Relational Spirituality, Part 1
Paradise Unbound: Cosmic Hybridity and Spiritual Narcissism in the "One Truth" of New Age Transpersonalism

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Cosmological hybridization, a process in which spiritual paradises are bound together, is highly active in American religious culture. Beginning with an early Christianized version of the Buddha, this religious Creolization gathered speed after WWII and peaked during the Vietnam War, leading to a complex spiritual revolution in which transcendence became an all important orientation. This revolution set the scene for the emergence of a non-relational transpersonal psychology in which Americanized nondualism gained ascendency. It is argued here that popular New Age transpersonalism traps the spirit, breeding a self-serving, Self-as-everything form of spiritual narcissism. Given that some are calling the New Age the religion of global capitalism, a more relational spirituality may be a vital intervention into transpersonalism's self-centeredness and a salve for a world in Creolization.

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> *In the Prison Notebooks Gramsci says: The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and [this] knowing 'thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory... therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory*
>
> *—Edward Said, 1979/1995, p. 25*

As the corpse of Baron De Palm burst into flames in the Presbyterian town of Washington, Pennsylvania, 135 years ago, it was hailed as the first ever cremation on American soil.[1] But that was not all; as the Austrian born Baron (and born again Theosophist) went up in smoke that December morning, a triumphant blow was struck by America's nascent cremation movement—a blow that signaled the overturning of thousands of years of Christian burial custom.[2] Early Christianity had done away with the ancient Greek and Roman practice of burning the dead on a funeral-pyre. Reinforcing the Christian custom of burial was a belief in the resurrection of the physical body, a belief that was at odds with the practice of cremation (Prothero, 1997, pp. 94-95). Indeed, the rhetoric used against the cremationists was that theirs was a "pagan custom" practiced only in the "heathen" Orient (p. 95). Conversely, in resisting the claims of the anti-cremationists, the fiery speeches of the reformers claimed that Greek, Roman, and Hindu peoples were "as intelligent, refined and worshipful" (p. 95) in their funerary practices as any American. Indeed the cremationists sought to restore to America what they saw as the grandeur that was Greece, Rome, and Asia.

While the new cremation was hailed as thoroughly modern, scientific, and secular, the movement envisioned itself as having spiritual import. It pressed its cause with Pentecostal fervor, referring to its work as "the gospel of incineration" and its labor as "missionary work" (Prothero, 1997, p. 97). Women's rights activists were drawn to the burning movement, and cremationists seem also to have carried the cultural "evolutionary" sentiments of the time (p. 107) to the good fight, seeing it as their sacred duty to raise the masses up to a "higher level of 'culture' and 'civilization'" (p. 97). The site of the cremation was the home of Dr. Francis Le Moyne, a physician and committed abolitionist—a home that had also served as a stop on the Underground Railroad (a network to free black slaves). The rite was carried out by

none other than Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, who a year earlier had co-founded Theosophy with Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the famous Russian occultist.[3]

The newly converted De Palm had befriended Olcott (and Theosophy) and had instructed him to arrange a funeral befitting his new and novel faith. Specifically, he requested that it be performed "in a fashion that would illustrate the Eastern notions of death and immortality" (Prothero, 1997, p. 99), and that his body be cremated. Theosophists believed that cremation could liberate the spirit and "loosen the astral body" from the so-called "grossness of matter" and the "irksome" body (p. 108). The ideas that reduce the human body to a prison in which the spirit is trapped are ancient and most likely inherited from Christianity, Hinduism, and the Greek traditions. Thus De Palm's death was shrouded in a cloth cut from Western spiritualism, Theosophy, and Christian and Asian spiritualities.

Olcott collected De Palm's ashes in what the New York Times called a "'Hindoo cremation urn… decorated with Hindoo characters and devices" (Prothero, 1997, p. 104) and is said to have taken the ashes to the Theosophical Society Headquarters in New York. Later, before departing for his new life in India, he scattered his friend's ashes over the waters of that city's harbor during a simple ceremony (p. 102). Soon after he would migrate to India and become the first American to formally convert to Buddhism on Asian soil (p. 99).

Cremation has of course, to echo the words of one early cremationist, "taken perennial root" in America (Protheo, 1997, p. 106)—a claim given credence, perhaps, in the funerary ceremonies of the '60s countercultural icon Jerry Garcia. When Garcia, the founder of the famed San Francisco band The Grateful Dead died in 1995, half of his ashes were spread under the Golden Gate Bridge, while the rest were transported to India and poured into the River Ganges on the Buddha's birthday (Fields, 1996). The Dead Buddhists of America (an allusion to his band which had been strongly associated with psychedelics such as LSD in the 1960s and after) held a meditation for him, that of *Chenrezi*, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In the middle of the meditation everyone was instructed to see Jerry as the bodhisattva, "merging with the lights of the Buddhamind in the journey through the bardos" (pp. 46-47).

The head Dead's funerary services seems to have an intriguing resonance with that of the theosophically oriented De Palm: they both embraced the religions that flowed from the River Ganges (on whose banks are the burning funeral ghats). They both had their ashes poured onto water, and each played his part in the social and cultural revolutions of their day—but they may share in something even more intriguing than the flames of the funeral pyre or a coincidental embrace of Asian religion. Robert Orsi (1997) claimed that De Palm's cremation proves once again how creative and wildly innovative religion is in America, but also noted that Stephen Prothero's study showed the rite to be neither Christian nor secular but something else, something related to the ambiguities of *religious hybridity*—a process for which a whole new language would need to be invented (p. 11). The scattering of Jerry Garcia's ashes on two continents—Asia and America—is something related not only to the afterlife but to this life and a globalizing
fusion of East and West—a symbolic spiritual and cultural process that has been occurring in America for well over 150 years. In death, Garcia—the acid-rock-country-bluegrass-bluesman of the Grateful Dead—has a foot in two continents—one Christian, the other Hindu-Buddhist.

The Way of the Hybrid

In terms of Orsi's new language, words such as *Creolization*, *Orientalization*, *Easternization*, *Africanization*, *crossover*, and *cosmological hybridization* are being employed to understand what happens when cultures meet in war and peace, trade or migration, colonization, and globalization (cf. Lahood, 2008). Hybridity concerns the ambiguous mixture of things, processes, and phenomena that are thought to be unlike, different, separate, disparate, and unequal—into novel cultural and religious forms. Entering social science under the guise of syncretism in the anthropology of religion (Pieterse, 2004, p. 90), hybridity suggests the "fusion of religious forms" often functioning as a mask "behind which non-Christian forms of worship are practiced" (p. 72).

However, in his study of the trial of Seberina Candelaria, a young woman priestess accused of witchcraft in early 19th century Philippines, Gregg Bankoff (1999) noted that the symbols of Christianity could also be "appropriated and incorporated" into a new and seemingly bizarre religious formation, the result of which "was neither wholly indigenous nor wholly exotic but the formation of a hybrid cosmology" (p. 49). Thus religious hybridizations can occur when beliefs Christian and secular or "Christian and native" are

merged, engendering a sort of "third religion" (Pieterse 2004, p. 73)—and the same is true of non-Christian hybridizations such as those created in the global propagations of Buddhism and Islam. For example, with the spread of Greek culture into India through the military conquests of Alexander the Great statues of the Buddha were carved in the gesture of peripatetic philosophers wearing togas and adorned with the sacred grapes of the sacrificial demi-god Dionysus.

I argue here that transpersonal psychology also came to be a kind of third religion, an Orientalized hybrid cosmology, and it began to crystallize in San Francisco in the heyday of the psychedelic '60s along with Garcia and The Grateful Dead, the Vietnam War, and a widespread religious awakening that involved communal living, changes in clothing, values, music, drugs, psychotherapy, and a host of other counter-cultural innovations. More importantly, transpersonalism's search for a presumed inner truth may well be the skeletal structure around which the New Age has clothed itself—with a hybrid paradise.

Central to this project was a series of strange marriages, amalgamations, juxtapositions, and cultural borrowings largely between the mysticism of the East and the psychology of West—between America and Asia.[4] These included, the American Transcendentalists' embrace of the Vedas, Mahatma Gandhi with Henry David Thoreau, Nashida Kitaro with William James, D. T. Suzuki's Zen with Romantic Nature worship, Aldous Huxley with Vedanta, Allan Watts with the Tao, Zen, Advaita Vedanta, the Beat poets Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsburg, and Gary Snyder with Buddhism and Peyote, Timothy Leary with LSD and Tibetan Buddhism, Ram Dass with Hinduism, the Beatles with LSD and with the Maharishi, George Harrison with the Hari Krishna Movement, John Lennon with Yoko Ono, Fritz Perls' Gestalt therapy with Mahayana Buddhism, Eric Fromm's psychoanalysis and Abraham Maslow's human potential with Zen Buddhism, and Stanislav Grof with psychoanalysis, LSD, and Kashmir Shaivism. This long cultural procession of religious blending is the fertile cultural mélange out of which Ken Wilber's influential ladder of consciousness grew: a hybrid cosmos of Neo-Platonism and Neo-Advaita Vedanta (which as will be shown is also the backbone of the New Age movement).

