ruminates: ‘I could not believe that any one religion could have the only truth and the whole truth. I could not turn for help to those who lived by the very exclusions that I wished to abolish in myself’ (ibid.). Bennett’s resolution of this quandary amounts to a seeker’s creed: ‘I vowed that I would never rest until I could find . . . the source of all religion and the unity of mankind’ (ibid., 45–6). Bennett’s ensuing ‘spiritual quest’ (ibid., 221) was to preoccupy him for the rest of his life, leading him from Sufism, through the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, to Subud and various other teachers, and finally to Catholicism.

Rawlinson (1997: 185) has aptly characterised Bennett as ‘a man of considerable intellect, fascinated by systems and formulae, but given to sudden lurches’. Nevertheless, at the same time as he ransacked the esoteric systems of the day, Bennett acted as guru to other seekers. For example, he led his own study groups in and around London in the 1930s, based on his own interpretations of Gurdjieffian and Ouspenskian ideas. These endeavours culminated in the establishment of households for work and study: at Coombe Springs in South London in 1946, and in the Cotswolds in the early 1970s. In these models of what Bennett termed ‘a spiritual community’ (ibid., 224) he and his associates explored his own eclectic version of ‘the Work’ (as Gurdjieff’s system was called). They were not short of interested participants: around two hundred associates in the late 1940s, and over four hundred a decade later (ibid., 251, 330).

**The significance of seekers and gurus**

‘I’m trying to cultivate my spiritual side’, people say; or, ‘I’m learning to connect with my spirituality.’ (Brown, 1998: 1)

The roles of seeker and guru adopted by Swainson and Bennett were certainly not unique, but they were comparatively unusual in their day.
Since the 1960s, however, these roles have increasingly been acted out en masse. Evidence for this can be found in Roof’s (1993) depiction of a post-war ‘generation of seekers’; in Rawlinson’s (1997) detailed compendium of contemporary gurus; in my own ethnographies of ‘New Age’ in Scotland in the 1990s (Sutcliffe, 1998); and in the narratives of virtuoso voyagers like St John (1977) in Human Potential circles, Forsyth (1993) amongst healers and psychics, McGrath (1996) in American ‘New Age’ circles, and Brown (1998) as a ‘spiritual tourist’.

But apart from their intrinsic interest as modern religious identities, in what ways does the study of these ‘wandering stars’ contribute to an understanding of religion – specifically alternative spiritualities – in the modern world?

First, these variant models of religious praxis are becoming more widely available in the culture at large, closely tied in with notions of ‘pick-and-mix’ religion (Bruce, 1996: 233) and the predilections of the ‘spiritual market consumer’ (York, 1995: 1). Recall, for example, Shirley MacLaine’s ‘spiritual search’ and Evelyn Glennie’s self-identification as a ‘spiritual person’, cited earlier. In this regard, Campbell (1982: 235) persuasively argues that the real significance of the NRMs of the 1970s and 1980s lies in their role as harbingers of a ‘more diffuse phenomenon . . . an ethos or cluster of values and beliefs which accords a general place to spirituality’. Indeed, Campbell (ibid., 236) notes the existence of a population of what he calls ‘incipient seekers’ – ‘a sizeable number of people sympathetically disposed towards some form of spirituality but not participating members of any particular church’. More recently, Rose (1998: 15) has found that around two-thirds of his sample of subscribers to the Mind–Body–Spirit/‘New Age’ magazine Kindred Spirit ‘follow more than one teaching at any one time’, leading him to conclude that ‘New Age spiritual practice is very much a self-led quest’ (ibid.).

A fine example of the kind of personal stance exemplified by the seeker – and, because variegated and curious, structurally convenient for the guru also – is a response at the Findhorn community to my question ‘How, if at all, would you describe your religious identity?’ A single white-collar German woman in her mid-thirties replied:

At the moment I tend towards eastern religions but I don’t follow anything specific, I like to pick out what is true for me and follow that and use it.¹³

Almost every word and phrase in this brief statement reflects key facets of seekership. ‘At the moment’ makes clear the radically contingent nature of the respondent’s choice, while the phrases ‘tend towards’ and ‘don’t follow
anything specific' confirm a stance in some tension with traditional models of religious commitment. Espousing 'eastern religions' – although now a well-established alternative to both Christian denominations and secular world views – still remains an affirmation of religious heterodoxy in many if not most western cultures. To ‘pick out’ establishes the self-selection principle, while ‘true for me’ clearly implies a relativist stance on what has previously been considered a matter of life and death. Finally, to ‘follow that’ (i.e. only those bits ‘true for me’), and to ‘use it’, completes a picture of individualistic spiritual pragmatism that is ruthlessly accommodated to the cultural flux of the modern world.

And this is my second point: ‘spiritual virtuosi’ embody in the religious orbit the tensions and opportunisms of the modern social and economic order. J.G. Bennett, for example, was acutely sensitive to the bigger picture. In war-torn Istanbul he grappled with the seminal questions of a diaspora world:

Where was I at home? In England, where I was born? In America, where my mother came from? In Turkey, where I felt at ease? Somewhere in Asia, where there might be a source of truth of which I knew nothing? (Bennett, 1962: 45–6)

The vivid multiculturality of post-war Turkey prompts some simple but crucial reflections:

All day long I was dealing with different races: English, French, Italian, Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Kurdish, Russian, Arab, Jew and people so mixed as to be of no race at all. Each and every one was convinced of the superiority of his own people. How could anyone be right and all the rest wrong? (ibid., 46)

Around the same time, at Gurdjieff’s experimental community near Paris, the grandly-entitled ‘Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man’, a tough regime of manual labour and neo-behaviourist psychology sought to prepare individuals’ psyches for a Europe in transition. In a 1924 article in the New York Times, a resident described the principle of ‘irregularity’ operative in the community:

It is a place where habits are changed, fixed ideas are broken up, mechanical routines do not exist, and adaptability to ever-changing forms and modes of life is practised. (Pogson, 1987: 75)

The writer might have been describing the post-war condition of the continent itself. In any case, a visitor to this international community might be received by ‘anybody, the editor of a London paper, a Harley
Street specialist, a court musician or a Russian lawyer’ (ibid., 75–6). Nationalities, professions and occupations were all manifestly displaced in this experiment in ‘harmonious development’.

Spiritual strategy or religious disarray? Assessments differ. Whereas Lofland and Stark (1965: 868–9) emphasise the seeker’s ‘difficulties’ and ‘discontent’ – his ‘floundering about among religions’ – Straus (1976: 252) understands the seeker as a radical subject ‘acting creatively . . . to construct a satisfying life’ and tactically exploiting opportunities for ‘life-change’ (ibid., 253). In this view, far from being a victim of circumstance, and rather more than a merely passive exemplification of wider social trends, the seeker is in fact an opportunist and a strategist looking to turn to good advantage the perceived shortcomings of the day – the structural atomisation, social fragmentation, and de-traditionalisation of this ‘age of extremes’ (Hobsbawm, 1995).

But whether losers or winners, seekers actively – deliberately – undermine institutional forms, and this is my third point regarding their significance in the study of contemporary religion. As the inherent fissiparity of historical movements which have encouraged seekership demonstrates – Theosophy, Spiritualism, ceremonial magical orders, say – or as a more recent phenomenon – ‘New Age’ – reveals through its repeated failure to achieve the minimum profile of a viable religious movement (Sutcliffe, 1997), seekers either struggle to maintain organisational structures or repudiate them altogether. This is of course to turn on its head Weber’s well-known statement that ‘every hierocratic and official authority of a “church” . . . fights principally against all virtuoso-religion and against its autonomous development’ (Gerth and Mills, 1970: 288). The tides have turned: virtuosity now has the upper hand, actively subverting institutionalisation per se rather than simply agitating for new or improved institutions (as do most NRMs).

The lack of concrete structure to regulate the diffuse collectivity of synthesisers, scavengers, and shoppers that constitutes the historical arena of seekers and gurus also helps to explain precisely why there is so much overlap, repetition and recycling of ideas and practices in these domains, as well as confusion and contention amongst practitioners and observers alike as to where, exactly, to draw the boundaries between sympathetic and contiguous currents such as Theosophy and Spiritualism in the late nineteenth century, modern occultism and popular Indian religiosity, or Paganism and ‘New Age’ in recent decades.

Now, the experiential, autodidactic and amateurist models of study and learning favoured by the majority of seekers and gurus only contribute to these fuzzy structural contours, since the main thrust of their folk episte-
mology is towards the de-differentiation, de-classification and de-regulation of formal categories of knowledge and status. Hence, the basic message of the alternative healing and human potential networks of the 1980s, according to Ross (1992: 539), is that 'everyone has the potential to become the engineer/architect/designer of his or her own environment'. Nevertheless such populist claims on access to special states of consciousness and subtle experience are likely to sit awkwardly with the practical demands of the elite-oriented, highly-skilled methodology required actually to attain them in most religious traditions. So while something akin to a mass culture of virtuosity – as proposed by, amongst others, Bloom (1990: 8) when he writes 'I advise people not to be cowardly about their own spiritual authority', or Edwards (1993: 192) in her call for 'everyone to become a shaman, a metaphysician, a dream-weaver, a walker-between-worlds' – may yet take hold as a result of the increasing ideological dissemination in popular culture of the idea of spiritual virtuosity, its simultaneous dilution in potency may be inevitable, given that – as Weber baldly puts it – ‘“heroic” or “virtuoso” religiosity is opposed to mass religiosity’ (Gerth and Mills 1970: 287). Thus, when the hero of a fictional reworking of Aleister Crowley's circle refers to himself as a 'spiritual aristocrat' (Wilson, 1963: 77), or when 'New Age' activist Spangler (1996: 46) describes himself as a 'freelance mystic', these identities gain allure and charisma precisely to the degree that they belong to a virtuosic avant-garde, and not to the popular mainstream. However, even if what actually obtains is not some 'universalization of charisma' but individualistic, user-friendly 'spiritual' praxis – variegated complexes of personal behaviour that are neither overtly religious nor resoundingly secular, but certainly heavily psychologised\(^ {17} \) – then such behaviour still has little to gain from cumbersome corporate institutions.

In fact the phenomenology of seekership and spiritual virtuosity in general correlates well with that 'disembedding of social institutions' which Giddens (1991: 16–21) claims to be a major characteristic of modernity. This we may understand as the sum of various social trends which prise both organisation and individual from existing loyalties, commitments and other marked indices of social 'belonging', through the inculcation of an ideology of autonomy and radical agency. Status, class, career, place and pattern of residence, peer-group, relationships, sexuality, self-identity: all may be to a greater or lesser degree thrown open to revision and reconfiguration.

Let me briefly indicate what I mean. In terms of social mobility – that is, movement between social classes – there has been considerable traffic in the post-war years, both inter- and intra-generational (Abercrombie et al., 1988: 198ff.). The net effect is inevitably to soften the social cement binding
individuals on the basis of occupation and attendant social mores. The well-known decline of heavy industry, and the concomitant growth in the information, service and leisure industries, only exacerbates this effect. Handy (1985: 8), for example, suggests we now pursue a 'portfolio of activities and relationships' in order to secure 'the package of things we want out of work and life'. Notice that this is effectively the 'supermarket' principle of contemporary spiritualities. Commitments – in work as in spirituality – become serial, perhaps even multiple; but always provisional.

Also significant is a trend towards single households. More than a quarter (27%) of British households in 1996–7 were occupied by single people (ONS, 1998: 42), almost double the figure at the beginning of the 1960s. In England alone, the number of single-person occupier-occupied homes trebled between 1977–8 and 1996–7 (ibid., 177). Significantly, the fastest growth area here was amongst younger people (under the age of forty-five). Now the evidence suggests that seeking, and alternative spirituality in general, is – at least post-1960s – largely an arena of younger single people. For example, York (1995: 191, 183) reproduces figures from an ‘occult’ survey conducted in 1989 by the Leeds shop and contact centre ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ which indicate that half its respondents were single people, and as many as 89% had become interested in occultism before the age of twenty-five: a very youthful and mobile constituency. York (1995: 191) also found from his own survey, in London, of a small Pagan group and a larger ‘New Age’ event that over half of each group comprised single people. Furthermore, 90% of attendees at the latter were aged between 18 and 49 (ibid., 180). At a larger Pagan gathering, over three-quarters of the assembly were also within this age-range (ibid.). Elsewhere, Rose (1998: 8) has found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of his sample of subscribers to Kindred Spirit were aged between 25 and 54. Younger single people, then, are particularly well-represented within contemporary alternative spiritualities, and in terms of their potential to ‘disembed’ (through age, relative lack of dependents and general mobility) are clearly well-positioned to exploit a seeker’s lifestyle.

A related point concerns trends in sexual relationships that correlate with the ‘solost’ lifestyle of contemporary seeking. The sharp fall in the marriage rate – particularly since 1970 – and the rise in cohabitation in the 1980s and 1990s is well-known. But two-fifths of the total number of marriages in 1995 were actually remarriages (ONS, 1998: 50), indicating that the numbers of first-time entrants into the marriage arena are dwindling. Indeed, ‘serial’ marriages and ‘polyamoury’ are amongst future behavioural models being forecast in the late 1990s: self-explanatory modes of relationship which again bear comparison with my models of ‘serial’ and ‘multiple’ seeking (Sutcliffe, 1997).
CONCLUSION

I do my thing, and you do your thing.
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
You are you and I am I
and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.
If not, it can't be helped. (Perls, 1969: 4)

This well-known 'gestalt prayer' may be understood as a more psychologically-nuanced formulation of the theme of Lee Marvin's popular song with which this chapter began. More widely, it typifies the pragmatic grassroots ethos of spiritual virtuosity and its chief agents, the seekers and gurus: that is, if it works, good; if not, move on. Active down the century in specific - often adjoining - microcultures, more recently these individuals, like other cultural dissidents, are increasingly 'coming out', so to speak, in popular and mainstream culture.

The sum is that the 'spiritual culture' of individuals is now one of the few remaining constants in post-traditional religious life, for the whittling away of institutional bulk has the effect of exposing the individuals at the heart of the social process. Thus has a traditionally massive (in the sense of material structure and concrete presence) social institution - 'religion' - metamorphosed into a buzzing hive of virtuosic individualists: the 'wandering stars' of the title.

Some have already understood this. In 1922, Gurdjieff was asked by a participant at the Institute why, as part of their work, they were erecting temporary buildings rather than more enduring structures. The guru explained that this was because 'in a very short time everything will be different - everyone will be elsewhere. Nothing can be built permanently at this moment' (Pogson, 1987: 83).

NOTES

1. Opening address by Spangler (15 April 1995) at a conference at the Findhorn Community in Moray, Scotland, entitled 'The Western Mysteries: Which Way Today?'.
2. See the discussion of Amsterdam as a European countercultural centre in York, Chapter 7.
5. See, for example, the ethnographies in Sutcliffe (1998).
6. See my typology of singular, serial and multiple seeking in Sutcliffe (1997). The singular seeker 'has inherited a tradition or . . . made a self-conscious decision to commit to one' (ibid.: 106), which s/he then pursues with self-conscious commitment and reflexivity.
8. Interview: 'Good Vibrations', Face to Face (Bank of Scotland consumer magazine), Summer 1997, p. 12.
9. Cf. King (1997: 667): 'Today the notion of spirituality is applied across different religious traditions; it is used inside and outside particular religions as well as in many inter-faith and secular contexts.'
11. See the exploratory models of Washington (1993), Storr (1996) and Rawlinson (1997), which variously naturalise this Sanskrit term. According to Hinnells (1988: 138), 'guru', originally indicating 'a brahman who instructed young brahmans in the sacred lore', 'has come to mean a religious teacher of any kind who has undertaken to give personal instruction to a pupil or disciple.' Storr (1996: xi) adopts the very broad definition of 'spiritual teacher', adding that 'most [gurus] claim the possession of special spiritual insight based on personal revelation'. Washington's (1993) sceptical narrative of personalities in the Theosophical and Gurdjieff-Ouspenskian lineages is implicitly a case study of the 'western guru', a phrase the author attributes to Andrew Rawlinson (ibid., viii), who for his part characterises gurus as 'western teachers in eastern traditions' (Rawlinson, 1997). My own use of 'guru' here suggests popular/vernacular ramifications: seekers and gurus as a 'folk' current within religious alternativism.
12. These figures – little-known in scholarly circles – exemplify significant currents within the field. But they do not exhaust it: only lack of space prevents me from casting a wider net.
13. From a questionnaire I conducted amongst a small group at Findhorn in February 1995.
14. See, for example, Blavatsky's (1972: 27–33) polemic against Spiritualism.
15. For example, is H.P. Blavatsky primarily an 'occult' (Hanegraaff, 1996), 'eastern' (Rawlinson, 1997), or synthetic (Bevir, 1994) figure?
17. Hence Ferguson (1982: 91) writes of 'psychotechnologies' – 'systems for a deliberate change in consciousness'; Rawlinson (1997: 34–5), of 'spiritual psychology'; Segal (Chapter 4), of Jung's seminal 'psychologising of religion'.
18. Cf. my models of serial and multiple seeking in Sutcliffe (1997: 107,108): 'the serial seeker represents a psychological differentiation of the singular act of seeking: now there are distracting, potentially rivalrous foci ... rather than one steady focus. A serial seeker [has] changed direction, or affiliation, more than once'; and 'multiple seeking is typically a multidirectional and synchronic activity ... a number of religions or facets thereof are filtered and explored more-or-less simultaneously'.

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INTRODUCTION

The Theosophical Society (hereafter 'TS') has for most of its history been the object of opprobrium from mainstream Christianity, and either ridiculed or ignored as a movement of marginal interest by students of religion until recent years. Yet the writings of Theosophists appear as a constant backdrop to many of the alternative spiritual traditions of the twentieth century. The society can be seen as the major institutional culmination of the growth of interest in occultism in the nineteenth century and its influence continues to be felt in our own times. The history and significance of the movement await a major study but work is beginning to be published which has moved on from the propaganda and polemic which has often characterised comment on Theosophy and its ramifications over the past one hundred and twenty years.

The key themes of modern Theosophy are to be found in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky and her followers. They are not original to her and she did not claim that they were. She gathered together ideas which she thought represented the tradition of an 'Ancient Wisdom', and which she believed had been expressed though the ages in widely dispersed circumstances. We summarise them as follows for brevity’s sake:

- The existence of a perennial wisdom tradition
- Its esoteric or gnostic character
- Its manifestation through exoteric religious traditions
- The existence of adepts or ‘Masters of the Wisdom’
- Reincarnation and the law of karma
- A view of the human constitution as functioning in a series of interpenetrating ‘bodies’ from physical, etheric, emotional, mental, to ‘higher self’
- An evolution of the spirit undergirding physical evolution
- A vision of universal brotherhood
- Western acceptance of Asian spiritual traditions
- Techniques of clairvoyance, divination and healing
The prime founder of the Theosophical movement was born Helena Petrovna Hahn in Ekaterinoslav in the Ukraine in 1831. She was by all accounts an unconventional child of her class, and did not fit at all into the pattern set for a young Russian woman of the minor aristocracy. She took a great interest in the folklore and popular religious practices of the local peasant community, especially psychic phenomena, magic and shamanism. Three weeks before her seventeenth birthday she was married to Nikifor Blavatsky, often described as an elderly military officer, but in fact a middle-aged provincial governor in Armenia. After a few weeks, however, Helena abandoned her husband and in 1848, the 'Year of Revolutions', began a series of travels and adventures which resulted in the foundation of the Theosophical movement twenty seven years later.

No child was born to this union. Indeed Blavatsky later wrote that the marriage was never consummated and that a combination of her distaste for sex and gynaecological problems precluded any consideration of childbearing. Some biographers have asserted that she did in fact give birth to a son, Yuri, in 1861, and that the child died in infancy. This has always been denied by Blavatsky and by Theosophical biographers. The name of Blavatsky was not to be lost to posterity by lack of issue, however, as Madame Blavatsky, or ‘HPB’ as she is referred to in Theosophical and occultist circles, lives on through a far-reaching series of activities. This essay outlines how the life and activities of this curious Russian woman, of no formal education, have been perpetuated in writings that have remained in print over the century since her death on 8 May 1891, and in a host of organisations expressing what we now call ‘alternative spiritualities’ from then until the present day. It will dwell no more on the details of her earlier life, fascinating though it was, but will describe something of what followed from it. Blavatsky travelled in Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia in search of spiritual wisdom. Contacts with the early Spiritualist movement led her to the United States where, in 1874, she met Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907) who was also investigating Spiritualism. These two drew together a small group to discuss how they might facilitate the study of occultism and related matters.

The birth of the Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in New York. Blavatsky contributed a charismatic enthusiasm for the occult and claimed to have access to teachings on the subject which had hitherto been concealed. Olcott, who had a background in law and administration, provided an organisational impetus for the movement. He became its first president
and remained in that office until his death. The founders travelled to India in 1879 and in 1882 established the headquarters of the now flourishing society at Adyar near Madras. The society had been established as a response to the growing interest in occultism, Spiritualism and comparative religion which had developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The reasons for the move to India are not obviously apparent, but it proved fruitful in terms of the growth of the movement, enabling links to be established with both Hindus and Buddhists, and bringing it closer to those ‘Masters of the Wisdom’ whom the founders believed to reside in the Himalayas. From that time onwards the spirituality of Theosophists was clearly rooted in eastern rather than western esoteric traditions.

The original single object of the society at the time of its foundation was ‘to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe.’ After some modification its objects were established in 1896 as:

1. to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour
2. to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science
3. to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man

But the society was not an assembly in the tradition of nineteenth-century literary or scientific societies. Blavatsky claimed that she had been instructed in an Ancient Wisdom that underlay the teachings and practices of all the world’s faiths, and that that instruction had come from hidden adepts – the Masters of the Wisdom. These adepts were alleged to be human beings who had reached the peak of human evolution through many reincarnations and were the custodians of this wisdom. Two such beings – Koot Hoomi and Morya – had chosen her to proclaim the teachings to a world that was deemed ready for their reception. The Theosophical Society was the mechanism by which this plan was to be achieved.

From its earliest days the movement had to cope with the inbuilt tension between the wide-ranging scope of its three objects and the apparently definitive teachings of Blavatsky and her hidden teachers. Despite its claims not to be a religious body it has in fact provided for many of its members doctrinal and ethical teachings traditionally associated with religion. In common with many movements of the period, the society’s predominant public activity was to arrange lectures and publish literature, both being directed to the propagation of the teachings and the recruitment of members. Meetings for members generally took the form of lectures or the group study of Theosophical texts. Though the TS itself did not for the
most part provide devotional or liturgical activities, these did in fact emerge in a number of associated movements.

Growth, Disagreement and Schism

The development of the movement became progressively more complex. In an attempt to provide a provisional taxonomy, I classify the groups that have links with Blavatsky's initiative as follows:

1. Controlled movements: groups whose membership is drawn wholly from the parent society but have their own organisational structures.
2. Schismatic movements: groups which use the term 'Theosophy' in their title or claim to present or interpret Blavatsky's teachings directly, but have separated themselves from the parent society.
3. Derivative movements: groups founded by one-time members of the parent society, and which embody some aspect of Theosophical teaching but whose members may now disavow or minimise the importance of the Theosophical connection.
4. Influenced movements: groups whose membership and leadership is largely drawn from the parent society, but are open to, and include, others.

The parent TS, with its headquarters in India, has remained the major component of the movement. It reached its peak of membership in the 1920s, when numbers reached 45,000. Its current worldwide membership is around 30,000. The basic group within the society is the 'Lodge'. This appellation reflects discussion in the earliest days of the movement, when the organisational pattern of Freemasonry was examined as a possible model for the TS (masonic lodges being semi-secret groups into which members are ritually initiated). In the event, it was decided that a rather more open system of membership was appropriate, though, as we shall see, the appeal of initiation into inner groups has been a constant attraction to Theosophists. As the movement grew, the lodges were organised into national self-governing sections. Representatives of these sections serve on a general council under an international president. The president resides at the international headquarters in India and is elected by individual voting by all the membership. In countries where there are few members they may be directly attached to the headquarters. The fact that the foundational writings of the movement were in English was important in its initial growth throughout the English-speaking world. In this we include India, which was the arena for the greatest recruitment and has remained so to the present day. The annual reports of the society demonstrate that the Indian section is the only major part of the society which has shown growth since World War II.
With the death of Blavatsky in 1891, the mantle of leadership passed to another remarkable woman, Annie Besant. Having rejected Christianity, Besant became involved in radical Secularism and Socialism, but was converted to Theosophy after reading Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* which she had been asked to review by W.T. Stead, the editor of *The Review of Reviews*. With her skills of oratory and organisation, Besant built up the movement and remained a focus for the devotion of its membership until her death in 1933. She was elected president in 1907 on the death of Olcott. Her powerful personality and gifts of popularising Theosophical teachings transformed the society from one centred on the metropolitan salon to a movement which drew its membership from a surprisingly wide range of society. But these same gifts were also a contributory factor to the first major schism in the movement.

What later became generally known as the Theosophical Society (Pasadena) came into being in the United States in 1892, after a dispute which was centred around the claims to authority by Annie Besant and the American W.Q. Judge. Both claimed to be receiving guidance from the Masters and to be the legitimate successor to Blavatsky, although neither could sustain a working relationship with the other. After Judge’s death in 1896 the leadership of his group of American Theosophists passed to yet another charismatic woman, Katherine Tingley. Under her inspiration a community was established at Point Loma, San Diego, California. By the early 1940s, however, this group had to move to smaller premises at Pasadena. The United Lodge of Theosophists, formed in 1909, represented a further split from the Point Loma Society. Both these remain separate organisations and claim to remain true to the original teachings of Blavatsky. Though both groups exist in many parts of the world their membership has never been anything like as large as the parent society. A number of smaller groups have split off at later stages, but have generally not outlived the individuals who led the schism. In more recent years the influence of Besant (and her collaborator C. W. Leadbeater) has declined somewhat within the movement and there has been some co-operation between the former rival Theosophical movements (as in the celebration of the centenary of the publication of Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* in 1988). Besant and Leadbeater, who wrote in an accessible but simplistic style on such topics as reincarnation, after-death states, the human aura and the chakras, still remain popular among some members of the parent society. They are often referred to in contemporary ‘New Age’ writings, and continue to sell to a constituency beyond Theosophy.
**ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS**

A further group of 'children' came into being who did not lay a claim to be Theosophical by name, but claimed to be valid interpreters of the same occult tradition. They may appropriately be termed 'derivative movements', having been founded by individuals who were once members of the TS. The Hermetic Society (led by Anna Kingsford) and The Quest Society (founded by G.R.S. Mead) have long since ceased activities, but the Anthroposophical movement had its origins in the German Section of the TS. The bulk of its membership left the TS with its then general secretary, Rudolf Steiner, just before the World War I. It has since grown into a completely separate movement and now plays down its Theosophical roots.

A TS member in the 1920s, Alice La Trobe-Bateman (later Bailey) claimed to have communication from the Masters who were guiding events from their Himalayan retreats. This precipitated one of the periodic crises of authority that punctuates Theosophical history. How are the genuine spokespersons for the Masters to be recognised? Bailey set up The Arcane School and over the next twenty years acted as a 'channel' for the teachings of the Master Djwal Khul, which rival those of Blavatsky in their length. From this group have derived a further series of groups, such as that of Benjamin Creme who proclaims the imminent return of the Lord Maitreya, a familiar messianic theme from the Theosophy of the 1920s. The 'I AM' Movement (begun by Guy Ballard) and its successor, The Summit Lighthouse, now the Church Universal and Triumphant (headed by Mark and Elizabeth Prophet) appropriated to themselves the direct guidance of the Theosophical Masters. We might ask ourselves whether these exalted beings are flattered or frustrated by the diversity of their disciples.

Melton (1989) has catalogued numerous other groups with Theosophical origins or links in North America. In England we might note that the Buddhist Society, one of the pioneering groups in English Buddhism, had its origins in the Buddhist Lodge of the TS and its enthusiastic young leader, Christmas Humphreys. The Society of the Inner Light, founded by Dion Fortune, had its origins in the Christian Mystic Lodge of the TS in London, as did one of the later manifestations of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Both these developments occurred in the 1920s, but links with other esoteric groups had also taken place in the 1890s when the Rosicrucian Society and the original Order of the Golden Dawn had enjoyed an overlap of membership with the TS.
The aforementioned three objects of the Theosophical Society did not mention Masters of the Wisdom or concealed teachings directly and there have always been members who did not concern themselves too much with these matters. For those who did, however, provision was made from the start of the movement for detailed teachings of an occult nature and the possibility of being put in closer contact with the Masters. The 'ES' (at various times these initials stood for the 'Esoteric Section', the 'Eastern School' or 'Esoteric School' of Theosophy) had its origins in the personal pupils of Blavatsky. They had to follow an ascetic spiritual regime and to declare confidence in the legitimacy of Blavatsky and her successors as the approved agents of the Masters, and to commit themselves to work for the society to the best of their abilities. Membership of this inner group has provided the leadership of the TS in most parts of the world until the present day. Other controlled groups – that is, those which restricted themselves to TS members – included at various times The Temple of the Rosy Cross (1912), The Krotona Drama (1921), The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries (1930), The Temple of the Motherhood of God (c.1924), and the Ritual of the Mystic Star (1935), all of which offered ceremonial expression to Theosophy. Some of these were short-lived, while others endured for longer periods. In the social field the Theosophical Order of Service (1908) co-ordinated work of a philanthropic nature. The Theosophical Fraternity in Education (1916) was the focus for progressive developments in schools and evolved into the wider New Education Fellowship. Less successful was the Theosophical World University project (1925) which envisaged a chain of progressive centres of higher learning around the world. It never developed further than a series of public lectures and some vague and grandiose planning. A number of activities for children enjoyed greater popularity in the period up to 1930. Lotus Circles (1892), the Order of the Golden Chain (1899) and the International Order of the Round Table (1908) provided opportunities for children of different ages to be exposed to the ethical and spiritual teachings of Theosophy. Since the 1930s the first two of these groups have been subsumed into the Order of the Round Table, which still functions in several countries and uses ceremonies based on the Arthurian legends. The bulk of its membership comes from the children of Theosophical families.

Those movements I have designated ‘controlled’ had links with the TS built into their individual constitutions, but there were two larger movements which sought, amongst other things, to explore Theosophy through ceremonial expression. They had no formal links with Theosophy and did
recruit some of their membership from outside Theosophy, but its influence remained as a vital component and hence they can fairly be described as 'influenced' movements. These two groups were The Liberal Catholic Church (hereafter 'LCC') and The Order of International Co-Freemasonry (generally referred to as 'Co-Masonry'). The LCC derived from an attempt to establish a branch of the Dutch Old Catholic Church in England in 1908. This attracted a number of Theosophists who enthusiastically adopted a rich catholic liturgical practice and interpreted it from an esoteric viewpoint. This appealed to those who had reluctantly left established churches as a result of their Theosophical interests, but also antagonised members who saw Theosophy as a rejection of Christianity. The LCC developed a hierarchy of bishops (who have generally been Theosophists) in many parts of the world has endured a number of schisms, and has reflected the general decline in Theosophical membership in its own decline in numbers. C.W. Leadbeater, an Anglican clergyman prior to becoming a disciple of Blavatsky, became a bishop in this church in 1916 and subsequently wrote prolifically on ecclesiastical topics. His *Science of the Sacraments* offered the student of Christian liturgy his clairvoyant Theosophical insights into what was going on in the inner worlds during the celebration of Mass and the administration of the sacraments.

The Co-Masonic Order had its origins in France and is still governed from Paris. In 1882 a French masonic lodge decided to initiate a woman. This resulted in their being expelled by their governing authority and they established a masonic order of their own which admitted men and women on equal terms. Annie Besant was initiated in 1902 and the movement expanded through her enthusiasm, particularly in the English-speaking Theosophical world. Since World War II this order has recruited less from the Theosophical movement and, like the LCC, has declined in recent years. In France, however, where the Theosophical influence was only peripheral, it has continued to grow. Several of the later generation of Theosophical leaders were active in this movement and have written on masonic symbolism, and in some cases the masonic ritual was elaborated along Theosophical lines. Some freemasons from lodges of the United Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of Scotland associated themselves with the new order, but the ruling authorities of those bodies did not take kindly to this feminine development and forbade their members from having any contact with it. Some men did in fact throw in their lot with the new body and assisted in its growth. After a few years of activity, in which several new lodges were founded in Great Britain, a faction of initiates who did not find themselves in sympathy with the Theosophical influence separated themselves. Their endeavours evolved into two separate
THEOSOPHY AND ITS HEIRS

orders of Freemasonry for women only which continue to the present day and have no connection with their co-masonic forebears.

THE EMERGENCE OF A WORLD TEACHER

One of the most remarkable fruits of the Theosophical enterprise was the promotion of Jiddu Krishnamurti. At the time of his death in 1989 his name was probably more widely known than Madame Blavatsky or any other Theosophical leader. His thinking attracted the attention of a wider and more significant circle of people than did Theosophical teachings in any of their traditional forms. His story may briefly be summarised as follows.

In 1909, Jiddu Narayaniah, a Brahmin employee of the TS came to live on the headquarters estate at Adyar. He was a widower with four sons and lived in rather straitened circumstances. C.W. Leadbeater, observing the fourteen-year-old Krishnamurti, one of the four, claimed that he had a remarkable ‘aura’ which indicated that he was a person of great spiritual significance. The boy’s education, hitherto non-existent, was taken in hand by a number of Theosophists, European and Indian. In 1911 a movement was started called The Order of the Star in the East (OSE) whose object was to prepare for ‘the near coming of a great Spiritual teacher’. Krishnamurti was the ‘Head of the Order’ and the implicit suggestion was that he would be the ‘vehicle’ for the embodiment of the ‘World Teacher’ at some stage in the near future. This movement was again organised quite separately from the TS but attracted most of its leading figures. Those who were disturbed by this messianic tendency left, Rudolf Steiner being the most prominent. After World War I the OSE began to take off, perhaps a fitting part of a post-war spirit of hope and optimism. Many people joined, including members of mainstream churches and other religious bodies who had no connection with Theosophy. Krishnamurti, now well-groomed and, when in the West, dressed in the height of fashion by his patrons, proved an irresistible and exotic attraction to the earnest seekers of the time. Centres for his work were established in Ommen (Holland), Sydney (Australia) and Ojai (California), and the OSE functioned as an adjunct to Theosophical activities in many countries of the world, and was often administered from TS premises.

However, as time went by, Krishnamurti considered that a spirit of self-aggrandisement bordering on hysteria was developing among his followers, some of whom saw themselves as ‘apostles’ to the new messiah. In 1929 he disavowed the role of ‘World Teacher’, dissolved the Order of the Star and embarked on a career as an independent spiritual teacher. He continued to attract a devoted coterie of disciples, but his teaching strongly attacked the
need for gurus or any form of organisation as a basis for the understanding of truth. Many Theosophists left the society, and Annie Besant, now in her old age, never really recovered from the blow and died in 1933. Other Theosophists adjusted to the new situation by suggesting that 'the Coming had gone wrong' perhaps though the agency of the 'dark powers'. In more recent times the current president of the Adyar Society, Radha Burnier, has led it away from the Besant/Leadbeater style towards a spirit more in accord with Krishnamurti's approach. Before his death Krishnamurti revisited the Adyar estate where he had spent his childhood and which he had not entered for over fifty years. His lectures, seminars and writings attracted a growing audience in the post-war years, and he engaged in dialogue with a wide circle of respected scientists, philosophers and educators.

**Theosophists at Work in the World**

Such was the organisational fruit of Blavatsky's endeavours, manifested in movements that attempted in some way or another to express the inner or spiritual aspect of her teachings. How far she saw her movement as having a wider social function is a matter of debate, but the influence of Annie Besant propelled many of the members into social action. Amongst the 'progressive' causes which they espoused were alternative medicine, vegetarianism, animal welfare, progressive education, female suffrage, the Garden City movement and the struggle for Indian independence. We should also note some influence on artistic and literary trends in the period from 1880 to 1914.

The excitements of the 1920s were followed by a period of retrenchment after the departure of Krishnamurti and the death of Annie Besant, and through the difficult years of World War II. A resolution, originally passed by the general council of the society in 1924 and regularly reproduced in The Theosophist, its international journal since the 1930s, illustrates the movement away from dogmatic pronouncements by authoritarian leaders towards a more dispersed pattern of authority:

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasise the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher, or writer, from H.P. Blavatsky downwards, has any authority to impose his teachings or opinions on members. Every member has a equal right to attach himself to any school of
thought which he may choose, but has no right to force his choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote because of any opinion he may hold, or because of membership of any school of thought to which he may belong. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of The Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise his own right of liberty of thought, and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

In common with other movements with a mission in a pre-electronic age, Theosophy used the printed word to embody its teachings. A great volume of books, pamphlets, and periodical literature poured from the presses. Their sales went beyond the membership of the specifically Theosophical, which might lead us to suppose that there were many more who took an interest in esoteric ideas than actually joined organisations, a situation which I suspect applies as much today as it did a century ago. The writings of Blavatsky remain in print, as do many by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater. The TS, which still runs publishing houses in India, the USA and elsewhere, has produced a wide range of books over the past one hundred years. We summarise the genres, with examples, as follows:

- Foundational texts of H.P. Blavatsky – *Isis Unveiled* (1877), *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and *The Key to Theosophy* (1889)
- Channelled/‘received’ texts – *The Mahatma Letters* (written in the 1880s, published 1923)
- Descriptions of supersensible experiences or observations – *Man, Visible and Invisible* (1902) and other titles by C.W. Leadbeater.
- Translations and commentaries on classical oriental texts – *The Bhagavad Gita* translated by Annie Besant
- Cosmological and anthropological schemas and accounts of past lives – *Man, Whence, How and Whither* (1913) by Besant and Leadbeater
- Guides to spiritual practices, meditation, yoga, etc.

The other movements already noted engendered a corresponding volume of printed material. Perhaps the greatest number of Blavatsky’s ‘children’ are these now largely neglected texts which expressed the hopes and fears of their earnest authors.

Our opening summary of Theosophical interests and our outline of the movements and activities over the past one hundred and twenty years points to the place where Blavatsky’s children mostly seem to dwell in our
own times – the New Age. Blavatsky is not the only mother of that age but surely one of the most significant. The movements and activities which she and her successors instigated provided a comprehensive range of opportunities for seekers of esoteric spirituality. The parent society might be likened to a Clapham Junction for occult travellers, who entered from various directions and travelled on to several destinations beyond. Some were quite famous names, and there has always been a faithful core of members who saw it as the centre of their spiritual world, but today the Theosophical Society is a rather faded shadow of its grand former self. For the seeker after ancient wisdom, there is now a bewildering variety of alternative transport. A century ago Theosophy had the major share of the market; now it is almost submerged by the brightly packaged products of the New Age. In 1889 H.P. Blavatsky wrote some words towards the end of her book *The Key to Theosophy* which now have a prophetic ring:

Every such attempt as the Theosophical Society has hitherto ended in failure, because, sooner or later, it has degenerated into a sect, set up hard-and-fast dogmas of its own, and so lost by imperceptible degrees that vitality which living truth alone can impart. You must remember that all our members have been bred and born in some creed or religion, that all are more or less of their generation both physically and mentally, and consequently that their judgement is but too likely to be warped and unconsciously biased by some or all of these influences. If, then, they cannot be freed from such inherent bias, or at least taught to recognise it instantly and so avoid being led away by it, the result can only be that the Society will drift off on to some sandbank of thought or another, and there remain a stranded carcass to moulder and die. (Blavatsky, 1893: 193)

**Notes**

1. Several biographies of the chief founder H.P. Blavatsky have been produced since her death in 1891. Most adopt a partisan attitude for or against the proposition that she was a major spiritual teacher of the nineteenth-century. Amongst more recent works are Meade (1980) (*against*), Fuller (1988), and Cranston (1993) (*for*). The co-founder of the Society, H.S. Olcott, has been memorialised from within the movement by Murphet (1972), and his place in the revival of Buddhism in Asia has been analysed by Prothero (1996). Studies of the history of the Theosophical movement as a whole have been written from within the parent society by Ransom (1938), from the Pasadena position by Ryan (1975), and from the traditionally anonymous standpoint of the independent United Lodge of Theosophists in *The Theosophical Movement* (1951). A general academic survey of the subject is to be found in Campbell (1980), and particular studies have been made of Theosophy in Australia (Roe, 1986), New Zealand (Ellwood, 1993), and Russia (Carlson, 1993). A popular work which accepts uncritically the accusations that Blavatsky was a 'fraud', but nevertheless goes on to chart some of the links between Theosophy and other twentieth-century movements, has been written by Washington
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(1993). Detailed academic studies of the movements and personalities which predated the foundation of the TS but whose influences are significant are to be found in Godwin (1994) and Faivre (1994).

2. Ransom (1938:545ff).

3. Letters alleged to be from these Masters were published by Barker in 1923. Details of physical and clairvoyant contacts with various Masters appear through much of Theosophical literature up to the 1950s. Johnson (1994) attempts to correlate Blavatsky's descriptions with identifiable historical figures.

4. Annual Reports of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, from 1908 to date.

5. Her life has been comprehensively recorded by Nethercot (1961, 1963), who is the only biographer to have seriously addressed the Theosophical phase of her career.

6. Leviton (1994) addresses in some depth the distinctiveness of Steiner's thought and the reasons for his parting from the Theosophical Society.


8. Schuller (1997) analyses the responses to these events.

9. A personal account of his life can be found in the works of Mary Lutyens, who spent her childhood with him, and remained a close friend and associate throughout his life.

10. Nethercot (1961, 1963) provides the most accessible source of reference for these activities.

11. The Mahatma Letters were purported to have been 'precipitated' by occult means from the Masters to A.P. Sinnett, Blavatsky and others. Other Theosophists have from time to time made claims to the reception of what is now referred to as 'channelled' communications from the same source.

12. Esoteric Christianity, so-called, generally turns out to be old gnosticism in new clothing. Theosophists from Blavatsky onwards subscribe to the theory that the Church throughout the ages has conspired to keep the true message of Jesus Christ a closely guarded secret.

13. No comprehensive bibliography covers the whole of the period of Theosophical history, but Gomes (1994) covers the period up to 1900.

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INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the twentieth century new centres of life were generated in various parts of Western civilisation. A ‘centre of life’ for the purpose of this essay is a place where people meet to share new ideas and try to realise them; but it may also be a place people pass through, many of the groups discussed here being loosely organised and peripatetic. The ideas of this period were new in a variety of ways; they fostered people’s sense of possibility – fed the sense that they could begin, as individuals or as small groups, to lead their lives in the way they wanted to. Simply by acts of will, faith and courage they could, for instance, defy the state and elude the iron cage of modernisation. Such an ambition could be regarded as tending towards anarchism, but there are many kinds of anarchism ranging from violent terrorism to peaceable Gandhian communities.

Most of these centres of life were in some sense religious, and their religion could be divided into two main kinds. One was Christian in its spirituality, or, to be more specific, Quaker/pacifist and was strongly represented in the peace movements. In the early twentieth century, and among more speculative minds, this spirituality often took over Hindu and Buddhist ideas. This orientalist tendency crystallised in, for example, the teachings of the Theosophical Society. But even when this religion’s vocabulary remained Christian, it rarely attached itself primarily to institutions or theologies.

The other strain of religion we can call ‘pagan’ – partly because that term was current in this period, 1880–1920. This was attached to eroticism, and thereby to feminism. The latter was not necessarily pagan in this sense, but the case of Emma Goldman, in whom these ideas did come together, was in some ways typical. Born in Russia, and spending most of her life in America, Goldman edited Mother Earth, preached paganism, and practised anarchism. Though she acknowledged her fellow countryman Peter Kro-
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potkin as her master, especially in the matter of anarchism, she felt herself separated from him by both his nonviolence and his refusal to speak for erotic values. There was also an angry debate between two male anarchists at the end of the first decade of this century: Otto Gross, a Freudian psychoanalyst, speaking for sexual liberation, and Gustav Landauer, a Zionist, speaking for marriage and village anarchism. The two men belonged to the German-speaking centre of Europe, and the Russians, Goldman and Kropotkin, also belonged to that mid-European culture. This paper will be concerned primarily with England's 'New Age', but from an international point of view German culture was always central.

Pagans tended to make much of aesthetic and occultist values; so, somewhat paradoxically, they looked back to picturesque medieval Christendom. But both Paganism and Quaker/pacifist Christianity were attracted to the simple life, to nature and often to nature cure, to folk and orientalist medicines. As important as these positive attractions was the negative distrust of western 'scientific' medicine, which represented contemporary civilisation at its most prestigious. Many kinds of art and philosophy reflected both strains of religion.

These centres of new life, taken together as a network, constituted a New Age — another phrase of the times, often applied both favourably and unfavourably in the years 1880 to 1910 or 1920. A 'New Age' is a period of more-than-ordinary life-experiment, spontaneity and social hope — when there is a general readiness to believe that life can be significantly changed by the conviction of an individual or a small group without their disposing of great force or devising big institutions or elaborate theories.

The greatest leaders of such teaching at the beginning of the 1880–1920 period were Tolstoy and Ruskin — long mocked for their 'idealism', by liberals as well as conservatives, but later acknowledged as the two great teachers of the next generation, which included Gandhi and others. The communities Gandhi founded in South Africa, Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm, were comparable with the English and German examples to be discussed here. These were all forms of protest against 'the world' in all its compromises.

We can begin with an example which was central to Europe both geographically and intellectually: the Mountain of Truth in Ascona.¹

Ascona

At the end of the nineteenth century, intellectual Europe became preoccupied with the problem of its own unhappiness, malaise, or — to use Freud's word in Civilisation and its Discontents — 'Unbehagen'. The favourites of this rich and powerful civilisation — the economically and educationally
privileged – felt themselves to be more unhappy than those less privileged. Those who seemed to feel the crisis most deeply were the Germans – meaning not only the inhabitants of Germany, but also German speakers all over Europe – who were moving faster than other peoples to grasp the glittering prizes of progress. Germany’s cities and its industrial power had been growing for some time, and with them spread a sense of dismay and dislike of both industrialism and city life. In 1800, the population of what later became Germany stood at twenty-two million. In 1900, the figure was fifty-six million, and every second citizen lived away from the place of their birth – most of them in a city environment. By 1910, Germany contained as many big cities as all the rest of Europe.²

Max Weber spoke of an iron cage or framework which closed around a society when it entered the modern world. Sigmund Freud, in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, wrote that, ‘it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilisation is based upon a renunciation of instinct.’³

Many of the best European minds from 1900 onwards were devoted to understanding this problem and to ‘solving’ it. Both Freud and Weber were intellectually conservative, and their moral enthusiasms took second place to their loyalty to ‘objectivity’ and ‘scientific neutrality’. But others were trying to solve the problem of civilisation and unhappiness more practically, emotionally and enthusiastically – by *living* a new life together, withdrawing from the cities and the professions and the ‘objective’ ways of thought, and by risking their own lives.

These people thought of Freud and Weber as enemies, and Weber and Freud thought of them as dangerous fools. But as we look back on that period – so like our own 1960s – we can see the two groups as complementary. Both must engage our interest, and perhaps compete for our loyalty.

Understanding the enthusiasts requires an extra effort on our part, for they have been largely consigned to the dustbin of intellectual history, and now look flimsy beside the serried volumes of Freud and Weber. It was a risk they knew they ran. But at the time it was different. In his 1880 pamphlet, *Spirit of Revolt*, Kropotkin wrote, ‘There are periods of human society when revolution becomes an imperative necessity, when it proclaims itself as inevitable . . . The need for a new life becomes apparent . . . Weary of these wars, weary of the miseries which they cause, society rushes to seek a new organisation.’⁴

As Roger Baldwin noted about Kropotkin, this change was not merely political but included ‘all social relations – marriage, education, the treatment of crime, the function of law, the basis of morality.’⁵ Kropotkin was one of those who came to Ascona, a Swiss mountain village which became a centre of the counterculture in the period 1900–20.
The first intellectual immigrants into this area in 1900 settled on the top of a foothill of the Alps, called Monescia, which they renamed Monte Verita, the Mountain of Truth. There they stayed in the nature cure sanitarium, or in ramshackle cabins which they built with their own hands. (The sanitarium, run by Henri Oedenkoven and Ida Hofmann, gradually became the most conservative and commercial of Ascona institutions.) Visiting radicals often stayed in inns or furnished rooms in the village, or rented one of the houses, or slept in the open. As they walked the landscape, so totally unlike the industrialised cities of northern Europe, they came across many shrines to the Madonna, tended by the local people—a fact they were pleased to take as evidence of a pagan cult of Woman among these supposedly Christian peasants.

One way to approach this side of Ascona is through Gerhart Hauptmann's once-famous novel, *Der Ketzer von Soana* ('The Heretic of Soana'). This tells the story of a young priest of a mountain parish much like Ascona, who leaves Christ for Eros after succumbing to paganism in the form of a beautiful girl who has been brought up outside the Christian religion and civilisation. This novel was published in 1918 to great international success, selling 140,000 copies by 1925. It formed part of that literary propaganda for eroticism so prevalent after 1918, in which D.H. Lawrence played the largest part among English-language writers.

At the end of Hauptmann's story, the narrator meets for the first time the woman who seduced the priest. He is going down the mountain after hearing the latter's story, and she comes up towards him. He feels weak and small before her:

There was no protection, no armour against the demands of that neck, those shoulders, and that breast, blessed and stirred by the breath of life. She climbed up and out of the depths of the world, past the wondering scribe—and she climbs and climbs into eternity as the one into whose merciless hands heaven and earth have been delivered.  

Such stories were written in all the languages of Europe between 1900 and 1920 and later, and many people joined the new centres of life because of them. However, that was not the only attraction. A complementary story, equally important to Ascanans, was about the 'primal crime' committed by the patriarchal father/husband/master who dominated the new iron-clad society, especially in pre-1914 Germany. This story was myth rather than fiction and it existed in fragments. One was invented by Otto Gross, the most brilliant of the Ascanans. He had a vision of a turning point in world
history when a horde of ambitious half-apes burst out of a clump of bushes and flung themselves upon the naked and unsuspecting women who had till then, in matriarchal innocence, directed human life. They enslaved the women and took them as their wives – and with that event our history began.

Such a ‘primal crime’ is Asconan and not Freudian, because it accuses ‘Man’ so angrily. Gross and Ascona acknowledged the Oedipus complex, that most famous of Freudian ideas, but it was not in Ascona a matter of individual fantasy, but of history. When we put such stories together we have a program – an impeachment of Man, an enthronement of ‘Magna Mater’ – which was dear to all Asconans.

One of the few Englishmen who lived in Ascona in those years before 1914 was Harold Monro, who later ran the Poetry Bookshop in London for many years, a centre of modern poetry in England. During his summers in Ascona he worked on a long poem entitled ‘Jehovah’, in which he attacked the figure of God the Father. Monro went to visit the Whiteway commune in the Cotswolds, an English version of Ascona, which will be discussed later; and on one of Edward Carpenter’s visits to Florence, Monro journeyed from Ascona to talk to him. These are all marks of the network of new life centres.

The idea of a sacred mountain has echoes in the stories of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount in Biblical teaching. In our recent past, an American equivalent would be Big Sur in California, notable for its landscape and its association with the Esalen Institute and speculative orientalism. In the Joan Baez film of the 1960s, Ceremony at Big Sur, we see young people flocking towards an outdoor concert in the costumes of anarchism and protest, defying and provoking the communities through which they pass on their way, just like the Naturmensch with their long hair, bare legs and sandals who flocked to Ascona between 1900 and 1920, to dance together to the sun. Memoirs of Ascona by writers such as Hermann Hesse and Emil Szittya, and the dancer Mary Wigman stress the ‘pilgrimage’ aspect of their approach to the place, walking through villages where the local people whispered and laughed behind the young hikers’ backs.

Whiteway

The closest English equivalent to Ascona was perhaps Whiteway, a Tolstoyan agricultural colony near Stroud in the Cotswolds. It was less erotic, and a smaller-scale phenomenon in every sense, but was set up for the same reasons and had many of the same features. We notice recurrent Asconan themes of imprisonment, anti-militarism, nature cure and the
simple life in the Whiteway colonists’ talk and action. People went to join or visit the colony, to share those ideas or experiences or to put them into practice.

Whiteway was founded by a group of radicals based in the London suburb of Croydon. (D.H. Lawrence was a schoolteacher in Croydon and took an interest in such colonies in the years when it was functioning.) John C. Kenworthy, a disciple of Tolstoy, who visited Tolstoy in Russia and wrote about the visit, was pastor of the Croydon Brotherhood Church and editor of the Brotherhood Publishing Company. This church, founded in 1894, ran a store, a laundry and a dressmaking establishment before setting up its agricultural colony. ‘Brotherhood’ stood for ‘Brotherhood of Man’; such churches were sometimes called ‘Labour Churches’. They built their faith around the Social Gospel – the application of the Christian Gospel to issues of social justice. They were themselves a ‘New Age’ phenomenon, and from this Croydon matrix a few radicals took a giant step towards Whiteway’s horizon of possibility, just as many Germans made their move from Munich to Ascona.

The English colonists made their big decision in 1898, just two years before the Asconans. (To be exact, they moved out of Croydon to Purleigh in 1897, and then, because of quarrels, away from there to Whiteway.) Three of the colonists officially bought the property, but they then burned the title deeds so that there should be no owning or owners. The original twelve, some of whom were Quakers, lived communally but also spontaneously. They shared even their clothes and took no vows, made no promises or pledges to each other. During their very first winter their money ran out and they lived on potatoes and parsnips.

However, though several left the colony, more came, with various intentions and from various countries. In 1900 there were twenty-four people, on forty-one acres. (W.H.G. Armytage gives an account of them in his *Heavens Below*.) Let us take as an example Franz (or Francis) Sedlak, who later studied Hegel and wrote a book about him. Sedlak was born into a farming family in Moravia in 1873, four years before Otto Gross, one of the leading anarchists in Ascona. A rebellious boy, Sedlak contradicted his teacher’s pious doctrines about priests and kings, denied his father’s authority over him and, while away at school, was sent twopence to buy some rope to hang himself.

Sedlak was an intellectual from the start, attempting while young to devise a system of ideographic writing. He refused to work on the family farm and instead ran away from home to join the Foreign Legion. After a short time he deserted, was imprisoned, and returned home in time to be conscripted into the Austrian army.
Sedlak soon came to have conscientious objections to obeying officers' orders. He refused to be a soldier, and was again jailed. (It is worth noting that armies are repugnant to anarchists because of their regimented discipline as well as because of their connection with violence. Places like Ascona and Whiteway were the opposite of military in both ways.) Sedlak studied the anarchist doctrines of Max Stirner, and as soon as he was free from the army, set out for England, where he had heard that an anarchist colony was operating in Newcastle-on-Tyne, headed by an Austrian (presumably Clousden Hill, founded in 1893 by a man called Klapper.) By the time Sedlak arrived, the colony had been turned into a private enterprise, in which he took work; but he soon set off for Russia, working as a stoker on board a steamship. Like Gandhi and Gross, he was a wanderer early in life.

Also like Gandhi, Sedlak had heard about Tolstoy and his way of life before being inspired by Tolstoy's writings – although the Austrian military authorities assumed that Tolstoy's pacifist pamphlets had been at the source of Sedlak's recalcitrance. In Petersburg, in 1899, he realised that the great Russian was not far away, and he travelled to the provinces south of Moscow to visit him at his country estate, Yasnaya Polyana.

Sedlak kept a diary as he tramped and begged his way to Yasnaya Polyana. 'Well,' he wrote, 'I am about to see the most famous and original thinker of the dying century.' Arriving at dawn, penniless, he had breakfast with Tolstoy and told his life-story. The old man, having no money of his own, borrowed three roubles from the cook to get Sedlak back as far as Tula, asked him to write up his army experiences and told him about the English colonies set up by Tolstoyans at Purleigh and at Whiteway.

When Sedlak arrived at Purleigh, he discovered that it too had reverted to private ownership; but at Whiteway he finally found a welcome, and he stayed there till he died in 1935, living in a free union with Nellie Shaw, one of the original founders. Having begun as a Tolstoyan, he was later attracted to Theosophy, practised yoga and wrote a Counterblast to Tolstoy. Like many of these figures, his life was essentially experimental.

Like some of the Asconans (especially one Gusto Graeser) Sedlak was a vegetarian and practised nature cure. He is described as a figure of splendid manliness and perfect health by other colonists. (It is notable that these living icons were most often male.) Mountain of Truth (Green, 1986) contains a full-length portrait of Graeser, who slept in a cave, dressed in a toga and ate wayside fruits for much of his life. He also went barefoot, dressed in white cotton pants and shirts and wore his hair long. He was often photographed by strangers, and compared with paintings of Christ's Apostles.

Just as Sedlak and Kenworthy visited Tolstoy, and Harold Monro visited
Whiteway, a certain Dr Albert Skarvan - a Tolstoyan who was consulted by the Asconans when they designed their enterprise - visited both the Brotherhood Church in Croydon and Yasnaya Polyana. (Skarvan had been an army doctor, but resigned for reasons of conscience, and became a sponsor and protector to other men who refused military service.) Meanwhile, Gandhi visited Whiteway in 1909, and set up his own Tolstoy Farm in South Africa the following year.

Gandhi's colonies

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) was of course a world historical figure. Famous throughout India, he also set up two communes in South Africa and was official agent there for both the Vegetarian Society and the Esoteric Christian Union, the latter an offshoot of the Theosophical Society. Gandhi had originally travelled to Natal from his native province of Gujarat after training as a barrister in London and failing to find satisfactory employment in India. He felt falsified by the official cultural styles he had to imitate, and yet believed in the liberal rhetoric of the Empire, as did Ruskin. The best imperialists had a quasi-religious historical vision which could be compared with that of their more extreme opponents. The solution to this tension between east and west Gandhi found in the religious radicalism of 'New Age' institutions like the Theosophical Society.

His first major disciple was Henry Polak, a young Anglo-Jew who had come to Natal to work as a journalist. He was already a London 'New Ager', like Gandhi; an admirer of Ruskin and Tolstoy, a member of the South Place Ethical Society and ready to take the next step of living in a commune. The two men met at a vegetarian restaurant in Johannesburg, where Gandhi also met Albert West, a young working-class emigrant from England who became another of his loyal followers.

Gandhi took over a newspaper, Indian Opinion, of which Polak became the editor, and – inspired by Ruskin's Unto This Last – the two decided to publish it in an agricultural settlement called Phoenix outside Durban, where they could practise the simple life at the same time. Ruskin's book was a discussion of politically radical economics which had a great influence on most 'New Agers'. Later came Tolstoy Farm, where Gandhi offered shelter to the families of Indians jailed for their political activities.

In both places, the Indians built their own houses, did their own cooking and laundry, practised nature cure and so on. This was a protest against the Eastern as well as the Western 'iron cages', which trapped individuals in systems of control and limitation. The caste system, for instance, was one such prison. For obvious reasons, Gandhi stressed his opposition to the
western examples, but he also broke all kinds of Hindu cultural regulations (for instance, he set a high value on physical labour). His followers, especially the women, found it hard to return to India from Africa because of the cultural restraints imposed upon them at home.

Of most immediate importance to Gandhi, however, were those 'New Age' freedoms that were anti-imperialist in their effects. He read the back-to-nature books written by both British and German enthusiasts. He followed the latter's directions for making mud-packs and recipes for wholemeal loaves. In religion, he tried to overcome the split between Muslims and Hindus and to build up their pride in being Indian, discussing great religious classics, like the Qu’ran and the Bhagavad Gita. But the moral authority in Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm clearly rested with Gandhi and not with any priest.

**Millthorpe**

In 1888, the same year that Gandhi came to London to study law, Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) published a book in praise of the simple and communal life that was to have a profound effect on the young Indian. This book, *Civilisation, its Cause and Cure*, was highly critical of Western civilisation and reinforced Gandhi's ideas.

Carpenter was a friend of George Bernard Shaw and of many of the Fabian Socialists though most disagreed with the book. Though born into the upper middle class and highly educated, Carpenter advocated poverty and followed Ruskin's ideas. He lived for some time at St George's Farm near Sheffield, a co-operative agricultural venture of the St George's Guild inspired by Ruskin. Later Carpenter bought himself a smallholding at Millthorpe, in Derbyshire, where he lived at first with a working-class family, and from 1890 on with his lover, George Merrill.

Carpenter shared Gandhi's admiration for Ruskin and Tolstoy. He could also be called a 'self-made Hindu': an Orientalist, he made a trip to Ceylon before settling at Millthorpe, and preferred the great religious classics of India to the Christianity in which he had been brought up. The connection between this love of the East and the 'simple life' is well illustrated by the sandals he habitually wore and made for his friends. The difference between sandals and bare feet on the one hand, and the traditional English leather boot on the other, was very significant. (His sexuality was also related to the East, since Carpenter - like E.M. Forster, and other writers after him - was physically attracted to oriental men.)

Free sexuality, and above all free homosexuality, was another part of Carpenter's teaching; a part with which Gandhi had no sympathy. Amongst Carpenter's popular titles was *Love's Coming of Age*. He was a
poet in the style of Whitman, and worked many years on a long poem with the Whitmanesque title ‘Towards Democracy’. It could be compared with Monro’s ‘Jehovah’ poem, mentioned earlier. Carpenter constructed a crude shed in which he could sit to compose; the free open air was as important as the concept of freedom to his verse.

Carpenter was a popular speaker who often attracted an audience of as many as 2,000 to Sunday meetings at the Brotherhood church. He was also visited by a series of notables including Shaw and Henry Salt, whose pamphlets on vegetarianism converted Gandhi to the practice. (Strictly speaking, Gandhi practised vegetarianism before reading Salt, but the latter gave him a rationale.) Carpenter differed from Gandhi in his liberated erotic ideas and in the importance he placed on poetry. Indeed, one must go further and say that Millthorpe was not really a commune. But it was a centre of the new life between 1890–1910.

**Ditchling**

Eric Gill (1882–1940) belonged to a later generation. His home at Ditchling in Suffolk certainly was a commune, though it was dominated by a single family, or more exactly by its patriarch. Although a writer like those discussed above, he was also a sculptor and woodcutter and practised a number of other visual arts – or, as he would prefer to put it, crafts. These ‘New Age’ leaders were all inspiring figures, but not all similar: one reason is that they were all eccentric in one way or another.10

At Ditchling, the role of religion in the commune was more prominent than at Millthorpe, where it took the form more of a diffused eroticism. Born into the Church of England, Gill was a convert to Roman Catholicism, and much of his work – for example, his Stations of the Cross in Westminster Cathedral – was Catholic and ecclesiastical. He had many admirers among the clergy, in particular the Dominican priest, Vincent McNabb. At the same time, Gill had read Nietzsche with enthusiasm, and, as with many Nietzscheans, much of his work was erotic in feeling. He admired D.H. Lawrence as a novelist, and his Catholicism was erotic. In the early years of the twentieth century in common with artists like Augustus John, Jacob Epstein, and Ambrose McEvoy, he saw Nietzsche as the source of a new religion, and he combined such ideas with his interpretation of Catholic/pagan traditions.

Gill was also strongly attracted to the ideas of the Hindu art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy, who lived in England until the outbreak of the First World War. Gill felt that he was applying traditional Hindu or Indian ideas in his own aesthetics, while in his *The Dance of Shiva*, Coomaraswamy wove Nietzschean ideas together with Hinduism. Coomaraswamy’s wife

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Ethel, later Ethel Mairet, a weaver and dyer, is said to have instructed Gandhi in spinning and weaving in England.

Ethel Mairet lived in an arts and crafts commune very like Ditchling, situated in Chipping Campden. Gill felt that in his later development he had moved beyond Arts and Crafts, to a whole revolution in the way of life of twentieth-century England. But we are bound to see a kinship between his craft work, Mairet’s weavings, Bernard Leach’s pots and Frank Brangwyn’s engravings. Gill designed the masthead for A.F. Orage’s journal *The New Age*, and a poster for the ‘Back to the Land’ movement.

In 1907 Gill bought a house in Ditchling village and in 1913 (the year of his religious conversion) moved to a farm on Ditchling Common, where he stayed until 1924. From there he and his extended family and apprentices moved to a settlement in Wales, and then to Piggot’s farm near High Wycombe. In 1913 he described their project as follows: ‘Their object was to own home and land and to produce for their own consumption such food as could be produced at home, for instance milk, butter, pigs, poultry and eggs, and to make such things as could be made at home.’ 11 In his smock and stockings, Gill and his followers were as distinct from their neighbours as the Asconans were from theirs.

**Community Farm**

The writer and critic John Middleton Murry (1889-1957) had been attracted to the idea of farming, from his early years as a student at Oxford. Farming was linked in his mind with the idea of England, and so with a kind of mystical patriotism; and he had been interested in joining D.H. Lawrence in the commune project ‘Rananim’, which the latter tried from time to time to realise. The climactic moment in that scheme came in 1923, when Lawrence invited his friends to join him in New Mexico, but Murry refused.

After Lawrence died in 1930, however, Murry took to living in the country, and friends gathered round him at Larling and Langham. He said that what drew him to farming was ‘the hunger for a religious basis, a supra-personal allegiance in my life’. 12 But the move was also linked to Christian pacifism. Murry went to live in the Old Rectory at Larling in East Anglia in 1933, when he lost faith in the Independent Labour Party and began to take an interest in pacifism. He soon became director of the Peace Pledge Union (of which Gill was also a member at the time). ‘I see in the pacifist movement the raw material of a new Christian church,’ he wrote in *Peace News* in May 1940. ‘The pacifist community is to me the analogue of the Christian community 1900 years ago.’

In 1935 Murry bought The Oaks, Langham, and established the Adelphi
Centre there as a venue for conferences deriving from ideas put forward in his journal, *The Adelphi*. The centre was run by a staff of a dozen men and women and included workshops (as at Ditchling) and a guest house. It was hoped that the journal might come to be printed there eventually, just as Gandhi's *Indian Opinion* was printed at Phoenix.

Murry's Community Farm of 180 acres was attached to the Adelphi Centre. A group of a dozen people worked on it, and it gradually developed into a successful agricultural concern. In the last decade of Murry's life he was quite a successful gentleman farmer. But he was always a promoter of 'new life' ideas.

The Adelphi Centre had been set up as a company, of which Murry was permanent chairman. The first Summer School was held there in 1936. George Orwell went to lecture there, as did Karl Polanyi, John Strachey and Herbert Read. Max Plowman, a very close friend and a Quaker, wrote *The Faith Called Pacifism*, and was General Secretary of the Peace Pledge Union. (The Pledge declared, 'I renounce war, and I will never support or sanction another.') Murry eventually succeeded Plowman in the post.

The two most important people to Murry in the first and more literary half of his career were Katherine Mansfield and D.H. Lawrence, both of whom took a strong interest in 'new life centres'. Mansfield spent her last months at G.I. Gurdjieff's experimental community, the 'Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man' at Fontainebleau, near Paris. Lawrence tried to organise his friends to join him in his 'Rananim' commune, to be located variously in Florida, New Mexico or Colombia. (In 1915 he described it as 'a little colony where there shall be no money but a sort of communism as far as necessaries of life go, and some real decency . . . [assuming] goodness in its members, instead of the assumption of badness'.) 13

Murry had reservations about such enterprises, just as his friends had reservations about his own. But if one takes into account all Murry's publications, his teaching, his autobiographical writings, one surely has to acknowledge him as the central personality in the new cultural-aesthetic movement in England in the first half of this century. Murray may also be said to have sacrificed a very promising literary or scholarly career to this other work. Despite his preoccupation with his religious ideas, he wrote a number of excellent essays on, the example Wordsworth and Coleridge, and he was an enthusiastic appreciator of the very different personalities of D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot. Even more strikingly, he was an enthusiastic admirer of Gandhi, who was ignored by both of these seminal literary modernists.
NEw CENTRES oF LIfe

In 1938 Murry read Gandhi’s book *Hind Swaraj* and described it in his journal as:

a classic almost by the simple lucidity of its expression: and certainly an epoch-making little book by the profundity of its insight. A great little book, which I am very glad to have read, and shall read again. A masterpiece of religion and philosophy . . . There is room for a deeply interesting comparison of Rousseau and Gandhi.  

However, though Murry was read by quite a large non-scholarly public of spiritual seekers, as far as serious contemporary writers went he was considered the ‘best-hated’ man of his generation because of his self-identification with such a number of ‘New Age’ schemes, and his experimenting with his own emotions and relationships. He was excluded from the consensus of respect and was mocked and satirised by contemporaries including Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell and Leonard Woolf. 

The case of Murry therefore indicates the variety of ‘new life centres’ in his day in England, and also throws light on the half-hidden, half-hostile relations between countercultural projects and ‘culture’, as the latter constitutes itself in an age of consensus.

CONCLUSION

There are, then, patterns or waves of experimental thought and action connected with notions of a ‘New Age’ or ‘new life’ which recur throughout history. There are always connections between such experiments and the contemporary high culture of art, religion and philosophy – as was the case in the 1880–1920 period. In this chapter quite a few names have appeared which will be familiar to students of art and thought. But a real ‘New Age’ of the type in question is bound to be in revolt against the established forms of high culture. Consequently a revenge is taken by the latter in the consensus periods which occur between ‘New Ages’ – a revenge which often takes the form of satire on ‘New Ages’ and their proponents. In the realm of political action, also, the structure of a government or a party, or even the more fluid structure of a charismatic leadership, may be at odds with ‘new life’ freedoms, although there are partial exceptions to that rule, as we see in the case of Gandhi.

Academics (as readers of this essay are likely to be) are bound to pay special attention to those cases where ‘new life’ advocates have a demonstrable effect upon the large structures of established culture. But we should recognise and respect these other elements. We can best bring these things together by imagining an underground water system which, except in times
of drought, always moves below the surface of high culture and professional propriety: a system that is out of our sight, and out of our sympathy much of the time, but that deserves to be studied because it is always necessary if the land is to be fertile.

Notes

1. In my *Mountain of Truth* (1986) and *Prophets of a New Age* (1992) I discuss these phenomena from a more broadly historical perspective.
5. Ibid.: 33.
11. Ibid., 118.

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**Jung’s Psychologising of Religion**  
Robert A. Segal

**INTRODUCTION**

In their desperation to find support for religion among its major theorists, scholars in religious studies often turn to the Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung (1875–1961). Clearly, Jung approves of religion, by which he means the institutionalised worship of God. For him, religion helps, not harms, adherents. He laments the decline of religion in the modern West and anxiously seeks a replacement for it. Surely, Jung, the son of a village parson, is ‘pro-religion’ and can be enlisted as a foil to the anti-religious diatribes of, above all, Marx and Freud.

To read Jung in so upbeat a way is in fact to misread him. Jung comes, if not to bury religion, not to praise it either. Rather, he comes to analyse it, which means to psychoanalyse it. No one, not even Freud, psychoanalyses – or, to use the broader term, psychologises – religion more relentlessly than Jung. For him, all religion – modern as well as primitive, living as well as dead, Western as well as Eastern – is a psychological enterprise in metaphysical guise. The origin, function and content of religion are wholly psychological.

Those who take Jung as the saviour of religion misconceive him. He not only explains but also evaluates religion entirely psychologically. Religion may deserve praise, but for its psychological, not its metaphysical, utility. Religion is the handmaiden of psychology. It serves to open adherents not to God but to the godlike side of their own personalities. To the extent that other activities, such as dreams and art, provide an entrée to the unconscious, Jung is prepared to propose them as alternatives to religion. At the same time Jung’s stress on religion as the cultivation of the inner self accounts in part for his appeal to New Age practitioners.¹
PsychoLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

Jung underscores his focus on the utility of religion by continually characterising himself as a mere psychologist rather than a philosopher. The truth of religion falls outside his professional purview:

I approach psychological matters from a scientific and not from a philosophical standpoint. Inasmuch as religion has a very important psychological aspect, I deal with it from a purely empirical point of view, that is, I restrict myself to the observation of phenomena and I eschew any metaphysical or philosophical considerations . . . . The psychologist, if he takes up a scientific attitude, has to disregard the claim of every creed to be the unique and eternal truth. He must keep his eye on the human side of the religious problem. (1969c: 2, 10)

Jung regularly distinguishes his psychological use of the term ‘God’ from a metaphysical one: ‘When I say “God” this is a psychic thing . . . . This has nothing whatever to do with God per se’ (1973: 487). Jung bristles at the characterisation of himself, especially by theologians, as a metaphysician – for example, the common labelling of him as a ‘Gnostic’. Declares Jung: ‘The designation of my “system” as “Gnostic” is an invention of my theological critics . . . I am not a philosopher, merely an empiricist’ (1976d: 1642).

Undeniably, Jung himself waxes metaphysical. He unabashedly professes belief in God. For example, he recounts that ‘from the beginning’ he had ‘the conviction’ that ‘it was enjoined upon me to do what God wanted and not what I wanted. That gave me the strength to go my own way. Often I had the feeling that in all decisive matters I was no longer among men, but was alone with God’ (1962: 48). Best known is Jung’s answer to the question, posed by a BBC interviewer, whether he still believed in God: ‘I know. I don’t need to believe. I know’ (1977: 428). Neither these statements nor others, however, are made on psychological grounds. Jung considers himself free to speculate on all topics, as he does most of all in Memories, Dreams, Reflections, but not as psychologist.

At the same time Jung refuses to refrain from psychologising the metaphysics of religion. His rigid, Kantian-like hiatus between the metaphysical and the non-metaphysical domains allows him to psychologise metaphysics without becoming metaphysical himself. Hence he objects as vigorously to theologians who deny him his psychological due as to those who mistake his psychology for metaphysics: ‘Psychology has no room for judgments like “only religious” or “only philosophical,”’ despite the fact that we too often hear the charge of something’s being “only psychological” – especially from theologians’ (1962: 350).
Jung finds most of his theological antagonists exasperating, not only because they mistake his psychological pronouncements for metaphysical ones but also because, as theologians, they focus on belief. For Jung, the heart of religion is not belief but experience – another respect in which his approach to religion appeals to New Age devotees. Thus Jung invokes Rudolf Otto's characterisation of religion as the encounter with an overpowering God:

In speaking of religion I must make clear from the start what I mean by that term. Religion, as the Latin word denotes, is a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolf Otto aptly termed the *numinosum*, that is, a dynamic agency or effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will. On the contrary, it seizes and controls the human subject, who is always its victim rather than its creator. (1969c: 6)

Psychologised, the cause of this experience is not an external God but one's own unconscious, which has the same relationship to consciousness as, for the Lutheran Otto, God has to the believer. In insisting that religion is at heart experience, Jung denies that it is at heart creed: 'I want to make clear that by the term “religion” I do not mean a creed' (1969c: 9). For Jung, creed is secondary and indeed derivative: 'Creeds are codified and dogmatized forms of original religious experience' (1969c: 10). Experience shapes creed, not *vice versa*.

**TRADITIONAL DIFFICULTIES FACING RELIGION**

In its capacity to work psychologically, religion for Jung faces various problems, some traditional, some distinctively modern. Mainstream Christianity, especially in contrast to Gnosticism, has perennially failed to provide avenues to all parts of the unconscious. For example, by excluding Mary from the pantheon, it has blocked what would serve, and what in popular practice does serve, as a channel for the experience of the anima archetype – the feminine side of the male personality:

Medieval iconology . . . evolved a quaternity symbol in its representations of the coronation of the Virgin and surreptitiously put it in place of the Trinity. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, i.e., the taking up of Mary's soul into heaven *with her body*, is admitted as ecclesiastical doctrine but has not yet become dogma. (1969c: 251)

Similarly, the exclusion of Satan from the pantheon has closed off what would serve as a channel for the experience of the shadow archetype – the evil side of the human personality:
But the Christian definition of God as the \textit{sumnum bonum} excludes the Evil One right from the start, despite the fact that in the Old Testament he was still one of the ‘sons of God.’ Hence the devil remained outside the Trinity as the ‘ape of God’ and in opposition to it. . . . The devil is, undoubtedly, an awkward figure: he is the ‘odd man out’ in the Christian cosmos. That is why people would like to minimize his importance by euphemistic ridicule or by ignoring his existence altogether; or, better still, to lay the blame for him at man’s door. (1969c: 252)\textsuperscript{4}

Second, Jung faults mainstream Protestantism in particular for its failure to provide safe openings to the unconscious. By eliminating most sacraments and other rituals, Protestantism has left worshippers on their own, still able to encounter God and thereby the unconscious, but bereft of the guidance provided by fixed rituals and mediation by priests:

Protestantism, having pulled down so many walls carefully erected by the Church, immediately began to experience the disintegrating and schismatic effect of individual revelation. As soon as the dogmatic fence was broken down and the ritual lost its authority, man had to face his inner experience without the protection and guidance of dogma and ritual, which are the very quintessence of Christian as well as of pagan religious experience. Protestantism has, in the main, lost all the finer shades of traditional Christianity: the mass, confession, the greater part of the liturgy, and the vicarious function of priesthood. (1969c: 33)

Jung pointedly notes that the majority of his patients are Protestants and Jews rather than Catholics,\textsuperscript{5} whose unconscious life ‘has been channelled into the dogmatic archetypal ideas and flows along like a well-controlled stream in the inwardness of the Catholic psyche’ (1968a: 21). For Jung, few persons harbour either the courage to undertake or the strength to withstand a solitary encounter with the unconscious, even when the unconscious is experienced as God. Jung himself came close to being shattered by his confrontation with the unconscious following his break with Freud in 1912.

\textbf{Modern difficulties facing religion}

Jung faults Christianity generally, Catholicism no less than Protestantism, for its failure to reconcile itself with modern science. More precisely, Jung grants that religious belief is inherently incompatible with modern science. While belief, like the rest of religion, can be psychologised, the acceptance of belief requires the acceptance of it as true about the world, not merely as true about oneself.

To see the place of religion in Jung’s scheme, it is helpful to note the
various stages of psychological development into which he divides humanity. The key divide for him is between 'primitives' and ancients on the one hand, and moderns and contemporaries on the other. Primitives project themselves onto the external world in the form of gods and, more, identify themselves with those gods. Ancients also project themselves onto the world in the form of gods, but do not identify themselves with their gods. Ancients worship gods distinct from themselves.

Primitives and ancients alike interpret religion literally, so that it refers to the external world. Yet it still functions to connect them to their unconscious. It simply does so circuitously, via projection onto the outer world:

All the mythologized processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective [i.e., external] occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection – that is, mirrored in the events of nature. (1968a: 7)

To encounter God is really to encounter oneself.

By contrast to both primitives and ancients, moderns and contemporaries have largely withdrawn their projections from the world. They experience the world itself, unfiltered by their unconscious. That world is natural rather than supernatural, impersonal rather than personified. It is explained by science, not religion: 'Only in the following centuries, with the growth of natural science, was the projection withdrawn from matter and entirely abolished together with the psyche . . . Nobody, it is true, any longer endows matter with mythological properties' (1968d: 395).

Like primitives and ancients, moderns and contemporaries interpret religion literally, but then they must reject it in the name of science. Moderns, who here part company with contemporaries, pride themselves on their rejection of religion, which they pit not only against science but also against their image of themselves as wholly rational, progressive, omniscient and omnipotent beings. They, not any gods, are the masters of their destiny. Nothing inner or outer lies outside their control. The notion of an unconscious is as anathema to them as the notion of God. In rejecting religion as irrational, they reject the best vehicle to date for encountering the unconscious. In similarly rejecting an unconscious as irrational, they see no need to find a psychological substitute for religion.7

The difference between moderns and contemporaries lies here: not in the rejection of religion, which they share, but in the necessity of a substitute, which moderns spurn and which contemporaries crave. Recognising the
existence of an unconscious, contemporaries seek alternative, non-projective means of attending to it. They bemoan the loss of religion as a means, even while resolutely rejecting it as an explanation of the world. Moderns, scornful of the idea of an unconscious, see no psychological value in religion and unhesitatingly embrace science as its explanatory successor. Science for them does all that religion has done, and does it better.

The modern dismissal of the unconscious does not, however, eliminate it. Moderns still partly project their unconscious onto the world – for example, in continued deference to superstitions like not walking under a ladder. More important, all moderns still project themselves onto other human beings: ‘Projection is now confined to personal and social relationships’ (1968d: 395). Jung especially observes the projection of the shadow onto others:

We are convinced that certain people have all the bad qualities we do not know in ourselves or that they practise all those vices which could, of course, never be our own. We must still be exceedingly careful not to project our own shadows too shamelessly; we are still swamped with projected illusions. (1969c: 140)

Yet as fully as moderns project their unconscious, to express it inadvertently is hardly to attend to it. To gain attention, the unconscious must now foist itself upon moderns in the form of neurosis:

When in the Babylonian epic Gilgamesh’s arrogance and hybris defy the gods, they create a man equal in strength to Gilgamesh in order to check the hero’s unlawful ambition. The very same thing has happened to our patient: he is a thinker who has settled, or is always going to settle, the world by the power of his intellect and reason. His ambition has at least succeeded in forging his own personal fate. He has forced everything under the inexorable law of his reason, but somewhere nature escaped and came back with a vengeance . . . It was the worst blow that could be dealt to all his rational ideals and especially to his belief in the all-powerful human will . . . Being highly rationalistic and intellectual he had found that his attitude of mind and his philosophy forsook him completely in the face of his neurosis and its demoralizing forces. He found nothing in his whole Weltanschauung that would help him to gain sufficient control of himself. (1969c: 27, 51)

Jung is not faulting religion for losing moderns to science. As an explanation of the world, religion is incompatible with science, and moderns by definition accept science. Jung has no interest in sophisticated attempts to reconcile religious explanation with scientific explanation – for example, by placing God behind the scenes. Either God is capable of being
experienced, or God is dead. A religion which removes God from the realm of human experience is no longer religion but, instead, philosophy.

Similarly, Jung is not faulting science for making atheists of moderns. Science is to be celebrated, not condemned, for its advances, and Jung sees the development of psychology as part of the scientific advance. He proudly deems himself a scientist of the mind. The triumph of science over religion poses a problem for religion, but the solution is not to reject science for religion. The solution is either to update religion or to replace it.

**Updating religion**

For Jung, religion cannot be updated as an explanation of the world. Religion can be saved only by extracting the mythology from the rest of religion and then psychologising the mythology, by which he means the stories of the lives of gods and heroes. Jung does not try to extract ritual. For Jung, mythology and religion have traditionally worked in tandem. Religion has preserved mythology, and mythology has sustained religion. Together with ritual, mythology has provided the best *entree* to God. In contrast to belief, which gives only information, myth offers experience:

> The protean mythologem and the shimmering symbol express the processes of the psyche far more trenchantly and, in the end, far more clearly than the clearest concept; for the symbol not only conveys a visualization of the process but – and this is perhaps just as important – it also brings a re-experiencing of it. (1968c: 199)

Jung praises early Christianity for both adopting and adapting pagan myths: 'The fact that the myth [of the phoenix] was assimilated into Christianity by interpretation is proof, first of all, of the myth's vitality; but it also proves the vitality of Christianity, which was able to interpret and assimilate so many myths.' A religion that does not reinterpret its myths is dead. The 'spiritual vitality' of a religion 'depends on the continuity of myth, and this can be preserved only if each age translates the myth into its own language and makes it an essential content of its view of the world' (1970d: 474 n.297).

Unlike early Christianity, modern Christianity has failed to update its myths. That failure is a part of its overall failure to reinvigorate itself. Sometimes Jung argues that modern Christianity has gone astray by severing belief from experience and trying in vain to rely on sheer belief. Jung's objection here is twofold: that belief without experience is empty, and that the belief is often incompatible with modern scientific and historical
knowledge. At other times Jung contends that modern Christianity has gone awry in trying to meet the challenge of modernity by turning belief into faith severed from knowledge. Jung's objection here is that even faith requires experience to sustain itself. As Jung sums up his criticisms of both options:

The Churches stand for traditional and collective convictions which in the case of many of their adherents are no longer based on their own inner experience but on unreflecting belief, which is notoriously apt to disappear as soon as one begins thinking about it. The content of belief then comes into collision with knowledge, and it often turns out that the irrationality of the former is no match for the ratiocinations of the latter. Belief is no adequate substitute for inner experience, and where this is absent even a strong faith which came miraculously as a gift of grace may depart equally miraculously. (1970b: 521)

While these particular criticisms do not involve myth, at still other times Jung says that modern Christianity has erred in its attempt to update itself by eliminating myth. Jung is here referring to Rudolf Bultmann's 'demythologisation' of the New Testament (Bultmann 1953: 1–44). Jung's first objection is that the supposed incompatibility of myth with modern knowledge stems from a false, literal interpretation of myth: 'Theology [wrongly] rejects any tendency to take the assertions of its earliest records as written myths and, accordingly, to understand them symbolically' (1970b: 551). Jung's second objection is that myth is indispensable to experience and thereby to religion:

Indeed, it is the theologians themselves who have recently made the attempt – no doubt as a concession to 'knowledge' – to 'demythologize' the object of their faith while drawing the line [between myth and religion] quite arbitrarily at the crucial points. But to the critical intellect it is only too obvious that myth is an integral component of all religions and therefore cannot be excluded from the assertions of faith without injuring them. (1970b: 551)

Here Christianity has sought to overcome the opposition between faith and modern knowledge by discarding belief at odds with knowledge. But in eliminating myth, it has eliminated experience as well.

At yet other times Jung maintains that modern Christianity has rightly turned to myth to resurrect itself but has still failed to reinterpret myth symbolically and thereby make it palatable to moderns:

[R]eligious have long turned to myths for help . . . But you cannot, artificially and with an effort of will, believe the statements of myth if you have not
previously been gripped by them. If you are honest, you will doubt the truth of
the myth because our present-day consciousness has no means of understanding
it. Historical and scientific criteria do not lend themselves to a recognition of
mythological truth; it can be grasped only by the intuitions of faith or by
psychology. (1970e: 751)

Ironically, Bultmann, despite the misleading term 'demythologisation,'
strives to do the same as Jung: not to eliminate myth from the New
Testament but, on the contrary, to reinterpret myth symbolically in order
to make it acceptable to moderns. And Bultmann, also like Jung, argues
that the true meaning of the New Testament has always been symbolic,
though for Bultmann, myth read symbolically describes the human con-
dition rather than, as for Jung, the human mind.

By Christian mythology, Jung means the life of Christ. Read literally, the
Gospels are incompatible with both history and science. But if, writes Jung,
'the statement that Christ rose from the dead is to be understood not
literally but symbolically, then it is capable of various interpretations that
do not conflict with knowledge and do not impair the meaning of the
statement' (1970b: 521). Read psychologically, the life of Christ becomes a
symbol of the archetypal journey of the hero from primordial unconscious-
ness (birth) to ego consciousness (adulthood) to return to the unconscious
(crucifixion) to reemergence from it to form the self (resurrection). Under-
stood symbolically, Christ serves as a model for Christians seeking to
cultivate their relation to the self – an interpretation that tallies with that of
New Age religiosity. Without denying the historicity of Christ, Jung
maintains that Christ can be inspirational even as a mythical hero. Indeed,
for Jung the prime appeal of Christ's life has always been mythical, which
for Jung means psychological:

Christ lived a concrete, personal, and unique life which, in all essential features,
had at the same time an archetypal character. This character can be recognized
from the numerous connections of the biographical details with worldwide myth-
moiifs . . . The life of Christ is no exception in that not a few of the great figures
of history have realized, more or less clearly, the archetype of the hero's life with
its characteristic changes of fortune . . . Since the life of Christ is archetypal to a
high degree, it represents to just that degree the life of the archetype. But since
the archetype is the unconscious precondition of every human life, its life, when
revealed, also reveals the hidden, unconscious ground-life of every individual.
(1969c: 146)  

Jung contends, further, that the Gospels themselves present a combined
mythical and historical figure: 'In the gospels themselves factual reports,
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legends, and myths are woven into a whole. This is precisely what constitutes the meaning of the gospels, and they would immediately lose their character of wholeness if one tried to separate the individual from the archetypal with a critical scalpel’ (1969c: 146). Just like Bultmann, to whom he is in fact so close, Jung thus claims to be explicating the symbolic meaning intended by the Gospels all along. For both Jung and Bultmann, the obstacles that modernity poses to a literal rendition of Christ’s life offer an opportunity to make clear for the first time the meaning intended from the outset.

REPLACING RELIGION

Jung never faults Christian mythology itself for its outdatedness, only its interpreters: ‘Our myth has become mute, and gives no answers. The fault lies not in it as it is set down in the Scriptures, but solely in us, who have not developed it further, who, rather, have suppressed any such attempts’ (1962: 332). Still, Jung recognises that religion has simply ceased to be an option for many, even if he is by no means assuming all present-day Westerners to be either moderns or contemporaries.9 Jung’s alternative solution to the incompatibility of religion and science is not to update the mythology but to replace it – by secular myths.

For Jung, secular myths take several forms. Minimally, artists recast traditional, religious myths in secular garb: ‘Mythological motifs frequently appear, but clothed in modern dress; for instance, instead of the eagle of Zeus, or the great roc, there is an airplane; the fight with the dragon is a railway smash; the dragon-slaying hero is an operatic tenor; the Earth Mother is a stout lady selling vegetables; the Pluto who abducts Persephone is a reckless chauffeur, and so on’ (1966: 152).

More significant for Jung has been the outright revival of traditional myth, of which his grandest example is the revival of the worship of Wotan in twentieth-century Germany: ‘But what is more than curious – indeed, piquant to a degree – is that an ancient god of storm and frenzy, the long quiescent Wotan, should awake, like an extinct volcano, to new activity, in a civilised country that had long been supposed to have outgrown the Middle Ages’ (1970a: 373). In parts of Germany, Wotan was taken as no mere literary metaphor but a real god ‘out there,’ worshipped with the slaughtering of sheep and other rituals. Here myth was lived out, not merely interpreted. To be sure, Wotan was not taken as a weather god, but he was considered the divine force behind Germany’s destiny.

Still more significant for Jung has been the creation of new, distinctively secular myths, of which his best example is the belief in flying saucers. The
belief is widespread. It arouses archetypal emotions of awe and fear. Flying saucers are invoked to explain events in the physical world. Above all, flying saucers, as a technologically advanced phenomenon, fit the present-day scientific self-image: 'It is characteristic of our time that the archetype... should now take the form of an object, a technological construction, in order to avoid the odiousness of mythological personification. Anything that looks technological goes down without difficulty with modern man' (1970c: 624).

For all Jung's insistence that the referent and in turn the function of myth are wholly inner, and for all his disdain for those who take the referent and the function of myth to be outer, he himself revels in the outer as well as the inner function of myth. Psychologically, flying saucers, often depicted as round, symbolise the archetype of the self and thereby abet the attainment of that unified state. But flying saucers also symbolise gods, who are themselves typically associated with roundness:

> There is an old saying that 'God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.' God, in his omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, is a totality symbol *par excellence*, something round, complete, and perfect... On the antique level, therefore, the Ufos could easily be conceived as 'gods.' (1970c: 622)

Just as the archetype of the self unifies the opposing parts of the psyche, so flying saucers, sighted especially during the Cold War, served to inspire hope that God would soon come to earth and bring peace to a world threatened with nuclear war:

> The present world situation is calculated as never before to arouse expectations of a redeeming, supernatural event. If these expectations have not dared to show themselves in the open, this is simply because no one is deeply rooted enough in the tradition of earlier centuries to consider an intervention from heaven as a matter of course. We have indeed strayed far from the metaphysical certainties of the Middle Ages, but not so far that our historical and psychological background is empty of all metaphysical hope. (1970c: 623)

The myth of flying saucers thus serves to make humans feel at home in the outer world, not merely in the inner one.

In the case of primitives and ancients, both of whom personify the world through projection, Jung readily emphasises that myth functions outwardly:

> Primitive man is not much interested in objective explanations of the obvious, but he has an imperative need - or, rather, his unconscious psyche has an
irresistible urge – to assimilate all outer sense experiences to inner, psychic events. It is not enough for the primitive to see the sun rise and set; this external observation must at the same time be a psychic happening: the sun in its course must represent the fate of a god or hero who, in the last analysis, dwells nowhere except in the soul of man. (1968a: 7)

Personifying the external world gives it meaning and relevance. A personified world operates responsively, in accordance with the purposes of gods and the pleas of humans, rather than mechanically. To cite Jung’s favourite example:

The Pueblo Indians believe that they are the sons of Father Sun, and this belief endows their life with a perspective (and a goal) that goes far beyond their limited existence . . . Their plight is infinitely more satisfactory than that of a man in our own civilization who knows that he is (and will remain) nothing more than an underdog with no inner meaning to his life. (1968e: 76)

Undeniably, most secular myths for Jung are non-projective. They presuppose the withdrawal of projections from the outer world, which is now experienced as impersonal and therefore meaningless: ‘We have stripped all things of their mystery and numinosity; nothing is holy any longer’ (1968e: 84). Most secular myths do not connect the inner world with the outer world, which remains the domain of science. Instead, they connect – better, reconnect – humans to the inner world.

Yet the characterisation of the external world as in fact meaningless really only holds for the earlier Jung. Once Jung, in collaboration with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, develops the concept of synchronicity, the world for him regains its meaningfulness even without its personality. Indeed, that meaningfulness is now inherent in the world rather than imposed on it through projection: ‘Synchronistic experiences serve our turn here. They point to a latent meaning which is independent of [our] consciousness’ (1976a: 495). Meaningfulness for the later Jung stems not from the existence of God, or personality, in the world but from the symmetry between human beings and the world. Rather than alien and indifferent to humans, the world proves to be akin to them – not because gods respond to human wishes or because human wishes directly affect the world, but because human thoughts correspond to the nature of the world. As Jung writes of his favourite example of synchronicity, that of a resistant patient who was describing a dream about a golden scarab when a scarab beetle appeared, ‘at the moment my patient was telling me her dream a real “scarab” tried to get into the room, as if it had understood that it must play its mythological role as a symbol of rebirth’ (1976a: 541). Here the world seemingly responds to
the patient’s dream, but understood synchronistically, the world merely, if fortuitously, matches the patient’s dream. It is the patient’s conscious attitude that is ‘out of sync’ with the world.

With the concept of synchronicity, Jung restores to the world a meaningfulness that the withdrawal of projections still demanded by Jung removes. Synchronicity is not itself myth. Synchronicity is the experience of the world as meaningful. Myth would be an account of that experience, but the pay-off would be less an explanation than connectedness to the world. Those secular myths which, like the myth of flying saucers, connect one to the world and not just to the mind, thereby accomplish more than either dreams or art, both of which function only inwardly. In the age of science, secular myth alone has the potential to duplicate the past psychological and existential feats of religion.

Notes
2. All references to the Collected Works are to paragraph, not page, numbers.
4. On Jung's praise of Gnosticism for according places to the feminine and to evil, see Segal (1992: chs. 4 and 5).
5. See, for example, Jung (1976b: 370).
6. On these divisions see the introduction to Segal (ed., 1992: 11-19).
7. Jung castigates as well those who, while granting the existence of an unconscious, assume they can control it. The epitome for him of this psychological modernism is Freud. See, for example, Jung (1969c: 141).
9. Jung's own position on Christianity is unclear. Some maintain that Jung seeks to replace dying Christianity with psychology: see esp. Hostie (1957); Philp (1958). Others contend that Jung seeks to resurrect Christianity through psychology: see esp. Schaer (1950); Cox (1959); White (1952); Stein (1985). Still others argue for a middle ground: see esp. Homans (1995).
10. On Jung's insistence that myth be analysed wholly psychologically, see Segal (1998: 3-7)
11. On synchronicity, see Jung (1969a, 1969b); Main (1997).

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Part 2: Places
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More of the Same?
Christianity, Vernacular Religion
and Alternative Spirituality in Glastonbury

Marion Bowman

Throughout the centuries Glastonbury has been recognised as a sacred site of intense transformative energies. These energies are not the monopoly of any one belief system, but are available to all. In effect the island acts as a spiritual magnifying glass, amplifying the strength of both positive and negative energies, giving the individual a unique opportunity to accelerate the process of their own growth and awareness.¹

Glastonbury is a small town (population c.8,000) in rural Somerset, in the southwest of England. Depending on whom you talk to, or what you read, it is also considered to be: the Isle of Avalon; the site of a great Druidic centre of learning; a significant prehistoric centre of Goddess worship; the ‘cradle of English Christianity’ visited by Joseph of Arimathea, and perhaps even Christ himself; the ‘New Jerusalem’; a communication point for alien contact; the ‘epicentre’ of New Age in England; and the ‘heart chakra’ of planet earth. Glastonbury has been hailed as ‘the fountainhead of three major religions: Wicca, Druidry and Christianity’ (Shallcrass, 1995: 23), and, along with Findhorn and Iona, as one of Britain’s three ‘light centres’ (see Monteith, Chapter 6). Numerous spiritual seekers (aligned and non-aligned) feel ‘drawn’ to Glastonbury (Bowman, 1993a).

If any site in Britain can provide an example of continuity and change in vernacular religion, or act as a microcosm of trends in alternative spirituality, Glastonbury must be a strong contender. Few places enjoy such high status among believers and spiritual seekers of so many different persuasions. Thousands visit Glastonbury for the Anglican and Catholic pilgrimages, for courses at the Isle of Avalon Foundation (which sees itself as the successor to the druidic university some claim existed there), for the vast array of healing on offer, for Goddess conferences, for ritual activity at various times on the eightfold calendar widely observed by pagans, and as individual pilgrims, spiritual seekers and tourists. While the Glastonbury Festival (at nearby Pilton) is primarily a contemporary music festival, it too has become an ‘alternative’ institution; in addition to the performance
events, regular features of the festival have been The Healing Field site and the Sacred Space site, in which various forms of healing, spirituality and ritual experimentation have been promoted, practised and disseminated. Nor is Glastonbury's significance merely local or national. People come to Glastonbury not simply from Britain but from all over Europe, North America, Australia and elsewhere. Many more know of Glastonbury through myths (old and new), books, novels, articles, television features and assorted Glastonbury-related websites.

A review of religious activity in Glastonbury demonstrates the significance of folk or vernacular religion for many aspects of contemporary spirituality. In this chapter I shall first clarify what is meant by the terms 'folk' and 'vernacular' religion, then explore a number of trends in contemporary spirituality, demonstrating how these are exemplified in Glastonbury. I shall argue that the contemporary spiritual scene in Glastonbury in many respects feeds on vernacular religion, and that there exists in Glastonbury what might be described as 'alternative' Christianity. I want to show that in Glastonbury, vernacular religion has been instrumental in the development of alternative spirituality, and that Christianity, though frequently overlooked in the context of contemporary spirituality in Glastonbury, is a dynamic presence there, interacting with alternative spirituality. While the roots of much alternative spirituality in Glastonbury are in vernacular religion, however, many of the current fruits have grown from seeds sown in the late-nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, and these will also be reviewed.

**Folk and vernacular religion**

Folk religion has been defined as 'the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion' (Yoder, 1974: 14). Many of Glastonbury's myths and traditions fall into just such a category, and thus tend to be seen as the preserve of the folklorist rather than of the scholar of religion. However, such treatment perpetuates the idea that there is a 'pure' form of religion which matters (the official), and debased forms (such as folk and individual) which do not. In preference to the term 'folk religion', then, it is useful to employ the notion of vernacular religion. As Primiano argues (1995: 44):

> Vernacular religious theory involves an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the religious lives of individuals with special attention to the process of religious belief, the verbal, behavioral, and material expressions of religious belief, and the ultimate object of religious belief.
Rather than being a ‘deviant’ form of ‘proper’ religion, vernacular religion is ‘religion’ as it is played out on a day-to-day basis in the life of the individual. The neglect of the folk or vernacular element of religion has contributed to deficiencies in both academic accounts of religion and the popular understanding of it (see Introduction). In this chapter, I intend to show how in Glastonbury the study of ‘vernacular’ elements is essential for understanding not only traditional forms of religion but also ‘alternative’ spiritualities, including New Age and Paganism.

**Alternative spirituality and vernacular spirituality**

‘Alternative spirituality’ in Glastonbury tends to be designated as such in implied contrast to Christianity. However, the folk/vernacular traditions of Christianity in Glastonbury exhibit an ‘alternative’ aspect of Christianity largely ignored by academia. In Glastonbury this alternative Christianity continues to flourish and has influenced many aspects of what is now regarded as alternative spirituality. It also interacts dynamically with developments in alternative spirituality. Consequently, when I refer to ‘contemporary spirituality’ in Glastonbury, I include both alternative spirituality and Christianity – and specifically vernacular Christianity – as part of the current spiritual scene.

**Narrative in the formation of vernacular spirituality**

Religious Studies scholars employ ‘myth’ as a neutral term to describe a ‘significant story’, making no judgement as to its truth or falsehood. Significant stories of divine or human figures or events within a religious tradition have always been recognised as a vital element of religion per se. However, rather less attention has been paid to the narrative (i.e. storytelling) process itself as an ongoing, constantly evolving feature of religion. Of particular significance in vernacular religion, for example, is the ‘belief story’. This is characterised by Gillian Bennett (1989: 291) as that class of informal stories which:

1. illustrate current community beliefs;
2. tell not only of personal experiences but also of those that have happened to other people;
3. are used to explore and validate the belief traditions of a given community by showing how experience matches expectations.

I have been told, for example, that the pedestrian crossing on Glastonbury High Street was built on a ley line to ensure that people benefit from its energies, whether or not they are aware of it. Unpacked, this utterance...
involves belief in ley lines, the locating of a particular ley line, the assumption that ley lines are beneficial on contact, and the confidence that someone in the Highways Department of the local council was sufficiently enlightened to position a pedestrian crossing in accordance with these insights.