The characteristic blend of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, and the dominating spiritual hierarchy that runs through Wilber's worldview (and the New Age) are due in large part to the strange force of hybridity long alive in the religious imagination of America. I have suggested elsewhere (Lahood, 2008)5 that Wilber's Orientalized cosmology is the inevitable outcome of religious globalization and the civil strife occurring in the 1960s in which religions of the East and West were brought together in America in a psychedelically informed subaltern resistance culture. The religious symbolism of this culture and its postulated *cosmic consciousness* reveal not some ultimate perennial postulate beyond culture, nor yet a One Truth coming from all directions, but a hybridized postulate springing from the complex matrix of a culture embroiled in war in South East Asia and an internal civil revolution, and gripped by an effervescent religious outpouring bent on the creation of a zealously enacted counter-reality.

This paper will further explore the procession of cosmological hybridizations that came together in the American context and show how this amalgamation of religious flavors began to favor a somewhat disembodied, non-relational, patriarchal and authoritarian One-Truth religion—one that came to overvalue individual transcendence at the expense of relationship. It is my belief that relational spirituality is the key to undoing the associated spiritual narcissism that plagues contemporary Western spiritual culture (cf. Ferrer 2002, 2009).

Transcendentalism's Holy Trinity

One can pick up the threads of the hybridizing process with the American Transcendentalists. They are the ancestor of a blending religious style that will eventually blossom in the religious counter-culture of the 1960s. Rebellious and ruggedly individualistic, this group of New England intellectuals, artists, writers, and poets began as a reform movement within the Christian Unitarian Church, seeking to exchange empirical knowledge and bone dry tradition for direct spiritual intuition, the emotions stirred by nature, and mystical contact with an indwelling god. Emerson (1849), the most influential of this group, claimed that Unitarian theology and ritual was a "corpse cold":

> Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? (p. 1)

Why not indeed! Yet Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Margaret Fuller, Henry James Senior

and Henry David Thoreau, were well versed in the sacred texts of various religious traditions (Heelas, 1996, p. 55) and regularly bathed their lofty minds in the Indic Vedas. Emerson, in a creative response to Eastern thought, especially the Bhagavad Gita, penned such poems as Brahma and Maya (Pagalia, 2003, p. 9). He also met with one Swami Jogut Sangooly, a "real live Brahmin, brought up a priest to Kreeshna," in 1858, according to his daughter (Prince, 1974, p. 258). Henry David Thoreau (1849/2008) authored *Civil Disobedience*, a tract which inspired Mahatma Gandhi to oppose Britain's brutal colonialism in India with non-violence (and which would come around again with complex ferocity in the 1960s)—a curious two-way religious borrowing between India and America synonymous with religious globalization.

Thoreau's (1854/1899) *Walden*, *or Life in the Woods*, a journal of his experiment in monastic living in the woods near Boston in which the writer/sage developed an almost St. Francis-like relationship to animals and nature, became a canonical text for the hippies of the 1960s (nor should one forget that natureloving St. Francis is the patron saint of San Francisco). In the words of Thoreau:

> In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta,… in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial…. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas.... I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. (p. 209)

One can see in the last line of Thoreau's mystical prose yet another curious mixing—in this overlapping of two discrete things (a device common to poets): the waters of two different continents, one Christian the other Hindu, are carefully mingled creating a liminal, third space (cf. Bhabha, 1994), an American blend reminiscent of Garcia's hybridizing funeral ceremony which also overlapped the waters of Ganges with those of the San Francisco Bay.

Anthropologist Fredrick Turner (1987) noted that Thoreau stood at a point when, "through immigration, economic expansion, the influence of Europe and forces inherent in its own constitution, the narrow Puritanism of New England had given way among the intellectuals to a variety of lofty theisms" (p. 85). In fact the mystical writings of Swedenborg (who, in a mystical awakening, was commanded by God to pen a heavenly doctrine with which to revive Christianity), pantheism, monism, and Emerson and Whitman's Romantic nature worship were mixed with Eastern constellations (cf. Prince, 1974; Paglia, 2003). The Hindu *gharba* (luminous cosmic womb) was somehow joined with the Buddhist sunyata (void) which had been imported into America by early Hindu and Buddhist missionaries coupled with a hundred years of South East Asian migrant laborers, and later, with returning soldiers from wars with Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Damon, 1996, p. 144).

This movement not only pre-figured the beats' and hippies' interests in Hinduism, Buddhism, social experimentation/community living, ethnic freedom, civil rights, vegetarianism, and nature-worship, but also the blending of religion and cosmology visible in Walt Whitman's (1855/2008) "The Song of Myself"—the poem itself a site of religious globalization:

> My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths.
> Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern,
> Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
> Waiting response from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun,
> Making a fetish of the first rock or stump, pow-wowing with sticks
> in the circle of obis,
> Helping the Lama or Brahman as he trims the lamps of the idols,
> Dancing through the streets in a phallic procession, rapt and austere,
> in the woods a gymnosophist,
> Drinking mead from the skull cap, to Shastas and Vedas admirant,
> Minding the Koran…
> (p. 55)

The poet's character clothed in a single coat of many colors—religious bricolage. The synthesizing and Orientalizing spirit here is undeniable. Yet for Emerson and his contempories Buddhism was a little too alien

and their deepest Oriental influence and appreciation was in Advaita Vedanta (Hanegraaff, 1996, p. 460).

According to Rick Fields, in his study of Buddhism in America, it was through Edwin Arnold's (1879/1885) *The Light of Asia*, "more than any other book that Americans first learned the story and the teachings of the Buddha" (Fields, 1992, p. 69). Poet Oliver Wendell Homes was "wildly enthusiastic" about the work lauding the poem as being "so lofty that there is nothing with which to compare it but the New Testament" (p. 68; a potent East/West juxtaposition). The book was immensely popular, with 80 editions and sales up to a million copies. In it the story of the Buddha was poetically retold as something of a Romantic hero and it popularized an attractive version of *nirvana*—perhaps a re-telling more palatable for Western/Christian tastes:

> He is one with life
> Yet lives not. He is blest, ceasing to be
> OM MANI PADME, OM! The Dewdrop
> slips
> Into the shining sea!
> (Arnold, 1879/1885, p. 275)

Here one sees a cultural and religious phenomenon crucial to the formation of New Age transpersonalism; Fields (1992) was careful to point out that this imagery of a dew drop slipping into the shining sea does not really fit with traditional Buddhism, with its concept of anatta and nirvana as extinction; rather, he said, it sounds more like a mixture of Hinduism and Christianity, with the *atman* or soul reuniting with its eternal Godhead (p. 69).

Indeed both Orientalist scholars and devout Christians were uneasy with the subtle hybridizing of *Shakyamuni* Buddha with Jesus of Nazareth—as Robert Young (1995) wrote, hybrids create "unsettling perplexities generated out of their 'disjunctive liminal space'" (p. 23). It is important to note, however, that in the mind-worlds and belief systems of many 19th century Americans the Holy Trinity of Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism were beginning to blend, their boundaries blurring—and this blasphemous breaking, joining, and blending of cosmologies in the American religious imagination, as will be shown, will eventually become the so-called esoteric core of the transpersonal movement and the New Age.

However, before the formal birth of the transpersonal movement the Transcendentalists' flair for spontaneous mystical intuitions would powerfully reproduce in the informal consciousness-expanding movement that preceded it—as would this curious Holy Trinity of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity—as would the Romantic emphasis on the sacralisation of self, the sacralisation of nature, the sacralisation of human kindness, and the celebration of life (Heelas, 1996, p. 42). The Transcendentalists' individualist and rebellious spirit would echo resoundingly in the religious and cultural revolution that defined the 1960s and 1970s.

The Neo-Transcendentalists

The hybridizing ancestry seen in the American Romantic movement would gain huge popularity with Aldous Huxley's (1946) *The Perennial Philosophy*, in which he claimed perennialism as "immemorial and universal" (p. 9). In this book the novelist was a bit lean on theological discrimination but not on poetic license. As Brian Morris (2006) pointed out, "Aldous Huxley's famous study of mysticism... includes many references to the Buddha"; he also noted that the early Buddhist translator Edward Conze, "opens his discussion with the statement that Buddhism is a form of spirituality that is identical with other mystical teachings," a statement which Morris claimed is "extremely misleading" because Buddhism "fits uneasily into a theistic definition" (p. 45).