Since personal experience narratives, corroborative legends and other stories underpinning popular perceptions are highly important in the establishment and maintenance of a belief system, knowledge of these stories is invaluable in accessing the world view of groups and individuals. Where there is no commonly recognised written canon, and where informal modes of transmission of belief predominate, belief stories should be seen as particularly significant. Such is the case with alternative spirituality. Narratives have always played an important part in establishing Glastonbury as a Christian centre and they continue to underpin its character as a multivalent focus for alternative spirituality.

**TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY**

With the approach of the Millennium, there seem to have been a number of trends recurring in the contemporary spiritual scene, whether in more established forms of religion, in sectarian New Religious Movements or in non-aligned spirituality. Most of these trends can be documented to a greater or lesser extent in Glastonbury. They include the perceived importance of the personal spiritual quest; ‘mix-and-match’ spirituality; remythologising; healing; the pursuit of a ‘Golden Age’ and/or a form of ‘Noble Savagery’; the revival of traditional customs; the search for hidden wisdom; perceptions of past lives, reincarnation and interconnectedness; and the importance of sacred landscapes, ‘topophilia’ and pilgrimage. Each of these is examined in more detail below.

**THE PERSONAL QUEST**

Although many people are currently operating outside established/conventional forms of religion (see Sutcliffe, Chapter 1, this by no means signals lack of belief. The extraordinary growth of ‘Body, Mind, Spirit’ sections in bookshops across Britain, for example, or the huge quantity of ‘cyberspace spirituality’ on the Internet, are among the indicators that many people are conducting their search for meaning outside (or in addition to) the more traditional forums. People putting together individual packages of belief can also draw on the many resources available through the ‘spiritual service industry’ which has arisen in Glastonbury and elsewhere (Bowman 1993a, 1994), providing everything from specialist literature, artefacts,
courses, workshops, lectures and rituals to services such as Spirit Guide portraits and New Age Bed and Breakfast.

'MIX-AND-MATCH' SPIRITUALITY

While the stress on the individual spiritual quest and personal experience in contemporary spirituality has been much commented on, the 'customised' or 'mix-and-match' nature of much of what is now appearing, and the roles of intuition, personal experience and 'what works for you', are not new. There is a long tradition in vernacular religion of people incorporating diverse beliefs and practices into their version of whatever the notional official religion might be – whether combining fairy belief with Presbyterianism (see Sanderson, 1976), reincarnation with Anglicanism or knocking the head off a statue of the Infant of Prague to guarantee good weather on a wedding day, under post-Vatican II Catholicism. Experience and belief in efficacy underpin personal belief and praxis, regardless of the tradition. However, in contemporary religion, the element of collage or bricolage is particularly pronounced, as people draw upon the great variety of religious and cultural traditions to which they now have access (see Introduction) and which have become 'commodified' in a variety of ways. Tradition-bending and -blending are very much the order of the day, as exemplified by the display in a Glastonbury shop of Bridget crosses and didgeridoos alongside 'dream catchers' specially charged with 'Glastonbury energies'.

REMYTHOLOGISING

A trend of considerable importance is 'remythologising'. The flurry of folkloric activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with the attention paid to myth by Freud, Jung and such writers as Robert Graves, led to a renewed interest in and awareness of myth and legend which developed in a variety of ways throughout the century (see Segal, Chapter 4). Myths have been revisited and revived; myths have been acted out for ritual and therapeutic purposes (Leith, 1998); myths have been identified with (Rees, 1996); myths have been reinterpreted; myths have been created. There is now a storytelling revival akin to the folk music revival of the 1960s and 1970s (Heywood, 1998). Glastonbury, the focus of so much myth-making for so long, is naturally very much affected by this trend, both in terms of myths about Glastonbury's past and the effect of Glastonbury on individuals in the present (Bowman, 1993a; Dudley Edwards, 1999).
Another significant trend in contemporary spirituality is the growing interest in healing and the concomitant growth in the variety of healing(s) on offer. Healing has traditionally been closely connected to vernacular religion, frequently involving the individual putting together a ‘package’ of complementary resources (prayers, charms, folk/traditional cures, conventional medicine) at times of need. It has also, of course, often been attributed to divine forces and associated with sacred sites. There are estimated to be over one hundred different forms of healing in and around Glastonbury, from aromatherapy and reflexology to crystal therapy, past-life regression and aura cleansing. Individuals can thus choose one form of healing or put together a combination particular to their needs and preferences.

THE GOLDEN AGE AND THE NOBLE SAVAGE

The notions of the Noble Savage or of some kind of ‘Golden Age’ are also increasingly influential (Bowman, 1995). In essence, there is a growing perception that in the past our ancestors (whether pagan or Christian) were more spiritual, more in touch with nature and had a deeper understanding and awareness of the sacred in everyday life. In Glastonbury, the recovery of a Golden Age and Noble Savagery takes three main forms:

1. Pursuit of the Celtic;
2. The ‘revival’ of customs;
3. Fascination with native peoples.

Celts

For many in the West, Celts (variously defined and imagined) have become role models for contemporary spirituality (Bowman, 1993b, 1996), and in Glastonbury this is reflected in a particular concern with Druidry, with observance of the ‘eightfold calendar’ and an interest in Celtic Christianity. The current interest in Brighid/Brigid/Bridget/Bride, as either a pagan Celtic goddess or a Celtic Christian saint (daughter of a Druid father and a Celtic Christian mother) epitomises such concerns. The Bridget Chapel at the rear of the ‘Glastonbury Experience’ complex, is ‘deliberately kept free of specific symbology or artifacts’ (sic), in order to make it ‘welcoming to all, regardless of religious or spiritual affiliation’ (Bridget Chapel leaflet). The custom (based largely on the Irish Catholic vernacular tradition) of making a ‘Bride doll’ at Imbolc (1 February, feast day of St Bridget) has been revived recently by those involved in Goddess spirituality in the town, and Bridget crosses are now among the artefacts on sale in Glastonbury shops. Mean-
while, there is a campaign to protect Bride's Mound, a site traditionally associated with St Bridget, and turn it into a 'sanctuary'.

There is also currently a sort of Christian 'euro-scepticism'. Many Christians see the Celtic church as purer, more spiritual, more in touch with nature and all other virtues valued at the present time. So the Celtic church is hailed as 'our native Christianity, before Roman Christianity imposed on us', and various means of 'recapturing' or 'reviving' the spirit of Celtic Christianity are sought (see Meek, 1992, 1996).

Revival of traditional customs

As assorted spiritual seekers try to recapture a Golden Age, there is much looking back in order to go forward. Many a claim is prefaced with 'tradition tells that . . . ', though requests for evidence are often met with indifference verging on distaste. As one informant said dismissively, 'You mean, observable phenomena?' What Glastonbury was, is and might be is largely a matter of perception, and is as much to do with the people observing as the phenomena observed.

The White Spring at the foot of Glastonbury Tor, for instance, has become an ancient 'rag well' in recent years, and Derbyshire-style well-dressing (which involves the making of pictures on a bed of clay with flower petals) has been revived there. The person behind the well-dressing revival came to Glastonbury with the specific aim of establishing – or re-establishing – well-dressing as a national custom, believing the 'Christianised' Derbyshire form to be a survival of a once-widespread UK tradition. He is interested in water conservation and ecological issues, and believes that if people learn to honour springs and think about water, they are more likely to use it sensibly and with respect. He claimed that Glastonbury is a cultural centre, and felt that if he could establish well-dressing here it could become a national custom again: 'If people see something at Glastonbury, they feel permitted to take it away.'

Native peoples

The concern with a Golden Age includes the idea that contemporary indigenous peoples elsewhere – such as native Americans and native Australians – have managed to sustain archaic forms of spirituality. The desire is to recapture that symbiosis between people and planet, to follow a spiritual path which incorporates the wisdom and praxis of the past and/or emulates existing native peoples. The growth of interest in shamanism as both spiritual path and healing technique, including Celtic shamanism (Matthews, 1991; Jones, 1994) and Druidic sweat lodges, is one example of this. A variety of native peoples, and people who claim to have worked with
or been initiated by native peoples, have appeared as lecturers or workshop leaders over the years in Glastonbury.

**Hidden wisdom**

There is a growing hunger for 'hidden' or secret knowledge of various sorts. This is being accessed through, for example, exploration of the Western Mystery traditions (see Greenwood, Chapter 8), and through 'channelled' wisdom which both imparts knowledge about the past, and advice for the present and future from diverse disembodied sources including historical figures, religious teachers, aliens, angels and ascended Masters. Glastonbury is considered a good receiving point for such wisdom. In the 1970s and 1980s communications were channelled from the 'Ramala Teachers' to the Ramala Centre in Glastonbury. Participants in the Isle of Avalon Foundation’s 'Avalonian Magic of Dion Fortune' workshop in 1998 were invited to ‘form a living chalice into which the Company and Watchers of Avalon may choose to pour their wisdom and their vision’ (workshop leaflet).

Other forms of esoteric knowledge include gematria (sacred geometry) and numerology. John Michell, frequently described as a ‘visionary’, has been involved in alternative spirituality in Britain since the 1960s. He has written extensively and influentially on gematria in connection with Glastonbury, claiming that the ground plan of the Abbey coincides both with Stonehenge and the Holy City described in Revelation (Michell, 1992). I witnessed one shopkeeper in Glastonbury explaining to an assistant how she used numerological principles in pricing, raising or lowering prices slightly in order to avoid any inauspicious combinations of numbers.

**Past lives and reincarnation**

In alternative spirituality – as indeed among many who would self-identify as Christians (see Waterhouse, 1999) – it is increasingly commonplace to believe in reincarnation, and in the possibility of recalling past lives. Some people consider difficulties in this life to have been caused by events in a previous existence. Past-life regression as a healing technique is predicated on being able to deal with such problems by revisiting the past. One ‘soul therapist’ who operates in Glastonbury offers to take the client:

back before the dawn of creation to connect with his/her soul essence. The soul then has unlimited energy and is naturally able to shed its conditioning.

(publicity leaflet)

More positively, reincarnation for many is seen as spiritual progression; ‘in every life a lesson’ is a commonly quoted maxim in Glastonbury.
INTERCONNECTEDNESS

A trend of considerable importance in contemporary spirituality is the idea of interconnectedness between all life-forms, between humanity and nature, between the empirical world and unseen realms, between past, present and future. A number of the trends already outlined - renewed interest in myth, the search for hidden knowledge, the move to restore ancient beliefs and practices, 'channelling' wisdom from discarnate sources, past-life remembrances - all help to reinforce the notion of interconnectedness. This leads to people thinking more globally, indeed universally. As one of the UK's 'light centres' Glastonbury is not merely nationally significant but, as 'heart chakra' of planet earth, enjoys global significance (Samet, 1987).

SACRED LANDSCAPES AND TOPOPHILIA

At a time when geographical mobility is greater than ever before, Glastonbury furnishes powerful evidence of 'topophilia': the belief that certain locations are inherently powerful and exude a heightened sense of place. People consider all sorts of power (healing, revelatory, restorative, planetary) to be vested in locations such as Glastonbury, Iona and Stonehenge, and such sites are frequently the focus of myths, corroborative legends and

Fig 5.1: Glastonbury - significant sites
personal experience narratives. Moreover, in addition to clearly marked or constructed sacred space, there is a view that entire landscapes have been meaningfully moulded into symbolic shapes, such as the Glastonbury Zodiac (Maltwood, 1964; Caine, 1992). In addition to the Zodiac (which some consider to be the true 'round table' of Arthurian myth), some now discern a reclining Goddess figure in the landscape. Two different figures have recently been pointed out to me: one whose womb is covered by the Lady Chapel of Glastonbury Abbey, and another whose belly is formed by Chalice Hill, with the red waters of Chalice Well as her menstrual flow. Some now see the outline of a swan encompassing the area of Glastonbury, claiming this to be a sign that it is under the special care of the Goddess Brighid. All this is taking very literally the idea of sacred landscape – that landscape communicates its sacred character directly to those willing to see and understand.

PILGRIMAGE

Travelling with a purpose to sites considered more sacred or special than others plays a considerable part in the lives of diverse spiritual seekers. Pilgrimage is being developed by new groups, and rediscovered by more traditional adherents. Examples of the latter are the Baptists who flock to Iona or the Evangelicals who seek transformation in Toronto. Traditional (or what are perceived to be traditional) pilgrimages are being revived and new pilgrimages are being created. Journeying has long been associated with individual spiritual welfare and advancement. Frequently it is seen as part of a negotiation with the divine, often with an element of choice of location. Frequently, too, it takes place without the full approval or control of officialdom.

Glastonbury serves a variety of pilgrims – Christian, Pagan, New Age, Buddhist to name but a few – and hosts pilgrimages formal and informal, traditional and non-traditional, individual and group (Bowman, 1993a). It is a multivalent destination, an end-point and a location for spiritual journeying, with guides of your choice for the Glastonbury of your choice. The main object of Christian pilgrimage in Glastonbury is the Abbey, the focus one weekend each summer for an Anglican Pilgrimage on Saturday, and a Catholic Pilgrimage the next day. Gothic Image offers ‘Mystical Tours’ of Glastonbury, ‘England's Jerusalem and gateway to the spirit realm, a place of natural enchantment’ (tour leaflet). The 1997 Gatekeepers Trust ‘Pilgrims Weekend’ focused on the Glastonbury Zodiac, particularly ‘wells on each of the Zodiacal signs and their use as spiritual gateways’ (publicity leaflet). Naturally, a variety of shops and services exist to cater for the needs of this plethora of pilgrims.
As I have shown above, the current spiritual milieu in Glastonbury exemplifies a number of trends characteristic of late-twentieth-century religiosity. However, in order to contextualise what is happening in the much-publicised 'alternative' scene, and to understand how Christianity is both contributing to and participating in contemporary spirituality, I shall now turn to vernacular and 'alternative' Christianity in Glastonbury.

'Set ALTERNATIVE' CHRISTIANITY IN GLASTONBURY

SIGNIFICANT STORIES

Much of Glastonbury's success as a Christian centre has been built on vernacular religion. Local legend is an important feature of popular belief, since it roots matters of universal concern in one specific place; it localises the sacred. Glastonbury is awash with legend. (As one woman commented, 'There's a new myth created every day around Glastonbury.') Three sets of myths, concerning Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus and Arthur, have been particularly important to Glastonbury's Christian lore.

According to the first set of myths, Joseph of Arimathea, who provided a tomb for Jesus after the crucifixion, was sent by St Philip to spread Christianity to England. Landing with his companions at Glastonbury by boat, 'weary all' from their journey, Joseph is said to have thrust his staff into the ground on what is now known as Wearyall Hill, where it flourished to become the Glastonbury Thorn, which flowers both in Spring and around Christmas. For many Glastonians, Wearyall Hill is the significant site, and the link with Joseph through the thorn is considered very precious. Joseph reputedly built a simple church dedicated to St Mary at Glastonbury, on the site where the Abbey later stood. Joseph is also said to have brought with him some sort of vessel, which became known as the 'Grail' (Carley, 1996). The vicar of St John’s Church reports that visitors frequently come looking for Joseph’s tomb, having read, or heard, that it lies in the church. Early Welsh Calvinists played upon the idea that Joseph founded a primitive and pure Celtic church in Britain before the advent of missionaries from Rome, a claim which still resonates for many today.

The connection between Joseph, the Grail and Glastonbury is significant in relation to the second set, the Arthurian myths, in which the quest for the Grail forms an important motif. After his last battle, Arthur was said to have been taken for healing to the Isle of Avalon, which some identified with Glastonbury (Ashe, 1957; Carley, 1996); according to legend he ‘rests’ there still, waiting to reappear at some great hour of need. This legendary association seemed to be confirmed when, around 1190, it was announced that the bodies of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere had been found in
the Abbey grounds, and they were reburied with great ceremony within the Abbey the following century. Although not strictly speaking religious relics, the remains of Arthur and his queen were a great draw for pilgrims, and the Abbey provided enduring ‘proof’ of the connection between Glastonbury, Arthur and Avalon in popular tradition.

The third set of myths concerns Jesus. One aspect of vernacular Christianity, ‘the tales which derive from the Bible and its silences’ (Utley, 1945: 1), has been and continues to be particularly significant for Glastonbury. One of the great silences of the New Testament surrounds what Jesus was doing between the age of twelve and thirty, and a variety of answers to this question have provided endless speculations and gap-filling in relation to Glastonbury. In a set of extrapolations from the Joseph of Arimathea myth, Joseph is said to have been a rich merchant who was accustomed to visiting the west of England in search of the tin and/or lead mined in the area, while Jesus is said to have been his nephew. What could be more natural, the logic runs, than for Joseph to have brought Jesus along on his business trips? This idea has been most famously and eloquently reflected in Blake’s words:

And did those feet in ancient times
Walk upon England’s mountains green?
And was the Holy Lamb of God
On England’s pleasant pastures seen?

The idea that Jesus came to England, specifically to Glastonbury, has been a tremendously significant myth for English Christians, and is still an important draw for Christians today. As one Catholic priest said to me of the legends, ‘It might have happened. I would like to believe it happened’. Some are less tentative on this point; typical of this genre is Kirsten Parsons who claims in Reflections on Glastonbury:

It does seem reasonable to assume that Joseph of Arimathea took the boy Jesus with him on some of these trips, and that our Lord came to love the Isle of Avalon and its glorious setting. So He undoubtedly came one day and decided to stay, spending the remainder of His time before commencing His ministry in Galilee. (1965: 6)

The speculation continues. There is the British Israelite prediction that Christ will appear in Glastonbury at the time of the Second Coming. There is the belief that Jesus came to Britain, to Glastonbury in particular, seeking instruction at the great Druidic teaching centre believed by some to have existed there. Similarly, in an updated version of the tradition, some now
talk of Christ coming to Glastonbury 'to walk along the ley lines' (*The Guardian*, 9 June 86, p. 10).

**Christian custom**

Each December, at the Anglican parish church of St John the Baptist, Glastonbury, there is a 'thorn-cutting ceremony' at which sprays of flowers from the Holy Thorn in the church grounds are cut in the presence of the Mayor, members of the town council, children from the Church of England primary school and other Glastonians. These sprays are then sent to the Queen and the Queen Mother. The ceremony provides the occasion for the retelling of the Holy Thorn legend, highlighting the significance of its flowering around the time of the two major Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, and the singing by the schoolchildren of 'The Holy Thorn' song. This is very much a local custom and attracts few outsiders.

In St John's, Glastonbury, a free leaflet entitled 'The Glastonbury Thorn' outlines 'The Facts, The Legends and The Meaning'. Under the heading of 'botanical information', the leaflet explains that the Thorn 'can only be grown by grafting it into a native Hawthorn'. Under 'Meaning', the leaflet goes on:

> Each generation of seekers after Truth has been grafted into the family of the Church, made part of the Body of Christ, and shares His love.

However, probably most apposite for Glastonbury is this comment at the end of the 'Legends' section:

> REMEMBER –The importance of a legend is not whether it can be proved, but whether it helps us find the truth.

Nevertheless, while many Christians are attracted to Glastonbury precisely because of the vernacular traditions, it has been claimed that some are deeply uncomfortable with such aspects:

> the 'liberal establishment' in the churches finds the Christian traditions of Glastonbury (i.e. St Joseph of Arimathea; the visit of Our Lord, etc.) acutely embarrassing, and as part of the 'lunatic fringe.' (Ives, 1998)

While St John's plays an important part in preserving and presenting tradition, however, it is worth noting that many members of the church have experienced 'God's Blessing' (the term now used in preference to the 'Toronto Blessing'). For some this has led not only to a sense of healing and
renewal, but a feeling of increased confidence in relation to 'alternative' groups. The vicar who thought that his ministry would be with 'New Agers' has found himself 'midwife to a Christian revival'. Both traditional and more experiential forms of worship are available to the congregation of St John's, and people from other churches attend the services, where the Blessing continues to be offered and received.

Celtic connections
Christianity in Glastonbury has long played on its Celtic connections. The Abbey claimed links with a variety of Celtic saints, including St Columba, St David, St Bridget and St Patrick; one abbot insisted that St Patrick was buried there! For some, the Celtic link supports the druidic connection, implying a smooth transition from the old religion to the new, in which the Celtic church both gained esoteric knowledge and remained closer to 'native' religion. The Abbey shop sells an array of Celtic and Arthurian merchandise, as well as jewellery made from Holy Thorn leaves.

The Celtic Orthodox Church
Glastonbury is also home to a branch of the Celtic Orthodox Church, which sees itself as successor to, and draws inspiration from, the Celtic Church in Glastonbury and the saints of Britain. Its mission is to 'restore' orthodoxy to the British Isles. Prominent on Glastonbury High Street now is 'The Orthodox Way', premises of the Celtic Orthodox Church, containing a shop, a library and the Chapel of the Mother of God and the Saints of Glastonbury. (There is also a little Glastonbury Thorn in the back garden.) The Orthodox priest is deliberately 'high profile' in his manner of dress; a very obvious symbol of the presence of Christianity, and specifically Orthodoxy, in Glastonbury. Some of his regular worshippers maintain their denominational allegiances elsewhere, but are attracted by and welcomed to the Orthodox liturgy. The Orthodox priest offers tours of Glastonbury and takes part in the Anglican Pilgrimage procession. It is now his 'tradition' to bless the waters of Chalice Well at Epiphany.

Ecumenical Christianity
In 1993 an ecumenical group, The Quest Community, was founded 'specifically to work among the many and varied visitors to Glastonbury' (Quest leaflet). This group took its inspiration from the Iona Community (see Chapter 6) and draws 'inspiration from the Celtic tradition, whilst holding on to what is good in our own varied church backgrounds' (Glastonbury Thorn, 4, Winter 1996–7: 8). Quest's core community
members have crosses made from Glastonbury Thorn, a symbol of 'Christian witness taking root by settling' (Glastonbury Thorn, 4, Winter 1996–7: 1), and come from a variety of denominational backgrounds. In 1996 the community took part in the Beltane Well-Dressing at Chalice Well and the White Spring, having been invited to give Christian blessings at each site. A Celtic blessing was considered appropriate for the occasion. In a variation of the rag well motif, the Quest Community has a 'prayer curtain' or 'prayer hanging', onto which people were invited to tie wool, symbolising their prayer. The hanging was a gift, embroidered at the top with the words 'In my Father's House there are many rooms' and at the bottom 'Blessed Be', 'a greeting which is meaningful to both Christian and Pagan' (Glastonbury Thorn, 4, Winter, 1996–7: 4). With their shared respect for the Celtic past, such interactions and 'cross-creativity' provide examples of the ways in which Glastonbury functions as a melting-pot for belief and praxis.

PAGAN–CHRISTIAN–PAGAN BORROWING

Pagans are borrowing from Christians, Christians from Pagans. It may be a truism that Christianity ‘christianised’ aspects of pre-existing pagan practice, but in the effort to reassert Paganism there is now conscious borrowing and adaptation from Christian practice. In Glastonbury the custom of tying rags to certain trees and honouring wells persisted in the vernacular Christian tradition; although it is now most obvious at the largely pagan White Spring, this is a recent development.

There are those in Glastonbury who are self-consciously ‘bridge-building’, and in some quarters both sides appear to be willing to learn from each other. One minister in the United Reformed Church claimed that working with ‘alternatives’ in Glastonbury had taught her to appreciate the value of meditation, candles and flowers. A Catholic priest responded to this by saying that he was saddened by the impoverished understanding of Christianity which seemed so prevalent nowadays, and that people were looking outside Christianity for the very spiritual fulfilment and practice it traditionally contained. However, the fact remains that it was through interaction with the ‘alternative’ community, not with the Catholic church, that such insights had come.

Much of Glastonbury's drawing power as a Christian site might be described as 'alternative'. It is a colourful, creative contrast to the pared-down version often presented as normative in academic accounts of Christianity, and it relies on a long history of vernacular religious myth-making and custom. In keeping with contemporary trends, some Christians
are exercising a degree of 'mix-and-match' within Christianity which goes beyond denominational choice, attending the services of other Christian traditions, experiencing healing, experimenting with Celtic Christianity and interacting with other groups in the town. Christians are keeping Glastonbury customs and legends alive, adding to the store of myth with personal experience narratives and corroborative legends.13

In many accounts of contemporary spirituality in Glastonbury, Christianity seems either to be absent or to be presented as an endangered species. However, as we have seen, it is as vibrant, responsive and innovative as the other strands of spirituality in the town.

Precursors of current trends

Many would argue that much of what is happening in Glastonbury now was set in motion a long time ago by aliens, Druids, Jesus, Celtic Christians, Arthur or ascended masters, to name but a few contenders. However, as other authors in this volume (Green, Tingay) indicate, interesting parallels can be drawn between the present situation and characters, ideas and events at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the theories and writings of Dr John Arthur Goodchild (1851-1914), for example, we find speculation on Glastonbury's Celtic connections, the assumption of a smooth transition between Druidry and the Celtic church, and a belief in the survival of an ancient Irish cult venerating the female aspect of the Deity which became attached to the figure of Bride (see Benham, 1993). Goodchild also discerned in the landscape of Glastonbury the ancient 'Salmon of St Bride', a monument he considered equal in importance to Stonehenge. It is worth noting that a number of people involved with the last fin de siècle Celtic revival had Glastonbury connections, including Goodchild, William Sharp (aka Fiona Macleod), and the artist John Duncan (Benham, 1993).

Meanwhile, in addition to bringing gematric and numerological principles to his excavations of Glastonbury Abbey, Frederick Bligh Bond (1864-1945) also claimed to have received instruction, through the medium of automatic writing, from a former Glastonbury monk named 'Johannes'. Bond, in the preface to his book The Company of Avalon (1924), speaks of:

the Company of Avalon, a group of souls who are impregnated with the devotional ideal which was translated into architectural symbol by the Benedictine brethren of old time. These, the 'Elect of Avalon', combine as a united spiritual force in an effort which is really one of response to those of us who, of our own volition, have attuned ourselves to their 'vibrations'. (Benham, 1993: 206)
There has also been an important Theosophical connection with Glastonbury. The early meetings of the Bath Lodge reveal Goodchild speaking on ‘The Teaching of Fiona Macleod’ (July, 1906), Frederick Bligh Bond on ‘Symbolism in Architecture’ (November, 1907) and ‘Some Psychic Happenings’ (December, 1908), and Wellesley Tudor Pole on ‘Colour and Number Symbolism’ (July, 1906). These and other topics – ‘The Druids: Their Beliefs and Customs’, ‘The Mystery of Ra’, ‘The Brotherhood of the Future’ – would not be out of place on the current programme of the Isle of Avalon Foundation. Dion Fortune’s involvement in the Christian Mystic Lodge which was interpreting Christianity in terms of Theosophy, and vice-versa, (Benham, 1993: 255) should also not be overlooked.

It is clear that in these decades there was also a variety of pilgrimage activity, with small groups and individuals such as Goodchild, Bligh Bond, the Tudor Poles and Alice Buckton following their own pilgrimage routes within Glastonbury, incorporating rituals such as tying white rags on hawthorn trees or meditating at significant spots. One might see the universalism of contemporary Glastonbury prefigured in Alice Buckton’s flyleaf dedication to Eager Heart (1904): ‘Inscribed to all who see and worship the One in the Many’ (Benham, 1993: 150). What is interesting, as Benham points out, is that all of the above-mentioned, however idiosyncratic their beliefs and practices, considered themselves Christians or in their own way honoured Christianity.

These examples indicate that much of what we have seen in Glastonbury in the latter decades of the twentieth century has not in fact been quite as new or revolutionary as may at first sight appear. There has been continuity as well as change.

Glastonbury and the ‘New Age’

Glastonbury has been hailed by the media as ‘epicentre of the New Age in England’. That epithet might seem deserved in terms of its crystal shops, bookshops, Archangel Michael’s Soul Therapy Centre offering ‘tools for personal and planetary transformation’, its ‘client cult’ activities such as the many workshops and lectures and the courses offered at the Isle of Avalon Foundation. However, ‘New Age’ is a notoriously contested term (see Introduction) which has frequently been used as shorthand for ‘alternative’. In Glastonbury, as we have seen, much of what has latterly been dubbed ‘New Age’ is an extension and public expression of what existed in the vernacular tradition and in the religious experimentation of earlier periods.
Nevertheless, some are actively anticipating a New Age – 'a new culture, an emerging, sacred reality that’s going to change everything in our world' – and feel that Glastonbury will have an important part to play in it. As one man said of Glastonbury’s legendary Arthurian connection: ‘The whole idea that [Arthur] lies here sleeping and will rise again, some people interpret that as meaning he’ll rise again to lead us into a New Age.’ However, one could argue that in Glastonbury even the notion of a ‘New Age’ is nothing new. According to tradition, Austin Ringwode, last of the Glastonbury monks, made the deathbed prophecy that ‘The Abbey will one day be repaired and rebuilt for the like [sic] worship which has ceased; and then peace and plenty will for a long time abound’ (Ashe, 1957: 362). A member of RILKO (Research into Lost Knowledge Organisation), who regards Glastonbury as the ‘New Jerusalem’, stressed to me the importance of ‘rebuilding the Temple’ at Glastonbury, to restore not only the spiritual well-being of the nation but ‘Britain’s greatness’.16

The most ambitious project proposed at present, and one very much in keeping with the ‘global’ status Glastonbury now claims, is the plan by the Isle of Avalon Foundation for the building of a universal Sanctuary in Glastonbury:

We hold a vision to build and maintain a great Sanctuary in Glastonbury, ancient Isle of Avalon, dedicated to the divine essence within all spiritual paths. Our aim is to create a sacred space of prayer, peace, meditation and healing in the centre of Glastonbury where pilgrims of all faiths and spiritual beliefs can meet and celebrate together. We believe this is a wholly unique venture on the planet now, which will progress religious and spiritual ideas and structures in ways which we cannot yet imagine . . . Drawing on the traditions of the past and present, it will be a seed of spiritual regeneration for the third millennium. (www.glastonbury.co.uk/ioaf/sanctuary.html)

Conclusion

While in no way underplaying the differences in outlook and tensions which undoubtedly exist within Glastonbury, there is a sense in which the ‘alternative’ is not quite so threatening or alien as it might seem, and the polarisation between alternative spirituality and Christianity is not as extreme as might be assumed. Despite occasional flashpoints, Glastonbury seems to deal well with pluralism. One Christian minister commented that people in Glastonbury tend to ask ‘What is your truth?’, rather than ‘What is the truth?’ He found that if he talked about ‘my truth’ rather than ‘Truth’ in dialogue with those in the ‘alternative’ community, there could be meaningful exchanges.
As befits an environment where the avoidance of an ‘either/or’ attitude is prevalent, there is an acceptance in Glastonbury that one revelation may shed light on another, that following one way need not negate another, that ideas and practices from one tradition might transfer to another and that existing beliefs and praxis can be enhanced by new revelations or developments. Such insights are implicit in both vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

Within the Christian and alternative communities in Glastonbury, there is a spectrum of beliefs and practices. Myths are being made and recycled, customs are being created, and there is a seeming abundance of spiritual experience. There are undoubtedly similarities between alternative spirituality and features of the vernacular religion which has always existed alongside what the academy regards as ‘official’ religion. The dynamism, creativity and versatility of both vernacular religion and alternative spirituality are amply displayed in Glastonbury. The challenge for scholars is to recognise, value and study them as legitimate, coherent aspects of religion per se.

Notes

1. This quotation is taken from the 1995 Isle of Avalon Foundation Tour brochure.
2. Since 1985, a group from St John's, Frome (a small town near Glastonbury), has been dressing and blessing a well in the centre of the town each Spring. According to the local paper, 'Frome is one of the few towns in the country to continue the religious tradition known as well-dressing.' In 1998 'Hydrangea, chrysanthemum and carnation petals were used... along with dried bread, toast and cornflakes for the face and hands of Jesus.'
3. The Ramala Teachers were described as 'belonging to a Spiritual Hierarchy, on a higher plane of existence, responsible for helping humanity through this time of crisis' (Introduction, The Wisdom of Ramala, 1986). The communications were received in the Ramala Centre’s Sanctuary of the Holy Grail.
4. The Isle of Avalon Foundation, formerly known as the University of Avalon, was founded in 1991 with ‘the vision of creating a recognised University of the Spirit in Avalon’ (1994 Prospectus).
5. When I asked one Druid what he thought about the Glastonbury Zodiac, he opined that it was ‘fanciful’. He then explained that what the landscape really revealed was a huge reclining Goddess figure, one breast of which is the Tor.
6. The same outline viewed from a different perspective has been identified as male genitalia with an erect penis.
7. In a variant of this legend, the tree is said to have grown from a thorn of the Cross of Thorns brought to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea.
8. Parsons (1965: 12) makes the definite, but wholly inaccurate, assertion that: Joseph died 27th of July AD 82. His sarcophagus can be seen in St John's Church, Glastonbury. The epitaph on his grave (in Latin) translates: 'I came to the Britons after I buried CHRIST. I taught – I rest.'
9. The Holy Thorn

There is a very special tree
We call the Holy Thorn,
That flowers in December,
The month that Christ was born.

We’re told this very special tree
Grew from a staff of thorn,
Brought by a man called Joseph
From the land where Christ was born.

It now is our tradition
To send a sprig of thorn,
To greet Her Gracious Majesty
On the day that Christ was born.

10. Originally part of the British Orthodox Church, which in 1994 became a diocese of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, Glastonbury and some other BOC churches 'broke away' in 1997 to become the Celtic Orthodox Church.

11. A St John’s Church member, commenting on Quest’s interest in the Celtic Church, said, ‘We have renewal, we don’t need revival.’

12. The members include Quakers, Methodists and Anglicans. The latter tend to be connected with St Benedict’s rather than St John’s.

13. In The Orthodox Way, for example, the relationship of the contemporary Celtic Orthodox Church to the historical Celtic Church is expressed visually in icons of Celtic and British saints painted in Orthodox style. One such icon, ‘Our Lady of Glastonbury surrounded by Celtic Saints’, was purchased in 1997 by an American Orthodox couple who donated it to the ‘Celtic Saints Corner’ of their church in Atlanta, Georgia. Visitors to the Glastonbury shop are now shown a letter from this couple describing how, between late December 1997 and early January 1998, a sweet fragrance was smelt around the flowering sprig of Glastonbury Thorn in Mary’s right hand and the Christ Child’s feet. This was interpreted in Atlanta as a sign of the rightness of that church moving back to the ‘Old Calendar’. This is reminiscent of an incident at the time of the shift from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar in 1752, when the timing of the Christmas flowering of the thorn in Glastonbury was popularly regarded as proof of the invalidity of the new dating system (Vickery, 1979; Bowman, forthcoming).

14. I am indebted to Kevin Tingay for information on the Bath lodge of the Theosophical Society. See Monteith (Chapter 6) for further information on Wellesley Tudor Pole and his connection with Iona.

15. Alice Buckton (1867–1944), radical educator, poet and playwright, lived at Chalice Well in Glastonbury for thirty years. She founded the Guild of Glastonbury and Street Festival Players who in 1914 performed Buckton’s play The Coming of Bride, a dramatised biography of the saint which culminated in Bride’s arrival in the Glastonbury area and her foretelling of the coming of King Arthur, the Round Table and the Quest for the Holy Grail (Benham, 1993: 143–69).

16. Somewhat less ambitiously, the Celtic Orthodox priest has proposed that the Abbey grounds be restored as a religious site of permanent pilgrimage, ‘an “ecumenical” centre, supported by Churches Together in England’, with daily liturgical worship and a permanent altar with canopy (Ives, 1998).
ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY IN GLASTONBURY

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the island of Iona will first be characterised as a social construct of Christians and other groups involved in diverse 'pilgrimages' to and settlements on the island in the period 1928–1996. Second, examples are given of how specific groups focused on Iona have initiated and sustained an interest in both Christian healing and what might be classed as 'New Age' healing, developing in the process a fragmented discourse of healing and wholeness.

Iona is a tiny island at the tip of the Ross of Mull in the Inner Hebrides. For most visitors, travelling there involves a long journey to Oban on the Scottish west coast, then a ferry to Mull, and then another ferry from Fionnaphort to the island. Although by today's standards transport is relatively simple, the island's remoteness still gives the impression of isolation, solitude and tranquillity. This has led to the romanticisation of the site and of its religious significance.

IONA AND THE IONA COMMUNITY

When George MacLeod (1895–1991), a distinguished Church of Scotland minister, founded the Iona Community in 1938, he did so for urban activists within the Church, not as a community of contemplatives. This has meant, in essence, that the activities in the island's Abbey – which the Iona Community restored over a period of years – were aimed at the mainland and that the concept of a 'pilgrimage site' remains alien to most Iona Community members and other visitors who, unlike the thousands of daily tourists in high summer, stay for more than just a few hours. The Iona Community finds it hard to live with the erroneous expectations of visitors who tend to prefer the contemplative mode (Goliher, 1989: 79ff.). Later it will be shown how one Iona Community member is addressing the tension
between activism and contemplation and has described the link in terms of healing.

Apart from the Border Abbeys and the Roman Catholic grotto at Carfin in Lanarkshire, the Scottish pilgrimage site with most claim to authenticity is St Ninian's settlement at Whithorn in Galloway, which was established in 397 CE, one hundred and sixty-six years before St Columba arrived on Iona from Ireland (Hill, 1997). All these sites have some claim to healing, but only Carfin has any ongoing concern with healing. Iona, on the other hand, was the only site to fall outside the control of a church hierarchy and, whilst the others were kept under control, the privately owned ruins of Iona were the target of various projects in the 1920s. The acquisition by George McLeod of a lease of Iona Abbey from the Iona Cathedral Trustees and the founding by him of the Iona Community, allowed the radical development of a theology of which 'divine healing' was part. This in turn, along with the increasing fame of the island, encouraged its adoption by other groups and interests.

The Iona Community is not a church or an institution which demands rigid conformity. Rather, it offers an open-ended milieu in which individuals may develop an attitude towards 'wholeness'. It has a 'Rule' which is currently under review, although healing and wholeness are not directly referred to in its text: it calls for a degree of spirituality, openness to a communal lifestyle and a political commitment which has usually been to the Left. Over the years, the membership of around 200 has lost its clerical majority, and many of those who have entered recently come from a medical background. Each member is expected to work out his or her commitment practically, normally in a project involving social change.

'Wholeness' currently appears as a topic for morning prayer on the twentieth day of each month, while the fifth day concerns 'the Church's ministry of Healing'. There is also a weekly service of 'Divine Healing' focusing upon healing and 'wholeness', when there is the opportunity to go forward for the laying-on of hands. George MacLeod had instituted prayers of intercession for the sick and wounded at the beginning of the Second World War, when demands for prayers arrived on Iona with a great urgency. After the war, the laying-on of hands was tentatively and carefully introduced and largely confined to the clergy. The service of Divine Healing has continued weekly to the present day, but has become open to almost anyone showing a genuine interest in leading the service. It has always been maintained that Divine Healing is a gift of God to all and not to a few 'healers'.

The 'history' of the island and its many ruins provides character and ambience. The reconstructed buildings of today are in fact closer to the
monastery’s medieval architecture than to the early Celtic settlement. There is a story about the training of visitor guides which is known to all who have an intimate knowledge of Iona: at the beginning of each season, they gather to decide where MacBeth is buried this year. This anecdote in particular is symptomatic of certain attitudes towards history which McArthur (1995) suggests have been characteristic of the Iona Community. She argues that many of the island’s historical sites are artefacts of a mythical history. For instance, she suggests that ‘the hermit’s cell’ may in fact not be the remains of such, but a structure built for milking cows during the 1890s (ibid.: 15). In general she claims that the Iona Cathedral Trustees have at various times over the years offended the native islanders over their strictures and changes to historical traditions, for the sake of archaeological and architectural probity. This has probably accelerated due to the recent Celtic revival.

The concept of conflicting ideas within a site of pilgrimage is fundamental to any understanding of Iona as a social construct. Eade and Sallnow (eds, 1991) examine the variety of discourses which may arise from the vested interests of those engaged in a pilgrimage site. They argue that, contrary to the model of Durkheim which stresses the community and solidarity of pilgrimages, and the alternative model of pilgrimage sites as being a place for the restoration of individuality, pilgrimage sites become the sum total of the different discourses represented. They assert that it is the conflicting realities of the contributions of different interests which make up the richness of the site. On Iona we can identify various discourses both within the setting of the Iona Community and beyond, which make up the type of model suggested by Eade and Sallnow (ibid.: 15). An introductory list of these discourses can be briefly sketched: within the Iona Community there might be ‘Divine Healing’, peace issues, ecological discourse and spirituality; whereas within the peripheral ‘New Age’ community there might be leyline discourse, healing and energy/cosmological discourse. I will only deal in this chapter with Divine Healing in the Iona Community, which is in fact an activity focused not only on Iona but conducted internationally by the Iona Prayer Circle; and with energy (psi) healing and other systems which involve cosmological discourse in ‘New Age’ parlance, whose advocates have over the years attached themselves to the island.

Reader (1993) maintains that sites produce different meanings that are:

a) individualistic;
b) multifarious;
c) arise from some common feature on to which all pilgrims can latch.
Miracles or healings are often the foundation of such meanings, particularly in the past but even in the present day. I contend that the concentration on Divine Healing by the Iona Community has created a meaning that goes beyond the original intention of the Community's founder, George MacLeod, and has allowed other groups to develop their concerns for healing and wholeness in connection with Iona, including tourists and 'New Age'-minded visitors. Evidence for this assertion may be found in leaflets published by other bodies with establishments on Iona, as well as by Jones's (1994: 152) assertion that the Iona Community is famous for its search for 'wholeness'. In fact, all of the Community's interests were founded on an incarnational theology stressing social justice, and MacLeod himself became interested in nuclear disarmament and economics.

A social construct is most easily identified by comparison with a potentially similar situation which has not so developed. Thus Iona might be compared with Whithorn in southwest Scotland. St Ninian came to Whithorn in 397 CE after studying in Rome and visiting St Martin of Tours in France (Patterson, 1991; O'Riordain, 1997). Ninian's aim was to convert the Britons of Galloway and further afield. Thus he brought Christianity to mainland Scotland more than a century-and-a-half before St Columba settled on Iona in 563 CE. Nevertheless, Columba has always overshadowed Ninian and Whithorn has been bypassed by the glamour of Iona. A factor in Iona's supremacy has been the classic biography of St Columba by Adomnan, which glamorised his relationship to Celtic and Druidical practices and gave the modern impression that Celtic theology accommodated the worship of nature characteristic of the Celts and Druids (Sharpe, 1995). Adomnan's biography also sought to establish the healing powers of Columba by illustrating his supremacy over the myths of Celtic culture. The motive for this is generally regarded as political: the establishment of Columba as a figure of strength. By contrast the biographer of Ninian, Aelred of Rievaulx, was commissioned to write an academic biography (Squire, 1969: 111ff.), dwelling on Ninian's alleged miracles (Hill 1997: 19ff.) but without the political and personal intensity of Adomnan. Adomnan tried to link Columba's miracles to Celtic and Druidic practices for political reasons, but Aelred felt no such impulse.

Other voices: Anthroposophy, spiritual healing, 'New Age'

In addition, the cult of Iona stems from a much more eclectic base than that of Whithorn. Iona became popular as a tourist resort for the rich in the very late 1800s when holidays on the Clyde coast became affordable by the
masses from Glasgow (MacArthur, 1991). The displaced class of visitors and holiday-makers moved to the West Highlands and some reached Iona, which developed rapidly in terms of accommodation. Some were inspired by the privately owned ruins of the Abbey and Nunnery on the island. By the 1920s and 1930s these included not only members of the clergy, but rich philanthropists. Many engaged in the fashionable pursuits of psychic research and the archaeology of sacred sites such as Glastonbury. The peculiar intermingling of mainstream Christianity with Anthroposophical and psychic interests established a climate which was to become dominant in the 1960s.

In founding the Iona Community, George MacLeod forged close links with Sir David Russell, who was a millionaire mill-owner in Fife, and shared with him a love of Iona. In 1929 Russell had established the Iona Fellowship, which organised retreats on the island for divinity students (Macintyre, 1994: 109ff.). However, despite being an elder of the Church of Scotland, Russell showed considerable interest in Theosophy and Anthroposophy. He was also greatly influenced by Wellesley Tudor Pole, with whom he corresponded almost every day. Having discovered psychic and healing powers during the First World War, Tudor Pole developed a mediumship which led him into many areas of mysticism. Tudor Pole recounts his experiences in a book entitled *The Great War* (Macintyre, 1994: 124) including a search in Istanbul for hidden treasures associated with Glastonbury (ibid.; Benham, 1993). In his many negotiations over the rebuilding of Iona Abbey, George MacLeod subsequently learned of Tudor Pole’s beliefs and the healing powers he had exercised.

In the early days of *The Coracle*, the journal of the Iona Community, there appeared three articles by Karl König under the overall title of ‘Integration’. These articles represented a manifestation of Anthroposophy within the annals of the Iona Community and they were evidently invited by George MacLeod who also liked to use the term ‘integration’. From the first article, it became clear that both men used ‘integration’ and ‘wholeness’ interchangeably to cover everything from housing to personal well-being. ‘Integration’ was in 1939 the nearest term to ‘wholeness’ in the vocabulary of George MacLeod and it is reasonable to assume that it came from König. König’s second article was entitled ‘Integration in Medicine’; the third dealt with agriculture. MacLeod greatly admired König’s work in Aberdeenshire, where he had founded the Camphill Community for profoundly disabled children, run on Anthroposophical principles. MacLeod was not convinced by Anthroposophy but admired its radicalism in the face of the Church’s perceived inertia (Ferguson, 1990).

MacLeod wrote fifteen theses on Divine Healing that were never
published, but in which he stressed that healing comes from many sources and was not confined either to the medical profession or the Church (Monteith 1997: 90ff.). To emphasise this point, he entered into correspondence in the 1950s with a Mr L.E. Eeman of Baker Street, London. The correspondence began with an approach by the latter to the then Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Spiritual Healing, in which Eeman attempted to gain support for scientific research in NHS hospitals into the laying-on of hands. Eeman, a healer for thirty-six years, wanted to confine his research to casualty patients who were bruised, in the hope that the ‘healing touch would remove the discolouration’. MacLeod subsequently read one of Eeman’s books, *Co-operative Healing: The Curative Properties of Human Radiations*, and became so convinced of ‘Odic forces’ (a term proposed in the mid-nineteenth century by Baron von Reichenbach to denote electrical and electromagnetic forces within the body [Kahili King, 1992: 38]), that he used the term several times in lectures.

This correspondence coincided with Sir David Russell’s decision in 1951 to set up the ‘Fundamental Research Centre’ in London to investigate ‘new energy forms’ in the treatment of cancer. Various other kinds of treatment were developed and were no doubt discussed with George MacLeod on many occasions, as he and Russell corresponded frequently during these years about the Iona Community. Russell’s friend Tudor Pole was also working in the field of psychic healing at the time. He wrote of George MacLeod: ‘In my opinion . . . [he] is on very shaky ground when he says he cannot find any authority in the New Testament for the idea that healers in this world can be helped by those who have passed on, or by others in the Unseen World’ (cited in Macintyre, 1994: 246). Russell was very interested in faith healing and presumably this too was part of ongoing correspondence both with George MacLeod and Tudor Pole.

A little later, in the mid-1960s the Columba Hotel on Iona was bought by a certain John Walters who undertook to facilitate the Iona Community by gearing meals and accommodation to the Abbey’s programme. The Iona Community actively encouraged Walters to set up the Columba Hotel, but the goodwill between the two parties faded slightly in the 1970s when the Wrekin Trust, a ‘New Age’ body, began to run separate conferences in the hotel inspired and led by Sir George Trevelyan.

Whilst the Iona Community was wooing John Walters, another ‘New Age’ activist, Peter Caddy of the Findhorn community in Moray, northeast Scotland, contacted Walters to offer to work in the hotel for a summer to help establish a link between the newly-formed Findhorn group and Iona. This link was important to Caddy’s wife Eileen, whose psychic ‘guidance’ was quite adamant when it came to the island. She thought that both Peter
and she should run the Columba Hotel, thus ensuring that most of the accommodation on the island was available to 'New Age' sympathisers. It would also allow them to develop other strategies such as demonstrating that the island could be self-sufficient in vegetables and other produce (Caddy, 1996: 253).

Why were Peter and Eileen Caddy so interested in linking Iona and Findhorn? Eileen Caddy believed strongly in a sacred triangle of Iona, Findhorn and Glastonbury, as is illustrated by her ‘guidance’ to Peter before his first pilgrimage to Iona to meet John Walters:

It is a linking up with a very strong Centre of Light. This is a triangle, Glastonbury, Iona, Findhorn. You may not see the significance of this now, but you will do in the days to come. Peter is to be open to every contact, and there will be several very important ones. They will be drawn to him. My blessings are on this journey. Many important events will spring from it. (Caddy, 1996: 238)

Later still, in the 1980s, an American couple spent some time on the island. Concluding that the island lacked a quiet retreat centre, Lindley and Gerry Fosbrooke bought the former Free Church manse, which they renamed ‘Duncraig’, and set up the Cornerstone Foundation to provide retreat facilities, mainly for burned-out ministers and others – particularly Americans – desiring a quiet time. They called the house ‘Christian’, and the Cornerstone Foundation still stresses this. Thus was introduced yet another type of search for healing and wholeness, this time as a reaction against the activities of the Columba Hotel and also the perceived frenetic lifestyle of the Iona Community. The Church of Scotland minister on Iona at the time, Harry Miller, was against the activities of those associated with the Columba Hotel and vehemently attacked its encouragement of Spiritualism, but he was also highly critical of what he regarded as the superficial preaching and teaching of the Iona Community. He was, therefore, sympathetic to the aims of the Cornerstone Foundation.

The examples of the Columba Hotel and Duncraig, then, illustrate the tensions both between Christian and 'New Age' parties, and even within and between different Christian groups, as to the appropriate way to use the restorative qualities of Iona.

**Discourses encapsulated: the MacManaway family**

To recapitulate, four distinct areas of discourse in relation to Iona and healing have been identified: tourism; Divine Healing, 'New Age' approaches and the island's harnessing to various mainland projects. Major
Bruce MacManaway and his family illustrate all four and thus bring into focus the conflicting discourses which arise on and through the island. First, in relation to tourism the MacManaway family had access to scarce accommodation since they owned a house on the island; second, Bruce MacManaway's religious background often conflicted with the Iona Community's practice of Divine Healing; third, he brought his 'New Age' interests to bear upon the Columba Hotel, being greatly involved in a series of conferences hosted there in the 1970s and 1980s; and last, the chief locus for his family's work was in fact not on Iona, but an alternative healing centre in rural Fife, one of the first of its kind in the UK.