Nevertheless Huxley's (1946) little book has been hugely influential. A devout pacifist, he had immigrated to America just before WWII and published *The Perennial Philosophy* just at the end of that global conflict—which ended in the atomic bombing of Zen Buddhist Japan. His reputation as a sophisticated modern novelist gave impetus to widespread interest in his perennializing breakthrough. Perhaps it offered hope for a brave new world of spirit and a new dawn of human realization, after the prolonged darkness and horrors of war. Be that as it might, the universalizing seed in Huxley's vision fell onto ground well tilled by the Transcendentalists—and on either account the book became very popular and the idea of transcendental unity of religious traditions (including atheistic Buddhism) gained further impetus.

Huxley was one of two figures who stood out as seminal architects of what anthropologist Raymond Prince (1974) called "Neo-Transcendentalism" (p. 261); the other was another Englishman and émigré, theologian Allen Watts. These two mystical intellectuals had set themselves a religious task that was "one of

synthesis and assimilation," to quote eco-psychologist Theodore Roszak (1968, p. 157). Roszak wrote that,

> In much the same spirit in which Freud had set out to reclaim the dream as a form of evidence that could bear the weight of scientific speculation, Watts and Huxley wanted to recapture the value of neglected cultural traditions for which no disciplined method of study existed. The method they proposed was the systematic cultivation of states of abnormal consciousness that approached these traditions by outflanking the discursive, and logic chopping intellect. (p. 158)[6]

It is in the slippery occult space between these "neglected cultural traditions" and the states of consciousness that "approached these traditions" (p. 158) where I believe one will find the strange hybridities that beget transpersonal psychology's so-called esoteric core. From its educated, academic, and mainstream beginnings this was an effort to out-contextualize the West's rationalism but it soon became synonymous with a wider grass-roots spiritual/psychedelic movement that was also something of a cultural critique of Cartesian dualism and a rejection of mainstream materialistic American culture (cf. Lahood, 2008). At its center it was an individual therapeutic project that became a widespread consciousness expanding movement—and it spread like wildfire.

The consciousness expanding movement overlapped with the Beats. Beatniks (from the expression, beatific vision, the ecstatic Christian vision of God after death) were an alternative, artistic, underground movement simmering in the '50s that would pre-figure the '60s counter-culture in several important ways. With roots in the Bohemians of the 1920s some of its important literary heroes such as Allan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder were influenced by the New England Romantics (Transcendentalists), with Ginsberg even evoking the Oriental style of Whitman's (2008) epic poem, "Leaves of Grass," in his own poem "Howl" (1956/2000; Pagalia 2003). The Beats were concerned with pushing the limits of consciousness with a blend of Buddhism and rebellion that become known as Beat Zen. As an example of this brew, the title of one of Gary Snyder's (1957) books was *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries*.

Influenced by the somewhat non-traditional Zen of émigré D.T. Suzuki (cf. Lahood, 2008; Cunningham, 2004) Ginsberg had wanted to create a form of "American compassion" as part of a "Western *sadhana* or 'way'" (Heelas, 1996, p. 50). While they certainly carried forward the syncretistic Orientalizing tradition of their Transcendentalist ancestors the Beatniks added an important botanical dimension to potentate their road—the use of the entheogenic peyote cactus to catalyze their beatific visions. What these neo-Bohemians pursued through peyote was a form of psychedelic Neo-Transcendental-Bodhi-shamanism. But theirs was also an attempt to restore a relationship with "the great unknown and undiscovered peoples" (Philips, 1996, p. 28) and cannabis smoking became a way of life for many, a practice originally drawn from Afro-American jazz and blues musicians who had their own history of hybridizations such as Vodou, involving French Catholicism and African religion. In the words of Turner (1987):

> For the first time since the Renaissance, when the societies of pagan antiquity had come to serve as models in the initiation of the elite, the West had grasped alien cultures as being possibly exemplary or superior to its own. The *profound Orientalizing* of our poetry, architecture, religion, and cuisine and our attempt to imitate imagined Amerindian virtues in our personal relations, dress and recreation, is a consequence of this remarkable nineteenth-century movement [Transcendentalism]. Castaneda's Don Juan has New England ancestry. (p. 86, emphasis supplied).

The Beat was a wanderer who eschewed family and work, one who had dropped out of life for the tentative life on the road (think Kerouac); a "dharma bum" (Prince, 1974, p. 264), he lived in poverty claiming the right not to raise a family. Both Hinduism and Buddhism offered the Neo-transcendentalist (the Beat and later the Hippie) not only a religiosity based in so-called direct experience, but also something of a social model for protest and civil disobedience:

> Buddhist teachings always held the potential to inspire an inner quest for salvation, rejecting in principle the legitimacy of social constraints on individual action and replacing them with the discipline of the monk's life outside the jurisdiction of political institutions" (Mabbett, 1998, p. 19).

Also imported into the Californian psyche was the image of the unfettered Hindu *sadhu*, the "wandering holy man (*sannyasin*) who lives in complete freedom from

the normal claims of society, was fundamental to Indian religious thought" (Mabbett, 1998, p. 27). Allen Ginsberg and Ram Dass, both of Jewish heritage, donned Hindu robes and prayer beads, with the later calling himself a Hinjew—there is perhaps by now small need to point out that this linguistic carnavilesque and magical hybridity (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) is a sacrilegious blending of two hopelessly disparate religions in the American context.

According to philosopher Donald Rothberg, psychedelic substances have played a pivotal role in the recent renewal of spirituality in North America and Western Europe—but this role has gone largely unacknowledged (1993, p. 109). These substances with extremely powerful psychotropic properties were only discovered recently by the Western world and released into a somewhat virginal Western psyche. They were to spread rapidly into the seventy-million-strong Baby Boom generation affecting music, dress-style, psychology, and religious values at a time when the American psyche was bogged down in a highly (one might say devoutly) contested war in South East Asia. This unusual situation promoted what Robert Bellah (1976) described as a complex cultural and religious revolution (p. 78). In the words of Beatle John Lennon:

> You say you want a revolution
> Well, you know
> We all want to change the world
> You tell me that it's evolution
> Well, you know
> We all want to change the world....
>
> You say you'll change a constitution
> Well, you know
> We all want to change your head
> You tell me it's the institution
> Well, you know
> You better free your mind instead
> (Lennon & McCartney, 1968, as quoted in Aldridge, 1969, p. 104)

Freeing your mind became the mantra for this inner revolution and was an allusion to Western understandings of Eastern religious ideas of transcendence, sacramental drug use, and the imperative of attaining so-called higher or cosmic consciousness (equated with peace and love as opposed to violent revolution—for which the time was also ripe according to the Rolling Stones (cf. Wyman & Coleman, 1990). It was here in the fiery crucible between 1963 when America entered the war in Vietnam, and 1974 when that war ended in America's defeat, that New Age transpersonalism was shaped. In the protesting counter-culture one finds a dizzying level of cosmological hybridization, juxtaposition, intermixing, adhesion, linkage, and the tactical blurring of boundaries between the psychotropic drug experience with multiple conjoined religious liberations (cf. Lahood, 2008).

What began simply enough with Aldous Huxley's (1954/2009) blending of mescaline with Christianity— "all I am suggesting is that the mescalin experience is what Catholic theologians call a 'gratuitous grace'" (p. 73)—would become a frenzy of religious syncretism and hybridization. The counter-culture would affect the transgressive reality shaping act of fusing not two, but *multiple* cosmologies together and this, I would argue, ended up as American nondualism or, in other words, Wilber's (1976) perennial postulate. Robert Elwood (1973), in his classic study of magic and the occult in modern America, confirmed that while they drew from archaic symbols, the charismatic leaders in the psychedelic movement described an "innovative constellation with a life of its own" (p. 18).

James Slotkin (1956/1975) in his conversion to the Native American Church, a religion that fused ritual peyote eating with a blend of Aztec and Christian elements (Burkholder, 1974) claimed, "This concept of salvation by knowledge, to be achieved through revelation … through Peyote … is a doctrine similar to that of early Middle Eastern Gnosticism" (p. 100). Slotkin wrote that peyote was a sacrament that could induce mystical awareness for hours rather than moments. His early work was glowingly incorporated into Huxley's (1954) *The Doors of Perception*, in which Huxley blended the mescaline experience with the cosmological postulate *dharmakaya*—the void of Tibetan Buddhism—and Christian Grace.

In 1957 *Life* magazine printed a 17-page promotion of the visionary magic mushroom called by the Aztecs *teonanacatl* (Flesh of the Gods) hinting that the visions of poet William Blake would become available to one and all. Theologian Allan Watts in his 1962 work *Joyous Cosmology*, specifically related the suspension of the subject/object dichotomy in LSD use with the immediate awareness promoted in Zen Buddhism, considering it commensurate with the Buddhist void (p. 91) and with Richard Bucke's notion of cosmic consciousness (p. 17). Richard Bucke in 1901 had published his influential study of comparative mysticism, *Cosmic Consciousness:*

A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind, in which he held that Christ, Buddha, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, Muhammad, and William Blake shared the same pinnacle of consciousness. Timothy Leary (1963) in *The Psychedelic Experience* categorically equated the peak of the drug experience to the Clear Light or the Void of Tibetan Buddhism.

Gestalt psychologists were also involved in psychedelic work, among them Claudio Naranjo (1973). California had seen a gestalt boom in the '50s and '60s and the Esalen Institute became the seat of the counter-culture's global therapeutic project. It is widely acknowledged that gestalt was strongly influenced by Buddhism in the form of Zen (Clarkson, 1989, p. 12). The ultimate goal of Zen (connected to the doctrine of no-self) was joined with the gestalt aim of integration of the whole personality (which again, is not really a very Zen pursuit). Buddhist terms such as emptiness, the fertile or pregnant void, and *satori* were appropriated and blended with gestalt practice (cf. Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman 1951, pp. 358-359; Van Dusen, 1975, p. 90).

Stanislav Grof (1998), an émigré and psychoanalyst from Czechoslovakia and one of the co-founders of transpersonal psychology along with Maslow, strongly paralleled his LSD cosmology and ontology with Kashmir Shaivism and evoked the Hindu concept of the *satchitananda* (p. 117) to describe what he also called the void, absolute consciousness, and the pregnant void. Grof (1977) also linked his cosmology to Maslow's peak experience (p. 158). Maslow's (1964) self-actualization theory emerged in tandem with psychedelics and he made several references to LSD and psilocybin as useful for people who could not have a peak experience otherwise (pp. 27, 80). In *Be Here Now*, a best-selling book by Tim Leary's collaborator and Hindu convert, Ram Dass (1971b) claimed access to cosmic consciousness as commensurate with the Christian idea of the kingdom of God, the Hindu notion of satchitananda, and the Buddhist notion of the void (p. 16).

Again, what is present in all this is a unique form of cosmic hybridity, the almost impossible joining and mixing together of diverse and divergent cosmological postulates in America brought into being largely in the American religious counter-culture. This hybridization of various religious postulates with the drug experience has a history that begins roughly in the late 1950s, and this appears to be the invisible hand that shaped what 20 years later would come to be called the New Age. As the author of *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*, Jay Stevens (1987) had it:

> Certainly the variety of interests that groups itself under the rubric "the New Age" is largely an outgrowth of the psychedelic movement, although just as an oak is much more than the seed it springs from, the New Age is far more complex and impressive than anyone could have guessed back in 1967, when the hippies thought they were creating a new world with nothing more than Love and LSD. (p. 495)

The transpersonal movement, it is to be remembered, sprang from that very same seed, as did religious or spiritual feminism (Spretnak, 1982, p. xii).[7]

The notion of consciousness evolution was also a familiar and positive trope in the religious counterculture. To quote Stevens (1987) again,

> we are doomed unless a way can be found to speed up evolution, to consciously push the smart monkey to a higher level, to renew the assault on the gods, which was the secret purpose of all religions. But can we consciously evolve ourselves? LSD... was the hippie sacrament, a consciousness-expander, a tool that would push us up the evolutionary ladder." (p. 5)

The rhetoric of evolution is still very much a central trope in what religious historian Wouter Hanegraaff (1996) called "New Age perennialism" (p. 329), and in Ken Wilber's evolutionary ladder-of-consciousness transpersonalism.[8]

New Age-Transpersonalism

The transpersonal movement has substantially changed the religious menu of the Western world. Furthermore, the counter-cultural psychologies of the humanistic and transpersonal movements were "a key influence in the emergence of New Age as a social phenomena" (Morris, 2006, p. 305). But even more importantly the New Age's mystical occultism has been called the religion of postmodern globalization—which is to say that transpersonalism is either tacitly informing the religion of globalization or it *is* the unseen religion of global capitalism.

The New Age is mostly a religion for white people (Hanegraaff, 2003, p. 23) and has been called "the secret religion of the educated class" (Heelas, 1996, p. 124). It is so secret in fact that many a person apparently has no idea that he or she is part of it. Indeed many a

soul engaged in the widespread channeling phenomena, many a person practicing shamanism, many a yoga teacher and her students, many a religious tourist on his pilgrimage, or many a Western tantric practitioner, may be completely unaware that they are part of a globalizing religion with roots in the '60s consciousness-expanding movement. Often an examination of the belief systems of people who do not identify themselves with the New Age reveals deposits of New Age transpersonalism in their psychic inventories. Furthermore, and this is the thesis of the present paper, the New Age may well be contributing to the great spiritual malady of our times—spiritual narcissism.

But just what beliefs do have currency in New Age transpersonalism? This is a very difficult question to answer, but very briefly, two anthropologists David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet (1994), suggested that the New Age *is* a religion and it tends to "view reality in terms of different dimensions, and enlightenment as a movement to ever higher dimensions [of consciousness], either in this life or in lives to come" (p. 8). "Reality, according to the perennial philosophy" wrote Ken Wilber (1997), "is composed of several different but continuous dimensions" (p. 39).

New Age religion joins psychology with religion and with a millenarian impulse (the coming of: a New Age of Aquarius, Total Bliss, the Cosmic Christ, twentytwelve, etc.) and an evolutionary design—the result is a self-oriented spirituality in which the transformation of, or the attainment of, a higher inner self is of paramount importance. Furthermore, for many, the action of expanding one's consciousness is deemed an activity that can save the planet (this means of course that everyone on the planet must participate in the consciousness-raising). New Age religion advocates a perennial philosophy stressing the transcendent unity of all religions although it expresses a religious metaphysic that reflects a Hindu/Gnostic, impersonal, nondual transcendentalism (Cortright, 1997).

Likewise the transpersonal psychology movement has been called "an openly religionist psychology" (Hanegraaff, 1996, p. 51) because it has the perennial philosophy—that is, esoteric unity—as its foundation (Wulff 2000). The perennial construct is imagined as a universal spiritual reality that "strikingly resembles the Neo-Platonic Godhead or Advaitin Brahman" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 89). Like the New Age, transpersonal psychology's interests are defined by a mingling of psychology and religion. Interest in peak experiences and expanded consciousness resulted in a strong focus on self-spirituality—the sacralisation of the inner self (Heelas, 1996). For roughly 20 years transpersonalism was dominated by, and conflated with, the religious and psychological worldview of Ken Wilber. Wilber joined the perennial philosophy with an evolutionary telos and a ladder of consciousness design with Hindu/Gnostic impersonal nondualism as end-state enlightenment.

Thus the New Age and Wilber's transpersonalism deeply mirror each other in basic structure. The basic metaphysic structuring its beliefs and practices is Eastern/Gnostic in flavor in that it holds everything is God without beginning or end, and the ultimate purpose of life is to transcend the individual self and merge with the Divine (Hollick, 2006). The Upanishads and the Vedic writings of ancient India conceive of Brahman as an impersonal world-spirit, sustaining but beyond the phenomenal world. The individual soul or *atman* is considered a manifestation of Brahman—and the Vedantic system of Shankara developed the concept of liberation (*moksha*) from the world.

An organic hybridity can easily occur between the East and West through Gnosticism and Vedanta. Morris (2006) has pointed out that Oriental religious traditions are generally seen to be different from Christianity and Occidental thought; however, the Upanishadic doctrine has close affinities with early Gnostic doctrines (p. 119). Gnostic Christians held an "absolute division between an evil material world and a good spiritual realm" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 141). Man could escape his entrapment in the gross material world through an esoteric knowledge gleaned from spiritual intuition. But, wrote Morris (2006), "in its stress on the concept of salvation by knowledge (Greek *gnosis*), in its devaluation of the mundane world as a realm of "unreality," and in its advocacy of mystical union between the individual (soul) and this transcendental realm the Upanishadic doctrine... resembles that of Gnostic religion" (p. 119).

I would take this insight a step further and say these two religions (Western esoteric Christianity and Eastern Vedantic mysticism) have found hybridized expression in the New Age, and that this is mirrored in Wilber's transpersonalism; indeed, Jorge Ferrer (2002) claimed Wilber's transpersonal psychology is "a hybrid of Neo-Platonism and Neo-Advaita" (p. 65). Thus it can be said that the New Age and transpersonalism have historically tended to value Eastern/Gnostic ideals

of transcendence over a devalued phenomenal world for identification with a metaphysical Big Self. Such identification is traditionally based on the yogic impulse to yoke the soul to the spirit by cutting the bonds and severing the ties to the world, severing the so-called limiting desires that connect one to the world—and severing the bonds that sustain and renew relationship.