MacManaway was the grandson of the Bishop of Clogher in Eire, and the son of an army officer. His mother was interested in Spiritualism but kept her concerns to herself for fear of upsetting the family. MacManaway served as an officer in the Second World War, discovering his gift of healing when he treated wounded soldiers after medical supplies ran out. In a lecture in Cheltenham delivered on Armistice Day, 1972, at an event run by two 'New Age' bodies, Universal World Harmony and the Wrekin Trust, he recounts the following:

At the age of twenty I found myself with a company to look after in France, and in the ensuing three week battle, which culminated in Dunkirk, medical supplies ran out, doctors were not available, and inevitably many people got hurt. I then found a tremendous impulse, to get my hands on my own wounded. This I did, with very extraordinary results, and according to doctors to whom we subsequently managed to get our wounded, it had saved their lives both from shock and from their wounds.  

The Second World War as a formative experience for healers has been a recurrent story in my researches (Monteith, 1997) and it is no less so in the case of MacManaway, who often illustrated talks with incidents from his war experiences. However, he never lost his Anglican background and repeatedly either castigates the church for its intransigence or builds his own doctrine to justify his particular understanding of Jesus as a psychic healer. For example, in his book Healing: the Energy that can Restore Health (MacManaway and Turcan, 1983), he expresses resentment that many clergy fail to acknowledge the healing skills of the laity and insist that any laying-on of hands must be undertaken by those ordained by the Church. MacManaway stressed that Jesus bestowed his gifts of healing on ordinary people, the laity. According to him, all healing gifts come from God and are interspersed throughout the population; furthermore, they may become available to many more after training in meditation, relaxation and
heightened awareness of the ‘Odic Forces’ present both within the world of the living and of those who have ‘passed on’.

MacManaway develops a theory of wholeness that is based on an understanding of Capra’s (1975) view of the atom as a form of vibrating energy that permeates the whole universe, and which we may tap into, with heightened awareness of our unity with nature. In common with a number of Capra’s disciples, MacManaway does not do justice to this thesis (which is more about the nature of dualism than about energy); nonetheless, Capra’s assumed emphasis on energy, and mankind’s potential to harness and use it as a source of power does provide MacManaway with a basis for a popular explanation of the talents of healers.

MacManaway begins by equating wholeness with being in touch with nature:

If we define healing not merely as curing symptoms but as making and becoming more whole, of bringing out the full potential, then we can include all life forms, and even the earth itself in the category of things worthy of our attention. (MacManaway and Turcan, 1983: 39)

The ability to heal depends upon becoming ‘tuned in’ to the energy which flows throughout nature, which at a microscopic level can be felt in the ‘tingling’ experienced during the laying-on of hands during healing or in psychic experience of those who have ‘passed on’ (ibid.: 41). MacManaway’s true interest, then, lies in the paranormal, mediumship and Spiritualism, and in later chapters of his book he again tries to legitimise such activity by quoting Church of England reports on the subject. A chapter devoted to dowsing is fairly conventional and might even be accepted by Ian Cowie, currently the Iona Community’s most eminent healer, but then MacManaway writes of dowsing by proxy (ibid.: 67), which is certainly beyond Cowie’s credulity.

At first sight, Bruce MacManaway appears to be a gifted healer who accepts that healing is of God, and gives praise for his gifts. But he acknowledges his indebtedness to spiritual healers such as Harry Edwards and to the Wrekin Trust, and thus never strays far from Spiritualism, ‘New Age’ and the general conviction that there are cosmic energies into which we can all tune and thus become much more complete people. MacManaway’s spouse still teaches meditation and yoga at Westbank Natural Health Centre, which was established in 1959 in Strathmiglo in the farmlands of Fife, and Wallis (1992) has recounted how he attended a course there involving the laying-on of hands for healing. MacManaway’s sons are likewise involved in alternative therapy. Patrick, for example,
trained as an orthodox physician but now works mainly in geomancy, or ‘psychic cleaning’, and in the study of sacred sites. He maintains that sacred sites such as Iona tend to occur on ley lines that cause a heightened awareness of spirituality.

CONCLUSION

Current interest in Iona as a site of pilgrimage and healing is characterised by plurality which allows many different belief systems to coexist in a pick-and-mix fashion under many different kinds of authority. This can leave many people confused and searching for understanding, including visitors to Iona trekking across Mull without any clear conception of the cultural history of Iona. Indeed, some members of the Iona Community now seriously question the role and continued presence of the Community on the island. Much of the radical theology of the Iona Community is quite inaccessible to the average visitor. Despite this, the publishing arm of the Community continues to attempt to produce accessible literature. Church of Scotland minister and former Abbey warden Kathy Galloway (1991) has written of healing as an attraction to many who arrive on the island feeling incomplete. Along with others, she maintains that the healing available on Iona partly meets a need to alleviate guilt (ibid.: 6). This is no special pleading on her part but represents a conviction that people still seek healing and wholeness in the ritual of the Iona Community and are comfortable with its overtly Christian emphasis.

In 1996 the then Warden of the Abbey, Peter Millar, suggested that it was the task of the Iona Community to interpret the purpose of the ongoing work of the Abbey and Community to the visitors who, consciously or not, lived in a postmodern age of immediacy and religious pick-and-mix. In subsequent correspondence he has addressed the question of how postmodernism relates to healing. He argues that people in a postmodern age are more inclined to seek a ‘direct’ experience of God and may invest their search in a quest for healing, which can be made without reference to an overall authority (such as in the past has often split Christian congregations). He writes:

I also believe that we are discovering (or rather rediscovering) the power of prayer in healing. This is partly because the modern mind, in my opinion, wants a direct experience of the divine rather than some mediated experience. Within postmodernism there is this search for the transcendent; we cannot live in a world denuded of transcendence. I think also that healing is seen to be important in many lives because of a greater recognition of evil/darkness/threatening powers. Many people want to be ‘healed’ and what they mean is taken out of their ‘inner darkness’ which they feel powerfully.
The above quotation appears to connect the major strands which have built Iona as a modern Scottish site of spiritual pilgrimage. First, there is tourism, with its immediacy and transience; second, the Iona Community, with a presence on the island for sixty years, and theologies which have appealed to the fringes of Christianity as well as the mainstream; and third, 'New Age' groups, which have been attracted by the cult of Iona and have developed their own interests in the realm of healing, wholeness and 'direct experience' in an existing setting of religious tolerance.

Hence in Iona, today, there has developed an accommodation between the various groups discussed above; and in several instances a mature mutual acceptance. A common repudiation of nuclear weapons and the current interest in the 'Celtic revival' offers the foundation on which people may retreat to find wholeness and its concomitant, healing. The cult of Iona has never faded but has been enhanced, for instance, by the recent burial on the island of the former Labour Party leader, John Smith. The magic which people claim to find on the island finds its expression most deeply in the weekly healing service and laying-on of hands at the Abbey. In the brevity of the service with its lack of emphasis on the miraculous, the meanings and discourses of many find a common meeting point and purpose.

Notes

1. By the Duke of Argyll, who entrusted them to Iona Cathedral in 1899.
2. One such was advocated by Clare Vyner who wanted to establish an 'Undenominational Social Service' training centre on Iona which would offer a training in 'health and hygiene, agriculture, fishing and gardening, weaving, etc.' There would also be theological training and the students would return to the mainland in a missionary capacity based on Quaker principles (McIntyre, 1994: 193ff.).
3. The Iona Community became formally associated with the Church of Scotland in 1951, since when it has reported each year to the Church's General Assembly, the highest Court within the Church of Scotland's presbyterian system of government. On the history of the Iona Community and the life of George MacLeod, see Ferguson (1988, 1990).
4. A term used by George MacLeod which was not actually favoured by some official bodies, such as the Archbishops' Commission of the Church of England, which commenced work in 1953, or certain charismatic Christians today.
   Healing has many names, reflecting the 'blind man and the elephant' phenomenon of multiple observers' reports from varied perspectives. My preference in scientific discussions is the term 'psi healing', where the Greek letter is used in parapsychology to denote the range of phenomena.
6. See Tingay (Chapter 2).
7. Eeman, L.E., letter to various hospitals re: Commission on Spiritual Healing, in the
George MacLeod and Iona Community Papers preserved in the National Library of Scotland (NLS), Edinburgh: Acc. 9084/337.


9. Cf. the description of healing energies in Hedges, and Beckford (Chapter 10).


11. Significantly, Cowie attended a primary school run on Anthroposophical lines, and another member of his family farmed on these principles in Moray. Cowie's daughter – whom he describes as ‘very New Age’ – currently works in a Steiner school. See NLS papers (op. cit.): Acc. 11569.


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As the Millennium has approached, bringing with it both explicit and implicit apocalyptic tensions, new forms of alternative religion and spirituality have proliferated throughout the Western world. These range from identifiable New Religious Movements (NRMs) to more amorphous religions such as Human Potential, 'New Age', Neo-paganism and Goddess spirituality. Compared to traditional church and sect sociological forms, these last are 'diffused religions' – a concept I used (York, 1995) when examining the 'New Age' and Neo-pagan movements in the late 1980s, and which develops from Colin Campbell's concept of the *cultic milieu* (Campbell, 1972), Geoffrey Nelson's understanding of the *cult movement* (Nelson, 1968), Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge's delineation of the *audience cult, client cult and cult movement* (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985), and Roy Wallis's work on the *social movement* (Wallis, 1979). In an institutional context, diffusion takes place from multiple centres rather than from any single, unitary locus. Within the contemporary world of alternative spirituality, such centres as Sedona and Esalen in the United States, Glastonbury in England and Findhorn in Scotland continue to emerge as nuclei to which people are drawn and from which ideas are disseminated. These places are linked through various channels of connection: travelling speakers and workshop facilitators, as well as the contemporary seeker and religious supermarket consumer (York, 1994; Sutcliffe, 1997).

The network of alternative spirituality draws both from its more established and 'traditional' centres and from its countless local manifestations. Each locality in some sense becomes yet another centre or focus for the repeated exclamation, 'It's happening here!' This chapter explores non-mainstream religiosities in three different European localities: Amsterdam, the official capital of the Netherlands; the Provencal village of Aups, along with French Provence more generally; and the Georgian city of Bath in England.
Since Amsterdam is recognised as the successor to San Francisco in the early 1970s as the centre of the counterculture, the presence of alternative forms of spirituality is greater here than it is in either Bath or Provence as a whole. The major focus in this chapter, therefore, is on the city of Amsterdam (population one million), which presents a much larger and richer field of study than either Bath, with its smaller number of residents, or Provence, with its diffused rural life. Nevertheless, both these more marginal communities have been penetrated in the current expansion of alternative spirituality developing from Western metropolitan centres, and they are examined in this respect.

Amsterdam, Centre of the Counterculture

Both the 'New Age' and Neo-pagan movements owe a large part of their origins to the counterculture which emerged in San Francisco in the late 1960s (York, 1997). This was the period of the 'flower-child' or 'hippy', whose paean to the Age of Aquarius found expression in the musical *Hair* of that time. In the 1960s, society became polarised between establishment 'straights' and anti-establishment 'freaks', but by its culmination in the late 1960s/early 1970s, hippy culture had become infiltrated by underworld drug barons, and centres such as Haight-Ashbury, once the womb of the counterculture, were lit up by the harsh glare of surveillance lamps and police cameras. As the Vietnam war continued under the Nixon administration, the extended 'Summer of Love' ended in 1970 with the Charles Manson murders and the National Guard's slaying of students at Kent State University. In the subsequent exodus from California, the centre of the counterculture shifted from San Francisco to Amsterdam.

Between 1970 and 1974, the capital of the Netherlands acquired the colour formerly associated with California's 'City by the Bay'. The central park of Amsterdam became a veritable scene from *The Arabian Nights*, with an exotic tented encampment and a raucous bazaar of magicians, shamans, belly-dancers, snake-charmers, sages and crazies of all kinds – a colourful and mysterious wonderland to be seen through the thick haze of burning incense, *chillum* smoke and Amstel fog. Communes proliferated throughout the Netherlands, but especially in Amsterdam, as they once had in California and San Francisco. Vegetarian and macrobiotic restaurants developed, and alternative centres – quasi-independent and quasi-state sponsored – such as the Kosmos Centrum, the Melkweg and the Paradiso, became social meeting places for the vagabond counterculture. These were combination discos, coffee houses, theatre centres and workshop venues. With liberal laws and lax police enforcement,
Holland seemed, to the 'hippy refugee' from America and elsewhere, the perfect haven.

Being an eminently pragmatic people, the Dutch tolerated this transnational influx, much as they tolerated their own youthful 'drop-outs'. Communes, in both privately owned and so-called 'cracked' (illegally occupied) houses, were not opposed, as long as the individuals involved paid the proper taxes and utility charges. In this way, the Dutch successfully reincorporated a wide range of marginal lifestyles into the mainstream: in the Netherlands, nobody escapes the plethora of integrating bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, though the countercultural scene changed radically and had largely disappeared in Amsterdam by the late 1970s, its legacy survived. Renowned for the freedom it has traditionally accorded to gays and prostitutes, Amsterdam has functioned vis-à-vis Europe in much the same way as San Francisco in North America. And just as the counterculture has come of age elsewhere, it has similarly matured in Holland.

The more anti-establishment element within the counterculture has emerged today in the various expressions of contemporary paganism. By contrast, the element of the former counterculture which has come to terms with the 'establishment' or even re-merged with it is essentially what we now understand as 'New Age'. The foremost manifestations of 'New Age' appear, in descending order, in the USA, the UK and the Netherlands, whilst the foremost manifestations of Neo-paganism appear, again in descending order, in the UK, the USA and the Netherlands – these three countries forming the primary nexus of exchange. Both movements continue also to grow in other European countries (e.g. Germany, France and Italy) and in non-European countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. As the traditional haven for freedom and nonconformity and as the legendary post-Haight-Ashbury centre, Amsterdam is the major networking venue for both the New Age and Neo-pagan movements.

The city of Amsterdam dates back to 977 CE when a charter was first granted allowing the levying of tolls on those wishing to ford the Amstel River, where two small islands had originally formed a natural crossing point. By extending the islands, damming the river and redirecting the waters through an elaborate series of sluices and canals, Amsterdam – 'the dam on the Amstel' – came into being. A strong Catholic presence gave way in the sixteenth-century Reformation to Calvinism in the form of the Dutch Reformed Church. In the seventeenth century, Amsterdam emerged as one of the foremost mercantile centres of the world and the foundations for its growth and wealth were established. With the rise of rationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and inheriting Calvinism's world-
affirming adaptability, Amsterdam became one of the leading centres in the twentieth century for liberal and secular thought.

In the Netherlands at present, church membership is the lowest of all Western European countries. As Janssen (1997: 2) explains, whilst secularisation is strongest in predominantly Protestant European countries, and although in the whole of Europe, Protestants score consistently lower on religious indices, ironically 'in the Netherlands it is the ... Catholics who show lower scores: they go to church less, are less interested in religion, pray less, pay less and so on.' Nevertheless, Janssen finds that most Dutch people are neither atheist nor fundamentalist, but rather retain a 'private, insecure, non-specific and abstract' religious identity. In fact, when measured not by church membership, but by 'attendance, prayer and the salience of religion in one's life', Dutch youth score highly in spirituality.¹

During the 1960s the Netherlands, which Janssen (1997: 3) recognises as 'a plural country by name and definition', became further pluralised through secularisation, individualisation and the emergence of New Religious Movements. In his survey of Dutch youth, Janssen was able to classify 16 per cent as 'New Age-minded' on the basis of their non-affiliation to a church and their participation in various activities such as Tarot, Yoga, astrology and Buddhism. This figure compares with 39 per cent who still belonged to a church, former members of a church who still prayed (18 per cent), 'doubters' who never belonged to a church but still prayed (9 per cent) and non-believers who lacked any religious involvement whatsoever (18 per cent). 'On several items,' Janssen reports:

> the New Age youngsters score higher than both the orthodox and the non-believers. They are more interested in art and literature, in experiencing beauty, and place greater weight on personal development. They are more interested in Oriental wisdom and believe more strongly in reincarnation. Politically they are left-wing oriented, and they are more revolutionary in their political opinions and actions. Furthermore, they report more psychological problems than do the other groups. (1997: 3)

With regard to prayer, nearly two-thirds of the entire Dutch population claimed to pray. But whilst older people prayed to God, younger people tended not to pray. 'When we look for common concepts that the young use to describe God, we first find that God is more often described as an activity than as a being. In 32 per cent of the definitions they say "God is"; in 75 per cent of their texts they say "God does".' (Janssen, 1997: 7)² This is reminiscent of what Margo Adler finds among American Neo-pagans: the emphasis is less on belief than on practice (1986; vide York, 1995: 102).
In fact, in the case of much contemporary alternative spirituality, belief is incidental. With its liberal, humanistic and secular traditions, the Netherlands has stripped away traditional support for official, institutional religions of belief. Amsterdam is at the forefront of this tendency. It is also in the vanguard of non-official spiritual developments consisting in an experiential and experimental approach to religion.\(^3\)

The current centre for alternative spirituality in Amsterdam is the Oibibio, a large canal building facing the Centraal Station. This building has been expensively renovated and is now known locally as a colossal folly, understood to be perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy. Nevertheless, it serves as the New Age centre for Amsterdam – replete with large gathering areas, workshop rooms, lecture theatres, banqueting rooms, concerts, a Japanese teahouse, a sauna with various bathing, tanning and massage facilities, a café/restaurant, a bookshop, statue and crystal shop, a warehouse specialising in children's items, clothes, household decorations, paper goods, alternative medicines and cosmetics: in short, all the amenities necessary to function as a social and spiritual nexus for the contemporary Dutch seeker.

The New Age spirituality promoted by the Oibibio can clearly be detected in the list of the top ten books promoted in its Spring 1997 programme. This included two works by Deepak Chopra, as well as one each by Paulo Coelho and Barbara Marciniak. The list also included James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*. With a focus on the business world, Oibibio also offered in this same programme training in the transformation of organisations from linear hierarchies to networks, storytelling management, team management, 'Beethoven voor Business', self-direction, 'Photoreading and Mindmapping', empowerment, meditation for managers, spiritual leadership ('Spiritueel Leiderschap'), exterior strength through inner power ('Ondernemingsraad: uterijke macht door innerlichke kracht'), stress relief, sabbatical programmes, personal leadership using dolphin strategies, and 'I Vision'.\(^4\)

Among the more affordable workshops and courses, the Oibibio programme included under the heading 'The Basics', oriental belly dance, trance dance and contemplation training based on 'the spontaneous play of being'. Under the heading of 'Movement', aikido, yoga aerobics and meditation were on offer. Three different tarot trainings were listed under the section entitled 'oracles'. 'Personal growth' included 'Sabbatical-Day', 'Vrouwen en Spiritualiteit' ('Women and Spirituality'), 'Touch for Health', and, relating to Redfield's book mentioned above, 'De Celestijnse Boodschap' ('The Celestine Message'). For its 'shamanism' offering, Oibibio presented a study day on 'ritual around the medicine wheel'.\(^5\) Most courses and
workshops were given in Dutch, but some teachers from the international New Age circuit were American and British, and English was therefore also used as a *lingua franca*, such as when an American came to channel White Eagle, ‘the spirit master from the White Brotherhood’.

In its 1997 celebration of the Buddhist festival of Wesak, the Oibibio presented a programme of ritual, reading and meditation. Those familiar with the Wesak celebrations held at St James’s, Piccadilly, in London, would recognise a basic similarity between the Dutch format and that offered by the British-based Alternatives Programme (York, 1995: 230–1, 234–5). Besides Wesak, in the Spring of 1997, Great Master Chen Xiaowang gave a T’ai Chi demonstration, Lama Karta spoke on the power and meaning of Buddhist mantras, and Bert van Riel gave a talk on feeling and understanding as the only means for survival in the year 2000. The Oibibio also holds a swing music dance evening on the first Saturday of each month.

Whilst the Oibibio is by no means the only centre or venue for workshops or alternative spirituality gatherings, it illustrates both the nature of current religious experimentation and innovation as well as its transnational or international scope. The Oibibio is thus exemplary of the diffused New Age religiosity currently to be found in Amsterdam.

The New Age is a loose confederation of Neo-pagan practices, psychotherapy, psychophysical body work and gnostic–theosophical orientations. Much of the emphasis upon human potential grew out of the Gestalt school of psychotherapy,6 represented in Amsterdam by the therapy collective Spetéra,7 which describes itself as ‘a collective for consciousness, contact and spirituality’.8 In addition to Gestalt, Spetéra offers therapy, workshops and schooling in the methodologies of Psychomotor, Enlightenment Intensive, Biodynamics and Biorelease as well as individual Taoist massage and guiding as ‘Sacred Intimates’. Besides its *ad hoc* venues, Spetéra sponsors regular monthly gatherings. Interest has also developed in the connection between the emotions and sexuality. ‘Man Fire Feast’ and ‘Female Fire Feast’ are workshops organised for separate single-sex groups, in which participants learn to give and receive Taoist erotic massage. For men, this is followed by ‘My Heart’s Desire’, a workshop in further erotic massage and sex magic – that is, the generation of erotic energy through genital massage. ‘The last two days [of the workshop]... focus on sex magic or using the erotic energy we generate as creative force.’9 To allow participants to contact ‘the magician and artist within your body’, the workshop employs erotic rituals claimed to be based on Tantric, Taoist and Native American traditions.10

In a third centre, the ‘Stichting Performing Inside Out’, a more gnostic leaning is to be discerned. An outgrowth of William Pennell Rock’s non-
profit organisation, Origins (USA), the foundation is described as 'dedicated to returning the healing power of vital energy, myth and ritual to contemporary performing arts'. Rock explains his basic workshop as Gestalt, archetypal psychodrama. A former instructor with Oscar Ichazo's Arica Institute in New York and California and the Jungian Institute in Zurich, Rock is a co-founder of the Center for Transpersonal and Expressive Arts Therapies in Los Angeles. His innovation is to combine the Human Potential Movement with experimental theatre.

Rock’s workshop, as well as the theatrical performance which develops from it, is called ‘Love Story’ and is based on the Hindu Ramayana epic archetypes of the hero (Rāma), heroine (Sita), monster (Ravana) and nature spirit (Hanuman). As improvisational performance, the approach is called ‘entheotic’ or ‘oracular’, with participants being encouraged to identify with each of the epic archetypes. The Stichting Performing Inside Out also sponsored a weekend workshop called ‘A Hero’s Journey’ at the beginning of May in 1997. Other workshops span two weekends and are designed for people with work commitments during the week.

The Olibbio, Spetéra and Stichting Performing Inside Out are three of the plethora of centres for alternative spirituality in Amsterdam. The city also boasts an array of New Age shops to cater to the diverse needs of the New Age consumer. Typical is ‘Himalaya’ which offers books (indigenous and imports), videos, New Age music, posters, incense, jewellery, aroma lamps, games, pendants, crystal balls, Bach remedies, ionisers, art cards, tarot cards, etheric oils, gems (and remedies), Ayurvedic medicines, massage oils, pyramids, Buddha figures, a large collection of Tibetan clothes and cymbals, and so forth. There are also many popular Dutch periodicals which focus on alternative spirituality and related consumer goods: Bres, Visioen, Para-Astro, Prana, Paravisie, Koörddanser, Onkruid, Jonas and Ode. Furthermore, entheogenic ayahuasca use is increasingly becoming a central feature in Amsterdam, as it is in the more urban expressions of New Age elsewhere.

Linked to New Age but often distinguished from it is the alternative spiritual tradition understood by practitioners and sociologists as Neopaganism. In Amsterdam, Wiccan covens have emerged, and the city is a familiar destination for contemporary pagan teachers such as Marian Green or Vivianne Crowley (York, 1995: 117–22, 151–4). Green, for example, has been visiting and working in Amsterdam since 1987: she now gives several weekend workshops each year, and a week-long summer school. These courses are usually for groups of a dozen people or less and are designed essentially for beginners who wish to learn the basic arts of Western magic. ‘The Dutch are very open,' Green said during a December 1997 interview,
'and long for a Western connection.' She sees interest in magic as a progressive development from the Indonesian influence established in the country's imperial past. Her concentration on people new to the alternative spirituality tradition stems from her conviction that the initial contact must be made correctly: 'It infuses you for life – if not in your next incarnation.' Green sees alternative spirituality as a living and growing experience for many people – and a liberation from orthodox faiths.

As with New Age generally, publishing is an important means of disseminating pagan ideas. Several of Green's books have been translated into Dutch. On the other hand, the *Wiccan Rede* is an English and Dutch language quarterly, published in Zeist, which serves the pagan community in both the Netherlands and (chiefly Flemish-speaking) Belgium. Another Wiccan/pagan organisation that serves both Belgium and Holland is Greencraft, which publishes its own magazine four times a year.

### Aups, Provençal village

Provence in the South of France, between the Rhône valley and the present-day French–Italian border, has since prehistoric times been a crossroads of large-scale ethnic immigration. The most recent occurred in the 1920s when numerous Italian families settled throughout the area. As a result, roughly half the family names in the village of Aups are Italian. Demographically, Aups is about one-half Roman Catholic and one-half Communist. When I first moved to the Midi (the vernacular name for the South of France) in the early 1970s, the local *Var-Matin* newspaper ran a series of articles investigating the claim that half of the population of the *département* of Var was étranger. In the final article, the paper did indeed determine that fifty percent of the people who lived in the Var were foreigners, but concluded that as long as everyone lived harmoniously together, it did not matter.

The cosmopolitan flavour of Provence is virtually as rich as that more usually found in urban communities, and yet the Midi remains essentially a rural area. When I first settled in the village of Aups, the town claimed a residency of 1,500. Today, that figure is around 1,800, but during the summer months, with the influx of tourists and vacationers (chiefly Parisian) who maintain a holiday residence in or near to the town, the population more than doubles. It is this combination of a multicultural population and a distinctively rural environment that gives the Midi its unique character.

When I first came to live in Aups, a vendor would pass through the village once every four or five years offering small, ornamental stones for sale. In those days, even the purchase of fresh milk was difficult unless one
went direct to the local farmers. In the past two decades all that has changed. The town now has supermarkets and is fully integrated into the French commercial mainstream. In the 1990s, not only can local residents purchase packaged milk and butter distributed through national franchises, but there is also a choice of crystals, amber, lapis luzuli and other stones from up to ten different merchants who come to the weekly marché on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the summer months.

The village of Aups was reputedly the capital of a Celto-Ligurian tribe known as the Oxigii. When the area became the Provincia Romana, or the first imperial province of the Roman Empire beyond Italy, Julius Caesar is reputed to have said, ‘I would rather be first in Aups than second in Rome.’ The village derives its name from the dative plural Alpibus, signifying ‘[way] to the Alps’. Indeed, behind the Plain d’uchane on which the town is situated, it is possible to catch one’s first glimpse of the Alps from the southwest.

Provence has had a long connection with practitioners of alternative or spiritual healing. These are variously designated as guérisseurs (‘curers’), rebouteurs (‘bone-setters’) or magnetiseurs (‘magnetic healers’). Usually, this indigenous practice has taken the form of a ‘laying-on of hands’. ‘Magnetic’ curers, however, are not sanctioned by the state and can neither advertise nor charge for their services. They are instead known locally and by word of mouth. Payment is optional and is left to the discretion of the client, as a donation. But even allopathic medicine is not averse to treatments that would elsewhere be considered alternative or even suspect. Perhaps as many as half the registered doctors of the medical profession in Provence include Chinese acupuncture and acupressure, if not homeopathic treatments, among their services.

The combination of heritage and contemporary cosmopolitanism has fostered a burgeoning New Age spirituality in the Midi which shows remarkable affinities to the patterns already seen in Amsterdam and elsewhere – for example, in London, Glastonbury, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco or even in such smaller American communities as Naples, Florida, or Providence, Rhode Island. A survey of rural France affirms the global dissemination of New Age programmes and concepts and the possibility that New Age religiosity is today to be found throughout the Western world.

The obvious centres in Provence include both Marseille and Aix-en-Provence as well as the Côte d’Azur (St Tropez, Cannes and Nice). For instance, in April 1997 L’Association «L’isthme» sponsored its second programme on Sufism at various venues in Avignon, Montpellier, Marseille and Aix-en-Provence. In most of the more urban centres of Provence, one
can find courses in the practice of yoga. In Marseille, there is also the Centre d'Étude et de Méditation Bouddhique. In Aix, both l'Atelier d'Évolution Psycho-Corporelle, l'Éspace MANUEL and le Centre CO-NAISSANCE between them host courses in yoga and relaxation, la Méthode Herrmann, morphopsychologie and la sophrologie, as well as individual consultations for Chinese massage, le Tarot psychologique, palm reading and les Remèdes Floraux du Dr Bach. During May 1997 in the town of Gordes, not far from Aix, a three-weekend course was conducted for trainers on Californian massage, Shiatsu and Korean relaxation, attended by twenty-five people.

In the more immediate environs of Aups, workshops are held in T'ai Chi and other forms of dance, in yoga and in medicinal therapies. Through local interviews I learned that the most popular stage (workshop) at present is that of story-telling. A relatively new development, this has been rapidly spreading through Provence in 1997 and may represent an emerging interest to re-connect with the earlier contadore traditions. The return to the tradition of the contes follows in the wake of the growing Provençal interest in the 1990s in both crystals and American Indian philosophy. In Aups, according to local informants, and, judging from newspapers, television and national booklists, in France in general, both the terms 'New Age' and 'Nouvelle Age' are becoming more widely used. Again, local informants explain that, throughout the Midi, the wearing of crystals has become a means of mutual recognition for those with New Age interests. The social changes which appear to be occurring as a result of the growing pursuit of New Age spirituality are attributed to an increase of communication between the genders, more equal sharing of activities among (chiefly younger) couples, and a greater ambiguity following the decline of traditionally defined gender roles.

The expatriate étranger community has also brought with it additional esoteric elements ranging from Osho sannyasins to American Indian spiritualists and the Gurdjieff teachings. Albeit on a smaller scale, the same massage, body work and personal growth techniques are to be found here or in the surrounding area as in the more urban conglomerations of the western world.

**Bath, Georgian city**

Between the Provençal village of Aups and the capital city of Amsterdam, we have the Georgian city of Bath, England. Bath has a population of roughly 85,000, but contains a diversity of religious expression which is surprising for a city of its size. According to records held by the Bath
Archives for Contemporary Religious Affairs (BACRA), the city's religious communities include Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Quakers, Spiritualists, Moslems, Buddhists, Mormons, Methodists, Orthodox, Pentecostals, Salvation Army, Non-denominational Protestants, Christian Scientists and Unitarians.\textsuperscript{19} There are also noteworthy New Age and Neo-pagan communities, as evidenced by the city's metaphysical bookshops – the oldest being 'Arcania', established in the late 1980s – and by the influence of individual activists such as Marian Green.

Bath traces its origins to Bladud, an exiled son of the king of the Britons, whose leprosy was cured by bathing in the hot springs for which the city has subsequently become famous. Bladud reputedly returned to the springs circa 880 BCE and, in gratitude for his healing, erected the first bath and temple. According to local legend, he also established a perpetual flame such as we find today in Banaras or Baudinath. In honour of this, a candle is now kept continually burning at the local Cross Bath. Bladud is also credited with having established the first university in Britain, possibly connected to the nearby stone circle of Stanton Drew, which, after Stonehenge and Avebury, is the third largest in Britain. In time, under the Romans, the tutelary deity of the springs, Sulis, was identified with the goddess Minerva, and a huge temple and bathing facility complex was erected corresponding in size and location with what later became the medieval walled city.

In the early eighteenth century, the city began its evolution into the sophisticated Georgian showplace of today. Employing esoteric Masonic principles,\textsuperscript{20} the architect John Wood the Elder (1704–54) and his son, John Wood the Younger (1728–1801), constructed many of the city's most famous buildings and squares. The King's Circus (1754–69) was modelled on the dimensions of Stonehenge, whilst the number of houses surrounding the Circus corresponds to the number of stones at Stanton Drew, which, John Wood the Elder believed, had been the heart of all British Druidism. With its architectural legacy and tradition of 'sacred' springs, Bath is currently being spoken of as a nascent pilgrimage centre. There is talk in the local metaphysical bookshops, at the Cross Bath, during Druidic moots and throughout the occult network in general, of the city being poised to become once again the place of pilgrimage it was in its pre-Roman, Roman and Georgian past. At present, in the New Age and contemporary pagan circuit, the nearby town of Glastonbury remains pre- eminent (Bowman, Chapter 5; also Bowman, 1993a and b), but virtually all the personal and spiritual growth techniques to be found in Glastonbury are also to be found in Bath: astrology seminars, holistic massage, Bach flower therapy, polarity bodywork, acupuncture, reflexology, aromatherapy, homeopathy, chiropody, on-site massage (OSM), overtone chanting, kinesiology, storytelling,
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sacred song and dance, iris diagnostics, shiatsu, reiki, Chinese medicine, chakra energising, drumming, rebirthing, neuro linguistic programming, sweat lodge, Transformation Game, craniosacral therapy, visualisation, non-stylised movement healing, yoga – and so forth.

Although various Wiccan-orientated ceremonial circles have been organised for the equinoxes, solstices and Celtic quarter festivals, the stronger influence in Bath is Druidic, stemming from a vernacular earth-centred folk-orientation that might be termed ‘geo-pagan’. In 1995 Bath resident and leader of the Secular Order of Druids, Tim Sebastian, laid claim to the ‘ancient druidic chair of Caer Badon’ (that is, of Bath as the alleged site of King Arthur’s last battle). According to Sebastian (whom locals in his pub refer to as ‘Archie Druid’), Bath has been reestablished as a Druid centre and is the first to be honoured with a bardic, druidic and ovatean chair (Bowman, 1998).

Perhaps the most prominent metaphysical centre in Bath is ‘Arcania’ – formerly known as ‘Arcania New Age Centre’. Arcania’s proprietor since 1995 is Richard Howard, who came to Bath via Glastonbury from London. During a December 1997 interview, Howard explained that the bookshop has existed as a beacon across the British southwest for those interested in alternative spirituality and, as such, has created an audience which today gives it a solid (i.e. ‘spiritually reputable’) foundation. However, on the business level, any bookshop must deal with the problem of small profit margins which ‘do not equate’ with extremely high rents and rates. Howard has developed a cynical response to the high degree of charlatanism which he perceives throughout the spiritual scene, with its increasingly materialistic and profit-motivated emphasis: namely, the plethora of people who claim healing powers or a privileged spiritual vision. In an effort to infuse ‘integrity’ into the cultic milieu and his own services, Howard and his staff invoke ‘the spirit of Arcania’ each morning before the shop opens and pay their thanks to the establishment’s spirit at the end of the day before enveloping the premises in ‘a protective bubble’ for the night. This ritual ‘dialogue’ solicits a future for Arcania through what Howard terms ‘integrity’, which he explains as the ‘recognition to give back to the spirit equal to what has been received’ – although he admits that having to keep to the commitment can be a ‘pain in the ass’.

Howard recognises the ‘massive potential’ of Bath and sees the proposed reopening of the spas as a means of augmenting spiritual energy in the city and attracting more like-minded people. Howard himself was drawn to Bath by its cosmopolitan nature, and sees Arcania as providing an ‘open doorway for everybody’, in contrast to Glastonbury, where, in his perception, access to information concerning spiritual matters was available only to those
already involved with a particular elitist path. Though Howard himself admits to having been a ‘member’ of the Glastonbury ‘spiritual club’ he did not like its exclusiveness. Preferring the greater openness he finds in Bath, he says, ‘People are becoming more accepting – even excited – by the fact that Arcania is truly different – a unique experience within the city.’

A former resident of the city itself, now resident within the ‘Bath Triangle’ (consisting of Bath, Bristol and Glastonbury), Marian Green divides her time between this area and Amsterdam. Publisher of *Quest* magazine since 1970 and founder of the networking/contact-making association the Green Circle, she has also organised the esoteric Quest Annual Conference since 1968. Green is a pioneer in British pagan spirituality, operating within what she terms the ‘Western Mystery Tradition’. A purveyor of ‘Magic for the Aquarian Age’, she also runs postal workshops through ‘The Invisible College’. As she explains, ‘A lot of the New Age may lead to dead ends rather than to a new spiritual direction. But at least it can awaken people to the options.’

Like Howard, Green talks enthusiastically about the reopening of the spas in Bath but claims the spiritual consequences will depend largely on how they are used, and for what ends. Recognising the area as an ancient place of pilgrimage, she argues that if the spas are used as religious sites and not just for recreation, the reopening will be positive. During my interview with her in December 1997, she explained that the spiritual aura of the place is ‘tidal’, but that, when the town is left to itself and not packed with summer tourists, one can sense the ‘old energies’. Consequently, Green takes small groups of people around the baths early in the morning, in order for them to experience a more natural feeling. The sanctuary of Sulis Minerva is, according to Green, ‘the oldest named shrine in Britain’. Cross Bath ‘guardian’ Margaret Marian Stewart makes the same claim.

At the time of writing, the dominant issue in the world of alternative spirituality in Bath is the proposed reopening of the spas, which have been closed since 1979. New Age and geo-pagan sentiment, expressed throughout the local alternative spirituality network, tends to see this as a further opportunity to promote the reawakening of Bath as a spiritual centre – a view which has general public support. The local council intends to incorporate the city’s Cross Bath, Hot Bath and Beau Street Bath as a three-component facility. The council argues that only by including all three centres can the Bath Spa Project be an economically viable package. However, earlier in 1991, the Council had granted the independent Springs Foundation the right to maintain the Cross Bath and open it for public sightseeing. In practice, this chartered organisation operates the Cross Bath as a low-key but ostensible pagan sanctuary. But with the advent of the
Bath Spa Project which aims to re-open all three centres as bathing facilities, the Springs Foundation – which might be termed a pagan ‘front organisation’ – is now reluctant to relinquish control of the Sulis sanctuary. In this way, the Bathonian sacred geography issue has links with other geo-pagan political concerns, such as the road protest movement, or the environmental issues espoused by the ‘eco-magickal’ organisation, Dragon. Whilst geo-paganism entails a more individualistic and spontaneous response, as opposed to the organised and formal ceremonial response to nature and the supernatural which is characteristic of Wicca, Druidry, Asatru and other forms of Neo-paganism, the parameters of the Cross Bath as a sacred place present a potentially divisive political issue.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have portrayed alternative forms of spirituality in three different European communities. Amsterdam is of course the largest and, correspondingly, the most expressive of the full range of contemporary non-mainstream religiosity. But even such a relatively remote community as the Provencal village of Aups reveals the presence of numerous elements deriving from the same cultic milieu. Whilst the numbers involved with new forms of religiosity remain hard to identify precisely, we can at least recognise the ubiquity and growth of the diffuse religious consumer supermarket which demonstrates an increasingly vital presence in both urban Holland and rural southern France. These areas are witness to the spiritual ferment which is either a product of, or concomitant with, the decline of traditionally western forms of religion and the growth of secularisation as the acceptable form of public life. Change occurs against a background of ubiquitous experimentation and innovation with regard to spiritual practice – one which eschews dogma, conformity and belief and emphasises both individual autonomy and direct experience.

Like Dutch Amsterdam and French Provence, the English city of Bath is a cosmopolitan environment. More of a town than Amsterdam yet more of a city than Aups, Bath nevertheless reveals the same plethora of New Age or New Age-type spiritualities as is found on the European continent, let alone in North America. In terms of alternative forms of spirituality, Bath benefits both from its own indigenous heritage and from its axial location between London and Glastonbury. Being the more urban conglomeration, Amsterdam has always been ahead of Bath in terms of spiritual change, but even the English town reveals a notable conformity to such quasi-spiritual growth as, for instance, that of vegetarianism (Twigg, 1979 and Hamilton et al., 1995). Vegetarian fare was available in the Dutch capital as early as the
late 1960s, while in Bath in the 1990s virtually every restaurant includes one or more vegetarian or even vegan dishes on its menu. In Aups, by contrast, the occasional health food shop or even vegetarian restaurant has been established, but these have remained essentially ephemeral, usually lasting only a few years. Whereas both the Netherlands and Britain are more open to direct influences from the USA, France is dependent on its imported innovative ideas arriving first through French Canada. Consequently, awareness of, and demand for, vegetarian food has been slow to develop in France – although there are now signs of influences beginning to arrive via Quebec. Bulletin boards in natural foods shops and metaphysical bookstores in both Amsterdam and Bath serve as information resources allowing interested consumers to locate goods, services and workshops on offer in the New Age market. In a village like Aups, on the other hand, the occasional poster is to be seen attached to a tree or even in the window of the main café on the town square.

An analytical look at the communities of Amsterdam, Aups and Bath indicates the newer kinds of development which, if not transforming, are augmenting the range of western spiritual expression. All three locales reveal a remarkable similarity in the specific types of psychophysical, human potential and other non-traditional spiritual alternatives which are available. Whilst each of the three retains local differences conditioned by indigenous settings, historic legacies and ethnic divergences, the general conformities support the current sociological theories of globalism which suggest the growing dissemination of a Western religious consumer market.²²

**Notes**

1. Of sixteen countries, Dutch youth rank third, after Ireland and Italy, in spirituality in terms of 'attendance, prayer and the salience of religion in one's life'. Whilst only 39 per cent of Dutch youth admit to church membership, 82 per cent claim to pray at least on some occasions (Janssen, 1997: 5). Janssen found that the young prayed primarily when facing problems or as part of meditational practice, and for psychological effect.
2. Janssen found that when asked to define God, only 32 per cent said 'He is'. He found this reduced to 25 per cent in written sources. In other words, three-fourths of textual references to God said that 'God does'.
3. For a further profile on Dutch spirituality based on data collected in the mid-1970s, see Thung (1985).
4. Oibibio: Programma overzicht (April-July, 1997). Dr A. Kamphuis' three-day dolphin strategy training cost fl 2950 (£900) plus VAT; Karin Aartsen's two-day vision training charged fl 1950 (£600) plus VAT.
5. Fl 115; £35, including lunch.
6. The Gestalt school of psychotherapy pioneered by Fritz Perls rose to prominence at the Esalen Institute in California and in Perls' own headquarters near Victoria, Canada, in
the 1960s. Among the many spin-offs of Gestalt beside transpersonal psychology, there is the Body Electric School of Massage founded by Joseph Kramer. In Amsterdam, Kramer’s work finds chief expression via Spetera.

7. Spetera developed as a cooperative venture from the Kristallijn Gestalt Opleidingen, a school for Gestalt therapists founded by Hans Koch in 1985.

8. ‘My Heart’s Desire’ promotional letter from Hans Koch.


10. The venue is De Roos on the Vondelstraat, and in 1997 the full four-day workshop cost f1 600 (£185).


12. The performers are led to ‘discover and strengthen their own individual process towards wholeness and harmony. This consists of discovering the essential active (yang) and receptive (yin) capacities of the self, freeing them from the inner saboteur who uses their energy in its drive towards disharmony, and reuniting them in balance under the Nature Spirit’s guidance.’ See reference in preceding note.

13. Himalaya (New Age winkel).


15. The Centre d’Etude et de Méditation Bouddhique is to be found in Marseille. The centre also maintains Le Refuge.

16. Sophrologie was founded by Alfonso Caycedo, a medical doctor, to treat symptoms such as stress, fatigue, anxiety, depression, insomnia, poor memory and so forth. The term derives from the Greek roots for ‘health, harmony’ (sos), ‘brain’ (phren) and ‘study, science’ (logos). It seeks to encourage the individual to employ the means to live positively and optimally to resist the many negativities of life. As part of its agenda to develop self-creativity, it endeavours to assist individuals faced with ordeals such as exams, sporting contests or childbirth. The goal of sophrologie is to attain a consistent ‘therapeutic level’.

17. L’Atelier d’Évolution Psycho-Corporelle and L’Espace MANUEL are based in Aix-en-Provence. Le Centre CO-NAISSANCE is based in Aix-les-Platanes.

18. Peter Eliot, a resident of the nearby town of Carcès, has hosted one- or two-year workshop courses in Aups for students of the Gurdjieff teachings.


21. The 31st Annual Quest Conference was held in March 1998 in south Bristol.

22. For globalism theory, see Robertson (1992), Beyer (1994) and Simpson (1997).

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Part 3: Practices
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"As above, so below'. Upon earth we see the reflection of the play of the heavenly principles in the actions of men and women. (Dion Fortune, 1987: 129)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine how power is gendered in magical practices: how power relationships are worked out through notions of femininity and masculinity in high magic (sometimes called 'ceremonial magic' or 'western mysteries') and contemporary witchcraft, or Wicca. High magic and Wicca are often termed a form of Paganism. However, this is problematic because 'Paganism' is a rather vague umbrella term for a group of magical practices which are often seen to pre-date Christianity. The word 'pagan' is derived from Latin pagus meaning 'rural', 'from the countryside', and has often been used to designate the 'other' from Christianity (Jones & Pennick, 1995: 1). Contemporary self-designated Pagans use the term broadly as 'one who honours nature'. A contemporary definition of Paganism is as 'a Nature-venerating religion which endeavours to set human life in harmony with the great cycles embodied in the rhythms of the seasons' (Jones & Pennick, 1995: 2). A study of history shows that, rather than being based on an indigenous nature religion, many current magical practices stem from the revival of magic in the Hermeticism of the Renaissance and more recently in the nineteenth-century magical organisation, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Magical practices by their very nature – their association with 'the occult', with secrecy, the mysterious, and with the realm that lies beyond the range of ordinary knowledge – have a certain frisson: an excitement induced by contact with what are seen to be otherworldly powers. My focus in this paper is on how this contact is gendered: how certain conceptions of femininity and masculinity are constituted through
magical practice and how women are seen to gain power through this gendering.

Modern magical practices are diverse and include many groups ranging from Druidism to anarchistic Chaos Magick; they do not form a systematic body of beliefs although they may be described as a western form of shamanism. Traditionally, a shaman is a person who, in a state of trance, journeys to spiritual otherworlds on behalf of a community for knowledge or healing. The anthropologist Michael Harner has defined a shaman as 'a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness – at will – to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge and power . .' (1990: 20). The emphasis is on bringing about an altered state of consciousness. In its western form, shamanism has been interpreted broadly to mean any magico-religious practice involving trance or altered states of consciousness. Contemporary magicians employ ritual techniques aimed at changing consciousness which involve trance experiences of another realm of reality which is often called the 'otherworld'. Ritual provides a channel of communication by which the powers of the otherworld (often expressed as deities or animals or a combination of both, as in the Egyptian pantheon) are mediated by the magician by the use of the magical will – the direction of the mind and emotions to a particular magical objective. The communication with otherworldly beings – which might involve the magician embodying the deity – is seen to be the source of all the magician's power. Thus, magicians work with esoteric rather than exoteric knowledge: their practices are shaped by a direct communication with otherworldly beings. This imbues them with an aura of mystery, setting them apart from the ordinary world, and implies occult power as a mastery of unseen forces.

The practice of magic is essentially about obtaining power, and I shall examine how this power is gendered. As Sherry Ortner (1974) has noted, women are culturally conceived as being closer to nature than men, and in magical practices femininity is also associated with the magical otherworld and intuition, while masculinity is connected to rationality, patriarchy and the wider non-magical culture. Magical ritual is the space where the ordinary consciousness – the rationality – of mainstream culture is reversed. In its explicit glorification of 'unreason' and femininity, the current practice of magic may be viewed as a romantic reaction to the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and its association with masculinity (Seidler, 1989). This gender polarity places women in a uniquely powerful position, because the female body and femininity are valued as a source of power. This is particularly clearly shown in Wicca. Gender roles in many magical practices have been strongly influenced by Dion Fortune, a one-time member of the
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Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and I shall discuss the influence of her work on high magic and Wicca. Before turning to an examination of gender roles I shall look at high magic and witchcraft in more detail to argue that modern witchcraft is not a pre-Christian Pagan tradition but a development of the Hermetic tradition.

THE HIGH MAGIC – WITCHCRAFT CONTINUUM

High magic or ceremonial magic developed from the Renaissance and is based on the Hermeticism of Renaissance magi such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), Pico Della Mirandola (1463–94) and Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). These magi derived influence from a body of philosophical and astrological writings, called the Corpus Hermeticum, dealing with sympathetic magic and with drawing down the powers of the stars, which they believed to be the work of an Egyptian priest Hermes Trismegistus. However, according to the historian Frances Yates, the Corpus Hermeticum was not ancient Egyptian but probably Greek in origin7 and was written in the second to third centuries AD (Yates, 1991).

Ficino, who was a physician and priest, developed a system of ‘natural magic’ which concerned the drawing down of the natural powers of the cosmos. Ficino’s theory of magic was based on the guiding of spirit from the stars using the natural sympathies, or knowledge of energies running through nature, by which one thing could be drawn to another8 – a process which the Victorian theoretical anthropologist Sir James Frazer termed ‘sympathetic magic’ ([1921] 1993).

Pico was influenced by Ficino’s natural magic but, in a bid to increase its power, incorporated the Jewish mystical Kabbalah (sometimes spelt ‘Qabalah’ or ‘Cabala’) to tap higher powers of angels and archangels in a form of esoteric Christianity. Pico’s magical work laid the foundation for contemporary esoteric Christian high magic.

By contrast, Bruno sought to take magic back to what he saw as its purer pagan source in Egypt. Bruno’s practical magic consisted of drawing spirits and demons, also through the use of the Kabbalah. In contrast to Pico, who wanted to work solely with angelic forces, Bruno actively wanted to unlock the inner power of demonic forces. The essence of Bruno’s magic was the discovery of the human divine nature through a magical communication with nature; it focused on the glorification of Man, who was believed to have divine origins and divine powers.9

Contemporary high magic has its roots in the nineteenth-century revival of occultism which led to the formation of the magical society, the Hermetic
Order of the Golden Dawn. There are two clear strands of magical philosophy emerging from the Golden Dawn which draw directly from the Renaissance magical workings of Pico and Bruno. The first strand is based on a Christian interpretation and involves the use of what magicians see as higher angelic beings and an emphasis on the light and the celestial. Christian-influenced high magic mythology is based on the mastery of the 'lower self' and baser nature through the Kabbalistic ‘Tree of Life’ glyph (see Figure 8.1) in the spiritual pursuit of true identity in the Light of the Ultimate Being. This is commonly explained by reference to the Judeo-Christian ‘Fall’ – the separation of humanity from godhead which created the need for human nature to be redeemed. At the beginning of the twentieth century Dion Fortune was the leading magician associated with this tradition.

The second strand is a direct rebellion against Christianity. It follows Bruno’s return to Egyptian religion and is represented today by Aleister Crowley’s Nietzschean glorification of the self. Crowley’s magick, which also made use of the Kabbalah but focused more explicitly on sex magic, was based on ‘liberating energy’ to develop the divine self – human nature being seen as inherently divine. Aleister Crowley took sexuality, specifically female sexuality, as a central organising principle of his ‘magick’, as demonstrated by his spelling of the word with a ‘k’ to denote the emphasis on Koth, ‘the hollow one’, meaning ‘female genitalia’ (deriving from kteis, the Greek word for ‘genitals’). Crowley was involved in two magical orders, the Argenteum Astrum and the Ordo Templi Orientis, which utilised sexual techniques for ‘establishing a gate in space through which the extra-terrestrial or cosmic energies may enter in and manifest on earth’ (Grant, 1976: 136) and his work was closely identified with eastern forms of Tantra. In particular, Crowley’s Gnostic Mass, a reversal of the Christian Catholic mass, is centred on the veneration of woman as priestess of the gods and ‘Queen of Space’. This ritual formed the basis of Wicca, a new conception and practice of witchcraft formulated by Gerald Gardner, who claimed that it was a form of an ancient mystery cult ([1954]1988). Gardner used a high magic framework to construct a nature religion. Thus, contemporary witchcraft or Wicca is not an unbroken tradition springing from the pagan folk practices and spell-making of the peasantry, as many modern witches would have it: it is a development of Bruno’s magical anthropocentrism, based on the view that human nature is essentially divine.

Current practice of Wicca is largely centred on the creation of rituals conducted in a circle marked by correspondences with nature, both in the external environment and within the individual witch. East represents light
and intellect, south represents fire and the witch’s will, west represents water and emotions, while north is symbolic of earth and the human body. Witches celebrate eight solar rituals which mark the turning of the year and are linked to a mythological cycle of the Goddess and her son/lover. There are four Greater Sabbats: Candlemas (2 February), May Eve (30 April), Lammas (1 August), and Samhain (31 October). The Lesser Sabbats are the Midsummer and Midwinter Solstices and the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes. Witches also perform magical work such as spell-making or healing based on a lunar pattern of either full or dark moon workings. Thus witchcraft is a practice which connects the individual to the rhythms of the sun and moon: for witches, internal nature is a reflection of the wider cosmological forces.

**The power of the otherworld**

A central Wiccan rite concerns the ‘Drawing Down the Moon’ invocation, during which the High Priest invokes and draws down the energy of the goddess into the High Priestess. Vivianne Crowley, a Wiccan High Priestess, describes invocation as:

> a process by which the Goddess or God will temporarily incarnate in the body of a selected worshipper – a priestess if the deity is the Goddess, a priest if the deity is the God. Both Goddess and God may be invoked in the rites, but traditionally only the Goddess speaks what is known as a charge. A charge is a ritual utterance that conveys a message from the deity to the worshipper. (1993: 133, emphasis in original)

Geoffrey Samuel indicates that it is possible that this central element of Wiccan practice may derive from Indian Tantra (Samuel, 1998). The embodiment of deity and the assumption of the status and power of deity is the basis of magical power in high magic and Wicca. Both practices are founded on the notion of spiritual transformation. This was also a central part of the Greek Mysteries, the purpose of which was to bring initiates into contact with otherworldly powers (D'Alviella, 1981: 33–6). I have argued elsewhere that invocation of the Goddess gives the Wiccan High Priestess a particularly privileged and powerful position in the coven and that this may be contrasted with the feminist democratic interpretation of witchcraft. The purpose of ritual is to provide the space for the magician to contact and embody the powers of the cosmos (represented by various deities) using the magical will. I have also suggested that the magical will is gendered (see Greenwood, 1996b).
Thus, all contemporary magical practices involve a notion of communication with an otherworld which is distinct from the world of ordinary reality. This communication is conducted when the magician is in a state of trance; the otherworld is experienced when the magician is in an altered state of consciousness.

The philosopher Lévy-Bruhl (1966) was the first to point out that human beings had two co-existing mentalities (what we would call two forms of consciousness): rational–logical and mystical. The anthropologist Stanley Tambiah (1991) developed Lévy-Bruhl’s ideas by proposing that it is possible to distinguish two orientations to the cosmos – two orderings of reality that women and men everywhere are capable of experiencing. The first is causality which emphasises atomistic individualism and distance and is represented by the categories, rules and methods of positivistic science and discursive mathematico-logical reason; the second is participation, an orientation to the world which places that person in the world fully as a totality, and where action is often expressed through myth and ritual. These two orientations to the cosmos correspond to what Michael Harner (1990) terms ‘Ordinary State of Consciousness’ (OSC) – which accords with causality – and a ‘Shamanic State of Consciousness’ (SCC) – which parallels with participation. It is through SCC that magicians contact the otherworld. Samuel identifies shamanism specifically with alternate states of consciousness and defines it as:

the regulation and transformation of human life and human society through the use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience. (Samuel, 1993: 8)

Samuel points out that shamanism has been defined in a restrictive and typological fashion by the emphasis on either the element of shamanic flight or that of spirit possession. He argues for an alternative approach that concentrates on common techniques of transformations of consciousness and what they mean for the functioning of human societies (Samuel, 1997: 326–7). In the context of this paper, magical ritual may be seen as a theatrical space where magicians utilise a shamanic altered state of consciousness to develop a connection with the ‘power source’ of the otherworld; it is a space in which boundaries can be negotiated between the microcosm of the self (and how it is gendered) and the forces of the macrocosm (the totality).
GENDERED power: the influence of Dion Fortune

Man should not for ever be potent, but should lie latent in the arms of Persephone, surrendering himself. Then she who was dark and cold as outer space before the creative Word, is made queen of the underworld, crowned by his surrender, and her kisses become potent upon his lips. (Dion Fortune, 1987: 132–3)

The influence of Dion Fortune on both high magic and Wicca is clear. Her notions of masculine/feminine polarity (influenced by Jungian psychology – see Fortune [1935]1987: 100) have shaped contemporary magical practices. Magicians’ gendered relationships with the otherworld are remarkably similar in both high magic and Wicca. However, magicians often stereotype the differences between these two practices: it is widely believed that high magic adopts a more formal and intellectual (and therefore more masculine) approach. By contrast, Wicca is said to be more practical and celebratory of nature (and associated with femininity). We can see in Wicca, therefore, the most developed notions of femininity and of feminine power, and I shall return to an analysis of this. But firstly I turn to an examination of Dion Fortune’s ideas. I start with her influential work The Mystical Qabalah, originally published in 1935, which was formative in my own high magic training.

When I was a student high magician during fieldwork, I learnt the attributes of the various sephiroth (or spheres) of the Kabbalistic ‘Tree of Life’ glyph (see Figure 8.1). I was taught that the sephirah Chokmah represents wisdom and the great primary male force. It is concerned with all masculinity, the father, and father-figures such as employers, authority and the state. The sephirah Binah represents understanding and is associated with form, restriction and limitation; it comprises all that is latent or passive – it is the ‘social unit’ in which the force of action has to work. Binah is the Great Mother, representing death and rebirth but also the home as the domain of the feminine side of life. The aim of learning the Kabbalah is to internalise the attributes of each sephirah of the ‘Tree of Life’ glyph, and so although the sephiroth of Chokmah and Binah are gendered in their association with notions of masculinity and femininity, the high magician must work towards balancing all the attributes of all the sephiroth within the self, leading to a form of spiritual androgyny. As my magical supervisor pointed out: ‘On the inner, we are neither male or female – we just are.’

When I questioned her about the gender of God, she said:

‘If you want to worship God in the female aspect, that’s fine, but remember that male and female forces are equal – neither is superior or inferior and the Universe has to have both to be balanced both on the macrocosm and the microcosm.’

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Fig 8.1: The Kabbalistic ‘Tree of Life’ glyph
Thus the emphasis is on balance: balance equals wholeness. The high magician works on becoming whole, aligning the microcosm (the self) with the macrocosm (the cosmos) and thereby helping humanity to evolve spiritually. As my magical supervisor commented: ‘When we are whole (or well on the way to being) we alter the whole of our race and in turn, the Universe’.

Dion Fortune’s main influence is on the dynamic nature of polarity: she was the first magician to incorporate Jungian psychology into magical ideas and to interpret it in such a way as to give women magical power. For Fortune, the sephirah Binah is associated with form and restriction, but this does not mean that femininity is viewed solely as passive: the relationship between the two aspects of polarity is active and dynamic and women are seen to be passive on the outer planes but active on the inner:

In her magical novel *The Sea Priestess*, Fortune tells of Wilfred Maxwell, a feeble asthmatic, who is taught the secrets of magic by Morgan Le Fay, the Sea Priestess. Fortune uses the medium of the novel to convey what she sees as essential magical lore, explaining how that which is ‘dynamic in the outer planes is latent in the inner planes’ (1989: 160). The Sea Priestess is an initiate of the ‘higher mysteries’ and was herself taught by the Priest of the Moon that manifesting Life had two modes or aspects – the active, dynamic and stimulating and the latent and passive which ‘receives the stimulus and reacts to it.’ The Priest of the Moon showed her how the two modes ‘changed places one with another in an endless dance, giving and receiving: accumulating force and discharging it; never still, never stabilized, ever in a state of flux and reflux as shown by the moon and the sea and the tides of life . . .’ (ibid.: 159). In turn, the Sea Priestess taught Wilfred that ‘in every being there are two aspects, the positive and the negative; the dynamic and the receptive; the male and the female’ (ibid.: 16).

Thus, there is gender equality in the inner magical spiritual domain, but this may be expressed using gender polarity on the outer planes and in the performance of ritual, as the following high magic ritual ‘The Summer Greeting Rite’ shows. This ritual demonstrates the close connection
between high magic and Wicca and the cross-over of ideas between the two: it is enacted around a central cauldron (a symbol of femininity borrowed from Wiccan ritual) and focuses on the Lady and Lord as sacred couple. The Lady summons the feminine powers of earth and water (rivers, streams and lakes), while the Lord summons the powers of air and fire which are identified with masculinity:

**LADY:** I am She who is the summer's breath, who holds the balance of the year. I am She who is in the brooks set free from winter's snare. I am She that in dappled shade of full leaved tree will whisper: Come to me! I am She in whose care all things have their time and place. I am She who replaces madcap maid with loving woman's face. I am She who calls to man and beast, bow before the power of love. Come to me! I am She whose warm breath feeds the earth and turns the fields to gold. I am She who is the core of every fairy tale that’s told. I am She without whose love the life of men would wither all away. Come to me!

Compare the role of the Lord:

**LORD:** Look on me without terror, for I am strength. Lean on me without restraint, for I will hold thee. Know me for what I have always been, the Life Force of the Land. My Horns are the symbols of that Force, as is my upraised phallus. Do not turn from me in shame, but glory in my manhood For it but reflects your own. Hear my voice in the October wind and the Winter's silent snow. Feel my power in the surge of Spring and Summer's bounty. Weep not when I am cut down, for I will rise again.

Note that Binah, the Great Mother represented by Nature, is receptive ('Come to me!'), and that Chokmah, the masculine force symbolised by the phallus, represents strength and 'the Life Force of the Land'. If we now turn to contemporary Wicca we shall see a similar gender polarity.

**Wicca and the emphasis on femininity**

Contemporary Wicca is practised in small groups called covens and attaches great importance to the aspect of family. According to Frederic Lamond, an initiate of Gerald Gardner's original coven, Wicca is a family which is based on gender polarity but with a 'special emphasis on femininity'. Wicca
is unique among magical practices in that the head of a coven is usually a High Priestess. When a witch reaches the Third Degree, the highest level of initiation, she may 'hive off' to form her own coven. Polarity is essential to the way that witchcraft is worked. Lamond points out that all is divided into male and female; that perpetuation requires the union of both genders, and that this is the basis of the nature of the powers: the primal mother and father brought earth and all its creatures into existence. This polarity is portrayed by the High Priestess and the High Priest in the highest Wiccan sacrament of the 'Sacred Marriage' or 'Great Rite', which aims to channel what are seen as the essential male and female sexual polarity of High Priest and High Priestess into the cosmos in such a manner as to transcend duality. Vivianne Crowley describes the Great Rite as a 'sacred marriage' in terms of Jungian psychology and in the tradition of Dion Fortune:

On the physical level it takes place with a priest or priestess; on the psychological level it takes place with the animus or anima; on the metaphysical level it takes place with the Goddess or the God. On the psychological level, the anima and animus can be considered as our initiators into the world of the True Self. (1989: 227)

Here the polaric forces of masculinity and femininity are seen as having physical, psychological and metaphysical elements which must be united in order to achieve a harmonious balance and effect the spiritual transformation of the true self. Masculine and feminine roles are also demonstrated on the mundane level. It is usually considered preferable to enter a Wiccan coven as a couple; some people do gain entry singly, but this is perhaps less easy for a man. On first entering the coven the neophyte witch is sponsored by a teacher of the opposite sex, and in this way the teachings of Wicca are passed on from female to male, and vice-versa. In addition, Wiccan rituals that I attended were explicitly ordered by gender. Before the ritual, women and men occupied clearly demarcated zones – spaces set aside where the ritual could be discussed beforehand, where men and women could rehearse the lines of the sacred drama, where they could get changed and talk generally about the ritual and also about ‘family’ relationships.

The Wiccan ritual is based on explicit gender division and gender roles: the Wiccan priest is very masculine – he will often call in the powers of the otherworld in a deep and commanding voice, using male imagery such as bulls and rams. The priestess is feminine, and this polarity is expressed in a manner similar to the high magic ‘Summer Greeting Rite’ already described. Both practices demonstrate the need for strong gender identity as a prerequisite for working polaric magic, and I have spoken to high magicians
and Wiccans who believe that homosexuals cannot work magic because they do not generate the required energy. However, it is interesting to note that the magical robes worn in some rituals make both male and female magicians appear androgynous.

**THE USE OF MAGICAL POWER**

Magical power is based on secret knowledge, and magicians identify themselves through their connection with the otherworld. Magical ritual is a theatrical space where social power relationships are reversed: the otherworld is where women as representatives of the Goddess are powerful vis-à-vis men. As already noted, Fortune suggested that women, following dominant notions of femininity, were outwardly passive in the ordinary world, but dynamic on the inner planes of the otherworld (Fortune, 1989). This means that in Wicca men have to give up their social power and surrender it to women. The High Priestess is the leader of the coven and the High Priest her partner. According to Vivianne Crowley, the rationale for this is derived from a ritual, *The Legend of the Goddess*, which is enacted as a mystery play during the initiation ceremony for High Priestesses. In the play, the Priestess enacts the role of the Goddess and undertakes a 'heroic quest' where she confronts the force of death, represented as male (Crowley, 1993: 135). This stems from Gardner’s *The Myth of the Goddess*, which he called 'the central idea of the cult', in which the goddess journeyed to the nether lands to the realm of death: 'Such was her beauty that Death himself knelt and kissed her feet..' (Gardner, [1954]1988). This has been interpreted by the Wiccans Janet and Stewart Farrar as: 'Such was her beauty, that Death himself laid down his sword and crown at her feet' (Farrar, 1984: 29, quoted in Crowley, 1993: 135).

Crowley notes that in Wicca the sword and the crown are seen as symbols of power and legitimate authority, and are given by the God to the Goddess. According to Crowley, this recognizes the underlying reality of male-female relations: the greater physical strength of the male. The woman can only rule because the man permits her to do so and 'in Wicca, he does' (1993: 135).

Gendered ritual contact with the otherworld does in some circumstances empower women. I have argued elsewhere that witchcraft (Wiccan and feminist versions) is concerned with the empowerment of the self and aims to (re)define selfhood (Greenwood, 1998; 2000); I have also suggested that Wicca is a specifically female model of power (Greenwood, 1996b; 2000). Male Wiccans enact a role where they give up their social power to a woman as representative of the Goddess. In Tantric practices women are wor-
shipped as manifestations of goddesses, but according to Elizabeth Puttick in her study of women in new religions, the main debate is whether the woman in a Tantric relationship is primarily a sex object for the man’s enlightenment or whether she is an equal partner (1997: 56). Puttick concludes that such practices do appear to have worked for women’s as well as men’s spiritual enlightenment in the past, but argues that success depends on high discipline and equality (1997: 58). It seems reasonable to suggest that there is potential for spiritual transformation based on a genuine equality, but that there is also the potential for abuse of power by magicians of either gender. Some male Wiccans may experience the loss of control as sexually stimulating: as an indulgence in the forbidden as a form of eroticism, or a transgression of the social world in the tradition of de Sade (Airaksinen, 1995) – a response which does not challenge institutions of masculine power in mainstream society. The practice of Wicca does not challenge social or political convention and thus largely supports the gender status quo of feminine subordination in the ordinary world. In this respect it differs from feminist versions of witchcraft which do not work in gender-stereotyped ways and which allegedly practise magic to transform what they regard as the patriarchal social structures of ordinary reality (see Greenwood, 1996a). Wicca works on notions of femininity based on traditional feminine stereotypes of intuition, feeling, relating and nurturing, but ultimately women’s legitimate power and authority is given to them only when men choose to surrender it. As Puttick notes, this seems to undermine the basis of female power by defining its conditions as social and as a ‘precarious authority granted by men, which can therefore be abrogated by men’ (Puttick, 1997: 217).

The promise of occult power is one reason why many people are attracted to magical practices. Magical power has two aspects: as an energy or force brought through as deity from the otherworld; and as a form of this-worldly identity and status. Some tentative work is emerging that associates magical practices with people who have suffered abuse. The practice of Wicca may involve using magical rituals to work out childhood feelings of powerlessness, thereby improving participants’ self-conception and this-worldly identity. Shelley Rabinovitch, in research conducted for an MA thesis, has noted the high incidence of abuse among those engaged in Paganism in North America.19 She found that many people involved in witchcraft came from abused or severely dysfunctional backgrounds, with either alcoholic parents, a history of drug dependency, or physical, sexual or emotional abuse (1992). Drawing on Rabinovitch’s work, Sian Reid argues that magic is a metaphor for expressing and manipulating the meaning context of life: by using spells, witches heal themselves from their personal histories of
trauma. She claims that magical practices confer certain psychological benefits to survivors of abuse. Abuse leaves its victims feeling powerless, but by engaging in meditation, visualisation, rituals and roleplay which confer power and control as self-knowledge it is possible for victims to re-integrate parts of the personality to alter consciousness and work towards change. Reid argues that magic is born out of the inner strength of ‘traversing darkness’ and that it gives a positive value to pain as a part of individual growth (1996: 160–3).

Although there are no accurate figures, my impression is that many women involved in magical practices in London had also experienced some form of similar trauma. One High Priestess that I knew had suffered from sexual and physical abuse as a child and used her power in her coven as a means of redressing her intense childhood feelings of powerlessness. In such cases – which may be unrepresentative of Wicca as a whole but nevertheless cannot be ignored – the ritual may convert these feelings of powerlessness to experiences of empowerment. Everyday coven interactions may also demonstrate this power relationship. This particular High Priestess routinely humiliated her High Priest and another male member of the coven who shared their house. On one occasion they both knelt down in front of her to be reprimanded for not doing the necessary cleaning of the floor before the ritual. It appeared to me at the time that both men enjoyed this performance (cf McClintock, 1993) and that there were elements of sadomasochism (S/M) in the relationship. The connections between Paganism and S/M have been explored in the American Pagan magazine Green Egg. In an article on the subject, Dossie Easton and Catherine Liszt argue that S/M is ‘consensual power exchange’ and that S/M fantasies can come from areas deep within childhood memory and experience. A characteristic of S/M is the exploration of the psyche as an ‘adventure in the forbidden’: an investigation of the Jungian shadow, the realm containing all that is excluded from awareness in the pursuit of transformation. They point out that ‘when we add ritual to our S/M, performing it with spiritual intention, we can travel deeper yet . . . beyond the personal unconscious mind and into universal consciousness, or spiritual awareness’ (1997: 18). In this context, magical ritual may be a cathartic space of transformation of the social realm; a negotiated space where feminine and masculine gender roles are enacted as a theatrical play to work out deep-seated psychological issues in the name of goddesses and gods. In short, magical ritual may be a place where social relationships of power from the ordinary world are negotiated and transgressed.
CONCLUSION

In this paper I have shown how a study of history reveals an underlying Hermetic framework to contemporary western magical practices and highlighted the problems of using terms such as ‘Paganism’ with its association with pre-Christian indigenous nature religion. I have argued that contemporary magical practices are based on Hermeticism and that the gender roles employed in both high magic and contemporary Wicca are largely shaped by the work of Dion Fortune. Fortune’s conception of gender polarity gives female magicians, as representatives of the goddess, power in the ritual space of contact with the otherworld. The question remains whether this feminine power, exemplified by the Wiccan High Priestess as a queen crowned by masculine surrender in a ritual context also empowers women in the ordinary world of mainstream culture.

NOTES

1. Some practitioners of magic (usually of the Nordic traditions) prefer to call themselves ‘Heathen’, which is the north European equivalent (Harvey, 1996).
2. All contemporary magical practices form a complex mixture of religious ontologies broadly termed the Hermetic tradition.
3. There is some debate as to whether Chaos Magicians are Pagans because Chaos Magicians reject all ‘belief systems’. I have spoken with some Chaos Magicians who do identify as Pagan.
4. The word ‘shaman’ comes from the language of a small Tungus-speaking group of hunters and reindeer-herders in Siberia (the Evenk, Even, Nanay, Orochi and Udegey). The term was adopted by Russian scholars and means ‘the ecstatic one’. In 1951 the historian of religion Mircea Eliade published Shamanism in which he used Siberian practices as classic cases of what he suggested were techniques employed by tribal peoples all through time and all over the world. As a result, the terms ‘shaman’ and ‘shamanism’ have since become generalised (Hutton, 1993: 10).
5. I use the term ‘magicians’ in preference to ‘Pagans’ as a more specific name which relates to the actual practice of magic rather than its associations or belief.
6. I prefer the term ‘embodying’ to ‘possession’, as the latter suggests a negative Christian interpretation of being possessed by demons.
7. The early Greek philosophers made no distinction between body and soul or the physical and the spiritual, and a sense of wholeness was the most typical feature of their world view (Kitto [1951] 1968).
8. During the Renaissance it was commonly believed that astrological signs ruled the body and that different bodily temperaments were related to the planets.
9. Bruno was influenced by Henry Cornelius Agrippa’s survey of Renaissance magic, De Occulta Philosophia (1533).
10. Crowley left little in written form on sexual magick. The topic was taken up by his student Kenneth Grant (Shual, 1995).
11. However, Katon Shual argues that for Aleister Crowley the ‘quintessence of the divine
was phallic’, suggesting that Crowley's ‘veneration’ of woman as priestess was for masculine ends (1995: 28).

12. No relation to Aleister Crowley.

13. Samuel notes that Tantric Buddhism had its origins in India. It was practised in the fourth to eighth centuries CE by small initiatory cult groups. The central ritual was conducted in a nocturnal circle (ganacakra), often in a cremation ground, and included the ritual use of sexuality, possession, dancing and singing (Samuel, 1998).

14. Feminist witchcraft, which developed from the 1960s 'second wave' feminist movement, is specifically opposed to gender polarity and is supposedly more egalitarian (Greenwood, 1996a, 1998).

15. It must be born in mind, however, that magicians often practise both high magic and witchcraft and any typology built on difference is essentially a heuristic tool.

16. This ritual comes from the Servants of the Light (SOL) school of occult science.


18. This is due to the fact that many men may be attracted to Wicca for the 'wrong reasons' i.e. the sexual attraction of working with 'skyclad' (naked) women.

19. At the Nature Religion Today conference held at the Lake District campus of Lancaster University 9–13 April 1996. Rabinovich noted that most abuse was carried out in the nuclear family and that the frequency of abuse among her informants was so high that she had to modify her questions: only 1 out of 40 persons interviewed did not undergo trauma.

20. The sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing coined the terms 'sadism' and 'masochism' in 1885 as medicalised psychopathologies of the flesh. Sadism was defined as an innate desire to humiliate, hurt, wound or destroy to create sexual pleasure. By contrast, masochism was the passive enjoyment of pain or humiliation (McClintock, 1993: 208–10).

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Bibliography


GENDER AND POWER IN MAGICAL PRACTICES

Boggarts and Books: Towards an Appreciation of Pagan Spirituality
Graham Harvey

INTRODUCTION

Paganism is a religion centrally concerned with celebrating Nature. Pagans are people who are listening to the living, speaking Earth (Harvey, 1997: 16). Whether the first, more systematic, phrase is preferable to the second, more mythopoeic one is probably a matter of taste or emphasis. There are many different sorts of Pagan (e.g. Druids, Witches and Heathens) and all celebrate Nature in one way or another. Few offer systematic definitions of their religion or of ‘Nature’, and they are rarely dogmatic about how to celebrate. The more mythopoeic phrase helpfully suggests an attitude diffused throughout life, rather than implying that this religion (or any other) is a discrete set of ceremonies or beliefs. Actual celebrations of Nature are not the entirety of Paganism, but are manifestations of a way of life. Pagans do not obsessively consider the environment in everything they do: while they are likely to use biodegradable washing-up liquid, they are unlikely to treat washing-up as an opportunity to indulge in invocations of deities, ancestors and elementals. Even during ceremonies, the focus of attention may not be on ‘celebrating Nature’ but on rites of passage, welcoming new members of the group or healing. This chapter presents a series of vignettes of typical Pagan activities and engagements with the world.

An adequate portrayal of Pagan interests (and a rounded picture of what Pagans consider Paganism to be) requires examination not only of the ceremonies but also of the rest of life. Although the festivities described here draw attention (sometimes in passing) to concerns that are lived out in ‘ordinary life’, a fuller exploration of Paganism should resist the temptation only to observe strange ceremonies. Similarly, the idea that Paganism can be studied only from books or the Internet should be dismissed.
It is nearly midnight and about twenty warmly-dressed people are sitting or lying around a fire. They are in the depths of a wood some distance from a village, twelve miles or so from a British city. This is a celebration of the beginning of winter. To be precise, this sitting or lying by the fire is the celebration. This is not merely an interlude between ceremonies. What is significant to these people is just being here, by the fire, in the wood, on this night, with these friends. If you face the fire your front is warm and your back chilled. This is winter’s beginning.

Hollowed pumpkin and turnip lanterns hang from nearby trees, another is sitting on a chair-like mossy rock. People have been cooking potatoes in the fire, and brought other food and drink with them, some for themselves and some to share. Currently it is fairly quiet as people gaze into the fire, doze off, share a drink or reach for another potato. Most have been here since they finished work, some have been here most of the day and others will arrive as soon as the village pub shuts. Some will stay the night, others will leave soon to sleep in warm beds at home.

The assertion that this sitting around the fire is itself the celebration of winter is tested by a question: ‘When are we going to do something?’. Some of the company consider ritual to be a necessary part of the celebration, or even the entirety of it. Sitting round a fire may be fun, but something more is required. Those who have been celebrating here regularly for several years think it is sufficient, but the gathering has grown, partly by invitation, partly by rumour and the accretion of friends. A conversation ensues in which no one objects to a ceremony, but some do not want to join anything elaborate. It is agreed that those who want to will move a short distance from the fire and form their circle at midnight, which seems an apt time to honour the cold and dark. But first there is time for those who have been here before to talk about the place.

This is a wood that is enjoyed by many people from the area, not only Pagans. It is a mixed, semi-natural wood, a remnant of an old working wood, now going wild. Most people find it a peaceful place to be, especially sitting by a spring which bubbles up in a small pool not far from the fire site. Although there is a small conifer plantation on one side of the wood, most of the trees are native and have grown in Britain since the end of the last ice age. There are several distinct areas within the wood, from old hazel coppice, to a rocky area near where the stream has cut round a craggy outcrop, a stand of birch and a boggy area of alder and willow. The fire itself burns in a clearing by the largest oaks in the wood. Just up the bank, tall beeches whisper with every breeze and sound like waves breaking when the
wind blows strongly. There are hares, foxes, badger, otter and deer in the wood. Occasionally salmon make it up the stream. Owls, herons, pigeon and rooks are among the many birds here. But the wood has other inhabitants too. British folk traditions speak of them as elves, dwarves, boggarts and so on – and collectively as the faery folk. But it is often traditional only to use circumlocutions like ‘Them’.

At this point in the orientation to the wood and its inhabitants, in case things are getting overly serious, a spontaneous outburst of spooky noises is made by some of the group. Melodramatic witchy cackles and screeches resound for a while. Uncannily enough, the noise helps the latecomers, just now arriving from the pub, find their way to join in the fun. Samhain coincides with Hallowe’en: both festivals may be key times for honouring the ancestors, the dead, and Death itself, but this is often achieved with humour, games, fun and mischief (Edwards, 1996; Hutton, 1991, 1996). Cold spaghetti in a bag is ‘the entrails of the dead’, peeled grapes are their eyes. It is too cold in the wood for anyone to want to duck for apples but an attempt is made to hang apples in a nearby tree so people can try to bite them without using hands.

When things calm down again, someone wants to know more about ‘Them’. The Victorians almost persuaded us that ‘fairies’ are diminutive and cute. Tolkien permitted a grander, more noble vision of proud and powerful if elusive inhabitants of the twilight and fringes of the world, but his elves are not at home in human-centred Middle Earth. They are not, in the end, the elves of earlier tradition, native to their forests and fringe lands. They are not the tricksters and kidnappers of Irish folklore, of Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin or the hidden, arrow-firing human foes of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon tradition. In this wood, and other reaches of the Greenwood, strange things happen: well-known paths become maze-like labyrinths, conjunctions of bough and branch reveal and hide watchers. You have only to go to the spring on this night to see that candles cast light like bonfires and incense billows like mist. Although this year it was the ‘spooky’ noises that drew latecomers deeper into the wood, in previous years flutes have been heard and followed to a fireside where no flute or flautist could be seen. And some have seen ‘Them’ dance. While the thought of this is enchanting and seems to validate Pagan traditions, a sense of unease tinges the story-telling here. The presence of faeries may not be a safe thing, ‘They’ may just be real and ‘They’ may just be here. Happily, someone is able to quote from Terry Pratchett on the subject:

Elves are wonderful. They provoke wonder. Elves are marvellous. They cause marvels ... Elves are terrific. They beget terror ... No-one ever said elves are nice. Elves are bad. (Pratchett, 1993: 169-70)
A round of favourite quotations from this prolific writer of comic fantasy ensues. Many (though not all) Pagans enjoy Pratchett’s style and humour, and also think they recognise a Pagan world in his imagined ‘Discworld’. Some might even recognise themselves or their fellow Pagans in its inhabitants. The company returns to the pleasure of the evening (although now some have a word for the feeling that there are unseen participants in the revelry). It should be noted, in passing, that ‘badness’ in this context does not mean ‘evil’ but ‘trickster’: one who does antisocial and dangerous things which sometimes harm but may benefit others.

Conversation and storytelling continue, sometimes about the ‘themes’ of the festival (death, winter, conclusions), sometimes about folklore and ideas from other cultures about ‘invisible beings’. It also emerges that the ‘sitting by the fire is the celebration’ interpretation is somewhat disingenuous: the collecting of firewood and the building and lighting of the fire in this particular place in the wood were themselves ritualised. The wood was asked for permission and help in finding firewood and a brief explanation of the purpose of the fire (the celebration of winter) was given. Offerings were made in several places: candles and incense were lit by the spring, strands of wool tied in several significant trees, cake was scattered and beer poured at the roots of a particular tree. In previous years the fire site had been elsewhere in the wood, much nearer its boundary with fields. This year those gathering wood shared a feeling of being invited to celebrate in a new place to which they felt directed (in some low-key, non-apocalyptic sense). While building the fire they ‘cast a circle’ around it, greeting the directions and associated elements, and placed protective symbols around it. One of the wood-gatherers has developed a tradition of collecting twigs from native British trees into a ‘protective bundle’, built around a central ‘rowan and red thread’ and re-encoding Robert Graves’s poetic mythology (Graves, 1948). No-one articulated what ‘protection’ was required for, although the later evocation (but not invocation) of ‘Them’ might offer part of an answer. The presence of the dead is clearly not feared but welcomed and explicitly invited. A mild concern was expressed that some who would join the celebration might be afraid (of the dead, of the night, of ‘Them’?) and that their fear might be disturbing.

It was my observation of this event and this conversation as a participant that led me to suggest that Paganism is less a ‘spiritual path’ than a ‘spiritual sitting among the trees’ (Harvey, 1993: 91; 1997: 224). This should not be taken too seriously; it is intended simply to highlight the fact that the significant activity in similar Pagan events is a sense of being at home within the ecology of the Earth. Being ‘at home’ requires a journey towards celebration of the reality of what exists, the physical body and earth.
Towards an Appreciation of Pagan Spirituality

The 'journey' is further illustrated by the fact that those who participated in this ceremony included people from fairly organised or initiatory 'paths' (Heathenism, Druidry, Ritual Magick and Wicca) as well as a majority of 'simply Pagans'. This 'ad hoc' grouping (Luhrmann, 1989) indicates not a lack of identity, but a more fluid and nature-centred movement that draws on all available 'paths' in a thoroughly postmodern way – and probably includes the majority of Pagans.

This particular evening did eventually include a midnight ritual led by Druids who, despite common perceptions even among Pagans, do not only celebrate 'in the eye of the sun', i.e. in daylight and in public. However, this section concludes by noting that although Druids and others share a concern with celebrating Nature, the 'sitting by the fire' type of Pagans generally devote less energy to contemplating themselves and their personal growth than Pagans of more initiatory paths. There is no great divorce here, simply a question of emphasis. Wicca is a nature religion concerned with personal growth or self-understanding (Crowley, 1989, 1996), while 'fireside' Pagans primarily focus on celebrating Nature with little reference to Jungian archetypes or the individual's 'true self'. So it was clear to some of those present that the point of describing the wood and its inhabitants was more than merely scene-setting. Our hosts and companions were being introduced to those of us who were otherwise merely casual visitors. In this event, winter was being celebrated not only by human people sitting around a fire, but also by the wood which provided the firewood (not only metaphorically) and by all the other personal beings in that community/environment. Trees, hedgehogs, owls, bats, fish, insects, rocks, breezes, 'Them', the dead, elementals and a host of other people (human and other-than-human) were engaged in a single festive encounter.

Circles in Avebury

To mention Druids is to conjure up images of bearded men in white robes processing into ancient stone circles. The archetype is sometimes more than stereotype and is sometimes manifest in reality: there are bearded male Druids and some do celebrate in ancestral sacred sites. However, they are rarely alone: Druids today come in both genders and all ages, and they do not only celebrate at Stonehenge at midsummer sunrise but at night elsewhere too (as noted above) – and some of their celebrations are far less organised than the word 'procession' implies. However, rather than directly challenge the stereotype, this vignette accompanies a regular Druid gathering at Avebury in Wiltshire.
By around noon on the Saturday nearest any given festival in the annual cycle of eight celebrated by the majority of Pagans, people will start gathering together within the ancient circles (bank, ditch and several rings of standing stones) at Avebury, in Wiltshire. They come from various Druid Orders and many wear some sort of costume. For some, a simple white robe is sufficient; others wear blue or green tabards to indicate that they are Bards or Ovates. Some wear more elaborate costumes, indicating their affinity for particular animals or their understanding of themselves as reincarnations of historical (or mythic?) characters such as Arthur. The Druids are not alone; Pagans from other traditions regularly join them and play significant roles in the gathering, but there are also Buddhists, Christians, Baha’is and others among the participants.

Rarely will a ceremony begin by noon, even when the ritual asserts that the ‘sun is at its zenith’. Time among nature-respecting traditions rarely follows the decree of watches, so ‘Druid Time’ and ‘Pagan Time’ are comparable to ‘Powwow Time’ among First Nation North Americans. The ceremony will begin when the Chosen Chief has finished his pint, or when a respected participant eventually arrives, or when a media interview is finished. A low level of impatience with these dignitaries is typical and various attempts are sometimes made to move things on. At other times, nothing discernible and no-one in particular is evident in marking the transition between gathering and ceremony. A procession of sorts begins.

A female Druid leads some of the party on the ‘Goddess path’ around the perimeter of the ancient circles, anti-clockwise or, more appropriately, counter-sunrise. This happens to be the shortest and least strenuous route from the usual gathering places to the usual focal point of the celebration in either the northern or southern inner circle. The longer ‘God path’ follows three-quarters of the outer circle, climbing and descending the steep banks at several places. These distances and difficulties, rather than gender, seem to determine whether people, other than the leaders, follow the God or Goddess path. Both parties meet by the two large stones at Avebury’s eastern ceremonial entrance.

The representative of the Goddess or the Guardian of the Place sits in a niche within one of these stones. She is greeted respectfully by the company who also request permission to enter the circle for the festivities. So far, she has always been happy to welcome the celebrants. A few years ago some of the group spontaneously formed an arch with staffs beneath which everyone else entered the outer stone circle. This has now become traditional and the staffs are occasionally joined by wands or didjeridus.
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Sometimes (depending on which Order's Chiefs are leading the event) the party stops en route to the inner circle to bless marriages and children at the remains of a 'ring stone'. The majority of the stones at Avebury were assaulted by Puritan Christians determined that something so obviously 'devilish' should not survive. Some stones were broken up for building roads and homes, and others were pushed into deep pits. Earlier this century, many of the stones were re-erected or their locations marked by a concrete bollard. The ring stone is said to have been a holed stone like one that survives in Cornwall. The blessings here are usually brief and formulaic, rather than individually crafted ceremonies, but are nonetheless enjoyed by many couples and families. Under other leadership, such blessings are made within the specific celebration of the season conducted within the remains of either of the inner circles. Sometimes elaborate marriage ceremonies are performed at Avebury, but they too are usually part of the regular round of seasonal festivals.

Druid celebrations typically begin like other Pagan events with the forming of a circle and the greeting of the four quarters. Some Druids do this by the recitation of elemental and totemic associations: north is 'the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth'; south is 'the great stag in the heat of the chase and the inner fire of the sun'; west is 'the salmon of wisdom dwelling within the pool'; and east is 'the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air'. Others simply face each direction and bid it or its 'spirits' welcome.

After a brief speech announcing the purpose of the gathering (i.e. naming the festival and the season it celebrates), everyone is invited to join in the chanting of Awen, 'flowing spirit' or inspiration. Although this is a common tradition among contemporary Druid Orders (some consider it equivalent to the Hindu 'Aum'), there is no universal agreement on how it should be done, some chanting it as written, others chanting the sounds 'A I O', but always in one long unbroken breath. The sound reverberates as it is repeated three times. Those who have never chanted it before will have caught on and joined in by the third round. Now all in the circle are participants, no longer mere observers. The chant enchants; it is not only a symbol of inspiration, it is an experience of it, as it flows around the circle and outwards, changing things.

Now that everyone has found their voice, they are invited to contribute songs, stories, poems or anything they wish to the celebration. For a while, people take turns to step into the circle and perform with greater or lesser skill. Some are clearly more popular than others, but this is not a competition and is supposed to encourage greater attunement to inspiration and celebration of the Earth. Many of the contributions evolve from
understandings of traditional stories or from experiences in direct action confronting road, quarry and housing developments. After a while, the group is invited to participate in ‘the Druid Prayer’:

Grant, O Goddess, thy protection; and in protection, strength; and in strength, understanding; and in understanding, knowledge; and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice; and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it; and in the love of it, the love of all existences; and in the love of all existences, the love of Goddess and all Goodness.²

This, of course, loses all but the Druids who have done it before – and even they stumble, unsure whether to say ‘Goddess’ or ‘God and Goddess’ or ‘Goddesses and Gods’ or some other version. (Its eighteenth-century author, the Welsh revivalist/folklorist, Iolo Morganwg, wrote ‘God’). Not that anyone objects to any particular version; Paganism is rarely fundamentalist even about understandings of, or invocations to, divine beings.

If marriages and other blessings did not happen earlier, they may happen at this point. Otherwise, seasonal food or drink may be shared (mead horns, wassail bowls and loaves of bread are common). The ritual draws towards an end with the threefold repetition of the vow:

We swear by peace and love to stand, heart to heart and hand in hand,
Mark, O Spirit and hear us now, confirming this our sacred vow.³

Finally, the directions are bid ‘hail and farewell’ and the circle is declared ‘open’ – that is, the ritual is over and we return to the pub, restaurant or home. Some wander among the stones communing with themselves, their friends, the place and its inhabitants, spirits and energies. There are those who are certain that what makes some celebrations ‘work’ is the presence and blessing of the ancestors who built these sacred circles. Others celebrate the almost palpable sense of awareness in the place itself which imbues all that happens here with significance. Perhaps there is even wisdom to be gained here: a complete stranger happily announced, ‘These moles know a thing or two’ as he strolled by. Understandings and appreciations of Avebury are fluid and relaxed, and the place has rarely witnessed the animosities evident around Stonehenge. There is an openness and freedom here that is still matched by the lack of fences, ticket offices and security guards. Those who engage in struggles for land-rights elsewhere usually visit Avebury in a lighter frame of mind and spirit.
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VIKINGS GET MARRIED

Obsession with the Celts is almost ubiquitous (not only among Pagans) in the West (cf Bowman, 1993, 1996), but some people actively celebrate their Anglo-Saxon and Norse ancestry. A marriage between leading members of one Heathen group explicitly links the honouring of ancestors with ensuring the continuity of the lineage.

The location is a popular beauty and picnic spot near another northern British city. To the bride and groom it is significant, both because their Viking ancestors settled near here and because they are involved in its environmental protection and enhancement. Neither of these reasons is less significant than the other, and both are stressed in speeches welcoming guests. The ceremony begins with a procession from the car park to a central rock outcrop. The couple’s group lead the way, with family and invited guests following. Like other religionists, Pagans of all traditions dress up for ceremonies (robes, jewellery and symbolic blades are commonplace), but this group’s distinctiveness is evident in their regalia. Thor’s Hammer (Mjölnir) pendants are common among Heathen groups – even those whose affinity with Odin might lead them to wear his Walknot symbol of three interlocked triangles – but this group displays their self-understanding in more elaborate ways. The clothes they wear for ceremonies would make any re-enactment society envious. In fact, some members of the group do re-enact tenth-century Norse-settlement life, but their festive costume and equipment is of a considerably better quality than that used in mock-battles. Wool tunics, linen shirts, leather belts and boots, jewellery, swords and axes, banners and mead horns all declare this to be a proud, warrior tradition strongly supported by expert craft-workers. For example, the groom wears a precise replica of the Sutton Hoo helmet and among his gifts to his bride is a fine copy of a Danish brooch.

Arriving at the marriage site, the quarters are greeted. A hammer is held aloft and the directions are named in a way that adds different nuances to this typical Pagan engagement with the world. Alongside wider understandings of the elemental associations of the directions ‘north’, ‘east’, ‘south’ and ‘west’ are the names of four dwarves who hold up the sky. So, while the greeting of the quarters is always a summary of Pagan cosmology, the Heathen version addresses issues of security, strength, mutuality among the world’s inhabitants and the animation of seemingly abstract forces. Deities are honoured by poetic invocations and, as the occasion is a marriage, those most associated with ancestry and love predominate. Thor, Sif, Freyr and Freyja are named several times: their presence and inspiration are requested and their powers are drawn upon.
The actual wedding ceremony draws on traditional Norse understandings. Ancestry, kin and family rather than romance are central in the ceremony – although romance is far from absent. The continuity of the family line and differentiation of the roles of husband and wife are stressed on the authority of ‘ancestors’, ‘tradition’ and ‘nature’. Similar understandings are prevalent among other nature-centred indigenous religions, but provoke frequent debate among Pagans and their observers. However, the ceremony itself is not a time for debate but for affirmations, especially between the couple. They make vows of commitment to one another and to their kin (ancestors, friends and descendants), validating them on significant symbols such as hammer, sword and, of course, rings. Finally, the bride’s hair is plaited by the groom as a sign of his care for her and of their mutual entwining.

A horn full of mead is shared by the couple and also offered to the deities by pouring in a hollow on the rock. It is then passed around family and friends. Further feasting takes place after the ceremonies, in a pub reception. Nothing would have attracted particular attention to this if it had not been for the costumes of the wedding party and the fact that some are carrying swords. The more ‘secular’ or embodied aspects of rites of passage and calendar festivals require little change in order to be incorporated into Pagan ceremonies, or perhaps, in order for the essential elements of such celebrations of life in this world to be retrieved. Concurrently, Pagan ceremonies, like polytheistic deities, send us back into the world with a renewed sense of the value of our ordinary human lives (Harvey, 1997: 168–9; Green, 1989).

Re-sourcing Paganism

Pagans do not spend all their lives, or all the significant moments of their lives, out of doors. Many Pagan activities take place indoors. Not all elements of the celebration of Nature require contact with the mud and matter of the other-than-human environment. The inspirations and validating experiences of Pagans are not solely ‘natural’, nor do they consist exclusively of encounters with the Greenwood and its inhabitants or immersion in woodlands and wildernesses. The development of Paganism in this century has involved considerable study of anthropology, history, folklore, herbalism, philosophy, archaeology and other disciplines. As individuals and in groups, Pagans draw on a wide range of (re)sources in the evolution of their world view. This is rarely if ever deliberately planned: like most other religions, Paganism does not have an agenda requiring continuous codification. The fact is more straightforwardly that Pagans are
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influenced by what they read, hear and experience – and that they tend to be well-read in areas that have a bearing on nature, ancestry, cosmology and spirituality. This final vignette of contemporary Pagan engagements with the world visits the home of a woman who facilitates a Matriarchal Studies group. This is a purely local group of like-minded women who share an affinity with Goddess traditions, feminist spirituality and a Pagan understanding of life. There are larger networks and journals which are important to some of the group members, but belonging to this group does not exclude other affiliations and identities. The group meets in this house as near as possible to each full-moon evening.

There is nothing exceptional about the house, which was built as a council house, now privately owned. Its small gardens do not contain strange herbs like Belladonna or Aconite. There is no besom broomstick just inside the front door – this woman is ‘not that kind of witch’, although she knows witches who do grow herbs and display broomsticks. She dislikes the stereotype, but only mildly, and celebrates the connection it represents with those persecuted as witches in the past. In fact, she rarely calls herself a witch, but does use some of the symbolism and techniques employed by those who are, conversely, happy to identify themselves with ‘the Craft’ or ‘Wicca’. A major difference between this woman’s Paganism and that of the Craft is that she sees no need for male symbolism, participation, deities or stereotypes. When challenged that this is unbalanced, she quietly points out that it is the imposition of men and male symbolism, deities, stereotypes and activities which is dominating and unbalanced. By devoting her energies to women and their well-being she considers herself to be making a small start towards redressing the imbalance of patriarchy. It has been quite difficult for me to gain her trust sufficiently to be invited to meet her in her own home. There is certainly no possibility of my participating in any event she organises, although I know about half of the women in this group. They are not secretive about their activities, although they doubt I will understand or value everything they say or do, but they have no intention or desire for male participation in their discussions or celebrations. This lack of interest in men does not extend to all their relationships – many are happy in heterosexual relationships – nor to the books they study. It is these books and their study that I am interested in discussing with the group’s facilitator.

There are books in most rooms in the house, alongside notes in files and on loose sheets of paper. Some are academic books: predominantly history, archaeology, classical literature and folklore. Books about local history, geography and (ancestral) sacred places are also common. There are many books about Goddesses from different cultures and times, and others that
bring them together so that people can honour 'the Goddess'. There are 'how to' books with guidance on rituals, calendars and political and cultural empowerment. Plenty of novels and other works of 'fiction' are scattered among the shelves; some seem well used. Most of the books here could be found in other Pagan homes, although perhaps not in such profusion. Although there is a clear focus on Goddesses and the Goddess, this is not unique to feminist women's groups or Matriarchal study groups. For example, Elinor Gadon's *The Once and Future Goddess* (1990) and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* (1989) are popular among many Pagans (including the less male-dominated forms of Heathenism). Starhawk's *Truth or Dare* (1990) and Merlin Stone's *When God was a Woman* (1976) are not quite as common, requiring a degree of activism or feminism beyond some other Pagan books. Meanwhile, Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* (1988) is probably the most commonly cited of a series in which many Pagans enjoy recognising 'their sort of people'. It is not accompanied in this house by many other 'fantasy' books: Tolkien, for example, is conspicuously absent – my host asserts that Tolkien contributes little of value to feminists.

These are all sources of significance to the Study Group. Intrigued as I am to make sure that I have not missed some central text that explains the interests and activities of this significant branch of Paganism, I want to know how the group makes use of these books. What kind of authority do they have? Are they consulted to confirm existing understandings or to develop new ones?

In their monthly meetings the group discusses a chosen issue or theme. Sometimes these are treated as a series – for example, 'Celtic Goddesses and Saints' or 'African Goddesses'. One of the group will volunteer to read everything she can find (often borrowed from the facilitator) and report back to the group. The facilitator clearly intends the group to use this discussion as a means of 'consciousness-raising' or 'self-empowerment'. These are not simply discussions of ancient history or interesting cultures. They are about finding better ways of understanding the world and better ways of living. They are intended to counter patriarchy, to move towards its end. Various members of the group also belong to movements engaging in direct action of one sort or another, and all are encouraged to consider the rooting of ideas in lifestyles. As is common in the Goddess Spirituality movement, there is no dogmatism about whether Goddesses exist 'out there' in their own right, 'within the human heart' as empowering archetypes, 'between women as that which happens when women meet', or as 'personifications of the natural processes of life, death and rebirth'. Nor is this a dogmatic system in which 'the Goddess' is 'one or many' (see Christ, 1979, and Long, 1994). All these views (and others) are held by members of the group, but rarely cause conflict.
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The books provide resources for imagining and re-imagining, inventing or re-inventing oneself and one's place and time. Authority derives from the experience of being women, and the experiences of women in a (late) patriarchal culture. The books that are valued here are those which disseminate ideas and resources, inspire action rather than passivity and are enabling, not belittling. Finally, there seems to be an openness towards new possibilities. While there is certainly a standard (feminism) by which any proposed resource must be judged, the group invites change and searches for alternatives to the way they and others live in the world today.

Vignettes are not snapshots

These four vignettes are illustrative of significant Pagan themes and engagements. They are neither exhaustive nor complete. Nor are all their ramifications made explicit here; that is left to a continuing dialogue between Pagans and those who study them. Finally, it should be noted that, although the vignettes draw on actual events and encounters, they are also all (to one degree or another) composite images. They are not snapshots of single events, but attempts to convey the life of a variety of ways of being Pagan. Only by doing a little violence to the particular embodiment of selected events can I hope to have avoided stealing the soul of Pagan engagements with life.

Notes

3. Ibid.

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INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this chapter is to show that theoretical and empirical research on aspects of the healing activity which is associated with the New Age has called in question many widely held assumptions. Our argument will be in two parts. The first will suggest that commentators have tended mistakenly to portray alternative healing or complementary therapy as an excessively individualistic activity. The second will draw on empirical findings to argue that some currently fashionable notions of the body as a site of cultural confusion, change and conflict do not help fully to explain the processes whereby so-called New Age healers acquire their skills, but that notions of ‘flow’ and ‘tuning in’ are relatively more helpful. Our contribution will therefore be theoretical and empirical.

We place particular emphasis on the combination of theoretical and empirical analysis for the simple reason that the literature on healing, bodies and the New Age is rich in speculation and conceptual debate but relatively poor in empirical reports of healing activity. In fact, the disparity between the ambitious sweep of theoretical generalisations and the meagre supply of reliable observations is astonishing. There seems to be no limit to the extent to which social scientists are prepared to go in allegedly charting massive historical changes of consciousness, identity and imagery in relation to human bodies and healing. Yet there seems to be little appetite for careful observation and collection of reliable information about the actual patterns of belief and practice. This chapter is therefore offered as a contribution towards a theoretically informed, but critical, understanding of how at least one particular group of New Age healers were equipped for their work.