The human potential and transpersonal movements (e.g., Perls, Maslow) have also been important foundations in the materialization and affirmation of what has been called self-spirituality, an internalized form of religiosity (Heelas, 1996). The touchstones of self-spirituality were about getting in touch with inner divinity and self actualization through consciousness-expanding techniques that could deliver a peak experience and enable the aspirant to attain higher levels of consciousness—this was favorably seen as consciousness evolution (Heelas, 1996; Hanegraaff, 1996; Morris, 2006). However, it is this very program that brings us inevitably to self-spirituality's inherent problem—and what is perhaps the foundation of a growing spiritual malady in these globalizing times—that New Age transpersonalism is prone to breeding an overt focus on only one half of what could be a more relational spirituality. Put crudely, its concern is with a highly *individual* self and not with the Other.

New Age Narcissism

The foundations of this self-oriented spirituality in transpersonal psychology were laid by its founding father Abraham Maslow, who brought together Western psychology and mystical states (the term he favored was "peak-experiences"; cf. Maslow, 1964, 1968, 1969). In terms of psychology, Maslow wanted freedom from the Freudian obsession with psychopathology and a new focus on maximized psychological health or selfactualization. In terms of religion, Maslow believed that traditional religious contexts obscured or retarded a universal core experience and skewed the potential of the peak experiences, and he wanted to "dissociate such [peak states] from their traditional religious contexts" (Wulff, 2000, pp. 422-423). Maslow is undoubtedly an important pioneer—but there is a danger here because in Maslow's peak experiences the emphasis was on "the individual's experience over, if not to the exclusion of, the reality that is encountered" (Wulff, 2000, p. 397). This sounds quite similar to Donald Evans' (1993) description of monistic subjectivity as a narcissistic mode of consciousness: "In general, everything outside of me has significance only in relation to me; what concerns me is not this or that reality but my experience of it" (p. 42). In a discussion of justice in Maslow's motivational model, Anthony Taylor (2006) pointed out that "the state of self actualization or psychological perfection that Maslow outlined, was supremely self-centered" (p. 184):

> Maslow described self-actualization in "ethereal terms, showing a benign indifference to the outer world of reality while fostering internally a state of Nirvana of sublime spirituality... such a state of existential withdrawal... cannot be construed has anything but a major symptom of avoidance, inadequacy, and selfishness that is uncharacteristic in mature people. (2006, p. 185)[9]

Self-spirituality emerged in Western culture where the ego is historically "constructed dissociatively from nature, community, ancestors" (Kremer, 1996, p. 46) and, as such, is an ego already prone to rigid dualism, isolation, solipsism, and self-centeredness. Self-spirituality coupled with the logic of "individual competitiveness and consumer capitalism" can result in what is called "spiritual narcissism" (Ferrer, 2002, pp. 34-36)—in other words, extreme egocentrism spiritualized.

The New Age has been described as spiritual consumerism (Arweck, 2002) in a pick-and-mix spiritual marketplace (Roof, 1999). Once counter-cultural, the New Age sanctifies capitalism (Heelas, 1996) and promulgates a search or journey for prosperity and a means to wealth (Morris, 2006). Spirituality has in a sense become a commodity, a fetish linked to purchasing power and economically based self-esteem. Lavish spending on spiritual commodities (e.g., expensive New Age group events, spiritual tourism, or showy donations to Gurus buy prestige and *participation mystique*, without the transmutative suffering required to reduce narcissistic alienation). This kind of conspicuous consumption may also be intended to create envy in others; there is perhaps nothing of more value to the spiritual egoist than the envy of others.

Using Donald Evans' (1993) account of spirituality as "a basic transformative process in which we uncover and let go of our narcissism so as to surrender into the Mystery out of which everything continually arises" (p. 4), Ferrer (2002) argued that "narcissistic modes of consciousness... preclude a genuine availability to others" (p. 36). To quote Evans (1993), "Where love

inclines and enables us to engage in the mutual giving and receiving of 'I-Thou' encounters with other human beings, narcissism's self-enclosure precludes such intimate encounters" (p. 207).

The problem is self-centeredness, and the inability to care about the other—but the paradox here is that immersion in self-spirituality can fail to transform these dynamic defenses and spiritual growth simply becomes another narcissistic activity. Inner spiritual experiences and practices (sought for therapeutic ends) are easily appropriated by the ego in a form of narcissistic survival (Ferrer, 2002) in what has been called spiritual materialism (cf. Cortright, 1997). Here the person dons the spiritual garb and talks the spiritual language but ducks the appropriate transmutitive suffering—her self-serving continues—a wolf in lamb's clothing. Ultimately, this means her self-denial and suffering are *prolonged* rather than transformed because the spiritual aspirant mistakes "spiritualized self-gratification" for authentic self-fulfillment (Battista, 1996, p. 255) which is the opposite of authentic spirituality.[10]

Narcissistic spirituality, then, is the use of an inflated spiritual persona which claims itself to be spiritually developed (evolved, advanced, or higher) as a means of constraining, controlling, and exploiting other persons (Battista, 1996), a dynamic which others naturally feel as oppressive and in my opinion should rightly oppose with healthy human anger.11 Adherents of the New Age claim they are overcoming "attachment to self" for altruistic purposes, but this "defense allows an apologist for 'higher consciousness'" (p. 255) with its implicit claim to psychological superiority. The New Age votary, self-elevated in this way, has trouble recognizing, owning, and working through her subtly manipulative, deceptive, and dominating side. Another related defense is spiritual bypass or transpersonal rationalization wherein the person reframes his compulsive self-serving behaviors in spiritual terms (Cortright, 1997). A similar strategy is to invent a spiritual facade, and cleave to it, in the hope of annihilating inner suffering.

The New Ager's psychological narcissism (a result of primal repression [cf. Washburn, 1995] or lack of mirroring [cf. Kohut, 1971]) is accentuated through: (1) perennialism: the notion of an inner esoteric core truth (Self, essence, etc.) that resides at the heart of all religions—a hybridity that allows the New Ager to claim spiritual authority for herself; (2) New Age ethnocentrism—a conviction of cultural superiority; and closely related (3) religious narcissism—religious traditions almost always raise their aspired states over other systems, and this is adapted into a form of narcissism where the New Ager mimics the authoritarianism within myriad traditions by elevating his cult, group, guru, tradition, or practice as higher up the chain of consciousness than others. This threefold structuring builds a spiritual facade trapping the authentic person and *participatory consciousness* itself within an alienating, self-separating shell.[12] In the following section I explore how the New Age spiritual ego comes into being.[13]

Cosmological Détente[14]

According to Christopher Lasch (1978) in his well known work, *The Culture of Narcissism*, increasing hopelessness in the face of the global disasters of our times has produced a form of narcissistic selfpreoccupation (Ferrer, 2002, p. 35). During the past 100 years the Western "trust in human progress, as a way toward universal peace and happiness, was progressively abandoned due to its empirical disconfirmation by a number of bloody wars" (Introvigne, 2003, p. 65). If two world wars, ongoing wars against communism and now terrorism, and the shadow of a horrific third world war destroyed the notion of a utopian paradise of universal peace and prosperity through progress, it also gave birth to a more individualized, personalized, and privatized utopia. After WWI it was held that positive thinking might still win the day through the attainment of a "higher state of peace" (p. 65). Massimo Introvigne pointed out that while all this could be easily be construed as wishful thinking, a convergence of Christian New Thought and secular positive thinking coalesced in the work, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, by Norman Vincent Peale (1952), which turned out to be one of the best-sellers of the 20th century—and positive thinking is now a central dogma of the New Age.

For the 1960s religious counter-culture the American Dream, messianic and unchallenged as it was (Bellah, 1976), had dissipated into an apocalyptic nightmare of Biblical proportions. For many the wisdom of putting blind faith or trust in dualistic science and exclusivist Christianity had also been disconfirmed in an atmosphere of moral turmoil, rampant materialism, and violence both internal and external. According to the eminent sociologist Robert Bellah (1976), the "counter cultural criticism of American society is related to a belief in *nondualism*" (p. 347, emphasis supplied). As one researcher into the emerging new religious consciousness

put it, "previous beliefs had not worked; people were searching for a *spiritual absolute* that would lead them beyond war, strife and chaos" (Johnson, 1976, p. 34, emphasis supplied).[15]

If the counter-public of America (and beyond) could find this spiritual absolute, then a New Age of peace and love might dawn, but only if the people could awaken from their dualistic dream—a seemingly commendable desire. The coming New Age would be a psychological one arriving through the "transformed consciousness of millions of people" (Johnson, 1976, p. 34). Thus, if the counter-culture was unified at all, it was in an "obsession with personal experience... each individual was urged to pursue freely a personal state of ecstasy" (p. 42), and this program would, so the dual logic went, end the war and save the planet. Yet this cherished spiritual absolute would have to be found in an amalgamating inclusivity, a hybrid—One absolute Truth—to avoid the chimera of exclusivism that was and is central to Christianity. It would somehow have to be inclusive of all truths, and this amalgamation would be billed as arriving through consciousness evolution. In this one arrives at the basic formula of the New Age:

> The two main tenets of "classic" New Age were, firstly, that a golden age of higher consciousness was manifesting itself on Planet earth; and secondly, that it was possible to co-operate with this happy manifestation without the need for a dogmatic creed or formal structures. (Introvigne, 2003, p. 60)

Or as Paul Heelas (1996) put it:

> New Agers are averse to traditions, with their dogmas, doctrines and moralities. Yet New Agers continually draw on traditions—shamanic to Buddhist. The solution to this seeming paradox lies in the fact that New Agers are perennialists. Before explaining this apparent paradox, let us dwell for a moment on the perennialized nature of the New Age. Unity firmly prevails over diversity. Having little or no faith in the external realm of traditional belief, New Agers can ignore apparently significant differences between religious traditions, dismissing them as due to historical contingencies and ego-operations. But they do have faith in that wisdom which is experienced as lying at the heart of the religious domain as a whole. From the detraditionalized stance of the New Age what matters is the "arcane," the "esoteric," the "hidden wisdom," the "inner or secret tradition," the "ancient wisdom." And, it can be added, New Agers attach equal importance—because it is an aspect of the spiritual realm as a whole—to the essential unity of the human species, scorning nationality or ethnically differentiated modes of being. (p. 27)

Now it is possible to return to Abraham Maslow the founding father of the self-spirituality movements (humanistic and transpersonal) for the similarities:

> Among humanistic perspectives on mystical experience, no others are as well known as Maslow's (1964, 1968). In the course of his famous studies of self-actualizing persons, Maslow noticed that it was common for these exceptional individuals to report having had mystical experiences.... Maslow called them peak experiences, a term that other psychologists have adopted as well. In describing peak experiences, Maslow reiterated the ecstatic feelings of egoless fusion with the world, of wholeness and integration, and of effortless existence in the here and now.... Eager to make such experiences and their putative benefits widely available in an increasingly secular world, Maslow argued (1964) that the traditional religious contextualizations of this intrinsic core of experience serve not only to distort and suppress it but also to create divisiveness where otherwise there might be profound accord. According to Maslow, by studying and promoting this core outside of its traditional contexts, humanistic psychology could revolutionize human existence by making the peak experience and its values the ultimate goals of education, if not of every other social institution as well. (Wulff 2000, 422-423, emphasis supplied).

For Maslow religious traditions created divisiveness, even war—it is to be remembered that some of Maslow's most influential works (e.g., 1964, 1968, 1971) were created during the Vietnam War years; in fact Maslow (1908-1970) published throughout WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. At the Esalen Institute in California during a seminar there Maslow declared that he had "'the feeling of historical urgency... that there's a fire that we have to put out. The world is burning. It's literally possible there [will be] atom bombs next week'" (Hoffman, 1988, p. 293). Maslow (1964) urged his readers toward an individual, inner, privatized

religious experience that went beyond, but included, all traditions—in his words,

> this private religious experience is shared by all the great world religious traditions including the atheistic ones like Buddhism, Taoism, Humanism, or Confucianism. (p. 28)

Ferrer (2002) in his important deconstruction of subtle Cartesian dualism in transpersonal theory (specifically Maslow's perennialism) wrote: "To *lump* together these different awarenesses into one spiritual liberation or referent reachable by all traditions may be profoundly distorting" (p. 148, emphasis supplied). Ferrer's argument ostensibly has to do with Buddhism but it is very much applicable to the more pertinent theme he is tackling—the validity of Maslow's presumed core. From a contextual position (e.g., Katz, 1978) this conflation is profoundly distorting, on one level, but this term "lump together," while certainly not very elegant, points to a much stranger, trickster-like cultural and religious process in the American context—one of hybridization and amalgamation—which, I believe, had an egalitarian, anti-racist, anti-hegemonic, anti-essentialist intention. It is a conflation based on respect for other traditions and a desire to join with them. I believe this amalgam/hybridity was originally used as an occult fetish with which to democratize religious traditions. The process of hybridization, wrote Nestor Garcia Canclini (2005), "can serve to work democratically with differences, so that history is not reduced to wars between cultures.... We can choose to live in a state of war or in a state of hybridization" (p. xxxi).

American One-Truthism, in reality an unrecognized and complex religious hybridization glossed as perennialism (Lahood, 2008), gained acceptance and popularity because, at face value, it was a defense (by amalgamation) against the force of religious exclusivism, ideological domination, and what Ferrer (2002) has called spiritual ranking (pp. 159-162): the way religious traditions, groups, or creeds subtly belittle one-another by placing their aspired ultimate states above others. According to Ferrer (2009), the elevation of "one's favored tradition or spiritual choice as superior" is itself a form of "spiritual narcissism" (p. 140) and which appears to be inculcated into religious cultures as ethnocentrism (a cultural version of egocentrism). Americanized One-Truthism was/is cherished by hippies, transpersonalists, New Agers, and contemporary, grass-roots Western Buddhists alike because it was also seen as a simple solution to spiritual competition and one-up-manship (cf. Cortright, 1997, p. 31). If it is believed (and performed) that all religions are inherently the same—that all religions are rivers running into the same transcendental ocean—then this promotes the relaxing and easing of tensions between competing groups or even warring religions (Lahood, 2008).

Eternal Fascism

There are many examples of this subversive credo, for example, Roman Catholic Trappist monk and anti-war peace activist Thomas Merton, who nicknamed himself Rabbi Vedanta (another Hinjew hybrid), "argued that Zen meditation shatters the false self and restores us to our paradisiacal innocence which preceded the fall of man" (Lipski, 1985, p. 243). The terror of deconstructive agency is apparent in Merton's speech act—it is a form of sorcery (or shamanism), the term Rabbi Vedanta itself an impossible mix, discombobulating yet joining Catholicism, Judaism, and Hinduism—his person becomes the bi-polar trickster, the disjunctive, liminal, shamanistic space.

To take another example, here again is theologian Alan Watts (1961) in *Psychotherapy East and West*:

> Ideally and theoretically the church as the Body of Christ is the entire universe, and because in Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, bond nor free" [Galatians 3:28], membership in Christ could mean liberation from maya and its categories. It could mean that one's conventional definition and classification is not one's real self, that "I live, yet no longer I; but Christ lives in me." (p. 12)

This is a Christian-Hinduism which erases and assimilates the "Greek" and the "Jew" while exploding the borders of Hinduism and Christianity by forcing/marrying them together. Underlying these subversive and universalizing tactics, were, I believe, sincere attempts at a kind of mystical democratization, a leveler of the spiritual playing field, and a disavowal of privileged, namely Christian, religious perspectives. On these grounds there seems to be something inherently well intentioned behind the unifying mind. However, if tilted toward the direction of one absolute or universal spiritual strand, then it may also point to the resurgence of spiritual ethnocentrism, essentialism, narcissism, and

totalitarianism seemingly inherent in human beings and their religious traditions or formulations.

The statements above by Merton and Watts deserve careful scrutiny because buried within their hybridity may be the seeds of what semiotician and anthropologist Umberto Eco (1995) has called Eternal Fascism. Taking Merton's example: Zen meditation returns his readers to the state of prelapsarian purity (cf. Lahood, 2008) in a Catholic-Zen hybrid cosmology— the marriage of Zen practice with Christian soteriology. In a sense this throws traditional Zen—with its emptiness, void, nirvana, sunyata—and Catholicism—with its theistic cosmos, eternal soul, and triune godhead—into disarray, yet binds the two traditions as if they were one. It is this kind of joining toward which Eco expressed suspicion. He wrote:

> In spite of some fuzziness regarding the difference between various historical forms of fascism, I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it.
>
> Traditionalism is of course much older than fascism. Not only was it typical of counterrevolutionary Catholic thought after the French revolution, but is was born in the late Hellenistic era, as a reaction to classical Greek rationalism. In the Mediterranean basin, people of different religions (most of the faiths indulgently accepted by the Roman pantheon) started dreaming of a revelation received at the dawn of human history. This revelation, according to the traditionalist mystique, had remained for a long time concealed under the veil of forgotten languages— in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in the Celtic runes, in the scrolls of the little-known religions of Asia.
>
> This new culture had to be *syncretistic*. Syncretism is not only, as the dictionary says, "the combination of different forms of belief or practice;" such a combination must tolerate contradictions. Each of the original messages contains a sliver of wisdom, and although they seem to say different or incompatible things, they all are nevertheless alluding, allegorically, to the same primeval truth.
>
> As a consequence, there can be no advancement of learning. Truth already has been spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message.
>
> If you browse in the shelves that, in American bookstores, are labeled New Age, you can find there even Saint Augustine, who, as far as I know, was not a fascist. But combining Saint Augustine and Stonehenge—that is a symptom of Ur-Fascism. (pp. 57-59)

The question is this: in their attempts to combine and join these religions together do Watts, Merton, and Ram Dass, with the help of many others, unwittingly plant the seed of spiritual fascism? New Age perennialism flourishes because it is a source of visible and invisible hybridization—a process that can exhaust the authoritative voice within each tradition by a complex process of joining and cancellation. But each hybrid also carries the forces of totalitarianism, essentialism, and resistance—and power configurations arise, assimilate, and re-assert. For example, *A Course in Miracles* (Anonymous, 1976/1992), something of a New Age gospel or Bible (rightly appraised as Christianized Vedanta and a form of nondual perennialism) extolled a blatant assimilation/colonization process with all the arrogance and gusto of 19th century Christian missionaries:

> The Name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol. But it stands for love that it is not of this world. It is a symbol that is safely used *as a replacement for the many names of all the gods* to which you pray. (Manual for Teachers, p. 59, emphasis supplied)

One can only wonder how the Muslim or Buddhist populations would respond to this teaching. This appears to be a thinly disguised form of spiritual totalitarianism and New Age imperialism, carefully removing itself from its culturally relative context and human responsibility by claiming metaphysical authority, while brutally effacing all other gods—the term "safely" brimming with conceit and subterfuge.