Part of the distinctiveness of our work also lies in the fact that we deliberately studied people who had chosen to try to heal other people’s bodies. Starting from a position of scepticism about many of the claims made about the individualism and narcissism allegedly inherent in New Age or
alternative therapies, we wanted to show that some of these therapies really depended upon forms of sociality and ideas which were collective and holistic. Our evidence about the healers’ concern for ‘whole persons’, including their physical bodies, is incompatible with much of the literature about the New Age which is narrowly focused on individuals’ images of their own bodies and ailments.

**New Age**

The term ‘New Age’ is notoriously slippery. It seems to us that attempts to legislate for its use by drawing sharp boundaries around the concept are likely to be self-defeating. This is because virtually every conceptualisation emphasises the family resemblance among the New Age’s many manifestations. In other words, very few people who use the term intend it to be applied in a narrowly restrictive fashion (but see York, 1997). On the contrary, the intention is usually to draw attention to the simultaneous ‘flow’ of variegated sentiments, beliefs, experiences and practices in different but compatible directions. In so far as coherence is sensed among these ‘flows’ it inheres less in a small number of fixed, shared characteristics and more in a hopeful expectation that they will be, or can be, reconciled in a well-ordered life. The search for logical consistency between them, or for empirical proofs of their effectiveness, misses the point that their effects are ideally to be experienced in the course of trying to live by them. This is partly why the notion of human potential looms large in most accounts of New Age phenomena. Another way of putting this point is to say that New Age beliefs and practices are an anticipation of a hoped-for state of affairs which is conditional upon people living their lives in the present as if a New Age had already dawned. This requires faith or, at least, a radical suspension of doubt, even if only for a brief period of time.

What is the family resemblance which indicates that the sentiments, beliefs, experiences and practices that flow around the New Age are indeed connected to each other? None of the common features that we shall list here is indispensable; and there is no minimal number of features required to warrant the designation of anything as ‘New Age’. The phenomena are both broad and diffuse, but they usually include currents of:

1. hope that the seeds of a significant improvement in the quality of human life have already been sown and are ready for cultivation by individual human beings who have the required combination of knowledge, trust, diligence and patience to give expression to their ‘authentic’ selves, instead of merely conforming with routines and roles;
criticism of aspects of the prevailing modes of living in advanced industrial societies as being materialistic, shallow, unreflective and unfulfilling to the point where the natural human potential for creativity, compassion and play is stifled. There is also criticism of religious and ethical systems which arouse feelings of guilt for infractions of supposedly absolute obligations, rules or standards;

3. openness to fresh ideas about the interconnectedness of all life forms and the value of taking personal responsibility for living one’s life in ways which anticipate, and accord with, a better ordered and more fulfilling world where authentic selves can realise higher values. An experimental and pragmatic attitude to new ideas, experiences and practices is common among New Agers;

4. appreciation of the merits of seeking to minimise human disruption, corruption and exploitation of the natural world conceived as complex systems of normally harmonious and self-equilibrating forces, as symbolised in some pre-modern belief systems.

We have deliberately chosen highly general terms in which to frame the family resemblance among the richly diverse tributaries of thought, experience and feeling which flow into and around the New Age. In practice, of course, there is a bewildering variety of ways of translating them into personal outlooks, shared practices and even social organisations. Some ‘translations’ require strongly individualistic, self-directed and self-centred thought and action, while others give pride of place to selfless, altruistic submission to the communal will. In fact, Paul Heelas (1996: 215) attributes the vitality of the New Age to the tension ‘between autonomous, expressive personhood and that which derives from without’. The challenge for the New Age is therefore ‘to find ways of ensuring that it minimizes the trivialized and self-indulgent whilst at the same time not becoming too traditionalized or hierarchically authoritative’ (214). Whilst this formulation is helpful in drawing attention to the extremes of thought found in the New Age, we shall argue that it is misleading to portray the New Age in sharply dichotomous terms. Our claim is that some unexpected combinations of self-centred and selfless practices can coexist in the New Age and that the distinction between inner and outer sources of authority is not always clear. In short, the choice facing would-be New Agers is not one of trivial self-indulgence versus selfless submission to nature or community. Our interpretation of the process whereby one particular type of New Age ‘holistic’ healer is recruited and trained will show just how complex and subtle the texture of New Age spirituality and healing practice can be.

In order to prepare the way for our interpretation of holistic healing, however, we need to clear up some of the confusion that has crept into some influential commentaries on the societal roots of ‘alternative therapies’ and so-called self-religions.
Self-religion, holism and high modernity

Firstly, the term ‘self-religion’ (Heelas, 1991, 1992, 1996) is entirely appropriate for the many new and alternative forms of spirituality and religion which encourage practitioners to draw inspiration and guidance from within their own minds and bodies rather than from external texts, traditions or human authorities. ‘Personal authenticity’, ‘inner truth’ or ‘higher self’ are characteristic goals of this inward turn. It can lead in some cases to ego-dominated, assertive outlooks which favour narrow self-interest and material prosperity or social power. But the New Age can produce many other outcomes which turn on transpersonal psychologies constituting the ‘true self’ as naturally social, compassionate and attuned to the rhythms of the natural world. In these cases the search for the ‘true self’ means escape from ego domination. It also promises a sense of de-alienation or re-identification with others, such that self-actualisation requires working with others to restore the social and natural harmonies and sense of wholeness that have supposedly been subverted by centuries of dominance and exploitation of humans and the material world.¹ The true self is not therefore an island or an atom: it is only one part of a much larger whole. To borrow from Charles Taylor’s analysis of ‘the modern identity’, the search is for ‘new languages of personal resonance’ or fresh ways of bringing ‘crucial human goods alive for us again’ (Taylor, 1989: 513). This means trying to abandon utilitarian outlooks and habits which give priority to the rewards that individuals gain from being instrumentally rational. It also involves commitment to values of benevolence and justice having deep roots in human cultures.

Secondly, we see evidence of this search for sources of moral commitment (and of the break with the idea of the ‘disengaged subject’) in many forms of holism. The holistic notion of self, as we shall show later, is integral to New Age healing ideologies and practices (Beckford, 1984, 1985). But some commentators on the New Age have failed to appreciate the full significance of holistic notions of the self. For example, they impose a premature closure on ‘holism’ and its cognates by applying them exclusively to individuals, viewed in isolation. Thus, Coward (1989) frames ‘the whole person’ in terms which isolate him or her from other people and from social or natural environments. Holism allegedly ‘suggests the possibility of integration, of feeling that all parts of ourselves belong to the same essential person’ thereby implying that ‘the whole person can be found and that when it is, the individual will be healed’ (Coward, 1989: 68, emphasis added). In her opinion, ‘holistic’ is entirely a ‘quality of personal attention and care’ which ‘appears to give an individual an unparalleled sense of participating in his or her own well-being’. At the centre of this sense of well-being is supposedly
'the kernel of a whole person' (ibid.). While this very attenuated version of holism may be characteristic of some New Age healing philosophies, it is by no means universal. In fact, it is incompatible with the first principle of holism as promulgated by the British Holistic Medical Association – that holism means ‘responding to a person as a whole within the environment, seeing that person as mind, body and spirit’ (BHMA leaflet, quoted in Sharma, 1992: 110, emphasis added). The image that Coward deploys of a ‘kernel’ of wholeness lying inside individuals is an entirely inappropriate way of representing holistic relations between human beings and their environments. It is merely an image of ‘integration’ at the level of the individual as an isolated entity, whereas holism also conceives of humans as being ideally in relations of mutuality with their environment. From a truly holistic point of view, individuals could experience wholeness (or integration) only if they also felt in harmony with other people and their physical surroundings. Coward’s preoccupation with the idea of an ‘inner core’ is therefore misplaced as far as the New Age healing practices that we shall analyse below are concerned. It is also at odds with her own acknowledgement that ‘a small minority’ of holistic healing practitioners stressed ‘the links between individual and environment’ and that ‘many people within the alternative therapies movement are concerned in active ways with anti-nuclear and ecological politics’ (Coward, 1989: 204–5).

By contrast, others such as Michael York (1995, 1997) and William Bloom (1987, 1991) stress the potential of some, though not necessarily all, New Age healers to emancipate humans from the limitations of conventional spirituality and to give them the novel opportunity to select and combine spiritual ideas and practices from the whole gamut of possibilities. Thus, York (1995: 38) cites with approval the view of Sunday Times journalist, Katie Saunders, that ‘the movement is a revival of Sixties mores and a revolt against the hedonism and “selfish bingeing” of the 1980s – a “hanging loose” but without a “dropping out”’. The point at which all the diverse streams of New Age spirituality converge, according to York (1995: 39, emphasis added), is the vision of ‘a radical mystical transformation on both the personal and collective levels’. An even clearer construal of the holism inherent in New Age ‘visions’ is the claim that ‘the New Age is always ultimately directed toward the communal, that is, toward something greater or more inclusive than merely the self or that reification of the self which is termed the “Self”’ (York, 1997: 414–15).

Thirdly, outright rejection or ridicule of ideas about the New Age and holism is relatively rare among the informed specialists in the social sciences or religious studies, but a number of ‘social critics’ have reproached these ideas for a wide range of reasons. The broad lines of criticism directed
against New Age ideas in general and ideas of self-fulfilment or the realisation of human potential in particular are too well known to need exposition here. We shall merely record that they have been dismissed for being, among other things, ‘psychobabble’ (Rosen, 1978), ‘subjective expressivism’ (Taylor, 1989), ‘self-absorption’ (Schur, 1976), ‘the shrinking of America’ (Zilbergeld, 1983), and ‘narcissism’ (Lasch, 1979).

These dated assessments of the New Age are much less interesting than more recent attempts to locate some of the same phenomena in the context of very broad characterisations of present-day social change. We therefore need to review briefly two particular commentaries on the condition of ‘high modernity’ or ‘postmodernity’ which have indirect implications for the cultural significance of the human body and its ‘maintenance’ but which still do not do full justice to the meaning of New Age healing.

In the first place, Anthony Giddens is critical of Lasch’s idea that concern with the state of one’s health is necessarily a sign of narcissism. Instead, Giddens regards the construction of the self as a ‘reflexive project’ which is made necessary by the erosion of traditions and community in late modernity. The resources for this project include the popularised versions of expert knowledge which, in itself, draws increasingly on experience from all parts of the world. Awareness of risks and of the limits of expert systems is apparently just as important as awareness of therapies, drugs and regimes with the capacity to protect or to heal. Giddens therefore explains the reappearance of belief in fate as a response to the awareness of what he calls ‘low-probability high-consequence risks’. By this, he means the calamities which are unlikely to strike but which are nevertheless worrying because we have no experience of what they may entail; which are remote but, we suspect, potentially catastrophic. Giddens does not include holistic healing among the ‘adaptive’ responses to these risks. Instead, he regards all forms of therapy with a degree of ambivalence: they may promote ‘dependence and passivity’ but they can also permit ‘engagement and reappropriation’ (Giddens, 1991: 180). In fact, he virtually confines ‘therapy’ in high modernity to psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, self-help and counselling. This allows him to construe therapy solely as a form of ‘self-mastery’ which allegedly acts as a substitute for morality. By contrast, ‘new forms of religion and spirituality’ represent ‘a return of the repressed’ for Giddens (1991: 207) and apparently have no place in either emancipatory politics or life politics. Accordingly, the human body is represented as a site of choice, control and experimentation on which the interaction between person and planet can be observed and modified. The pressing problems of the natural environment, new technologies of biological reproduction, and globalisation are therefore taken into consideration in life politics mainly in so far as they
have an impact on the 'reflexive project of the self. We believe, however, that the philosophies and practices of holistic healing can represent a much less individualistic, psychologistic or moralistic response to high modernity than can be captured in Giddens's notion of therapy. In particular, they cut across the sharp distinctions that he seeks to make (Giddens, 1994) between tradition and expertise (or guardians and experts). Holistic healing actually represents a fascinating re-mix of tradition, expertise and modernity.

In the second place, the attempt made by Philip Mellor and Chris Shilling (1997) to move beyond what they regard as the excessively cognitive and psychological approach of Anthony Giddens offers two promising ways forward. Their work not only takes uncompromising account of the 'embodied' nature of human experience, but it also insists on re-establishing links between historically changing forms of embodiment and changing forms of human sociability and community. This approach augurs well, therefore, for a sensitive analysis of New Age healing, but Mellor and Shilling's very conceptualisation of the 'baroque modern body' places so much emphasis on 'carnality' and 'sensual experiences' that, ironically, the specificity of much New Age healing is obliterated. If it is true that 'banal associations may dominate the formal institutions of contemporary society, but they cannot contain the human body in its entirety' (Mellor & Shilling, 1997: 173), carnality or sensuality may indeed come to serve as the basis for new forms of partial sociality, i.e., 'sensual solidarities'. They are groupings 'based on the feelings, emotions and the effervescence which can derive from being with others' (Mellor & Shilling, 1997: 174, emphasis original), at least temporarily, in the form of, for example, charismatic religious assemblies, initiation rituals or crowds of spectators at soccer matches. They are all allegedly manifestations of the sacred because they bind people together - for good or evil - and remind them of the sacred totality of life.

Like Giddens, Mellor and Shilling limit their discussion of 'therapy' to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, thereby making it easy to characterise it as a form of banal association on the grounds that it involves nothing but talk. They claim that '[a]s with all banal associations, the fleshy body is relegated to a position beneath information and talk' in conventional therapy (Mellor & Shilling, 1997: 183). Exorcism and fear of satanic activities, by contrast, supposedly give rise to sensual solidarities because they depend upon beliefs about the danger of evil invading and inhabiting human bodies. But the sharp opposition that Mellor and Shilling make between 'banal' therapy and 'sensual' exorcism misses the point that we wish to make, namely, that some forms of holistic healing are distinctly sensual and embodied whilst also thriving within relatively banal forms of
association. In short, the fact that banal associations and sensual solidarities can be combined in advanced industrial societies is not necessarily a symptom of societal schizophrenia but might actually be a search for wholeness understood in bodily, cognitive, emotional and spiritual terms.

To sum up our conceptual argument before introducing empirical evidence, we believe that the conceptual distinctions between (a) tradition and expert systems, and (b) banal associations and sensual solidarity are exaggerated caricatures. In reality, some of the most interesting developments in religion and healing confound these dualities by drawing creatively on their opposed poles. The material from our case study will show that creative compromises between tradition and expertise, no less than between banality and sensuality, are characteristic of some New Age healing practices, philosophies and organisations.

**How New Age Healers Acquire Their Skills**

Discussions of the New Age have emphasised the importance of courses, workshops and seminars addressing self-development and self-therapeutic approaches (Bowman, 1999; Heelas, 1992; Van Hove, 1999). Participants may attend these for self-healing and then perhaps progress to become practitioners in what Bowman has termed ‘the healing industry’ associated with the ‘spiritual marketplace’ (1999: 188). Our observations here, however, concern the experiences of a group of nurses whose development as healers occurred as an unintended consequence of their practice of aromatherapy and ‘holistic massage’.

Although only eight nurses, all females, were included in the study, they were part of a larger group who were receiving tuition to diploma level in aromatherapy and ‘holistic massage’ from a local nursing sister. While several of the members of this group had experienced periods of personal crisis which, in New Age terms, might be seen as indicating a need for some form of healing for themselves, the ethic of care that dominated their nursing practice provided a vehicle for incorporating self-development within their professional development. Such experiences had enhanced their capacity and willingness to empathise with the sufferings of others. The often fervently expressed desire to do something for those patients whom conventional medicine could not help exemplifies this. There was, then, a relationship between working on their own well-being and that of their patients, but their sense of professional identity countered the supposedly individualistic and narcissistic tendencies widely attributed to the New Age.

The importance of their professional identity as nurses could mean that
the term 'New Age' as a description of this group is both secondary to their main identity and inappropriate. The difficulties encountered in using the term have already been made clear. Taking Rose's (1998) finding that the majority of New Age participants are female, aged between 35 and 54, and middle-class, the nurses in our study could be said to meet the first set of criteria. In addition, Rose's study showed that women were much more likely than men to be interested in healing. Whether our respondents would have described themselves as New Agers is doubtful, however. Studies such as that by Van Hove (1999) suggest a reluctance to identify oneself within such a category. Indeed, some of our respondents with more limited conceptions of the holistic basis of healing were decidedly unsettled by phenomena such as channelling which have been characterised as typically New Age (Riordan, 1992).

However, certain members of this group had, through practising massage and aromatherapy, found themselves upon a path of self-development consonant with typically New Age concerns. This path incorporated, to varying degrees, those qualities that we identified earlier with the New Age, but especially an appreciation of what is often described as an 'holistic' world view. The tensions between self-centred and selfless practices, and between inner and outer sources of authority, which we have argued are inherent in the New Age, were felt particularly strongly by members of this group, because of the conflicting demands of their personal lives (with their own priorities and sense of personal development) and their professional practice (where professional development was demanded but also bounded by a healthcare system whose culture was rapidly being colonised by managerialism). It is not surprising then to discover that the diverse beliefs and practices of the New Age were translated by different members of the group in characteristically varied ways.

Central to the experiences to be recounted here is the importance of what has been described as the Human Energy Field (HEF) (Brennan, 1988). This consists of 'primary subtle energetic fields that underlie and contribute to the functional expression of the physical body', and that are harmonised through energy work with universal natural energies (Gerber, 1988). The presence of the HEF is experienced in several ways, for example as tingling, or pulsating, but heat is the most common sensation experienced by both healers and their clients (Benor, 1992). Nurses in this study reported that their patients had remarked upon the warmth of nurses' hands when they were giving a massage. They also reported localised sensations of tingling or pulsating in the part of the body requiring attention when the nurse paused and held her hands over that area during a massage. Nurse respondents also experienced heat and sometimes found the flow of what they described as
healing energy so intense that the palms of their hands became almost painful.

The significance of the HEF here is, firstly, its partial acceptance (through the practice of particular therapies) within the arena of conventional medicine, albeit within specific institutional circumstances (for example some hospices) whose ethos is sufficiently receptive to make this possible. Secondly, there is its role in providing sensual experiences in the context of a healing intent, which depend upon and reinforce the construction of shared experience and which may produce experiences similar to those described by Luckmann as transcendental (Luckmann, 1990). He describes such experiences in their most minimal form as no more than ‘suspicions of another reality’ (1990: 129). On a more complex level, there can be intermediate and great transcendences which, Luckmann argues, are universal, socially constructed and can be systematised and institutionalised. Although the scope of the transcendent in modern societies is shrinking, and becoming privatised in the modern sacred cosmos through such themes as self-realisation, he suggests that this ‘does not mean a loss of the “sacred” ’ (1990: 138). Instead, there is a ‘powerful “elective affinity” between the structural privatisation of individual life and the “sacralisation” of subjectivity that is celebrated in much of modern consciousness’ (Luckmann, 1990: 135). There is a sense, then, in which transcendent experiences may act for some individuals as openings to what they regard as the sacred in modern life.

Luckmann suggests that these experiences are intersubjectively articulated, for example through re-telling, to become part of collective memories. What we shall be arguing here is that they are also constructed intersubjectively through the shared experience of the HEF, and that this occurs through the healing activities described below, which combine rationalised and bureaucratised healthcare with therapeutic practices which access the HEF. Our nurses were involved in activities which cut across the distinction between ‘banal associations’ and ‘sensual solidarities’ (Mellor & Shilling, 1997).

**Holism and Healing**

We have already characterised the New Age representation of the ‘true self’ as naturally social, compassionate and attuned to the rhythms of the natural world, working on self-actualisation through interaction with others and directed at the restoration of a sense of wholeness. We have also argued that holistic notions of the self operate on a continuum which moves between the ‘kernel’ of wholeness within an individual and relations of
mutuality between individuals and their environment. Both these notions of the self are discernible in the accounts of our respondents, not necessarily because they were familiar with the tenets of the New Age but rather because these tenets appeared to have an affinity with some aspects of their professional ethic of care.

While the notion of holism inherent in much New Age thinking has been criticised for its individualising tendencies, it is also possible to argue that its universalising tendencies foster a sense of compassion for others, rather than individualistic self-improvement. Our respondents adopted an holistic approach to healing in various ways. Their perceptions of holism were threefold in nature, reflecting the different levels of holistic philosophy identified by Power through her content analysis of 'holistic health' materials in the 1980s: the 'whole body', the 'whole person', and 'the integrity of creation' (Power, 1991; see also Hedges, 1997).

The first category, the 'whole body', focused to a large extent on the physical, seeing approved forms of health behaviour (e.g. diet, exercise) as the chief means of dealing with symptoms. Only minimal therapeutic intervention by the practitioner was required, sufficient to stimulate the body's own self-healing force. The category of 'whole person' perceived illness as occurring on the emotional, mental and spiritual levels as well as the physical. Self-help techniques and individual responsibility were necessary to effect real improvements. The third category of 'the integrity of creation' envisaged widespread social renewal brought about by intentional changes in personal consciousness. (This belief is, of course, central to the New Age.) Sources of healing energy were threefold, and were attributed to the love and energies within oneself as a giver; to whichever divine source of energies one might believe in; and to the universe, which was seen as providing extraordinary energies.

It was those respondents who focused on the third level, the integrity of creation, who demonstrated most confidently their familiarity with the HEF, and were receptive to associated ideas such as the language of chakras and auras. Regardless of whether these respondents identified themselves as New Agers, their interaction with the HEF enabled them to express their compassion more effectively than might otherwise have been possible. So profound was this engagement that they found themselves acknowledging a new identity for themselves as healers and an unexpectedly strong sense of their own spiritual development. Some examples of how they prepared for and gave a treatment session help to demonstrate this process.
'I was just massaging a body, but I know it's not just that any more'

While several of the respondents were preoccupied with holistic philosophy, its emphasis on stress as the cause of illness and the educative and counselling aspects of their role as nurses which derived from this philosophy, several other respondents almost completely ignored these issues. This was because of their experiences when giving massage and aromatherapy. This was predominantly a shared experience, both in the sense that the nurse giving the massage anticipated the patient's needs and responses during the interaction, but also because what happened was an exploration of a sensual experience which was new to both of them.

One nurse commented upon the effects of her contact with the HEF as she felt a stronger flow of energy passing through her hands as she became more practised. Whilst she included a request to God to help her in healing as part of her preparations for giving a massage, the resulting energy flow was so powerful that she felt unable to control or make full use of it. Indeed, it made the palms of her hands feel most uncomfortable, and she sensed that the condition was 'getting worse' as the energy intensified from one massage session to the next. In her own words:

'I usually try [to] what I call, centre myself, ask for help from God, before I start, in his name, you know . . . "Please help me, send healing to this person", and then I usually put my hands on the person so that we can communicate in a way before we start the procedure, so that I invade her privacy slowly. And you ask them to breathe, so that you almost synchronise yourself with that person. And then as I start to massage I feel this energy. These last four weeks it's got worse, and I've started to make a log now, of what the woman says to me, because she's noticed this energy too. And she'll tell me that I do stop at times over the places where she's got problem areas, and she will feel a pulsating from my hands . . . but I'm not aware that I'm doing it . . . and it can go on for a while afterwards, get quite uncomfortable. I don't know how to stop it. I need it, I call for it and it comes, then I feel it's such a waste, then.'

The process of massaging produced not only the sensation of a flow of energy for patient and nurse, but also reports from patients (and nurses who had been massaged) of bright flashes of colours:

'They're beautiful . . . even if you open your eyes, you can still see them. I've seen red, lilac, silver, gold, but oh, they're beautiful colours, really bright, almost fluorescent. Pink, I've seen . . . not always as a complete field, though, just flashes that float.'
These ‘healing colours’, as the nurses called them, had also been seen as purple, amethyst, gold and turquoise.

The impact of a treatment on patients could be quite profound. One nurse described her patient’s response thus:

‘She says she goes right inside herself, she says it’s an incredible feeling, I can’t tell you, I can’t put it into words... She’ll say she goes all pins and needles, and the area [I’m resting my hands over] starts to pulsate, and she’ll say “I feel as if I’ve had a boost”.’

The benefits of aromatherapy and massage were seen in stark contrast to the organisational environment in which they were offered. Thus the patients benefited from knowing that they were going to have someone else’s undivided attention for longer than would normally have been possible on the ward:

‘If you go to a place of quietness with a “Please do not disturb” sign on the door, they know you’re going to give them total care. You’re there, well, you’ve got to make them feel you’ve got all the time in the world. You may have a mental note that this can’t take more than an hour and a half, but they don’t know that, and they’re the most important thing that you’ve got ...’

‘Total commitment to that person without being disturbed ... that’s very important and you cannot get that on the ward.’

The success of a treatment depended on preventing distractions and on evoking the appropriate atmosphere through a ritualistic lighting of candles and burner, dimming of lights and the playing of New Age music. Giving a treatment could, however, have negative effects in that respondents reported taking on their patients’ symptoms after the massage; preventive measures to ‘cleanse your aura’ included meditation, taking Bach flower remedies, drinking a glass of cold water and washing of hands in cold water. While these precautions might be disregarded when in a hurry (thereby leaving only the nurse herself open to ill effects), other preparations to ‘set the scene’ were rarely neglected.

In answer to the question of whether aromatherapy provided the patient with something unique, one nurse answered:

‘Well I think it probably does ... You can comfort someone by talking to them, or by putting your arm round them or holding their hand, but that isn’t prolonged, is it? But if you’re massaging someone, there’s even more of a closeness there, and everything is, well, everything else is blocked out ... you know, totally.’
The same nurse talked about how her patients had reported greater heat from her hands as she had become better practised:

'People do say your hands have gone very hot . . . and that was something I hadn’t experienced or knew about and it’s like, sort of the energy in your hands . . . To start with, as far as I knew and was concerned, I was just [very deliberately enunciating the words] massaging a body, but I know it’s not just that any more, and I can feel that it isn’t that any more.'

Comments such as these, seen in the context of their respective interviews, illustrated respondents’ perceptions of an enhanced function for the techniques of aromatherapy and massage. Using such techniques, they were no longer operating at the most immediate level of the ‘whole body’ or even the ‘whole person’. Whatever they might achieve was on a level which transcended everyday experience and provided a gateway to universal energies of a divine origin. The shared experience of the HEF reinforced this. What these nurses considered themselves to be facilitating was the process of ‘healing’.

**Sharing inner time: making healing together**

Healing within the New Age is understood, Albanese (1992) suggests, as a ‘work of reconciliation’. Its holistic ethos means that this form of healing ‘emphasises a forgiveness that dissolves physical disease, emotional hurt, and the collective distress of society and nature. Healing in this sense is different from curing. To experience healing may or may not be the same as effecting a physiological change’ (Albanese, 1992: 78).

Similarly, efficacy is not seen as the main consideration of healing rituals by Neitz and Spickard (1990). They draw our attention to the fact that healing rituals can be judged effective even when there is no immediate evidence of success. They attribute such occurrences to a shared participation in a ‘vivid present’ (1990: 31) which, they suggest, is fundamental to an understanding of the religious experiences underlying other elements of religion such as beliefs, symbols and meaning systems. Such ideas further illuminate the social, as distinct from the individualistic, nature of healing discussed in this chapter.

Learning to work with the HEF involves more than the acquisition of a formulaic technique in Giddens’s sense of traditional knowledge. Rather, it appears to involve two components: ‘flow’ and ‘tuning in’. Neitz and Spickard (1990) show how these may be combined in order to account for religious experience, citing firstly Csikszentmihalyi’s definition of ‘flow':
Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. It is the kind of state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, quoted in Neitz and Spickard, 1990: 20)

Certain activities are more likely than others to precipitate flow experiences. Whether one is rock-climbing, playing chess, composing music or meditating, three structural characteristics prevail: 'selflessness, limited sensory input and the match between the challenge of a task and one's ability to complete it' (Neitz and Spickard, 1990: 20). By 'selflessness', Csikszentmihalyi means that one is no longer conscious of the separateness of self from one's surroundings. The self becomes relatively superfluous. Interpersonal negotiation is less important than the willingness and ability to lose oneself in the activity, even when others may be involved (for example, in some sort of ritual). The intense concentration selectively reduces one's sensory stimuli, so that the only focus is those sensations associated with the activity itself. Flow occurs in the space between one's apprehension of the task as difficult but realisable, and its achievement. In particular, extraordinary experiences are likely to result, which language is, on the whole, felt to be inadequate to describe.

While Csikszentmihalyi suggests that religious rituals can demonstrate flow, Neitz and Spickard are cautious about accounting for religious experience in these terms alone. Although it is possible to argue that flow emerges from structured activities which have to be learned, and that the type of experiences produced by flow are not, therefore, entirely private, Neitz and Spickard argue that a sociology of religious experience also needs to take account of the notion of 'otherness', in particular in terms of the tuning-in relationship discussed by Schutz.

Schutz's exploration of how people make music together as a mutual tuning-in relationship is relevant to healing because both processes articulate meaning independent of 'talk'. Rather than relying on interpretation of a semantic system, Schutz suggests that communication is effected by the sharing of inner time, through the process of durée (a term borrowed from Bergson):

Two series of events in inner time, belonging to the stream of consciousness of the beholder, are lived through in simultaneity... [T]his sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a vivid present in common,
constitutes what we call... the mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of "We", which is at the foundation of all possible communication. (Schutz, 1951: 173, quoted in Neitz and Spickard, 1990: 28)

Such experience is closer, Schutz suggests, to the meaning of religious participation than the rehearsal of beliefs alone. In order for it to work, certain conditions are necessary such as a general knowledge of religious culture. In addition, the experience is eminently social, in that sociality depends on 'the possibility of living together simultaneously in specific dimensions of time' (Schutz, 1951, in Neitz and Spickard, 1990: 28). Even individuals separated in outer time and space can achieve this shared experience; as Neitz and Spickard point out, it does not take much extension of this idea to talk of feeling that one has tuned-in to nature as an inspiration for religious experience, or, in the case discussed here, tuned-in to the universe's abundant energy flow. Applied to a particular healing ritual, all present would become, in effect, 'healers' and all are 'healed' as they share a 'vivid present' (Neitz and Spickard, 1990: 31).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have suggested that the 'healing' activities described here cut across the banal associations characteristic of rationalised and bureaucratised healthcare and the sensual solidarities evoked by the experiences of healing. In particular, we have argued that the process of holistic healing incorporates experiences which are common to spheres of meaningful human interaction such as religion and aesthetic appreciation. Rather than encouraging the individualism for which holism is so often criticised, this process provides opportunities for the expression of values such as love and compassion, albeit within the ambit of a professionalised ethic of nursing care. Through a mutual tuning-in relationship between healer and patient, as well as between healer and patient and the source of healing energies, there is a blurring of the boundaries between selves which, as an inter-subjective construction of transcendence, may bind people together. For some individuals this would also have sacred significance. The nature of the interaction, structured as it was in terms of shared time between patient and nurse through the mutual experiencing of the Human Energy Field, meant that these experiences were incontrovertibly social.
Notes

1. We are referring to what Charles Taylor (1989: 495) has called ‘the disengaged and instrumental modes of thought and action which have steadily increased their hold on modern life’.

2. ‘Conventional therapy depends on choice, involves an attempt to reconstruct the self through discourse, requires a decision to enter into a contract which can be revoked at any time, and is directed towards reconciliation and reform rather than transcendence.’ Mellor & Shilling (1997: 183).

3. In the positive, French sense of compromis, not in the negative sense of ‘compromission’.

4. The study was conducted in 1992 in the English East Midlands by the first-named author and was initially concerned with the integration of complementary therapies into nursing practice. Eight nurses were interviewed in depth, using semi-structured interviews which allowed respondents to develop autobiographical narratives as part of their response. Additional interviews were conducted with a Roman Catholic nun who, as a nurse tutor, taught the nurses holistic massage and aromatherapy, and with a local consultant in palliative care who facilitated the use of these therapies in the hospice where he worked. Analysis of the data from these interviews was with reference to grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The data used in this chapter draw on the interviews with the nurses only.

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INTRODUCTION

If New Age can be characterised as to some extent an audience cult then the Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit held annually in London is one of the main sources of the dissemination of its ideas. As with the UFO convention described by Stark and Bainbridge (1985), visitors to the Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit listen to lectures, attend workshops, watch performances and demonstrations, pick up literature and leaflets and purchase commodities and services from exhibitors. They accept many, all or none of the ideas presented to them as they see fit and are ‘interested in’ and often willing to try out any new idea, therapy or technique to be found in the general milieu of the alternative sub-culture. The Festival might be described as the annual convention of New Age in Britain. But New Age is not simply an audience cult. Although it comprises a number of them, it also embraces many client cults and other groups and movements which belong to neither of these types. It is perhaps best described, as Michael York (1995) argues, following Gerlach and Hine (Gerlach and Hine, 1970; Hine 1977), as a segmentary, polycephyhalous, integrated network (SPIN). The Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit reflects this in the astonishing diversity it brings together annually under one roof. In 1997 the Festival offered 97 exhibitors, 32 lectures, 47 workshops and 108 stage events and demonstrations from inversion therapy to the Aetherius Society, from Kirlian photography to belly dancing. Comparison with an eastern bazaar is irresistible and there is always an air of 1960s experimental exuberance about it.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Started in 1977 by Graham Wilson, the Festival took place originally at Olympia, West Kensington in London, where it remained for six years. That the first Festival filled this enormous exhibition centre is revealing. As
a result of undergoing out-of-body experiences during his champion cross-
country runs, Wilson had for some years been exploring the world of the
psychic and paranormal and had become involved in the alternative scene. It
was a world that was, however, largely esoteric and underground, and one
that was closed to most people. Information about it was hard to come by.
Wilson wanted to introduce it to a wider public. The familiar venue of
Olympia, more usually associated with the Ideal Home Exhibition and the
Motor Show, would seem well chosen for this purpose, except that its size
and its choice expressed tremendous faith in the growing appeal of alter-
nativism. It was a confidence that was not, at least initially, misplaced. The
first Festival attracted some sixty thousand visitors over its five days. By the
third Festival in 1979 a peak of eighty-eight thousand visitors was reached.

During the Eighties, however, attendance figures of this kind could not
be sustained. At this time there was, Wilson explains, a decline in interest in
things spiritual and alternative and greater interest in more material
pursuits and in making money. Attendance at the last Festival at Olympia
in 1982 had fallen to twenty thousand, for which the venue was clearly too
big and too expensive. In 1983 the Festival moved to the smaller Royal
Horticultural Halls near Victoria. This had an additional advantage in that
it was better suited to the provision of lectures and workshops in smaller
meeting rooms for which there had been a growing demand. It also allowed
the organisers to exercise closer control over the character of the exhibitors
so as to ensure the Festival retained a broad appeal. In 1979 Wilson took the
Festival to New York and later to Los Angeles and San Francisco and
eventually to Australia. The US Festivals were later replaced by Whole Life
Expos as an independent operation. Similar independent festivals based
upon the London event later sprung up in many other parts of the world.

Wilson’s experience in the USA led to ideas which enhanced the
character of the Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit. In the States, psychic fairs\textsuperscript{5} were popular but these were virtually unknown in the UK. Wilson felt that
there would be considerable interest in Britain for similar events and in 1980
launched the Psychics and Mystics Fair as a regional event, eventually
running eight annually. Also in 1980 he started the London Natural Health
Clinic at his headquarters at Arnica House, Notting Hill Gate, northwest
London.\textsuperscript{6}

Attendances at the main Festival at the Royal Horticultural Halls began
to grow again during the later 1980s, eventually reaching fifty thousand.
Wilson’s experience has been that there is a marked growth in interest in
the alternative scene during periods of recession. Such was the demand that
the duration of the Festival was extended to ten full days, and by 1996, a
second Festival was launched, in September at Alexander Palace in North
London. Meanwhile the burgeoning interest in all forms of alternative and complementary medicine and healing techniques saw the establishment by Wilson of the Healing Arts Festival in 1988.\footnote{7}

The Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit has, in many respects, been the centre of, and the inspiration for, a worldwide network of similar and related New Age events, especially in the English-speaking world where New Age is largely based. It is truly international in itself with a large proportion of exhibitors and practitioners coming from the USA, Australia and elsewhere. In this way it has acted as a focus for New Age, both in the sense of bringing this diverse world together and in disseminating its message very widely.

\section*{Developments}

Over the years a number of significant changes can be observed in the character of the Festival. One which Wilson cites as being perhaps the most noticeable and significant is that in terms of those attending it has shifted New Age ideas and concerns from the esoteric fringe to an almost mainstream position. On the other hand, when something becomes too mainstream it tends to drop out of the Festival. The Body Shop was a feature of early Festivals but its success meant that it no longer had the alternative edge that made it appropriate for the Festival or the Festival useful to it.\footnote{8}

Some of the environmental groups, prominent in the early years, also found more appropriate and often more political channels for their energies. It is important, Graham Wilson feels, that the Festival does not become too mainstream. Part of the appeal of the Festival, and one might add of the alternative scene generally, is precisely that it is alternative and not established, and it is important to preserve a balance in bringing the esoteric to a wider mainstream audience and clientèle.

Perhaps even more important than the shift towards the mainstream has been that from what I shall term a ‘conversion’ to a ‘consumption’ orientation. In the early years of the Festival there was a greater emphasis on putting a message across, on disseminating an idea or a philosophy and upon influencing and converting visitors to a way of thinking. Prominent at early Festivals, for example, were groups such as the Rajneeshees. This gave way in the 1980s to an emphasis upon the sale of products and services. As Graham Wilson puts it, in the past visitors looked more to gurus for personal growth, whereas now they seek to enhance it by the application of various techniques and therapies.

Another noticeable change that has occurred has been a decline in prominence of groups and organisations concerned with more universal
questions such as the environment in favour of rather more self-oriented concerns relating to personal and inner growth and development. Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were regular exhibitors in the early years. The sixth Festival in 1981 specially featured Friends of the Earth at the tenth anniversary of their foundation. A thirty-five-foot inflatable Planet Earth was suspended from the roof in the centre of the hall. In 1982 the theme of the Festival was Peace and Greater Planetary Awareness. It was at this Festival that alternative and complementary medicine was introduced for the first time at the Festival’s Holistic Health Centre. By 1984 the theme of the Festival had become Healthy Living. Alongside conservation and the environment, the programme introduction for that year emphasised alternative medicine, natural living, herbs, aromatics, skin and body care, spirituality, human potential and psychic sciences.

The commercialisation of the Festival which accompanied the increased emphasis upon the more self-oriented and bodily concerns of health and personal growth perhaps reflects the general ethos of the 1980s. However, it is also in many ways stimulated by an inherent logic embedded within New Age or certain aspects of it and particularly those concerned with healing, body work and personal well-being, growth and development. The commodification and marketisation of these aspects of New Age is homologous with its diffuse and fragmentary nature, individualism, relativism and eclecticism. Characteristic of it is the absence of binding doctrines, of any overall organisation and of any overall leadership. This has implications both for the way disseminators of New Age ideas and practices operate and the way in which devotees relate to them. Disseminators become practitioners and devotees become clientele.

**Marketisation**

Practitioners can best support themselves as professional disseminators of New Age thought and practice through the market system. They readily make the transition from disseminating a message to selling a commodity or service. The New Age had its roots in the hippie culture of the 1960s, but when members of the hippie generation found themselves having to settle into the business of making a living and supporting a family, some turned to retailing in the spiritual marketplace as a means of livelihood. Others became craftsmen and women selling their products directly to the consumer. Yet others fashioned less tangible ‘products’ concerned with care of mind, body and spirit. This in turn admirably fitted the needs of consumers who were not interested in religion of the traditional kind which tended to demand exclusive commitment. The countercultural
generation wanted to retain the freedom to experiment and thrived in an ethos of eclecticism and variety. New Age appealed to those who were not interested in substantial commitment of time or dramatic changes in their pattern of life of the kind demanded by some of the New Religious Movements such as the Unification Church or ISKCON. As New Age moved more towards the mainstream the cult and the commune gave way to counselling and colour therapy. Such activities can be readily slotted into normal lifestyles and are compatible with following a regular profession or occupation. The spiritual life becomes a leisure and consumption activity. Thus, followers of New Age are not members of a religion or religious organisation, but are participants in a variety of client and audience cults and in a cultic milieu (Campbell, 1972) in which they ‘pick and mix’ their own individual and personal combination of elements which they can change to suit and as they themselves change and develop. This in turn reinforces the impetus towards commodification as practitioners find their customer base more fluid, less deferential towards spiritual authority and leadership and more likely to transfer their allegiance elsewhere. This decline of deference towards experts and the process of detraditionalisation (Heelas, 1996) is, of course, often considered to be a general development in contemporary societies, but it has particular consequences for religious and quasi-religious life, which has traditionally been based upon either prophetic or priestly charismatic leadership (Weber, 1965). In the contemporary religious world, characterised as it is to a considerable degree by epistemological individualism (Wallis, 1984) of which New Age is the most striking example, it is increasingly difficult for disseminators of spiritual truths to operate except through the commodification of what they have to offer. With no binding doctrine and no organisation there is no membership and therefore no source of income for the support of leaders. The Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit does, of course, lend itself particularly to such commodification processes, but they are in any case characteristic of the way much of the New Age/alternative milieu has developed.

This is a much more specific point about New Age than one that is often made about it, namely that it exemplifies the religious pluralism of modern society, its epistemological individualism (Wallis, 1984), detraditionalisation (Heelas, 1994, 1996) or the spiritual circus (Lyon, 1993). In these and other analyses, the echo of Berger’s original ‘market and marketplace’ metaphor (1973) is indeed very prominent, but it is the aspects of variety, choice and consumer sovereignty that are stressed rather than the delivery of commodities and services through a market mediated through monetary exchange. Lyon, for instance, points out that
the New Age has ‘much to do with a market place – shopping mall or circus – of religious and quasi-religious elements focused on self and on choice’ (p. 117). These analyses tend to conflate a number of different things. Religious pluralism, despite being dubbed the ‘religious supermarket’, does not in itself imply commodification. It refers to a wide range of choice between religious alternatives. These could all involve a process of conversion or joining a bounded sect, cult, denomination or church financially supported by donations, tithes or gifts and the direct input of voluntary labour on the part of its members, rather than by the sale and purchase of anything. Secondly, there is the aspect of bricolage (Van Hove, 1999) or ‘pick-and-mix’ in which components from possibly diverse sources are put together by the individual to comprise a personally satisfying conglomeration which may be unique to them but also changeable at will. Neither does this necessarily involve commodification of the elements. Finally, true commodification involves the selling and buying of spiritual commodities and services in a market system in which money is the medium of exchange and where what is offered and its price are determined by the conditions of supply and demand. It is the latter which has not received sufficient emphasis in the literature, and which the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit is so well adapted to provide. However, in doing so it only reflects, as argued above, broader developments in the world of alternative and New Age spirituality and holism. Graham Wilson’s company, New Life Promotions, which promotes the Mind-Body-Festival, is also, for example, involved in mounting regular tours for some of the regular workshop-providers in the Festival. In some senses, then, the Festival is a trade show for holistic and alternative therapies and techniques for healing and spiritual development. As with any trade show, it is a forum enabling practitioners to find out what the competition are doing as well as to promote their own products.

Competition tends to promote product development and the capture of a distinct market niche. The spiritual supermarket is no exception and the Festival tends to reflect the movements of fashion in the world of alternativism. Graham Wilson considers that the continuing success of the Festival requires the addition of new things which will attract interest, and that this can be quite difficult. Fashions that have been noticeable in the past have included Aromatherapy, colour therapy, crystals and more recently Reiki. New products have to attract customers, and many fall by the wayside if there is insufficient money in them. Turnover of exhibitors and workshop leaders is very high (see Table 11.1). For example, only nine exhibitors in 1997 had also participated ten years earlier.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of exhibitors</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. remaining from 1987</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. remaining from 1992</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of lecturers and workshop organisers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. remaining from 1987</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. remaining from 1992</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, a number of exhibitors find that their efforts are best placed elsewhere rather than in mounting exhibitions at such events. This would include the Body Shop, Greenpeace and so on, as noted above, but most of those who have disappeared over the years have probably done so as a result of changing fashions, loss of interest and economic unviability. Among workshop providers only two of the forty who had attended in 1987 did so in 1997, namely the mass healer Mathew Manning, and Dr Richard Lawrence, executive secretary of the Aetherius Society.12

The Festival is, then, to some extent a testing ground for new products and services. For some exhibitors it is their main source of income – or certainly used to be. They could earn, according to Wilson, as much, or almost as much, during the Festival as they could during the rest of the year put together. This may still be true for some. There is, as a consequence, considerable competition to be included in the Festival. Whereas once exhibitors had to be coaxed to participate, now the organisers can be selective in who they choose and in Wilson’s opinion, there is considerable kudos in being chosen. The Festival has been and remains to some extent crucial in supporting in a very material way an alternative subculture.

**Plausibility structures**

The Festival is probably crucial in supporting the subculture in another way also. It provides a central pillar of the plausibility structure of the alternative and New Age subculture. In gathering together such a large number of like-minded people – exhibitors, practitioners and visitors – most of whom probably have little contact with others similarly committed to alternativism, the Festival creates a strong sense of the force and significance of the alternative world view. As Campbell (1972) says of the cultic milieu, it ‘is kept alive by the magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures, demonstrations and informal meetings through which its beliefs and practices are discussed and disseminated’ (p. 123). The Festival is one of the most important of such meetings and it has always attempted to project a sense of a growing,
spreading and developing movement. The close juxtaposition of exhibitors who, in isolation, would appear perhaps to be offering something quite bizarre and deviant, lends to all of them a collective authority and credibility which they might never otherwise enjoy. A visitor who is well disposed to aromatherapy or Shiatsu may well be prepared to take inversion therapy or even the Aetherius Society and by extension the whole alternative scene more seriously for the fact they appear as part of this large and well-supported event. As Campbell puts it, “the individuals who “enter” the cultic milieu at any one point frequently travel rapidly through a wide variety of movements and beliefs and by so doing constitute yet another unifying force within the milieu” (1972: 123). If, as Hanegraaff (1996: 17) argues, the New Age is the cultic milieu become conscious of itself in a particular phase of its historical development, then such gatherings as the Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit are at the centre of the process by which it becomes self-aware and a movement. If, as Hanegraaff points out (ibid.: 19), the elements and components of the New Age movement are linked not by similarity but by contiguity, then the Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit is in a very literal sense a physical manifestation of that contiguity.

For the more committed devotee, the intensive workshops provide the strongest form of reinforcement of their world view. These were first introduced in 1984 and have become a central feature of the Festival, reflecting a demand for more in-depth and participatory involvement on the part of visitors. Attendance at the workshops came to outstrip attendance at lectures. In the early Nineties, double (two-hour) workshops were introduced to meet this growing demand for more intense participation. In 1997, of the 47 workshops on offer, no fewer than eight were led by Denise Linn, of which two were double. Her workshops were devoted to past-life regression and the miraculous healing power of the mind. Descended from a Cherokee grandmother, she is the biggest draw of the Festival and also runs one-day workshops in London, her advertising presenting the typical eclecticism of New Age healing, stating that she has served apprenticeships with a Japanese Zen master, a Hawaiian kahuna, a Pueblo Indian medicine man, Aborigine elders, a Maori Tohunga and an Apache Indian shaman. With two double workshops and a mass-healing event, Mathew Manning was the next most active workshop director, in 1997 celebrating twenty years of involvement with the Festival.

Survey Data

This move towards more intensive participation may reflect the deepening involvement of a significant section of visitors in alternative and holistic healing and therapy over the years. A small-scale survey carried out by the
author at the Festival in 1990 \(^{13}\) revealed that 47.3 per cent of visitors sampled had attended previous Festivals, 13.4 had attended twice before, 11.4 per cent had attended three times previously and 18.7 per cent had visited it more than three times; 40.3 per cent had previously visited similar types of event elsewhere.

Visitors were asked about their use of alternative and complementary therapies; about their involvement in sects, cults and New Religious Movements and in human potential groups and activities; about their readership of human potential, New Age and health magazines; and about their support for environmental concerns. \(^{14}\) Table 11.2 summarises the data.

### Table 11.2: Involvement in Alternative Activities by Sex and Age (% of Festival sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>16-25</th>
<th>26-35</th>
<th>36-45</th>
<th>46-55</th>
<th>56+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of therapies</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health magazines</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human potential groups</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human potential magazines</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sects and Cults</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As might be expected, the figures are high, the highest being for use of therapies. Women generally score more highly than men. With the exception of support for Green movements, involvement tends to rise with age at least up to the 46–55 age group (and further in the case of sects and cults), after which it tends to falls off somewhat. The figures show a fairly high degree of immersion in the New Age subculture and a considerable overlap between this and related concerns such as environmentalism, vegetarianism, animal rights and so on. This and the growing demand for intensive workshops perhaps indicates that, although appropriated as a commodity and slotted into lifestyles in relatively undemanding ways, the consumption of New Age products and services is nevertheless based upon something more than fickle seeking for spiritual entertainment, novelty and exoticism. As Swatos (1983) suggests, 'even as the new religious sensibility is fed commodities . . . one must concede that something is there, to which the market responds . . .' (p. 334).

**Conclusion**

That there is something there perhaps receives strongest testimony in the conviction expressed by Graham Wilson (based upon numerous personal
reports to him from visitors to the Festival) that the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit can change - and has changed - many people's lives. It may do this in a very general way, by drawing them into a new world, giving them a new direction in life or giving them the confidence and encouragement to change their jobs, careers and lifestyle. More specifically, it may lead them to establish personal contacts which facilitate such change, to become a practitioner of a form of alternative therapy or to set up a New Age business of their own. The effects that the event can have are not sufficiently appreciated, according to Graham Wilson. Indeed, when not being put down as a seductive con, the Festival is often seen and portrayed somewhat unseriously as offering a rather light-hearted romp through an amusing assemblage of engaging and congenial weirdness. In some senses it might be said to be for many just that - an opportunity for playful indulgence in dreams and fantasies, in a romantic make-believe world. As Luhrmann (1989: 336) puts it, speaking of the present day practitioner of witchcraft and magic, 'he plays at magic and understands the play as serious'. Put differently, however, is this not to say at the same time that the Festival provides a means of transcending the apparent meaninglessness and arbitrariness of ordinary existence? For a great many attendees, the Festival offers a potent concentration of practical and effective solutions to real and otherwise intractable problems of mind, of body or of spirit, or of mind-body-spirit, for which the normal medical and traditional religious means of addressing have, in their own experience at least, been manifestly less than adequate.

Notes

1. The audience cult is characterised by Stark and Bainbridge (1985) as diffuse and unorganised and one in which membership, if it can be called that, remains for the most part a consumer activity. 'Members' seldom if ever gather together physically in a given place but consume cult ideas and information through magazines, books, newsletters, and other media outlets. Today one would probably add the Internet to this list.

2. Gerlach and Hine (1970) developed this concept to describe the very fragmented and diffuse movements they were studying such as Black Power and Pentecostalism. Movements of this kind are characterised by a multiplicity of groups with no overall organisation and no single person or body to speak for the movement as a whole or to take authoritative decisions. There is often only loose organisation within many of the groups, considerable competition between them, fluidity with respect to the formation, fission and disintegration of groups and varying understandings of the goals and aims of the movement. Most participant groups have limited knowledge of the other participant groups or the extent of the movement and only partial knowledge of the extent of their own 'membership' or following. Followers are attached to the groups with varying degrees of commitment and involvement. The segmented fragments of the SPIN are
linked by what York (1995: 326) calls an 'unbounded reticulation' manifested through a number of features. There is, for example, considerable overlap of membership of many groups; there are many personal ties of kinship, friendship and personal contact between the members of particular groups; there is liaison and communication between the leaderships of various groups and exchange of information between them; there are travelling evangelists and spokespersons who move extensively between the groups, and large gatherings and demonstrations at which many groups are represented; finally, there is sharing of a core set of beliefs or ideology disseminated through a whole variety of means and outlets.

3. I am grateful to Graham Wilson for most of the following information, which was obtained through personal interview with him on 18 November 1997 at Arnica House, and for his comments on the first draft of this article. I am also grateful to him for providing me with a number of back programmes and videos made of past Festivals from which much additional information has been drawn. Also, I have drawn upon observations made on many personal visits to the Festival over the years almost from its inception.

4. It was originally entitled the 'Festival for Mind and Body' becoming the 'Festival for Mind–Body–Spirit' in 1979.

5. Gatherings of various types of alternative healers and practitioners, astrologers and diviners, experts in the Tarot, counsellors and meditation guides, etc.

6. This was, according to Wilson, the first comprehensive alternative therapy clinic of its kind in Britain, bringing together a variety of alternative and complementary forms of healing and types of practitioner. Wilson saw a market advantage in making available to customers a range of services in one location which had previously only been available from scattered specialist outlets.

7. The Healing Arts Festival, while in many respects very like the Mind-Body-Spirit Festival, emphasises more specifically 'natural', holistic, alternative and complementary healing defined in the broadest sense. 'Healing' here includes the pursuit of inner peace, happiness and joy as much as it does the alleviation or removal of physical symptoms. There is the same mixture of exhibitors, lectures, workshops and performances as at the Mind-Body-Spirit Festival.

8. Although Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, was at the time of writing booked to give a lecture for the first time at the Festival.

9. Jorgensen and Jorgensen (1982) found much the same thing in their study of occult practitioners in a large city in the Western USA, where the sale of occult services seemed to be a strategic adaptation to survival in the larger society which does not detract from the fact that these practices are located within 'quite complex theosophies wherein magic is secondary to enlightenment or salvation' (p. 377). Campbell (1972) also suggests that it is the substantial commercial substructure of the cultic milieu which enables it to survive.

10. This is defined by Heelas (1994: 103) as the process whereby there is an 'internalisation of authority' (Bellah, 1991: 223) and in which traditional external loci of authority which cannot be ignored without feelings of guilt and sinfulness become centred within the individual whose own wishes, desires, ambitions, beliefs and judgements become pre- eminent.

11. See also Wilson (1976).

12. This snapshot approach, taking Festivals five years apart, may, of course, miss some regular participants but gives a good indication, nevertheless, of the degree of turnover.
A notable figure who has been missed by this procedure should be mentioned, namely Sir George Trevelyan, who opened the first Festival and continued to do so for many years thereafter as well as being a regular lecturer at the Festival. Also a regular contributor to the Festival was Peter Caddy, founder of the Findhorn Community.

The project was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, to whom thanks is due. A brief questionnaire was administered to 402 visitors and participants during the whole course of the Festival in 1990. Of these, 252 were female and 148 male and in two cases the sex of the respondent was not recorded. Two hundred and thirty one were single, 100 married, 62 divorced or separated and 9 widowed. Seventy-four were under 26, 147 between 26 and 35, 95 between 36 and 45, 50 between 46 and 55, 35 over 55 and in one case the respondent’s age was not recorded. The respondents were interviewed mainly around the steps leading up to the performance area and, while the sample was not random, it was probably as representative as it could have been. The questionnaire was actually concerned with the dietary practices of visitors to the Festival in connection with a study of wholefood, health food and organically produced food consumers. Striking is the extent to which the sample showed distinctive dietary practices. Almost 74 per cent were following unorthodox diets. Fully 60 per cent of the sample were vegetarians of one kind or another, a figure massively greater than the proportion of vegetarians in the general population (between 3 and 6 per cent). Those following whole, health or organic (WHO) diets comprised around 45 per cent of the sample. Of these, a high proportion, about 70 per cent, were also vegetarian. Conversely, of vegetarians, about 52 per cent reported that they followed WHO diets. Significantly, catering at the Festival has always been vegetarian and organic. At Olympia the Festival was, for this reason, uniquely granted autonomy in providing the catering. On vegetarianism and alternative/spiritual values, see Twigg (1979, 1983) and Hamilton (1993, 1995).

Respondents were given a range of therapies, magazines, etc., listed on a card and asked if they had used, been involved in, read, etc., any of them. The figures are for any level of use or involvement, i.e. one or more positive responses for each type of item.

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of the Human Potential Movement 
Elizabeth Puttick

INTRODUCTION

The Human Potential Movement (HPM) was one of the most significant and influential movements of the counterculture of the sixties and seventies. It originated as an experimental rebellion against mainstream psychology and organised religion. Its explorations and advances trailblazed the now widespread interest shown by mainstream society in personal development, the quality of relationships, emotional literacy, human values in the workplace and the replacement of 'hard' political causes with 'softer' issues such as environmentalism. Its values have pervaded our outlook to the point where even philosophy may be interpreted in terms of the philosopher's emotional problems, as with a recent biography of Bertrand Russell.\(^1\) The bestselling success of *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman (1996), as well as a plethora of popular self-help books, highlight the growing acceptance of these values. The magnitude of the shift may be gauged by comparison with the following quotation from a speech by the Conservative MP Nicholas Soames, grandson of Winston Churchill, which epitomises traditional British attitudes towards personal development:

>This terrible counselling thing has grown up in Britain. Whatever you do wrong it's somebody else's fault, or your mother hit you. I think that's all balls. It's ghastly political correctness. People need to pull themselves together. I'm not a great believer in blubbing in your tent. I do get melancholy now and again, but you go to bed, sleep well and wake up pawing the ground like a horse in the morning.\(^2\)

Whilst such reactionary views may raise a laugh, they also contributed to the crushing Conservative defeat in the 1997 general election. The landslide Labour victory highlighted a shift of values in which 'caring', 'compassion', 'cooperation' and 'feeling' are paramount. There seems to have been a
fundamental transformation of the British people: from a stiff-upper-lipped race keeping feelings firmly under lock and key apart from a discreet tear at weddings (but not funerals), to an emotionally expressive people self-disclosing in public, print and on television. The change was most dramatically illustrated a few months later in the public displays of emotion following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and indeed during her life the princess had both expressed and provoked many such displays. Soames was one of the princess’s most vociferous critics, describing her as ‘mentally unstable’ and a ‘loose cannon’.3 Whatever the truth of their respective positions, emotionally-centred values are now in the ascendancy. These changes have not taken place overnight but have been building up from the grass roots for over thirty years.

My argument here is that the phenomenal growth and success of the HPM has been in two opposite directions: spiritualisation and secularisation. On the one hand, the process of integration between psychology and spirituality that began in the 1970s has continued to inspire and provide tools for new developments in psychospirituality. On the other hand, the biggest growth area for psychospirituality has been in business, education, even politics and the armed forces. Although these are quite different strands, one of the most interesting developments is the ever-closer association between the traditionally opposed worlds of religion and business, with both areas taking on each other’s values and methods – though not always smoothly or successfully.

The HPM has expanded from margin to mainstream, and become quasi-institutionalised in representative councils and associations such as the Association of Humanistic Psychology (AHP) and hundreds of training organisations; also, less formally, in management training programmes, teacher training, and academic courses.4 This exemplifies what Weber termed the ‘routinisation of charisma’. It also illustrates an important principle of social change that I have described elsewhere (Puttick, 1997a), and will summarise here.

Mainstream society may be seen as a relatively static, stable conglomeration of individuals, groups and institutions that throws up more dynamic, deviant groups on its margins. This margin covers all fields, including politics, science, health, gender, the arts, and religion, and it has a significant role: it may also be the leading edge, whose experiments help create the future. New Religious Movements (NRMs) are examples of marginal groups that have an impact and influence on society beyond the numbers of people involved. Their members have chosen their status actively and consciously. This is partly why social marginality has been discredited as a conversion theory.5 Particularly in the counterculture,
marginality could be a voluntary status, and was celebrated by hippies and others who proudly bore the label of ‘freak’. Osho, who as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was leader of the most fashionable NRM of the 1970s, elevated marginality into superior status:

The people who have gathered around me are all misfits in the rotten society. Any intelligent person is bound to be a misfit in a society which is dead, out of date, superstitious, based on belief systems. Only retarded people can be the fit ones . . . All the great names in the history of man were just misfits in their society. To be a misfit is a tremendously valuable quality. (Osho, 1985: 413)

It has been widely noted that NRMs flourish during periods of rapid social change, arising as vehicles of protest, rebellion and challenge. They are responses to change but also agents of transformation. They function as laboratories experimenting with new ideas and practices, often in sealed-off communities, isolated from the norms, conventions and restrictions of society. The more successful experiments are taken up – usually in a more diluted, digestible form – by mainstream society.

The HPM is sometimes seen as a NRM, though this is an overextension of the classification. Firstly, ‘Human Potential Movement’ is an umbrella term, not always recognised or used by its practitioners, who sometimes used ‘growth movement’ or no label at all. They have always consisted of loose congeries of individuals, centres and schools of thought, some of whom saw themselves in alliance as the vanguard of a new wave of consciousness, while others disagreed fiercely with each other. Secondly, its origins were secular, providing an alternative, sometimes an adversary, to religion. Its more spiritually-oriented practitioners tended to become Buddhists or join a NRM, in particular the Osho movement. However, on the whole there is enough correspondence among their ideas, values and methods to constitute a cultural movement, best chronicled by John Rowan (1976).

The origins of the Human Potential Movement

The 1960s marked the beginning of a period of rapid social change, and an explosion of rebellious creativity. It also included a millenial dimension aimed at a transformation of the world and of consciousness, which has been termed a ‘paradigm shift’. The causes of the shift are complex and multidimensional and can be traced back at least as far as the eighteenth-century Romantic movement. However, the 1960s counterculture seemed both at the time and in retrospect to mark a turning point. This was partly
because it followed a period of particularly staid conservatism in the 1950s; partly because, rather than remaining a fringe subculture, it grew to have enormous impact on all aspects of society: politics, social and political activism, the arts, literature, fashion, health, gender, sexuality, and spirituality.7

The counterculture arose partly as a rebellion against the materialism and ‘technocracy’ of the postwar climate. Furthermore, the militarisation of two world wars had encouraged a rigidity and repression that Wilhelm Reich (1968), a radical progenitor of the HPM, called ‘character armour’, and which he identified as the cause of neurosis, many psychosomatic disorders and sociopolitical problems, including fascism. In this austere climate the Roman virtues of discipline, duty, gravity, firmness, tenacity, hard work and frugality restrained the ‘softer’ virtues and the spontaneous expression of affection. So the children of the postwar period grew up economically privileged but emotionally and spiritually deprived. A small but influential minority rejected their parents’ goals of wealth, success and status in favour of the search for meaning and fulfilment.

The HPM may be seen as the psychospiritual wing of the counterculture. It was largely an outgrowth of humanistic psychology, which was developed by Maslow (1970) as a ‘third force’ in response to the limitations of psychoanalysis and behaviourism. In contrast, Maslow developed a more optimistic, holistic theory based on mental health rather than pathology, with an emphasis on choice and values, best explicated in his ‘hierarchy of needs’.8 His main contribution was his concept of the ‘self-actualised’ human being: one who is fully alive and responsive; who has solved the basic survival needs and psychological problems, and is therefore capable of ecstatic ‘peak experiences’, including mysticism. Maslow thus paved the way for the later spiritualisation of psychotherapy, although the HPM was originally more secular in its aims.

Maslow’s theories and methods were adapted and developed into a number of major schools of humanistic psychology and psychotherapy, in particular Carl Rogers’s (1980) person-centred counselling, Fritz Perls’s gestalt therapy, Eric Berne’s Transactional Analysis (TA), and Will Schutz’s encounter groups. Their common approach was the exploration of the realms of feelings and relationships, a taboo area in British society at the time. The result was the demystification and destigmatisation of therapy, which was now seen as a path for ‘normal neurotics’ to explore the full range of human potential. In the 1960s, these techniques were further developed by countercultural ‘growth centres’, of which the largest and best known is Esalen, founded in California in 1962. Despite some criticisms of the ethics
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and effectiveness of psychotherapy (Masson, 1989; Hillman & Ventura, 1992), it has grown enormously. In Britain in the 1990s there were over 300 different kinds of counselling and psychotherapy available, over 500 training organisations, tens of thousands of practitioners, and over one hundred thousand clients. In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that British culture is undergoing a shift towards ‘softer’, more ‘feminine’, emotionally-based values.

THE SPIRITUALISATION OF THE HPM

Despite the tremendous creativity and experimentation in the HPM, it hit a barrier around the early 1970s. There was a widespread feeling that the full potential implied in self-actualisation had not been realised: self-improvement had indeed happened, but not radical transformation. One psychotherapist summarised the mood of the time: ‘By now I’d been doing groups for two years very intensively, and I began to feel there was something more. All this looking inside and emoting all these feelings, behind that was something deeper, but I had no idea how to reach it.’

Many seekers shared this frustration, which stemmed partly from a limited understanding of the inner quest.

Even within psychology this confusion was apparent, as expressed by a psychologist of religion: ‘Self-love is perhaps the most crippling of the cravings from which the person on the contemplative path needs to be liberated’ (Thouless, 1971: 123). The antipathy may spring partly from a perceived contradiction between the therapeutic goal of self-actualisation and the Christian ideal of service and sacrifice. It exemplifies a widespread misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of personal development, echoed by social commentators such as Wolfe (1976), Schur (1976) and Lasch (1978), who satirised or castigated the movement for its narcissistic self-indulgence and lack of social conscience. This dualistic dichotomising of self-development and service is emphasised by labelling groups and traditions that incorporate personal development as ‘self religions’ or ‘self-spirituality’ (Heelas, 1996), ignoring their own emphasis on the importance of love and service. Just as the two ‘wings’ of Buddhism (itself a ‘self religion’ by this definition) are wisdom and compassion, so the basis of humanistic psychology is the understanding that insight, self-love and love for others are inextricably linked and mutually enhancing. This ideological shift is well summarised in a section entitled ‘The self-love of the counsellor’ taken from the standard textbook for person-centred counsellor training:
The world is full of helpers whose activity is a desperate strategy to avoid confronting themselves. This self-evasion is sometimes mistaken for selflessness and can receive reinforcement from a misguided understanding of the Christian tradition where the concepts of selfishness and self-love have often become hopelessly confused. According to this misunderstanding one's own needs must always be subordinated to the needs of the other and it is considered unhealthy even to reflect unduly on one's own state of being. Once such a way of thinking is allied to a common distrust of introspection, the scene is well set for the kind of helping which is permeated by a dogged sense of martyrdom and further damages the self-respect of the person being helped. For the person-centred counsellor the ability to love herself is, in fact, the cornerstone for her therapeutic practice, and in its absence the usefulness of the helping relationship will be grossly impaired. It is impossible to offer a client acceptance, empathy and genuineness at the deepest level if such responses are withheld from the self. (Mearns & Thorne, 1988: 23)

Yet misidentification of spirituality as self-sacrifice persists, as demonstrated by the following recent book review in a national newspaper. It should be remembered that, at the time of writing, self-development books filled the bestseller lists, while Christian theology was a minority specialist genre.

Wander into the 'spiritual uplift' section (or whatever it's called) of a modern bookshop and amuse yourself at the ridiculous attempts contemporary authors make to help you convince yourself that you are wonderful. Compare with à Kempis: 'The highest and most profitable form of study is to understand one's inmost nature and despise it.' This is why The Imitation of Christ has been in print for 500 years, and I'm OK, You're OK won't be.¹¹

Those who looked deeper perceived HPM ideology as a rebellion against the arid intellectualism of Western philosophy and theology and the aggressive destructiveness of scientific materialism. Turning inwards was partly the result of a widespread disillusion with politics in the aftermath of the Vietnam war and the failure of idealistic political movements to change the world. The ranks of those espousing alternative spirituality today have been swelled by numerous ex-socialists and communists following the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' in the late 1980s. Science had disenchanted and desacralized the world, nature, and the self. On the other hand, the Judaeo-Christian tradition was perceived as either arid, hypocritical, apathetic (particularly Anglicanism) or damaging. Furthermore, Christianity had mainly treated the psyche as a 'forbidden zone', and possessed only a very limited methodology for personal development.
The appeal of Eastern mysticism to the counterculture has been well documented. Although it may be traced back to the nineteenth century or even earlier, most of its influence on the HPM has been via psychology. Psychologists from Jung onwards have claimed a natural correlation between psychology and Buddhist philosophy. Jung had been very interested in Eastern mysticism and symbolism, though his interpretations have been criticised by both Indians and Westerners. Fromm (1950) and Maslow (1943) made theoretical connections between psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism, but until the 1970s psychotherapy and meditation were largely perceived as different, mutually exclusive paths. Fitzgerald (1986: 286) argues that it was Alan Watts 'who constructed the intellectual bridge between the therapists and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh' by interpreting the Eastern mystical traditions as being closer to psychotherapy than to philosophy or religion. He thus influenced many people to travel to India to discover meditation.

The 'Beat Zen' of Allen Ginsberg and other Beat poets in the 1950s and early 1960s had popularised Buddhism in the counterculture, while the Indian gurus of the sixties and seventies offered a praxis of meditation and mysticism. Transcendental Meditation (TM), for example, was an adaptation of these techniques designed for busy Westerners, who could slot it into their daily routine without renouncing material comforts or retiring to a monastery. Other Indian NRMs popular in the West in the early 1970s were ISKCON, the Divine Light Mission (later 'Elan Vital') and Muktananda's Siddha Yoga.

The problem with the teachings of the Indian gurus was that they had no organic connection with Western spiritual and cultural traditions. Psychology had made theoretical connections, but it was within the practical, experiential approach of psychotherapy that a living synthesis between Eastern spirituality and Western psychotherapy was created. Therapists of the HPM were utilising meditation as an adjunct to 'personal growth' and experimenting with it in their groups, particularly at Esalen. One of the first growth centres in Britain was Quaesitor, founded in London in 1970 by Paul and Patricia Lowe. At first their main focus was on psychotherapy, but soon they and their clients began to meditate, and a natural integration started. Clare Soloway (formerly Patricia Lowe) described the process in an interview:

There isn't a point where therapy ends and transformation begins; it's a continuation. We were laying the groundwork for that at that time. We were
involved with meditation, because it's a process of self-awareness. We were continuously looking for the new, always looking for the next person who would come, and who could shine a light from that angle. We were on the path of searching very consciously. So there wasn't a time when anything began, we were already in that process of finding ourselves very consciously.

In 1972 the Lowes went to India to meet an Indian guru, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (later known as Osho), and became initiated as sannyasins (disciples). Osho's first Western disciples were drawn from hippies and seekers travelling around India, but the Lowes inspired other key HPM therapists to join. His following then grew very fast from their clientele. Wallis summarises the phenomenon: ‘Rajneesh’s tantrism overlapped extensively with the principal ideological elements of the Human Potential Movement, but offered something far more, a path to Enlightenment’ (1986: 197). By the mid-1970s the Osho movement had become one of the most fashionable and fastest growing NRMs in the West (Puttick, 1997a).

Much of the popularity of the Osho movement was derived from its praxis, based on Osho’s own meditations which were themselves partly derived from powerfully cathartic Reichian technique. The rationale for his departure from silent Buddhist sitting meditations such as vipassana, was that the former were devised at a time when life and the human mind were much simpler. The complexity and stress of contemporary life, with its frenzied activity and emotional repression, make it hard for Westerners to sit in meditation for long periods. As one Buddhist convert expressed it: ‘I've been sitting zazen for years and I still don't like it particularly. It makes me mad. I shake, sometimes very violently’ (Needleman, 1977: 48). This was a problem described by some of my own respondents who had previously been Buddhists, which was resolved by Osho's 'Dynamic Meditation': an active meditation featuring breathing, but in a chaotic rather than the controlled way typical of Eastern meditations. As breath is perceived to be the bridge between body and soul, so these meditations became a significant bridge between East and West. Osho’s HPM therapists greatly expanded his methodology into an innovative programme of psychospiritual development, beginning with body-based, cathartic methods and progressing through encounter-style groups to the more subtle Buddhist meditations:

When Western people come to me, I put them into the groups. That is good for them. They should start with what is easier for them. Then by and by, slowly I change. First they go into cathartic groups like encounter, primal therapy, and then I start putting them into intensive enlightenment, then vipassana. Vipassana is a witnessing. From encounter to vipassana there is a great synthesis. When you move from encounter to vipassana, you are moving from West to East. (Osho, 1977: 170)
In the 1970s the Osho movement was almost alone in its attempt to integrate the techniques of psychotherapy and meditation into a new psychospirituality. Other Eastern traditions and Eastern-based NRMs in the West tended to ignore or disparage psychotherapy, especially in Britain where a deep-seated distrust of psychology has combined with a belief in meditation as a ‘higher’ path. The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) in particular has been hostile towards the HPM. Subhuti (1988: 33) condemned attraction to Buddhism as therapy on the grounds of its encouragement of ‘egocentric self-involvement’, proclaiming that ‘Buddhism had to be distinguished from therapy’. Yet personal development is seen as fundamental to Buddhism as a spiritual path in the West. Although the ultimate goal of nirvana is attained through the extinction of the idea of self (anatta), paradoxically the praxis of meditation and other techniques involves a process of self-knowledge and insight that effectively extends the methods of the HPM into spiritual growth.

In America, homeland of the HPM, the two movements – Eastern spirituality and Western psychotherapy – were seen as compatible and mutually enriching. Indeed, the HPM ‘gave Buddhists a new language for expressing human problems’, introducing key terms such as ‘growth’, ‘openness’, and even ‘peak experience’ as a synonym for nirvana in Buddhist terminology (Prebish, 1978: 165). The Buddhist psychologist Jack Kornfield (1989) is probably the best known advocate of this synthesis, arguing that repressed emotions, psychic woundedness and ‘unfinished business’ can obstruct progress in meditation. This more positive attitude towards the benefits of psychotherapy is now pervading British Buddhism also, and even the FWBO is beginning to recommend it under certain circumstances.

Self-development in Shamanism and Paganism

The main criticism made by philosophers and theologians such as Jacob Needleman (1977) and Harvey Cox (1979) about the ‘turn East’ was that Eastern traditions were inherently alien to Westerners, who should return to their ‘roots’ – which they assumed to be the Judaeo-Christian tradition. There are several problems with this essentialist position in a pluralist, multifaith, multicultural society, including the claim of many participants to feel more ‘at home’ in these movements than in their religion of birth. Nevertheless, in the 1990s there has been a return, not to organised religions, but to ‘earth traditions’: interpretations of living tribal traditions such as Shamanism, and reconstructions of European Paganism such as Wicca and Druidry.

Political activism has been partly replaced by environmentalism, which
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has fuelled the growing appeal of nature religions in the West in the 1980s and 1990s. While ecology has been the main influence on the beliefs and values of these movements, their magical praxis and language have been strongly influenced by Jungian psychology and the HPM. These have also influenced the shift away from an emphasis on political power towards personal development in magical ritual. Reciprocally, some shamanic healing techniques have been taken up by psychotherapists, although shamans interpret spirits and the 'non-ordinary reality' in which they are encountered as ontologically more 'real' than the material world, representing the true nature of existence and the cause of events. Psychologists, on the other hand, tend to interpret these experiences as elements of the personal psyche or archetypes. 'Soul retrieval' presents the most significant challenge:

The ancient practice of soul retrieval and modern psychology potentially have much to offer each other. By restoring lost soul parts, the shaman can give the psychotherapist a whole patient with whom to do psychological work, thus making possible faster and deeper results. (Ingerman, 1991: 40)

In the past, one of the key differences between the New Age and Paganism has been their attitude towards money. While the HPM and New Age have generally been enthusiastically entrepreneurial, Pagans have tended to prefer simple living, 'downshifting' and right livelihood as being more environmentally-friendly. However, Heelas (1996: 90) argues that 'many work and business activities fall into an indeterminate zone where one really does not know whether what is going on is primarily Gaean or primarily commercial'. While the majority of Pagans probably still endorse the former philosophy, there appears to be a more positive attitude towards money as 'energy' with creative potential in some circles. Susan Greenwood argues that 'the magical vision of the development of the self motivated by spirit begs comparison with Weber's conception of the Protestant ethic as a motivational structure of action which is well-suited to capitalism' (1995: 47). There is an increase in workshops and the sale of magical tools to create business success, and 'wealth magic' is an accepted practice for chaos magicians. Such practices link them with New Age prosperity consciousness, which has both influenced and been influenced by business and management training.

HUMAN POTENTIAL VALUES IN THE WORKPLACE

Training, and especially management training, is one of the fastest-growing service industries, extending throughout the public and private sectors into
business, the professions and education. Most training is basically technical in character, dealing with issues of day-to-day competency in the workplace, but, increasingly, personnel and management training is probing into the areas of attitudes and feelings known as the 'affective domain'. Educationists and trainers have long regarded this as the most difficult and contentious form of training, but also know that it can have the greatest rewards in bringing about changes beneficial to the individual and the company (Armstrong, 1991).

These processes have a twofold provenance. They were originally developed in Japanese and American companies, sometimes resulting in spectacular increases in productivity and profitability. Amway, a pyramid selling company, is one of the most dramatic American examples of this philosophy in action – and has been criticised as a cult practising 'mind control' (Bromley, 1991). In Britain, so far such practices are mainly found in companies that are part of multinational corporations, but they are on the increase. On the other hand, some of the ideas and techniques may be traced to the HPM, beginning with Kurt Lewin's T-groups (training groups), developed at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in the 1940s (Armstrong, 1991). Despite some criticisms, this approach has been highly influential on management training and has developed into various other methods including sensitivity training, interpersonal skills development and group dynamics. Another major influence has been Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis (TA), and most trainers include TA 'games' in their repertoire. Other important methods and tools imported from the HPM are workshops, roleplay, group exercises, feedback and stress management.

Contemporary organisational restructuring processes often have two levels: financial/practical and ideological – although they tend to be presented jointly to participants as primarily a business model to increase productivity and/or profitability. The ideological aspects are increasingly being rationalised as attempts to agree shared workplace values, including the value of personal and corporate financial growth. (As such, they may be seen as the 1990s face of mercantile idealism and the protestant ethic, repackaged for the contemporary world as the 'Gospel of Prosperity' [Bromley, 1991]).

Despite the HPM's emphasis on personal development extending into spiritual growth, it has usually been largely pro-business and entrepreneurial. For example, many of its practitioners have amassed large personal fortunes and founded successful commercial organisations. This is also often the case with some of the NRMs who become involved in business consultancy and management training, particularly those fitting into the
‘world-affirming’ category (Wallis, 1984). Some NRMs are directly involved in the workplace as training consultants, either through individual members or the group as a whole, of which the best known is the Forum (formerly est; Rupert, 1992). Others include Scientology’s subsidiaries WISE and Sterling Management, Programmes Ltd, MSIA’s Insight Seminars (whose founder has written a number of self-help bestsellers; John-Roger & McWilliams 1992), Lifespring, and Silva (1993; see Heelas 1999 for an extensive list). Most of these groups were founded for personal development, but often their clientele was drawn from the sales and business world – as were some of their founders, including Werner Erhard (est) and John Hanley (Lifespring). This was also the case with neuro linguistic programming (NLP), which achieved respectability via this route (O’Connor & Prior, 1995). Many people who have undergone Werner Erhard’s est training and other similar trainings have gone on to become business and training consultants.

Most of these trainings do not focus on spirituality directly, even when originating from NRMs, though the values may be implicit. One of the books that best exemplifies the trend is a recent bestseller in the lucrative self-help/business genre, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey (1992). It carries seven pages of endorsements by top personal development and business celebrities, from the premier self-help guru M. Scott Peck, to business gurus Tom Peters and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, to chief executive officers of multinational corporations. Yet although he writes mainly about success and self-improvement in professional life, Covey (1992: 319) ends with a personal inspiration note that epitomises HPM spirituality: ‘I believe that as human beings, we cannot perfect ourselves. To the degree to which we align ourselves with correct principles, divine endowments will be released within our nature enabling us to fulfill the measure of our creation’. The ‘god within’ has been secularised – and personal power made divine.

**Business and Spirituality**

The combination of spirituality and business is one of the most interesting aspects of the apparent secularisation of the HPM. It is most dramatically expressed by the futurist (and former TM leader) Peter Russell: ‘My aim is to get all IBM’s managers to experience themselves as God’ (Heelas, 1999: 51; see also Evans & Russell, 1990). Hundreds of Japanese companies have implemented corporate meditation programmes through the Maharishi Corporate Development International, which has several multinational
corporations as clients, as does the Osho movement’s Centre for Consciousness in Organizations.

Within the broader New Age there are also many examples of this mutual influence between the spiritual and secular realms. London venues such as the Mind–Body–Spirit Festival, Neal’s Yard on the fringes of Covent Garden, and Alternatives at St. James’s, Piccadilly, regularly put on talks on prosperity consciousness. Alternatives is moving even further in that direction, with the money workshops of its co-founder William Bloom (1996) and current director Nick Williams and his colleague Steve Nunn. Magazines such as Human Potential and Caduceus have recently devoted whole issues to the theme. The Scottish New Age community of Findhorn has been interested in these issues for many years, and in 1997 organised an international conference on ‘Business for Life’.

Just as HPM-influenced NRMs, New Age groups and individual trainers are affecting business philosophy, so there is a reciprocal trend of business leaders themselves becoming interested in spirituality, and inculcating these values into their organisations. Richard Barrett (1995), an executive of the World Bank, is also founder of the World Bank’s Spiritual Unfoldment Society, whose members discuss personal development, meditation and reincarnation. He believes that spirituality can improve the bottom line of companies and even the health of national economies. Most business gurus are American, but the well known British management thinker Charles Handy’s (1997) recent book is almost a spiritual self-help manual. Anita Roddick’s Body Shops have transformed our attitudes to beauty care; previously seen as epitomising self-indulgent vanity, The Body Shop is now compatible with environmental ethics and Roddick has founded a business school espousing her vision, with spirituality on the syllabus.

Controversies and dangers

As indicated, the ideology of the HPM, and to some extent also of New Age and spiritual ideas, has been quite easily grafted onto the more evangelical business philosophies of the past fifteen years. The aims of each are in some respects consonant but in others opposed, which is causing some confusion and controversy. Some of the confusion is linguistic in origin: terms such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘personal development’ have quite different meanings and associations in the counterculture and the enterprise culture. Furthermore, it is sometimes unclear whether the training industry is selling a product or an ideology. More controversially, some of the more confrontational techniques formerly used in Mind Dynamics, Synanon and est
(Rupert, 1992) have been provoking criticism in some training programmes. In America some people have successfully sued these organisations and their employers for psychological damage.

Another dimension to this is the relatively high failure rate of many programmes of corporate culture. It has long been recognised that changing culture in a company is very difficult, and in desperation, senior managers are resorting to ever more radical programmes. It should also be noted that the business training market, and the company restructuring market, are both intensely competitive, with numerous consultants jostling for patronage in this very profitable arena. As a result there is a tendency for consultants to try to present their unique process as the most innovative, radical, and hard-hitting option. Psychological and spiritual techniques are seen as 'grist to the mill', to be exploited in the service of corporate change.

These problems were graphically exemplified in a business restructuring programme in which I participated at a multinational publishing corporation, which was later researched by Robin Puttick (Puttick, 1995). It was introduced into the company with no induction preparation or explanation, so that most participants were confused and alienated. The title was 'Vision and Values', but, rather than being created organically from within, the values were imposed top-down without consultation by a management who were perceived as not fully endorsing them. There was no attempt to encourage 'ownership' by staff, which created much resentment and resistance. The staff felt most of the values were either self-evident or contradictory: although the majority were 'soft', they were implanted with 'hard' techniques, and the main thrust of the programme was financial and commercial. There was also no encouragement or time for the reflection that is fundamental to training purportedly based on 'action learning'. As a result, very few people experienced the promised increases in empowerment or personal development. The consultants were sacked after about a year (and an alleged cost of several million dollars) and replaced by another firm.

Whether business, personal development and spirituality can combine as easily and smoothly as some of these experiments would like has yet to be seen. As with NRM's, the combination seems to work most effectively in organisations led by a strong charismatic leader with a clear vision, such as Anita Roddick, although there have been allegations that The Body Shop's business practice does not always live up to its ideals. On the other hand, failure is almost guaranteed when spiritually-oriented restructuring programmes are adopted by organisations whose chief executives do not share or practise these values.
Out of this mass of diverse and sometimes conflicting evidence, one can perhaps discern two trends where business and spiritual ideologies combine effectively. Firstly, the so called 'Gospel of Prosperity' (Bromley, 1991) and its New Age variation ‘prosperity consciousness’ (Heelas, 1999) support capitalism, sharing its self-centred aggressive expansionism. Secondly, and conversely, the Buddhist and Pagan ethic of recycling and ‘right livelihood’ correlates with the ‘new economics’ of sustainable development, based on the work of E.F. Schumacher, author of Small is Beautiful, whose writings have been promoted by various organisations and initiatives such as The Other Economic Summit (TOES), the New Economics Foundation, and the Intermediate Technology Development Group. Consumerism is still rampant in the 1990s, but as the public and policy-makers become more aware of the limits of growth, the ethic of consumption may be replaced by one of personal development and ecospirituality. There is a growing grassroots trend towards these values, exemplified by the numbers choosing to reject the rat-race and the corporate treadmill in favour of ‘downshifting’ (Ghazi & Jones, 1997).

In the meantime, the Findhorn community is not planning a follow-up to its Business for Life conference. The organiser informed me: ‘Unless the world of business accepts a spiritual reality behind its modus operandi, I believe we have no chance of shifting the consciousness of humanity into the Aquarian age.’ Hence it is yet to be seen whether the ancient duality between world and spirit will prevail, perhaps even deepen, or whether a more holistic synthesis between these values – the secular and the spiritual – will emerge on a global scale.

Notes
2. Interview with Lynda Lee-Potter, Daily Mail, 25.5.96.
3. Soames’s remarks were made on television following the 1994 ‘Panorama’ television documentary comprising a frankly self-revealing interview with the Princess of Wales.
4. Most corporate management training programmes, particularly personnel training, and university business schools that I have heard of or come across, display clear influences.
5. Sociology and psychology have tended in the past to explain the appeal of NRMs in terms of social marginality or deprivation, but research on more recent movements has tended to find that people join movements that directly affirm their personal values, e.g. Wallis (1979); Stark & Bainbridge (1985).
6. The term was invented by the historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn in 1962, and popularised by various New Age writers, particularly Marilyn Ferguson (1989). ‘New Paradigm’ is also sometimes used by the more intellectual wing of this movement in distinction from what they see as the ‘flakier’ New Age end.
7. See Campbell (1999); Hutton (1998), for the influence of Romanticism, respectively on the New Age and Paganism. For more detailed accounts of the counterculture see Roszak (1968); Bellah (1970); Wuthnow (1976); Glock & Bellah (1976); Mullan (1983); Ferguson (1989).
8. I have argued elsewhere (Puttick, 1997b) that Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be adapted and applied to religion, particularly NRMs, to explain spiritual choice. Needs and values are the key factors determining why people join an NRM and which movement they choose.
9. Peter Berger (1974: 186) saw this as an inherent problem of modern social life: 'The paradox of techniques . . . applied to the attainment of nonfunctional relations with other people points to the inherent difficulty of the de-modernizing impulse: one wants to be sensitive to others in the manner of a poet, and one is trained for what purports to be such sensitivity in situations that are planned and manipulated in ready-made packages.'
10. This and all following unattributed quotations are taken from interviews with members of the Osho movement that I conducted as part of my doctoral research in 1991-3.
12. See for example Bellah (1970); Wuthnow (1976); Glock & Bellah (1976); Needleman (1977); Cox (1979); Ellwood (1979); Tipton (1982).
13. Koestler (1960) has noted that Jung has no following in India and is disliked for his perceived misinterpretations of Indian religion and philosophy. Jones (1979) shows how they were based on unqualified, unproven assumptions of correlations between Western psychology and Eastern religion.
14. The appeal of meditation was partly an outcome of mystical experiences induced by psychotropic drugs, partly a direct interest in Indian and other Asian mystical traditions as more and more proto-seekers travelled to these countries. See Puttick (1997), for a fuller discussion.
15. Wilhelm Reich was the most significant pioneer in body-based psychotherapy, partly for his discovery of the fundamental role of the breath in breaking down 'character armour'. He believed that 'the inhibition of respiration was the physiological mechanism of the suppression and repression of emotion, and consequently the basic mechanism of the neurosis in general' (Reich, 1968: 297). Reichian theory was the main influence on Osho's Dynamic meditation and other active meditations, and a key element in Rajneesh therapy.
16. 'Action learning' is generally considered the most effective management training programme with its emphasis on initiating change through real, work-based experiences and problems, and its focus on personal learning, reflection, analysis, and team-building. The most widely used book on the subject is Action Learning by Krystyna Weinstein (London: HarperCollins, 1995).
17. Ecospirituality, aka deep ecology, is a widely used term referring to the spiritual wing of the environmental movement. It is often used by Pagans and members of other nature religions, as well as non-affiliated spiritual seekers.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to locate New Age spirituality in the general context of changes in the nature of religious belief and behaviour in modern societies (by which I mean specifically the industrial democracies of western and northern Europe, North America and Australia and New Zealand), and to consider its likely impact.

I will begin with some quotations which exemplify the start and finish of the process of social mutation which has brought us to the New Age. All concern the nature of truth and authority and the social relationships that are associated with divergent attitudes to the status of what the speaker takes to be the divine truth. The first is from Bishop Augustine of Hippo:

There is an unjust persecution which the ungodly operate against the Church of Christ; and a just persecution which the Churches of Christ make use of towards the ungodly . . . The Church persecutes out of love, the ungodly out of cruelty. (cited in Kamen, 1967: 14)

As a dissenter from the orthodoxy of his time one might have expected the sixteenth-century reformer Martin Luther to take a more charitable view of diversity, but he heavily constrained his claims for freedom of conscience which, he argued: ‘cannot be absolute freedom because no one can be free from the obligations of truth’ (Kamen, 1967: 30).

My third quotation is from a statement written by Tissington Tatlow for the British Student Christian Movement (SCM) in 1910. For a decade, Tatlow, a young evangelical episcopalian, had been working to extend the student movement’s support beyond its original evangelical base. He and other activists had frequently been challenged on the doctrinal soundness of the endeavour by suspicious Church of England bishops. The following statement of the ‘interdenominational’ position (consciously contrasted
with an ‘un-denominational’ position) became the foundation of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh and was the credo on which the entire ecumenical movement was to develop. Tatlow described the SCM as follows:

The Student Christian Movement is interdenominational in that while it unites persons of different religious denominations in a single organisation for certain definite aims and activities, it recognises their allegiance to any of the various Christian Bodies into which the Body of Christ is divided. It believes that loyalty to their own denomination is the first duty of Christian students and welcomes them into the fellowship of the Movement as those whose privilege it is to bring into it, as their contribution, all that they as members of their own religious body have discovered or will discover of Christian truth. (Tatlow, 1933: 400)

The statement cleverly avoided determining just which bodies were ‘Christian’ and thus allowed the gradual expansion of what would be accepted as being in some sense valid. What it also contained was the first hint of relativism. At the heart of Tatlow’s draft was the notion that in the dark cloud of apparent contradiction could be found the silver lining of fundamental unity. Where previously, in what was known as ‘un-denominational’ work, co-operation required that differences be tactfully overlooked, now they were to be celebrated while the law of non-contradiction was suspended. Where the Bishop of Hippo would persecute those who differed with him, the bishops of the major Christian churches that formed the ecumenical movement would eventually endorse everything from high Catholicism through the evangelicalism of the Salvation Army to the pantheism of American native religion.

The fourth quotation comes from Sir George Trevelyan, doyen of British New Age spirituality, who concluded one account of his beliefs with the words: ‘This is what things look like to me. If it doesn’t seem like that to you, you don’t have to accept what I say. Only accept what rings true to your own Inner Self’ (in Greer, 1995: 159).

A VOCABULARY AND TRAJECTORY

In order that we have a consistent set of terms in which to discuss changes in religion, I want to introduce a typology developed by Roy Wallis.

Wallis believes that most of the important differences in how people organise their religious lives can be identified if we look at just two questions: (a) Does the religion see itself as having a unique grasp of salvational knowledge? (b) Is the religion seen by others as respectable or deviant?
Table 13.1: A Typology of Ideological Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Conception</th>
<th>External Conception</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uniquely Legitimate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Respectable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Sect</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pluralistically Legitimate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Denomination</strong></td>
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Members of the Exclusive Brethren believe that their organisation offers the only way to God. Hence they try to persuade people to join their uniquely legitimate organisation. The Christian Church of the Middle Ages took a similar view. But there is considerable difference in the popularity, acceptability and prestige of the Christian Church in the Middle Ages and the Exclusive Brethren: the former was a 'church' while the latter is a 'sect'.

What unites the denomination and the cult is that they do not claim a unique possession of the truth. They think they have something valuable to offer, but they recognise many other organisations as being every bit as valid. They think of themselves in the terms of Tatlow's interdenominational basis for the ecumenical movement. Similarly, the vast majority of purveyors of cultic wisdom and esoteric practice do not claim the monogamous commitment of their followers. Indeed, the relationship between purveyor and consumer is so loose that terms such as 'member', 'adherent' and 'follower' are usually inappropriate in the cultic milieu. Cults see themselves as simply one of many guides on the single but very broad road to enlightenment.

Again, what separates them is 'external conception': the extent to which they have succeeded in establishing themselves in their society. Denominations are a respectable part of our social and cultural landscape; cults are not.

The point of introducing these distinctions is to offer a very simple way of describing the major changes in the religious climate of the western world so that we can understand why New Age spirituality takes the form that it does, why it has become popular now and why its cultural consequences are likely to be constrained. We can observe the possibility and popularity of the four forms of religion in different sorts of society. I am not suggesting that sects were unknown prior to the Reformation, and that denominations and cults were unknown prior to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Even within the massive consensus of the Holy Roman Empire one had Christian humanists (such as Erasmus) who searched for common values to
The New Age and Secularisation

unite the range of religious expression they confronted. However, I am suggesting that there is a crucial difference in the number, size and popularity of the exemplars of the various forms. Church is characteristic of the pre-modern world church; church and sect of the early modern; sect and denomination of the modern; and the cult is characteristic of the late modern period.

The key to the shift between these four forms is modernisation, by which I mean the historically and geographically specific package of major social, political and economic changes that came with economic growth, urbanisation and industrialisation in western Europe, and the form of consciousness associated with those changes (see Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1974). I am not at this point making any universal claims or offering observations about societies that have more recently been affected by some of those changes. The extent to which the patterns may be repeated will depend on the extent to which new circumstances match the old. Naturally, what follows can only be the briefest of sketches (but see Wilson, 1982, and Bruce, 1996).

From Church to Denomination

Modernisation makes the church form of religion impossible. The church requires either cultural homogeneity or an elite sufficiently powerful to disregard diversity. Societies expand to encompass ever larger numbers of religious, ethnic and linguistic groups, and improved communication brings increased knowledge of that diversity. Modernisation also undermines the hierarchical and rigid social structures which permit the maintenance of monocultures. What at first sight might appear to be two countervailing tendencies combine to encourage and legitimate diversity.

First, as Durkheim notes in his distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, the increased division of labour and growth of economies creates ever greater social diversity and social distance (Durkheim, 1964). The feudal estate and closed village became the town and the city. The medieval old town of Edinburgh, where people of very different 'stations' lived on different floors of the same tenement and threw their excrement into the same street, was superseded by the New Town, inhabited by the bourgeoisie and their servants, separated from the trades and the factories. Increasingly, differing social circumstances created increasingly divergent cultures, which in turn created religious diversity. Different social groups re-worked the dominant religious tradition in ways that made sense from their position in the world.

At the same time, as Gellner in his theory of nationalism persuasively
argues, modernisation produced a basic egalitarianism (Gellner, 1983). A division of labour need not undermine a hierarchical society (the caste system of India is profoundly hierarchical and the castes are defined by their occupations) but economic development also brought change and the expectation of further change. And it brought occupational mobility. People no longer followed the traditional family pattern of employment. Occupational mobility made it hard for people to internalise visions of themselves that suppose permanent inferiority. People cannot simultaneously strive to improve themselves and their class position while thinking of themselves as fixed in a station or a degree or a caste in an unchanging hierarchical world. Modern societies are thus inherently egalitarian.

Economic expansion increased contact with strangers. Profound inequalities of status are tolerable and can work well when the ranking system is well known and widely accepted as legitimate. Soldiers can move from one regiment to another and still know their place because there is a uniform ranking system and rank is displayed through the wearing of uniform. Economic innovation and expansion mean constant change in the nature of occupations and increased mobility, both of which in their different ways mean that we have trouble placing people. There is no way of ensuring that we know whether we are superior or subordinate to this or that new person.

The separation of work and home, of the public and the private, further makes for equality. ‘Serf’ and ‘peasant’ were not job descriptions; they were all-enveloping social, legal and political statuses. One cannot be a serf during working hours and an autonomous individual for the evening and at weekends. A temporary work-role is not a full identity and though work-roles may be ranked in a hierarchy, they can no longer structure the whole world view. In the absence of a shared belief system which would sanction inequality and subjection (and the decline of religion usually removes that), egalitarianism becomes the default position.

The precondition of employability, dignity, full moral citizenship and an acceptable social identity is a certain level of education, which must include literacy – and literacy in a single language common throughout the economy. Once this was recognised, socialisation became standardised and placed in the hands of a central agency which was not a family, clan or guild but a society-wide education system. It required a single cultural and linguistic medium through which people could be instructed.

Gellner is, of course, not saying that in modern societies everyone is equal. His point is that the profound and fixed division of rights one finds in traditional and feudal societies is incompatible with economic development. Modernisation and the development of the capitalist economy require the end of the old world.
The fundamental egalitarianism that came with modernisation meant that, at the political level, the costs of coercing religious conformity were no longer acceptable: the state was no longer willing to accept the price in social conflict, and it adopted a position of neutrality on the competing claims of various religious bodies. In some settings, the neutrality was explicit (as in the United States Constitution); in others, it was implicit (as in the ‘fudge’ by which the established Churches of England and Scotland were left with notional advantages over their competitors but no real privileges). At the level of individual consciousness, it made it ever more difficult (though, of course, still possible) to dismiss religious views which were at odds with one’s own as being of entirely no account.

FROM SECT TO DENOMINATION

In some countries, where the Lutheran influence predominated, the religious upheavals of the Reformation were largely contained within the church form. In others, religious dissent, accelerated by the social changes of the early modern period, created a profusion of sects, most of which initially tried to establish themselves as ‘the church’. It was only after failing to achieve power, either through becoming the majority religion or effecting a minority coup, that many of them discovered the principle of toleration and evolved into denominations (Bruce and Wright, 1995).

At the same time as external relations with other religious organisations and with the state were giving the sect good reason to moderate its claims, there were a variety of internal pressures in the same direction, which are summarised in the well-known Niebuhr thesis (1962). For millenarian sects, the failure of the world to end is one problem that must be faced. For almost all sects the status of the children of sect members calls into question the initial hard demarcation between the saved and the unregenerate. It was hard for sectarians to suppose that their children, who had been raised in the faith, were the same as the children of outsiders. Gradually the strict membership tests were relaxed. Survival for any length of time brought assets (buildings, publishing houses and capital) which required to be managed. The creation of a bureaucratic structure in turn brought officials whose interests were to varying degrees at odds with the original radical impetus of the sect. The asceticism of the sect often resulted in upward social mobility. Even if there was no independent ‘Protestant ethic’ effect, most sects endured in circumstances of general economic growth. Increasing prosperity meant that the sacrifices inherent in asceticism grew proportionately ever larger. When coupled with the lower levels of commitment found among those generations which had inherited their sectarianism
rather than acquired it through choice, the result was a gradual relaxation of Puritanism and a gradual accommodation to the ways of the world.

There is nothing inevitable about this; Wilson (1990, 1993) explores a variety of ways in which certain sects have avoided the erosion of their initial radical sectarianism. To give just one example, the moderating effects of increased prosperity can be blunted if, as is the case with the Seventh Day Adventists, that prosperity is channelled and controlled by the sect itself and can thus serve as a device for maintaining commitment (Bull and Lockhart, 1989). But we cannot look at the sect’s deployment of commitment mechanisms in isolation from the sect’s surrounding environment. The sectarian form of religion is demanding and disruptive because it challenges other belief systems and modes of behaviour (religious and secular). To the extent that a nation-state or a society is prepared to allow its people social space in which to create their own subcultures, the sect form can prosper (as one sees with fundamentalism in America). However, the distance between a sect’s beliefs and those of most people in the modern world is so great that few outsiders will be attracted and its success will depend on socialising its children in the faith.

That the sectarian form of religion is demanding of its members and requires a social structure loose enough to allow effective subcultures means that its influence in the modern world is limited. The fact that the mass media frequently print or broadcast scare stories about the growth of fundamentalism (often inspired by a failure to appreciate that Iran is very unlike Britain or America) does not disprove this. It is evidence of the failure of commentators to appreciate that the numerical decline of the denominational form of religion leaves the sectarians as an ever greater part of the ever smaller number of believers.

THE CULTIC MILIEU OF THE NEW AGE

Thus far in what must be a massively simplified view of the history of religion in the West, we have seen the church form faced first with competition from the sect and then both churches and sects tending to become denominations. But where does the cult come into this account? First with the New Religious Movements of the 1960s and 1970s and then with the New Age of the 1980s, we have seen a flowering of alternative religions. Some, such as Transcendental Meditation and Rajneeshism, are re-workings for the western mind of traditional eastern religions; others, Scientology for example, are spiritualised versions of lay psychotherapies. In comparison with the popularity of the Christian denominations and sects, the cultic form of religion remains very much the minority
case. However, it is, I would argue, emblematic. Other contributions to this volume discuss various New Age beliefs and therapies in detail. What I aim to do here is sketch the major themes of the milieu (Heelas, 1996).

First, there is the belief that the self is divine. Christianity always assumed a division between God the Creator and the people he created. More than that, it assumed that people were basically bad. They only became good by subjecting themselves to God's will and God's commandments. Religion was about controlling the self and shaping it into a valuable object. The New Age does not espouse that division of God and his creation. Instead it supposes that we have within us the essence of holiness. The human self is essentially good. If it is bad, that is a result of our environment and circumstances. The aim of many New Age belief systems and therapies is to strip away the accumulated residues of our bad experiences and free our human potential. The point of the spiritual journey is to free the God within, to get in touch with our true centre.