The Course's spiritual imperialism is anticipated in Rudolf Steiner (2010), who, in a public lecture on July 13, 1914, said of his self-proclaimed spiritual science:

> Thus it becomes clear to us through spiritual science that the being whom we call Christ is to be recognized as the center of life on earth, that

> the Christian religion is the ultimate religion for the earth's whole future. Spiritual science shows us particularly that the pre-Christian religions outgrow their one-sidedness and come together in the Christian faith. (n.p.)

Or as Wilber would have it—all religions will eventually outgrow themselves and alight at the station of neo-Advaitin nondualism. Or as the Dalai Lama would have it—emptiness, sunyata, or final spiritual enlightenment can only be attained within his *dGe lugs* school of Tibetan Buddhism (D'Costa, 2000)—"a view that he believes all other Buddhists and religious people will eventually accept" (Ferrer, 2009, p. 140).

Nestor Canclini (1995/2005) observed that in the vertigo inducing worlds of hybridization the human imagination becomes "afraid of losing itself" and historical movements, both hegemonic and subaltern, "time and again institute essentializations of a particular state of hybridization" (p. xxii). This leads inevitably to Ken Wilber's ethnocentric paradise, and may explain Wilber's break from the more relaxed universalism of Huxley, Watts, Maslow, Grof, Ram Dass, and others in early psychedelic/transpersonal movement, to his more essentialized, hierarchical hybrid in which he ranked his nondualism above the other contenders. Malcolm Hollick in his *Science of Oneness* (2006) explained:

> The perennial philosophy claims to be tolerant and inclusive of all religions. Yet it establishes a single spiritual truth against which all traditions are judged. Those that do not match its criteria are rejected as inauthentic, merely exoteric, or as representing lower levels of spiritual insight. For instance, according to Ken Wilber's influential ladder of consciousness development, the Eastern concept of nonduality is the highest form of spirituality, whereas the Sufi and Christian traditions of union with an impersonal One come a rung lower at the Causal level. Platonic archetypes and Christian gnosis are a further rung down at the Subtle level, while the mystery religions and many indigenous faiths are relegated to the Psychic. (p. 341)

It is because of this tilt toward assimilationist and totalitarian one-truthism that I suggest the One-Truth of New Age transpersonalism and its spiritual ego be gently but firmly consigned to the funeral pyre in the hope that from the ashes a more relational cosmos will emerge.

Uncooked Seeds

Ultimately, with Eastern nondualism occupying the top rung of consciousness evolution according to Ken Wilber and the New Age, one ends up with a very conservative religion which eradicates the many spiritual tastes in the name of the One—a religion that smothers diversity, ceases to evolve or change, and a religious vision which is already prescribed by world-denying Eastern mystics (Lahood, 2008; Hanegraaff, 2003; Heron, 1998). As Hanegraaff (2003) concluded, the New Age begins to look like a replica of the exclusivist, dominating, one-way Christian religion it was trying to escape (2003). Again, the seeds of this psycho-spiritual malady were sown in the religious counter culture that gave birth to transpersonal psychology and the New Age. Let me present here a small case study of one of the most beloved sons of this movement and an important proponent of naive universalism: Baba Ram Dass.

Richard Alpert (Ram Dass) had been a teacher of psychology at Harvard and along with Dr. Timothy Leary began research into psychedelics there in 1961. After being relieved of his post there he eventually travelled to India in 1967 and came under the tutelage of a Hindu guru Neem Karoli Baba, after which he wrote a best-selling book *Be Here Now* (1971b). In this book the term cosmic consciousness joined Christianity's kingdom of heaven with the satchitananda of Hinduism and the void of Buddhism as something that could be realized through various catalysts or practices:

> Unless you start again, become that trusting, open surrendered being the energy can't come in, that is in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Energy, it is the same thing—Cosmic Consciousness…its all the same trip, its all the same and any trip you want to take leads to the same place…you can get there by tuning in…you can get there by turning on…you can get there by having baby. (p. 16)

Ram Dass was not only an important charismatic leader in the American psychedelic movement, he was an early contributor to the transpersonal psychology movement, and he can be seen to represent the Easternizing spirit of America in these times—he has been credited as "one of the most influential spiritual teachers of our time" (Walsh & Grob, 2005, p. 207). Here is Ram Dass (1974) as he spoke of his religious evolution and the emergence of what appears to be a curious universal amalgam—an

amalgam that, seemingly, will become the problematic esoteric core of the New Age:

> I am not a Hindu. I am a Western, Jewish boy from Boston who has studied Hinduism. I also find the same thing in the Greek Orthodox Christians and in the Hasidic movement in Judaism. I find it in all mystical traditions: in the Sufi, in the Egyptian, and certainly in St. Teresa and St. John and so on. So that, I find it is in a way the amalgam of all this stuff that is allowing me to be what I am doing right at this moment. (p. 54, emphasis supplied)

One hears an echo of Whitman's joyous poet (in the woods, trimming the lamps, shatas admirant... minding the Koran). However, it is important to note carefully that with Ram Dass's globalizing statements and the subtle marriage of Judaism with Hinduism, with Greek Orthodoxy, Sufism, Egyptian, Christian mysticism, and Buddhism, that a third space of enunciation (cf. Bhabha, 1994) is articulated in the form of an esoteric amalgam. Ram Dass' simple synopsis was presented at the Menninger Foundation in 1970 during talks on LSD and spirituality. These talks were published in early volumes of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (1970, 1971a). Later they were published in a book, *The Only Dance There Is* (1974), with an image of the Dancing Shiva Nataraj on the front cover. Two editors wrote in an opening statement:

> Historically, one spiritual system after another has been assimilated in another culture in such a way as to modify the form of discipline without diminishing its essence. In this respect, Ram Dass has been especially effective in helping Americans and other Westerners feel "at home" in what has been considered a "foreign" tradition. (Sutich & Fadiman, 1974)

If I understand this statement correctly, Americans (nominally Judeo-Christians) and other Westerners are to be assimilated into Hinduism—or is it an Americanization/Christianization of Hinduism? Slippery stuff this hybridity. Nevertheless, out of all of these religions—monistic, theistic and atheistic—Ram Dass is adamant that "higher consciousness is a state of unity" (p. 8), and that this unity must be nondual: "The goal of these efforts [practices] is a nondualistic state. That is, the place you are reaching for is a state where there is only one. Not one versus anything else; just one. It all is. It's one. A nondualistic state" (p. 31). This seems to be the cherished spiritual absolute sought by the counterculture—One Truthism.

Certainly with Ram Dass one senses a great appreciation of the other culture's mysticism and a respect and celebratory approach to non-Western cultures. Yet this very act can suggest an appropriation, assimilation, and colonization (Lahood, 2008; Hanegraaff, 2003). In the following passage Ram Dass spoke in his open hearted and enthusiastic way of a cultural joining between hippies and Hopi Indians:

> I went as a representative of the hippie community of San Francisco to meet the Hopi Indian elders to arrange a Hopi-Hippie Be-In in Grand Canyon. We wanted to honor their tradition and affirm our common respect for the land. As you can guess, this was during the sixties. (Ram Dass & Gorman, 2005, p. 7)

He then wrote that the Hopi did not want to be honored by them and, according to the *Berkeley Barb*, "the Indians were not impressed and the tribal spokesman brushed them off" (Matusow, 1984, p. 298).