Second, New Agers are holistic. They have borrowed from Hinduism and Buddhism the idea that everything – ourselves, the material world, the supernatural world – is really just one single essence. This gives many New Agers a keen interest in, and a new slant on, environmentalism. We should protect the material world from ruthless exploitation, not just for our own future good, but also because the planet is a spiritual being. Hence many New Agers are vegetarians and many are interested in holistic approaches to physical and psychological ‘healing’.

Third, as the Trevelyan quotation at the start illustrates, in the New Age there is no authority higher than the individual self. Of course we can learn by reading books and listening to great teachers, but the final arbiter of truth is the individual. If something works for you, then that is the truth. Personal utility is the final test.

This in turn brings in the fourth characteristic: eclecticism. As we differ in class, in gender, in age, in regional background, in culture, we will all have different notions of what works for us. The New Age milieu offers an enormous cafeteria of cultural products from which consumers can select. A simple way of illustrating the range of what is on offer is to consider the subjects covered in a very popular series of books called ‘The Elements of . . .’ The nouns that follow that opening phrase include: Alchemy, Astronomy, Buddhism, Christian Symbolism, Creation Myth, Crystal Healing, Dreamwork, Earth Mysteries, Feng Shui, Herbalism, Human Potential, Meditation, Mysticism, Natural Magic, Pendulum Dowsing, Prophecy, Psychosynthesis, Shamanism, Sufism, Taoism, Aborigine Tradition, Chakras, Goddess Myths, the Grail Tradition, Qabalah, Visualisation and Zen.
Even many of the new religious movements of the 1970s such as Scientology and Transcendental Meditation, whose cadres privately believe that they have the truth and everyone else is plain wrong, have been forced by market pressures to accept the eclecticism of the New Age milieu. Instead of recruiting loyal followers, they market their services to people who will take some courses, attend some events, and then move on to some other revelation or therapy. It is worth adding that, unlike the movement of conservative Protestants within sects, New Age sampling is not usually driven by dissatisfaction. People are as likely to move on because they feel they have acquired the benefits of this particular practice or insight as because they feel let down. Or to put it another way, consumers maximise benefits by compositing elements into their own best fit, rather than by searching for the one perfect match.

Eclecticism requires an appropriate epistemology. In practice, New Agers are relativists. Many simply sample a range of ideologies and therapies without noticing incompatible assumptions and truth-claims. If forced to attend to paradoxes they can assert Trevelyan's credo and find a philosophical reconciliation in the perennialist notion of a 'fundamental' unity behind apparent diversity.

A final central feature of New Age spirituality is its focus of attention or manifest purpose. All the major world religions have claimed that if we follow their teachings we will be happier and healthier people, but those therapeutic benefits have generally been secondary or latent. The medieval Christian followed the instructions of the Church because that is what God required. While one hoped for a good life, it was always possible that God's inscrutable providence destined otherwise. In this scheme of things, suffering was accepted and could be given spiritual significance. In much New Age spirituality, therapy is the manifest, not the latent function. Insights and practices are marketed as ways to feel better, to get the better job, to improve your marriage.

**Changes in the Churches**

My reason for supposing that the New Age is sociologically significant is that many of the characteristics just listed can be found in a minor key in the mainstream churches. The twentieth century has seen an increasingly positive evaluation of the human self and a corresponding decline in the notion of God the all-powerful creator. The idea that most people are going to hell has completely disappeared. Indeed, hell itself has vanished from all but the smallest and most conservative Protestant sects. The modern Christian self may not yet be divine but it is a pretty splendid thing.
Modern Christians are reluctant to accept authority; they no longer do what their churches tell them to do. British Catholics may admire the Pope but they do not follow his instructions on abortion, contraception or divorce. The therapeutic emphasis on benefits in this world is increasingly evident in all the churches.

These changes are not specific to Britain. In a general summary of the religious life of Americans, Wade Clark Roof said: ‘The religious stance today is more internal than external, more individual than institutional, more experiential than cerebral, more private than public’ (Roof, 1996: 153). Hammond makes the same point when he talks of a ‘shift in the meaning of the church from that of a collective-expressive agency to that of an individual-expressive agency’ (Hammond, 1992: 169). Writing about religion in the West generally, Wilson said: ‘Despite the persistence of external church structures, the privatization of religion and the demand for contemporary this-worldly salvation can be seen powerfully in Charismatic renewal, in the house church movement, and in the new concern with healing and the enhancement of personal competence’ (Wilson, 1988: 204).

That one finds resonances of the dominant assumptions of the New Age in the Christian churches, which one might have supposed to be relatively resistant to such ideological innovation, suggests that the New Age is not an accident. There is something about the cultic form of religion that makes it particularly well suited to late capitalism.

**Social functions of the New Age**

One of the major virtues of the epistemology of the New Age is that it solves the problem of cultural pluralism. If everyone believes the same thing and sees the world the same way, then it is possible for a society to believe that there is one God, one truth, one way of being in the world. However, when that single culture fragments into a whole series of competing visions, you have the possibility of endless argument and conflict. One resolution is to change the basic idea of knowledge so that we become relativists. We suppose that there is no longer one single truth, one single way to God but a whole variety of equally good ways. We shift in effect to a perennialist view of reality which supposes that behind all the apparent diversity there is a single essence.

Relativism also accords well with our increasing self-assertiveness in that it allows a thoroughly democratic attitude to knowledge. We can picture the ‘new science’ and ‘new medicine’ of the New Age as the third stage in a progressive rejection of authority. Once culture was defined by experts. Now we accept the freedom of personal taste: ‘I may not know much about
art but I know what I like’. In the late 1960s claims for personal autonomy moved to a second stage of matters of personal behaviour: ‘I may not know much about ethics and morals but I know what I like to do and claim my right to do it’. In the third stage we now find the same attitude applied to areas of expert knowledge: ‘I may not know much about the nervous system but I know what I like to believe in and I believe in chakras and Shiatsu massage and acupuncture’.

But such individualism would bring social conflict if it was framed within the traditional notion that there is one true version of reality. The solution is relativism. Though the term ‘hermeneutic’ is still foreign to most people, the general notion that different sorts of people will see the world in different ways has become deeply embedded in our culture. As a sign of just how far we have moved from the confidence in our ability, by rational inspection, to discover the truth, let me quote from the essay of a good final year sociology student who concluded a discussion of the problems of source bias by saying: ‘In an ideal world there would always be a balance of sources to present everyone’s view’. She did not write: ‘In an ideal world we would research our way past bias to the truth’. The best we can hope for now is equality of opportunity to assert our preferences.

There is no space here to fully explain the rise of relativism but I suspect that our increasing unwillingness to accept the authority of professionals and experts is part of a general decline, not in class differences, but in the deference that used to accompany them. In the early 1960s sociologists used to distinguish professions from other occupations by accepting at face value the claim made by professionals that they were motivated not by a desire for money and power but by a commitment to serve fundamental social values. Professional autonomy (including the power to maintain lucrative closed shops) was defended as essential to preserving some social good (such as justice or health). Sociologists are now much more sceptical. More to the point, so is the general public, which readily assumes that people are self-interested and finds altruism implausible. The assumption that most of us have motives baser than the ones we assert is accompanied by an implicit epistemological premise. People’s perceptions will be influenced by their backgrounds. Hence objective or authoritative descriptions of the world are not possible; hence there can only be partial understandings.

Claims to professional expertise have also been undermined by the growth of the natural sciences. When scientific knowledge was not extensive and relatively undifferentiated, social respect for those who carried it was common. The ‘professor’, the man in the white coat who saved the planet from space invaders in those early 1950s science fiction films, was just a ‘scientist’. Now biology, physics and chemistry are subdivided into
hundreds of highly specialised fields. The number of practitioners has vastly expanded and their social status has been reduced. What is now done by scientists is too esoteric for us to understand, let alone admire, while those who do it are too numerous and too ordinary to command respect.

The mass media have played an important part in devaluing the status of science. As has become very obvious in the reporting of such health scares as the BSE story or the outbreak of E. coli food poisoning, journalists are simply not equipped to evaluate competing positions and so reporting very easily slips into the conventional confrontational mode of aiming for balance rather than accuracy.

A further explanation for the decline in deference to experts is the increased level of education of the general population. In 1900 there were 25,000 people in full-time higher education in Great Britain (Halsey, 1972: 206). In 1991 there were 400,000, in itself a doubling of the number for 1970 (Church, 1994: 47). Whether the expansion of higher education means that we are really better educated than our grandparents is neither here nor there. What is important is that more of us are at least superficially closer in status to the experts than was previously the case.

These observations deserve to be explored further, but it is enough to note here that the high place accorded to the self in the New Age fits well with the class background of most New Agers. The principal denizens of the New Age milieu are graduates. Or the point can be reversed. We can ask why it is that the unemployed and the poorly paid, who would most benefit from increased mastery over their fate, are least likely to be interested in New Age techniques for empowerment. One might suppose the costs of many programmes would be prohibitive until one compares them to the costs of smoking, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or attending major football matches. A more fruitful line of explanation is to be found in ideas about self-confidence and cultural capital. A basic requirement for an active interest in ‘new science’ or ‘new medicine’ is the belief that one is intellectually on a par with the experts in the old science and old medicine.

A final point to be made here is that the assumptions of the New Age fit well with a society which is short on authority and long on consumer rights. In the free market for consumer durables, the autonomous individual maximises his or her returns by exercising free choice. In the free market for ideas, the individual New Ager maximises his or her returns by exercising free choice and synthesising his or her best combination of preferences.
New Age spirituality may be better suited to late capitalism than more traditional forms of religion, but this does not guarantee that it will sweep all before it. In any consideration of the New Age we need to begin with a realistic assessment of its popularity. At first sight the growth of the New Age is impressive. The first Festival of Mind–Body–Spirit in 1977 was a one-day event; the 1993 version lasted ten days. In most bookshops the occult is now given more space than Christian titles. Popular magazines carry articles on Feng Shui, spiritual healing and Shiatsu. New Age publishers proliferate and, a good sign of the strength of the market, most of the major commercial publishers now have a ‘Mind–Body–Spirit’ imprint.

It would be easy to take all this endeavour as proof that interest in the supernatural is a constant; that we have mistaken for secularisation what is merely a change in the mode of expression of that interest. It would be easy but wrong.

First, we need to get the numbers in proportion. Thousands of people attend the Festival of Mind–Body–Spirit, but then it is an annual showcase taking place in the nation’s capital. Numbers resident at the Findhorn Community, Britain’s oldest New Age centre, rarely exceed two hundred and many of them come from continental Europe and the United States (Riddell, 1990: 132). Barker (1989) estimates the membership of some of the best known new religions in the hundreds. Those organisations which, rather than recruit followers, offer specific training can claim much larger numbers of people as having demonstrated an interest in, or fully acquired, their product. est claims to have had 8,000 ‘graduates’ during its time in Britain. A similar number may have gone through the Forum, est’s successor. The same again may have been trained by Exegesis and by the Rajneesh Foundation and so on (Barker, 1989: 151). On Barker’s informed estimates, the totals involved at some point in all such organisations cannot exceed 100,000 people over 25 years.

Such figures can be viewed in two comparative contexts. In 1985 the Christian denominations and sects in Britain could claim 7 million members (Bruce, 1995: 31–42). Furthermore the decline in the main religious traditions leaves ever larger numbers of people free to experiment; free because they are personally not tied to an older form and because the older forms can no longer effectively stigmatise cultic alternatives as ‘deviant’. Even leaving out the very old and very young, there must be at least twenty-five million people in the UK who have no connection with any mainstream religious organisation (Brierley, 1997). The Methodist figures are typical of the major denominations. In 1947 there were 743,000 Methodists.
in Britain. In 1995 there were 380,000. Even the most generous estimates of the New Age are unlikely to have the new spiritual seekers filling the space left by the decline of just one denomination. Over the course of the twentieth century, the proportion of the adult population in church membership has declined from about 30 per cent to under 10 per cent (Bruce, 1995: 31–42). The proportion of those who display any interest in New Religious Movements or New Age spirituality is very small in comparison.

In assessing the New Age we need to think not only about numbers but also about the nature of commitment. We should appreciate the very limited investment that most people make in the New Age. It oversimplifies, of course, but we can think of influence as a choice between range and depth: the least demanding activities are the most popular. For the vast majority of people interested in the New Age milieu, participation is shallow. They read a book or two and attend a few meetings. They do not become committed adherents to particular cults; they do not regularly engage in time-consuming rituals or therapies; they do not radically alter their lives.

Even for the small numbers of people who are deeply committed to various forms of new religion or new psychology, the impact may be limited. Or to be more precise, the changes that result from such involvement may be largely perceptual and rhetorical. For all the talk about transformation and empowerment, many New Age revelations and therapies (especially those closest to the secular Human Potential Movement) are intended to make people better at what they already do; the courses will not turn the stock trader into a community activist; they will make him a more effective and happier stock trader. In Zen Buddhism the secular man peels potatoes, the religious man thinks of God while peeling the potatoes, but the truly enlightened man just peels the potatoes. The point of this paradox is that, for the Buddhist, the last stage of seeking detachment from the world is to become detached even from the search for detachment. Final liberation means liberation even from the spiritual quest. Much New Age thinking waters down this principle so that the ascetic period of monastic discipline is neglected and what is advertised as personal transformation is actually the acquiring of a new vocabulary to describe one’s pre-existing attitudes. At its most banal, it is simply the adoption of Dr Pangloss’s insistence that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. What is advertised as a way of taking control of one’s destiny turns out to be more a way of accepting one’s fate.

This should not be scorned. There is doubtless much to be said for accepting one’s self and circumstances. However, transformations of the
personality that do not much change behaviour and have no impact on the performance of social roles should not be confused with those that do. The Methodist movement profoundly changed those people who joined it and they in turn profoundly changed the wider society. The same could be said of very few parts of the New Age.

The individualism of the New Age acts as a major constraint on its influence. Major changes in Christian culture such as the Reformation or the rise of Methodism were effective because the new persona was supported and disciplined by a believing community, typically the sect. The new psychology was supported by a new social order. Individualistic epistemologies make such cohesion impossible. There is not enough detailed agreement on substance to create a cultural movement with momentum.

The final constraint is the lack of ideological weight. Because they are not embedded in large organisations or sustained by a long history (in the UK at least), many elements of the New Age are vulnerable to being co-opted by the cultural mainstream and trivialised by the mass media. The growth in the number of television channels and the supplements to our daily newspapers has created a need for cheap, lightweight product. What better for our narcissistic culture than alternative medicine (so much easier to understand than the conventional kind), human potential psychology and eastern spirituality? To its expert practitioners, Chinese geomancy is a powerful tool for divination. To the editor of a Sunday paper’s ‘lifestyle’ section, Feng Shui is a new angle on decorating and furniture arranging. To the major supermarkets, aromatherapy is just a new word for bubble bath.

**Conclusion**

New Agers are fond of seeing themselves as being both ‘alternative’ and representing the future. My analysis suggests they are neither. While some elements of the New Age are tangentially radical, its fundamental principles are those of modern capitalism. Insofar as it is popular, it is so because its individualistic epistemology, consumerist ethos and therapeutic focus resonate with the rest of our culture. The New Age is important not for the changes it will bring but for the changes it epitomises.

The greatest of those can be seen if we return to the Wallis typology of ideological collectivities. Wallis distinguishes the denomination and the cult in terms of their respectability and deviance. But the idea of deviance presupposes a consensus. Obviously Methodism is still better thought of than spiritualism, theosophy or Wicca, but it is equally obvious that the distinction is being eroded. The decline of value consensus which is exemplified in the individualism and consumerism in the New Age means
the distinction between the denomination and the cult will also decline. Rather than see the New Age as an antidote to secularisation, it makes more sense to see it as a style and form of religion well-suited to the secular world.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Expressive Spirituality and Humanistic Expressivism: Sources of Significance Beyond Church and Chapel
Paul Heelas

We all know the great polarization that has split the religious life of our times, affecting everyone except Christians of convenience and people with absolutely no religious sense at all: the split between Christianity and a religion which repudiates any historical content, whether it be undogmatic monotheism, or pantheism, or a purely spiritual condition not entailing any specific beliefs.

(Georg Simmel, 1976: 258–9 [orig. 1917])

The other world, which religion located in a transcendental reality, is now introjected within human consciousness itself. (Peter Berger, 1965: 41)

For is He not all but that which has power to feel ‘I am I’?

(Tennyson, ‘The Higher Pantheism’)

INTRODUCTION

One of the great challenges facing social science is to determine the extent to which traditional cultural formations, providing order and significance, have collapsed, disintegrated, fragmented or otherwise lost their plausibility. For example, was Marx correct in supposing that the development of capitalism has eroded long-standing authoritative orders, including religion, to the extent that ‘All that is solid melts into air’? And an even greater challenge, perhaps, is to ascertain whether people find ‘new’ sources of significance for their lives when traditional, long-standing formations do in fact lose their hold, rather than simply engaging in hedonistic consumption and bland relativism.

Reflecting on the situation in Britain, virtually all commentators – whether academic or from the public world – agree that traditional, institutionalised religion, the religion of church and chapel, is in decline. But what is happening elsewhere, beyond the territories of church and chapel? Is disenchantment as widespread as cultural theorists, in particular,
like to claim? Having introduced what is taking place elsewhere in the 'religious' culture, the point is made that many more people are 'involved' – albeit to varying degrees – than those who continue to go to church and chapel (or mosque and temple) on a regular basis. Urgency is thus lent to the task of engaging in further exploration. Does Christianity, the historically dominant tradition in Britain, still provide the key influence? Alternatively, what is to be made of Thomas Luckmann's (1970) claim that 'a new religion is in the making', indeed, has now 'come to occupy a dominant position in the sacred cosmos' (ibid., 40: 107)?

BEYOND CHURCH AND CHAPEL

Some thirty-five years ago, Thomas Luckmann wrote that the 'sociology of religion is exclusively concerned with church-oriented religiosity' (1970: 22 [orig. 1963]). Today, there is a much greater awareness of what lies beyond church and chapel: namely, those beliefs which are religious, spiritual, supernatural, paranormal or supra-empirical in that they transgress what the secular frame of reference takes to be 'obviously' factual, rational, reasonable, sensible, and convincing, and which are not readily demonstrable to the public in general.

More specifically, but without aiming to be comprehensive or unduly systematic, such beliefs include: orthodox, theistic Christianity (Islam, etc.), associated with private Bible study or prayer (for example); less conventional and/or attenuated forms of traditional teachings; 'alternative' (and cognate) spiritualities, envisaging the ultimate as integral to the person and/or the natural order as a whole; magical or occult powers, found in connection with astrology, card-reading, palmistry, clairvoyance, mediumship, parapsychology and many superstitions; out-of-the ordinary phenomena such as Atlantis, ley lines, crop circles, Mayan mysteries, angels, alien life-forms, the mysterious happenings of 'X-file' culture; out-of-the-ordinary or uncanny experiences, taken to be of religious, spiritual or supernatural significance; and the relatively inchoate – for example, the belief that 'there must be something more, a "Higher Power", out there' or intimations of the Shakespearean 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth . . . than were ever dreamt of in your philosophy' variety.¹

NUMERICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Is 'religion' (relatively broadly conceived) beyond church and chapel in decline, or does it show signs of sustainability, even vitality? It is simply not possible, in the present context, to address the evidence pertaining to all
kinds of beliefs. Neither is it possible to explore the significance of beliefs for the lives of adherents. Instead, our aim is limited to drawing on a few claims and indices to argue that very considerable numbers of people are involved.

Among others, the case has been made by David Martin and Grace Davie. Martin (1969), writes, ‘Whatever we are, we are not a secular society, particularly if by that omnibus adjective we mean an increasing approximation of average thinking to the norms of natural and social science’ (p.107). He continues, ‘There is a luxuriant theological undergrowth which provides the working core of belief more often than is realized’ (p.108), concluding, ‘our society remains deeply imbued with every type of superstition and metaphysic’ (p.113). Turning to Davie (1994a), the claim is that ‘some sort of religiosity persists despite the obvious drop in [institutionalised] practice. The sacred does not disappear – indeed, in many ways it is becoming more rather than less prevalent in contemporary society’ (p.43).

In some contrast, however, Steve Bruce (1996: 273) argues that ‘... in so far as we can measure any aspect of religious interest, belief or action and can compare 1995 with 1895, the only description for the change between the two points is “decline”’. Explicitly addressing Davie, his argument runs ‘Davie (1994a) sees ... [latent or implicit religion] as a compensating alternative [with regard to the decline of institutionalised religion]. Given that such measures of latent religiosity as are available show the same decline as those of involvement in formal religion (starting from a higher point but heading in the same direction), it seems more plausible to view them as evidence not of a compensating alternative, but of a residue’.

What is to be made of these contrasting assessments? First, it can be argued that religion beyond church and chapel is a growth area relative to what has been taking place within the traditional, institutionalised frame of reference in the UK. Dwelling on developments since the Second World War, institutionalised religion might indeed be argued to have shown very considerable decline: from some 40 per cent of the adult population attending church in England and Wales in 1950, to some 10 per cent in 1990 (Bruce, 1995: 40). But during roughly the same period, belief in ‘... a personal God’ and ‘... some sort of spiritual or vital Force which controls life’ only declined from 84 (in 1947) to 79 per cent (in 1987) in Britain (see Bruce, 1996: 270). Clearly, this strongly suggests that religious belief, showing only a small decline (or dip?), is considerably more durable than church attendance. Furthermore, and taking into account the fact that the 84 per cent of ‘believers’ of 1947 presumably includes the (approximately) 40 per cent attending church, it appears that 44 per cent then believed without attending (84 minus 40 per cent), the equivalent figure for the late 1980s being 69 per cent (79 minus 10 per cent). By this way of reckoning the
matter, in other words, religious belief beyond church and chapel has become progressively more significant relative to numbers going to the traditional institutions.

Second, it is also possible to draw on statistics to argue that the numbers of those who have some kind of ‘religion’ without being involved in institutionalised worship has actually been increasing. The argument, in this regard, runs as follows. Again citing figures provided by Bruce (1996: 270), 10 per cent in Britain were atheists in 1991, 14 per cent being agnostics (totalling 24 per cent). Assuming, as is perhaps reasonable, that figures for 1950 were half this, 5 per cent were then atheists, 7 per cent agnostics (totalling 12 per cent). Then think of the decline in church attendance in England and Wales – from 40 per cent (1950) to 10 per cent (1990), it will be recalled. With all these figures in mind, it seems that more people (30 per cent) have left church and chapel than have rejected religion or become agnostic (12 per cent). And this entails that those who are (somehow) religious without attending church or chapel have been increasing in number.

To emphasise a crucial point: it would be misleading in the extreme to conclude that everything going on beyond the frame of institutionalised worship is of great ‘religious’ (or spiritual, paranormal, etc.) significance. It is highly likely that much is trivial or tucked away for occasional or nominal use. But the fact remains that many more people are (somehow) ‘religious’ without going to church on anything approaching a regular basis than are attendees. One set of figures indicates that the difference is between some 70 per cent (for those believers in a personal God and a spiritual/vital Force who are not attendees) and 10 per cent (for regular attendees). In short, there is much to commend Luckmann’s claim concerning ‘the replacement of the institutional specialisation of religion by a new social [that is, beyond church and chapel] form of religion’ (1970: 90–1; my emphasis).

TWO SOURCES OF SIGNIFICANCE:
CHRISTIANITY AND EXPRESSIVE SPIRITUALITY

But what exactly is going on within this ‘social’ form? What happens to ‘orthodox’ beliefs when they cease to be taught, sustained and regulated by institutionalised participation? Are they being challenged by other sources of significance? Given the (apparent) variety of things taking place beyond church and chapel, and given the (relative) paucity of (tricky) research, it is far from easy to provide satisfactory answers. What seems pretty clear, however, is that inquiry should focus on two ‘sources of significance’ – Christianity (by virtue of its traditional role) and expressive spirituality (by
virtue of the fact that it provides the most clearly and comprehensively formulated alternative to what Christianity has to offer).

Given the historical importance of Christianity, it is hardly surprising that in 1987 37 per cent of the British population claimed belief in 'a personal God' (Bruce, 1996: 270). With only something in the order of 10 per cent of the population being regular church attendees, the majority of such believers clearly do not 'belong' to the institutionalised order of traditional religion. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, however, it seems safe to say that their 'personal God' bears witness to the continuing influence of the Christian, theistic tradition.

It would be rash indeed to deny that Christianity continues to provide resources drawn upon by those who – in the main – do without regular, collective involvement. There are those (especially the elderly) who follow the Bible without going to church; there are those who turn to the Christian God (and perhaps the church) during periods of crisis; there are all those who use the church for life-cycle rituals; there are those who draw on Christian teaching to articulate their ethical commitments, perhaps in educational settings. However, the role that Christianity continues to play should not be overestimated.

According to Grace Davie, 'If belief persists, though increasingly detached from its institutional moorings, it begins inevitably to drift away from anything which might be called orthodoxy' (cited in The Mission Theological Advisory Group, 1996: 2). Beliefs remain (relatively) orthodox when people receive institutionalised instruction. But when beliefs are no longer 'policed' by 'official' institutions, those who have stopped going to church, or who only attend rarely, forget the details. Furthermore, 'believers' beyond church and chapel (and indeed within) are open to all sorts of different 'religious' messages: articles about film stars and Buddhism in Hello magazine, popular books on Shamanism, The X Files, Mystic Meg, perhaps other religions if they are at school, for example. True, Christian messages are also received through the culture (newspapers, Songs of Praise, etc.). But this takes place together with all the other – 'alternative' – communications: communications which open up the options and which can therefore facilitate the process of 'drifting' from more 'official' doctrines.

As for evidence of the weakening hold of Christianity, a crucial consideration is that belief in 'some sort of spirit or vital force which controls life' has now become more important than the (more clearly Christian-influenced) belief in 'a personal God'. Again drawing on figures provided by Bruce (1996: 270), 39 per cent of the British population believed in the former in 1947, 42 per cent in 1987, the respective figures for the latter being 45 per cent and 37. Given that belief in 'some sort of spirit or vital force
which controls life' would appear to deviate, in significant regards, from Christian 'orthodoxy', it is reasonable to suppose that the belief is (typically) informed by 'alternative' cultural influences which do not belong to Christianity per se.

Further evidence is provided by Davie's (1994a: 56) claim that 'latent or nominal Anglicanism persists as the most common form of English religiosity'. This, surely, is tantamount to saying that 'the most common form of English religiosity' is remarkably insignificant. Take the word 'nominal', defined in the dictionary as 'something that is . . . supposed to have a particular identity or status, but in reality does not have so' (an illustration being, 'Dad, nominally a Methodist, entered churches only for weddings and funerals'). Nominal Anglicanism, that is to say, involves people paying lip service to religion, communal engagement - when indeed it takes place - being of little or no religious significance.

The waning exercise of policed, (supposedly) clear-cut Christian instruction due to declining institutionalised involvement, together with the influence of the apparently increasing number of 'alternative' messages found in the culture as a whole, strongly suggests that Christianity is losing its hold in the territories beyond church and chapel. So it comes as no surprise to find that much of what remains of Christianity would appear to be 'latent' or weak; and that there is also evidence of 'drifting', as from belief in 'a personal God' to belief in a 'spirit or vital force'. Indeed, Davie (1994a: 76) goes so far as to say that 'drifting of belief is, probably, a greater challenge to the churches of the late twentieth century than the supposedly secular nature of the society' (see also ibid.: 43, 122).²

And so to our main concern. Could it be the case that Christianity is in the process of being replaced by another primary 'source of significance'? Indeed, as Thomas Luckmann and Colin Campbell (for example) have argued, could it be the case that Christianity is no longer the primary source?

Claiming that the 'the span of transcendence is shrinking', Luckmann (1990: 138) goes on to state that 'modern religious themes such as “self-realisation”, personal autonomy, and self-expression have become dominant' (my emphasis; see also Luckmann, 1970: 107). And in similar fashion, Campbell writes that 'an Eastern theodicy . . . has now replaced the dominant Western version. What this means in practice is that the concept of a transcendent God has been replaced by an immanent conception of the divine' (personal communication; my emphasis).

Accordingly, attention is now directed to exploring the significance of what I here call 'expressive spirituality'. This is the spirituality which has to

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do with that which lies ‘within’ rather than that which lies over-and-above the self or whatever the world might have to offer. This is the spirituality which is integral to what it is to be truly oneself; which is integral to the natural order as a whole. This is the spirituality which serves as the font of wisdom and judgement, rejecting authoritative sources emanating from some transcendent, tradition-articulated, source. This is the spirituality which informs (‘expressive’) authenticity, creativity, love, vitality. This is the spirituality which interconnects.

It is terribly easy, of course, to provide example after example of expressive spirituality in action. Whether teachings and activities be couched by reference to the East, the pagan, the therapeutic, the mystical, the gendered, even by way of sport, dance, voice training (together with fusions of such renderings), the basic message is the same: seek liberation from the contaminating effects of society and culture; seek genuine experience; seek to express all that one truly is as a spiritual being; and – for many – seek to experience and nurture all that is embedded within nature, beyond the reach of the artificial, the power games of the lower self, the destructive implementations of the technological.

But has expressive spirituality become dominant? I think not. Consider, in this regard, Bruce's forceful argument concerning the (relative) insignificance of New Age spirituality (and the 1970s New Religious Movements):

Given the millions who have been lost to the church and, given the decline in the power of the Christian churches to stigmatise alternatives, the number of people who have shown any interest in alternative religions is minute, the commitment of most is slight, the most popular products are those which are most secular, and most are consumed by people as a slight flavouring to their mundane lives. (Bruce, 1996: 273)

Bruce, it might immediately be objected, overstates the case for insignificance. Alternative and complementary healing, for example, is widely utilised, very often encourages people to make contact with the spiritual realm, and – given what is often at stake, namely being healed – is surely more than a consumer item for many of those involved. However, the fact remains that it would be rash in the extreme to maintain that expressive spirituality has become the ‘dominant’ source of significance within religion today. Places like Totnes, Glastonbury and Findhorn are the exception; in the great majority of population centres – from Barrow-in-Furness to Worthing to south London – expressive spirituality is decidedly marginal.
PAUL HEELAS

‘HUMANISTIC EXPRESSIVISM’

But I still think it can be argued that a formidable rival to Christianity is abroad in the culture, a rival which is playing a major role in weakening the hold of Christianity beyond church and chapel.

The matter can be approached by considering Luckmann’s ‘invisible religion’ thesis. A key claim, which almost certainly owes a great deal to Arnold Gehlen (1980 [orig. 1949]), himself quite probably influenced by the many writings on religion by Georg Simmel, concerns the turn to the self as the primary source of significance. On the one hand, as Luckmann (1970: 115–16) puts it, ‘... the functional rationality [of primary social institutions] is not part of a system that could be of “ultimate” significance to the individuals in the society’. On the other, the corollary of this ‘dehumanization’ of the mainstream order (ibid.: 116) is that ‘... “ultimate” significance is found by the typical individual in the “private sphere” – and thus in his “private” biography’ (ibid.: 109). What really matters, in other words, now belongs to one’s own, personal experiences. ‘The individual’, we read, ‘who is to find a source of “ultimate” significance in the subjective dimension of his biography embarks upon a process of self-realization and self-expression ...’ (ibid.: 110); or again, ‘Religious themes originate in experiences in the “private sphere”. They rest primarily on emotions and sentiments ...’ (ibid.: 104). Family life, friendships and sexual relations are called into play as sources of ultimacy. So are those ‘secondary institutions’ operating at a more organised, cultural level:

These institutions attempt to articulate the themes arising in the ‘private sphere’ and retransmit the packaged results to potential consumers. Syndicated advice columns, ‘inspirational’ literature ranging from tracts on positive thinking to Playboy magazine, Reader’s Digest versions of popular psychology, the lyrics of popular hits, and so forth, articulate what are, in effect, elements of ‘ultimate’ significance. (ibid.: 104)

In all cases, however, the aim is the same: to acquire a sense of ultimate identity by way of what ‘private life’ has to offer.

As will be apparent, ‘the modern sacred cosmos’, which, for Luckmann, serves to sanctify ‘subjective “autonomy”’ (ibid.: 116), contains a great deal: the Reader’s Digest on popular psychology, for example; even wife-swapping (ibid.: 106). Containing so much, Luckmann’s ‘sacred cosmos’ would indeed appear to add up to a formidable rival to Christianity; indeed, it could well have become ‘dominant’. But, as has often been pointed out, it surely contains too much. Informed by his definition of religion as that which
involves ‘the transcendence of biological nature by the human organism’ (ibid.: 49), his ‘sacred cosmos’ suffers from being implausibly inclusive, ending up as more or less synomous with all those cultural vehicles which address personal life, if not the cultural realm per se.

Luckmann’s claim (it will be recalled), that ‘modern religious themes such as “self-realization”, personal autonomy, and self-expression have become dominant’, is not helped by his inclusivistic theory-cum-definition of religion. However, it is possible to reformulate his thesis concerning the religious significance of the turn to the ‘subjectivities’ of the self so as to stand on more solid ground.

What can be religious – or partially so – about this turn, I suggest, is best conceived in terms of the fact that the way people talk about themselves and each other is – at least on occasion – associated with concepts and discourses which do not obviously belong to the secular frame of reference. Their ways of talking about ‘inner’ states of affairs, that is to say, at least on occasion transcend what the secular – defined as knowledge derived from the application of reason to publicly demonstrable states of affairs – has to offer.

The anthropological study of human anthropology, of indigenous psychology, of how people understand their nature, has barely got off the ground in contemporary Britain. However, one strongly suspects that very few would accept that they are merely bodies and brains; merely, if they know of behaviourism, a series of stimuli-responses. Conversely, one strongly suspects that the great majority would insist on their own (some­how irreducible) ability to act (not simply react), make decisions and judgements, exercise choice, free will and conscience, be creative, be faithful, trusting or suspicious out of their own volition. The (implied) ontology of this sui generis ‘I’ is far from being obviously secular. Discourses, we might say, not infrequently imply inner agency; the existence of an – ultimately mysterious – entity-cum-process, namely consciousness. Standing over the world of material causality, being irreducible to bodies and brains, in effect it functions as something supernatural; better, ‘superempirical’. It comes as no surprise to find it reported that some 60 per cent believe in the notion of ‘soul’ (see Davie, 1994b: 58).

For the most part, however, people do not believe in themselves as a crucial and explicitly religious source of significance, serving as a religious alternative to Christianity beyond church and chapel (or, for that matter, to institutionalised Christianity itself). Rather than dwelling on the capacities of the autonomous, inner self per se, most people, most of the time (except, perhaps, when experiencing the loneliness and reflexivities of an existential crisis), envisage their capacities in relational fashion. Acting in terms of frames of reference which, so to speak, take the self out of itself,
modes of self-understanding or identity – so the argument continues – are (predominantly) informed by (predominantly) secular frames of reference: the calculations required to make ends meet; the activities required to be a successful producer or consumer; the efforts required to be healthy and fit. And in such contexts, whatever might be taken to be ‘religious’ – or supra-secular – about the capacities of the self per se fades out of view.

Nevertheless, there remains a discourse of self-understanding which clearly does point to an – ontologically-speaking – religious source of significance. We enter the realm of what shall here be called ‘humanistic expressivism’, namely that expressivism of ‘authenticity’ where the inner self per se fades out of view.

As Robert Bellah and associates argue in Habits of the Heart (1985), as well as catering for the ‘utilitarian’ mode of selfhood, culture also services the ‘expressive’. Whereas the former comes into prominence when people think of themselves in terms of the means and ends of capitalistic culture, expressivist beliefs and values have to do with a ‘richer’, more ‘profound’ rendering of what it is to be a person. Drawing on Charles Taylor’s The Ethics of Authenticity (1991), the rendering is seen as ‘part of the massive subjective turn of modern culture’, a turn which involves ‘a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths’ (p.26). Crucially, ‘... the source we have to connect to is deep in us’ (ibid.: 260; my emphasis). The ‘principle’, as he writes, is that:

everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfilment. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him- or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its contents. (ibid.: 14)

Values come from within; ‘Morality’, as Taylor puts it, ‘has, in a sense, a voice within’ (ibid.: 26); freedom is ‘self-determining’ (ibid.: 27); ‘Being true to myself means being true to my own originality’; (ibid.: 29); ‘Revelation comes through expression’ (ibid.: 61). And as another illustration, here is a powerful passage from Edward Shils:

There is a belief, corresponding to a feeling, that within each human being there is an individuality, lying in potentiality, which seeks an occasion for realization but is held in the toils of the rules, beliefs, and roles which society imposes. In a more popular, or vulgar, recent form, the concern to ‘establish one’s identity’, ‘to discover oneself’, or ‘to find out who one really is’ has come to be regarded as a first obligation of the individual. Some writers on undergraduate education in the
United States say that a college is a place where young people can 'find out who they really are'. They suggest that the real state of the self is very different from the acquired baggage which institutions like families, schools, and universities impose. To be 'true to oneself' means, they imply, discovering what is contained in the uncontaminated self, the self which has been freed from the encumbrance of accumulated knowledge, norms, and ideals handed down by previous generations. (Shils, 1981: 10-11)

In contrast to the utilitarian mode, then, being oneself is taken to involve much more than merely satisfying desires generated (or enhanced) by producer and consumer culture; more generally, being oneself is taken to involve liberation from all social and cultural 'impositions'. We are in the realm of self-exploration, self-fulfilment and self-expression: all to do with an inner source; a fount of 'authenticity' and 'wholeness'. And so to a key point. Both substantively and functionally, this source belongs to the religious order of things. True, expressivist discourse generally takes a 'humanistic' rather than an explicitly religious form: the language of the 'true' or 'natural' self, not of the 'soul' or 'spirit'. But this should not blind us to the implied religious ontology and capacities. One should be true to oneself, trust one's sui generis authenticity, have faith in one's own 'intuition' or in what 'feels right', rather than simply relying on reason or tradition; one should trust what is integral to oneself, one's own experience, rather than depending on what the establishment might happen to dictate. And this is to be informed by (ultimately) irreducible and inexplicable consciousness-cum-agency: of a kind which clearly has characteristics which do not belong to secular (rationalistic, constructivistic, etc.) accounts of the nature (biological or socialised) and operation (calculative, hedonistic, or tradition-informed) of the person.

As we saw earlier, expressive spirituality – which, it should now be apparent, provides an explicitly or 'radically' spiritual rendering of 'humanistic' expressivism – is not especially significant. But the same cannot be said of expressive authenticity. Themes to do with 'being ourselves', 'finding ourselves', 'expressing ourselves', 'developing ourselves' and 'fulfilling ourselves', all premised on there being an inner source (to use Charles Taylor's useful term again), run through countless lives, personal relationships, publications, therapies and counselling practices, management trainings, environmentalist activities, feminism and women's movements, educational practices of the child-centred variety, and so on.

Furthermore, humanistic – or naturalistic – expressivism is a growing force in western cultures, including Britain, as can be illustrated with figures from the leading researcher in the area, Ronald Yankelovich (1990: 91). Of Yankelovich's sample of those born between 1906 and 1915, only 6 per cent
hold ‘postmaterialist’ – that is, expressivist – values. This percentage increases progressively as one moves towards those born between 1956 and 1965, the figure for this last cohort being 15 per cent.3

CONCLUSION

We have been looking at three main sources of religious significance in contemporary Britain. One, sustained in collective settings by institutionalised, traditional religion, is in (overall) decline. Another, Christian-influenced religion found beyond church and chapel and sustained by memory and cultural transmissions (books, the media), is also – it appears – diminishing in influence. But with regard to the third, involving faith in the self, the human, the natural, what it is to be alive – there are distinct signs of vitality.4

Dwelling on the third, we have seen that the self as a source of significance is thought of in three main ways. The source is least articulated among those who, whilst refusing to accept that they are merely brains and bodies, are too firmly locked into modes of identity provision (including the utilitarian, and, for some, transcendent Christianity) to have had reason to dwell and elaborate on what the self provides per se. The source receives a more fully articulated rendering among those who – at least on occasion – adopt the discourses of humanistic expressivism. And it is most fully articulated among those – again, at least on occasion – who have entered the territory of expressive spirituality.

Of these three degrees of articulation, the ‘religious’ significance of the first is too insubstantial, too occasional, too obscured by (predominantly) secular modes of identity provision, to serve as a serious religious rival to Christianity. And the third is (currently) too insignificant, with regard to numbers involved, to amount to much of a threat. Bearing in mind its cultural significance, however, humanistic expressivism serves as a formidable rival. Indeed, there is little doubt that it has played an important role in weakening the influence of Christianity, both with regard to church attendance and with regard to belief in the Christian God beyond church and chapel.

Virtually by definition, humanistic expressivists stay away from church and chapel, and, in the realms ‘beyond’, reject theistic beliefs. And if they should want to move beyond their quest for ‘authenticity’ to find something yet deeper or more profound, their faith in what their ‘autonomous’ selfhood or ‘personal’ life has to offer, combined with their distrust of the dictates and judgements of tradition, means that they are highly likely to turn to expressive spirituality as a source. In sum, the greater the
enculturation of humanistic expressivism, the greater the threat to church attendance and the hold of theism beyond church and chapel.

What of the future? Together with the historical point that expressivism is more important today than, say, at the beginning of this century, a whole range of theoretical considerations – primarily to do with the development of capitalism and humanism – means that it is highly likely that the self, as a source of significance, will continue to grow in importance. Writing some ninety years ago, Georg Simmel (1976: 251 [orig. 1909]) argued that ‘The subjectivism of modern personal life is merely the expression of [the fact that] the vast, intricate, sophisticated culture of things, of institutions, of objectified ideas robs the individual of any consistent inner relationship to culture as a whole, and casts him back again on his own resources’. Whether it be for the reasons given by Simmel, or due to other factors to do with detraditionalisation and pluralism (for example), there is little doubt that the turn to the subjectivities of the self is one of the key features of the time in which we live. And as Simmel acutely observed, when people have to rely on their own resources to make sense of their lives, what he called ‘spiritual reality’ is likely to thrive. It is when people are left to themselves, dwell on themselves and what they have to offer, that we find ‘the change to the religious shaping of life itself, and to the spiritual reality that, in philosophical terms, one could call the self-consciousness of the metaphysical significance of our existence – the change by which all otherworldly yearning and dedication, bliss and rejection, justice and mercy, are no longer found in the lofty heights above life, as it were, but in the depths within it’ (1997: 18–19 [orig. 1918]).

Those who have been thrown back upon themselves, who find themselves left with themselves (albeit with other ‘selves’), whose selves have come into ultimate prominence, are therefore faced with the sheer necessity of making sense of life ‘of’ and ‘from’ themselves. Being highly self-conscious or reflexive about deriving the meaning of life by way of self-exploration, such people are those most likely to feel that there is something of ultimate and sui generis ontology and value about themselves (including Buberian I-Thou relationships); something irreducible with regard to the public world of hard materiality; something which in the last resort has such depth (when can one stop exploring?) and source-significance as to remain mysterious, wonderful, full of what really counts. Citing Simmel again, ‘this emotional reality – which we can only call life – makes itself increasingly felt in its formless strength as the true meaning or value of our existence’ (1997: 24 [orig. 1918]). And, as he continues, ‘This tendency [to experiencing ‘life’] seems to have increased as culture has evolved’ (ibid.). The more the self engages with itself, the more ‘it’ in and
of ‘itself’ is experienced as the source of being; and directs those concerned accordingly.

Given the turn to the subjectivities of the self, more and more people (it appears) are likely to favour beliefs and practices – whether to do with ‘authenticity’ or ‘spirituality’ – which emphasise immanence: which point to that which is part and parcel of personal life; which point to that which serves to enrich identity, agency, and relationships; which serve to inform what it is to be alive in the experiences of the here and now. Religion within church and chapel will be affected (there already being clear signs of this happening); and in the realms ‘beyond’, Luckmann’s ‘modern religious themes’ of ‘self-realisation, personal autonomy, and self-expression’ will surely appeal to those who, whilst not being content with atheism or agnosticism, hold values – especially of the self itself, the freedom to be oneself, the authority of the self – which are not exactly catered for by traditional, theistic, religion emphasising the transcendent authority of God and the limitations of the human condition.\(^6\)

Thomas Jefferson declared ‘I am a sect myself; Thomas Paine, that ‘My mind is my church’ (cited in Bellah et al., 1985: 233). More recently, Stanley Spencer has thought of his artistic vision in terms of ‘the Church of Me’ (cited by The Mission Theological Group, 1996: 20); and an unnamed respondent, also cited by the Theological Group, states ‘life is our God’ (ibid.: 78). If the argument of this chapter is valid, Luckmann’s ‘new social form of religion’ has a promising future: a future where the self (together with intimate relationships) is the primary site for the life of authenticity-cum-spirituality; indeed, where the self (or the lives of selves together) serves as an ‘institution’, a source of significance taken to provide truth, judgement, identity, the essentials of what it is to be.

Two closing observations. The first concerns moving beyond the ‘New Age’: not the ‘movement’, but the term. I have not used it in this chapter (except once in scare quotes). However useful it might have been to describe a form of spirituality, when deployed as it often is to make negative evaluations the term now does more harm than good. In certain quarters, that is to say, it has come to be used polemically, to dismiss certain beliefs and practices as (supposedly) inauthentic, trivial, superficial, consumeristic. And it is not as though the term is necessary. ‘Expressive spirituality’ is relatively neutral in usage and therefore serves perfectly well to designate all those teachings and practices which dwell on inner spirituality, including the natural order as a whole.

The second observation concerns a more problematic issue. In the main, the preceding discussion of the fate of sources of significance – institutionalised Christianity, ‘popular’ Christianity beyond church and chapel,
expressive spirituality (beyond traditional religious institutions) and humanistic expressivism (also beyond the traditional) – has rested on the assumption that these are distinct sources, and that people only become involved with one or another. It can readily be objected that this ignores the complexities of life on the ground. That such sources are not distinct, it might well be pointed out, is clearly seen in the fact (for example) that institutionalised Christianity not infrequently contains a strong spiritually expressivist dimension (‘creation spirituality’, among other things), as well as humanistic expressivism (as with liberal forms of teaching). Furthermore, as has often been claimed, rather than being content with any one form of religion, very considerable numbers are now ‘religious individualists’ (to use Roof and Gesch’s term [1995: 72]), and ‘seekers’ (Roof, 1993), functioning as *bricoleurs* and seekers to draw on an (apparently) diverse range of religious ‘resources’ – beliefs, values and practices – as and when occasion demands.\(^7\)

If indeed, on the side of ‘provision’, sources of significance are all mixed up, and if indeed, on the side of ‘usage’, *bricolage* is the order of the day, my attempt to contribute to the thesis that ‘Self-immanence’ is on the road to replacing (Christian) theism as the primary source of (significant) significance is clearly doomed to failure. In defence, all I can say here is that however fashionably ‘postmodern’ it might be to claim that (deconstructive) freedom is the order of the day, as when religious individualists serve to undermine the exclusivistic authority of any particular tradition by ‘mixing’ it with others, much strongly suggests that at least some boundaries – that is, source-informed differentiations – remain operative. Rather than ‘religions of choice’ running wild, ‘polarisation’ – to use Simmel’s term from the quotation with which we began – has far from disappeared with the advent of some (supposed) postmodern condition. Of particular note, expressivists either avoid theistic, transcendental Christianity, or – if they should draw on it – ‘experience’ tradition in ways which accord with their own source of significance. Expressivists do not become *theists*. Belonging to a rival camp, their challenge to theistic ‘orthodoxy’ is firmly on the agenda for the future.

**Personal endnote**

What on earth ‘am I’? For those, like myself, who are not content with answers provided by the institutional order, the search within for responses to existential questions is unlikely to be associated with atheism (surveys suggest that only some 10 per cent of the adult British population are atheists). I am an optimistic humanist because my own experience of ‘life’ makes it much harder for me to believe in atheism than to hope that ‘life’ really is as mysterious and supra-empirical as it appears.
I would like to thank Steve Bruce and Linda Woodhead for illuminating discussions on studying the territories beyond church and chapel.

Notes

1. In addition various combinations of these beliefs may be held, sometimes in coherent or integrated fashion, sometimes not.

2. A recent, graphic illustration of the weak hold which Christianity exercises within the culture is provided by a Daily Telegraph survey in which only 15 per cent gave the correct answer to the question, ‘Could you tell me what event the forthcoming Millennium in the year 2000 commemorates?’ (The Daily Telegraph, 14.3.98).

3. Since writing this chapter, I learnt about Sylvia Collins’ survey of 1,090 young people, aged 13 to 16 years. Her findings provide further evidence of the importance of expressivism, and indeed – and to my relief – support much of what I have been trying to argue. Whereas ‘Only a minority of young people actually invest faith in Christianity and derive some sort of ontological security from it’, much suggests that ‘Faith would seem to be, in Luckmann’s terms, “invisible” . . . For most of the young people it is organised around family, close friends and the reflexive self. These were the referents which formed the immanent faith structure which gave the young people existential meaning, hope and purpose’. In sum, Collins finds that, ‘In accordance with the nature of immanent faith, the majority of young people do not refer to an absolute transcendent authority when forming moral opinions, but rather adopt a morality based on the principles of autonomy and authenticity, relativism and tolerance’ (unpublished report, based on Collins, 1997). Anna King’s (1996) exploration of ‘spirituality’, during which she draws on Margaret Chatterjee’s phrase, ‘the search for the trans-empirical’ (p. 347), also provides support for what I have been arguing.

4. Having provided an extremely useful survey of material pertaining to religion/spirituality both within and without church and chapel, John Wolffe (1993: 341) concludes that ‘it could be that a characteristic feature of twenty-first-century religion will be a change in the position of Christianity from the normative expression of religion in Britain to a position of prominence but not necessarily of dominance within a much more varied range of religious options’.

5. Roof and Gesch (1995), for example, provide evidence of this threat. ‘Individual-expressive views of the church’ (p. 74), among a sample of the baby-boom generation in the States, are associated with those who ‘have dropped out of organised religion’ (p. 68), turning instead to the more ‘spiritual’ (p. 72). See also Roof (1993).

6. On the turn to (expressivist) self within the church, see for example Hunter (1987: 64-71).

7. See, for example, Roof and Gesch (1995: 72-3) on those (expressivistic) ‘religious individualists in the States who ‘combine Judaeo-Christian beliefs with reincarnation, astrology, and other “New Age” beliefs and practices such as communicating with the dead, exploring psychic powers, and meditating’. Luckmann (1970: 80-1) provides a useful discussion of ‘individual religiosity’, now with regard to the ‘“official” model of religion’. More generally, Lyotard (1984: 66) writes that ‘the temporary contract is in practice supplanting permanent institutions’.
Sources of Significance Beyond Church and Chapel

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