Scholar of Native North American religions Luan Fautaek Makes Marks (2007) pointed out in her discussion of the Mysterious *Wakan Tanka* and its conflation with a Western concept the Great Spirit, that "perennialist scholars seized on the opportunity to emphasize Wakan Tanka as monolithic Great Spirit. This provided more respectability for the Lakota religion, but conflated the manifold mysterious into the One" (p. 34). This is exactly the problem that besets the New Age: by perennializing their cosmos and consciousness (one truth, essential-self, etc.) the world's colorful religious cultures are co-opted into one monolithic nondual ocean—drowning the many multi-hued mysteries in a spiritually imperialistic One-ness. It is little wonder that the Hopi would not join with the Hippie and that the Lakota Indians published a declaration of war on the New Age in 1993 for disrespecting its traditions (Hanegraaff, 2003, pp. 22-23).

Thus it would seem that dedicated and intelligent therapists, spiritual healers, and important charismatic spokesmen for the transpersonal psychology movement such as Ram Dass or Stanislav Grof seem to be convinced that unity is to be preferred over diversity.[16] Here is an example of perennialist Grof chastising Ken Wilber for what he appeared to perceive as the mistake of cultural specificity:

> In his account of cosmogenesis or consciousness involution, Ken closely follows the highly culturespecific archetypal map from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Bardo Thodol (Evans & Wentz, 1960), rather than creating a more general and universal description that would be applicable in any cultural and historical context. (Grof, 1998, p. 90)

Grof seems wholly correct in criticizing Wilber for his attempt to reduce the world's religions to Tibetan culture's view of cosmogenesis and to privilege it above others. But he then makes a plea for a universal cosmic schemata, one that can cover, as it were, the whole of the world's religious history—and here Grof falls into the trap of subtle universalism because while such a scheme eradicates Wilber's spiritual ranking and undermines his basic culturecentric claim (which holds up Tibetan culture as a model for all cultures), it at the same time ends up calling for yet another species of ethnocentrism and another form of totalitarianism.

New Age Authoritarianism

One inherent problem with the universalizing tactic is that it feeds spiritual narcissism and New Age ethnocentrism: it sets up the New Ager to feel as if she has evolved beyond the older traditions. Thus, Hanegraaff (1996) wrote that the New Ager can "reject all exoteric religions... because they *fall short* of universal esoteric wisdom" (p. 328). In doing so she sees herself, paradoxically, as more advanced than traditional religions by laying claim to a superior vision of spiritual wholeness (see Lahood, 2008; Hanegraaff, 2003). This can create for the New Age global villager a somewhat ethnocentric and conceited spiritual outlook. Sociologist Paul Heelas (1996) has observed:

> So, what has perennialization to do with how New Agers treat religious traditions? The perennialized viewpoint involves going beyond traditions as normally conceived, going beyond differences to find—by way of experience—the inner, esoteric core. This means that New Agers can "draw" on tradition whilst bypassing their explicit, authoritative doctrines and dogmas, and moral codes. Instead, in detraditionalized fashion, they can discern—by way of their own experience, their gnosis or experiential knowledge—those spiritual truths that lie at the heart of, say, Vedanta or shamanism. And although these truths—by virtue of their intrinsic nature—exercise authority, they do not curtail the authority of the New Ager's Self: the truths within the "traditions" and within the New Ager are the same. (p. 28)[17]

Participatory theorist John Heron (1998, 2006) has placed careful and useful emphasis on what he calls *authoritarian religion* and its correlate, *spiritual projection* (onto external authority/s) within religious traditions. However, Heron does not attend specifically to the non-traditional New Age spiritual ego and its unique brand of religious authoritarianism. Heron's (1998) claim, for example, that the current (perennialist) Hindu-Buddhist cosmology is nothing beyond a "revelation only relevant to its original context" (p. 12) does not seem to recognize the emergence of a novel and complex religious formation (Lahood, 2008 p. 166). No doubt many in the New Age run spiritual projections on traditions, or cults, or leading lights (e.g., the Dalai Lama, Rajneesh, or Eckhart Tolle) as suggested in Heron's thesis. However New Agers typically do not stay long in authoritarian or traditional groups—and a central aspect of the New Age and contemporary spirituality its antiauthoritarian stance (Morris, 2006; Heelas, 1996; Hanegraaff, 1996).[18] Indeed, according to sociologist Donald Stone (1976) in times of rapid change such as the current globalization, people join these religious groups in a maneuver that enables them to assume the "special status" of a "member of the elect" (p. 114)—in the New Age it is thus perhaps less a case of spiritual projection than it is a form of spiritual elitism.[19]

There is nothing unusual, said Stone (1976), for people to seek a new authority to compensate when their worlds are dislocated—a term often used to describe the effect of globalization. What is new, and perhaps crucial, is the reliance on an "authoritative basis of direct experience" without reference to an outside power (p. 113). This trend is an epochal revolutionary movement away from conformity to an external higher truth toward what is instead held to be a subjective turn (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). Thus the New Ager does not really go in for tradition. Hanegraaff (1996) stated for example that

> Although New Age adherents tend to have a positive view of enlightened "masters" or gurus who impart insights to their pupils, the idea of being dependent of somebody else (rather than on

> one's own inner self) for spiritual illumination is not congenial to New Age individualism. (p. 400)

As Heelas (1996) has pointed out, the New Ager largely *bypasses* tradition (p. 28) giving herself an unassailable position of spiritual authority and superiority by drawing on the religious capital within each so-named ancient tradition while at the same time disavowing traditional authority. This means the New Ager does *not* project onto religious authority—he *is* the authority. He will not claim membership with religious institutions but rather with "Shelley's 'white radiance', which transmitted through 'the dome of many-colored glass' expresses itself in the world in the multifarious imagery of the institutionalized religions" (Prince, 1974, p. 256). Nevertheless, this white person's light supposedly shining through all religions is still a culturally relative position brought about by globalization, and, as has been seen, it was not only the light that gained ascendency in transpersonal New Ageism but a particular species of Easternized nondualism. Thomas Dean (1984), reviewing the perennialist position wrote:

> A transcendent referent nondualistically conceived (with the help of language drawn from Hindu, Buddhist, or mystical traditions), in which all culturally derived religious differences are ultimately transcended.... This transcendent reality is what is already and always there, and our knowing of it, which involves a mode of thinking that transcends our ordinary mode of cognition, is similarly a knowledge (gnosis) that is "already there." Knowing is primarily a matter of clarifying, of "removing the veil of darkness that obscures," this primordial truth. (p. 213)

The dichotomy between light and darkness can very easily translate into New Age hubris. If I do not locate myself in what might be called a dissociated nirvanic defense, if I refuse to pay cult to the esoteric light of New Age Oneness/nondualism, or if I am critical thereof, then I can be swiftly relegated to some dark/samsaric/unawakened realm—such is the nature of interpersonal one-upping.

This hybrid esoteric core garners some of its emotional power and authoritative force by proclaiming that its One Truth is a pure, pre-existing or given truth, a truth always already there—in life and presumably in death—awaiting our evolutionary arrival. Charismatic authority is also secured through the idea that it is a truth that blows in from every direction, that it represents the world's great wisdom traditions (Hammer, 2003). By way of example, consider the following proclamation by perennialist philosopher Georg Feuerstein in a work on Tantric yoga:

> As the great spiritual traditions of the world affirm, truth is always one, though there are many pathways to it. Truth is Reality, which is singular, what is relative are our angles of perception and comprehension (Feuerstein 1998, 42-43).[20]

Affirmations of this perspectivist version of perennialism (Ferrer 2002) are numerous among New Agers and transpersonalists. Feuerstein's perspective, like Shelley's, is nevertheless relative to its context which is, inescapably, a product of globalization. Feuerstein's claim on the nature of Truth gains authoritative power not only from its proclaimed source in the juxtaposition of great wisdom traditions, but also in the subtle promotion that this One-Truth reality comes from all around the globe.

A consideration of the religious theme of life after death can serve to outline how perennialism comes into being. Adopting a contextualist position (cf. Katz, 1978), Olav Hammer (2003) noted that the more one looks at "the structures, interpretations, ideological uses and narrative details of the various speculations on life after death the more they appear to be unique. Hindu reincarnation is not the same as kabbalistic reincarnation" (p. 52), and so on.[21] "However," he continued, "for a synthesizing mind intent on finding a perennial philosophy underlying the divergent traditions, there is ample material from which to synthesize, and every opportunity to claim that the divergences are insignificant details" (p. 52). This act also leads to the disembedding of the wisdom traditions:

> Bits and pieces of non-Western traditions are disembedded from their original religious contexts. Through an incessant bricolage carried out by leading religious virtuosi, these fragments are reembedded in a modern, Western esoteric religious setting. The principal mechanism of doing this, is by forcing these exotic elements into a fairly rigid, pre-existing interpretive mould. Thereby, to the

believer, the same message does indeed seem to come from everywhere. (p. 56)

This act of forcing together is cosmological hybridization. In the writings of Ken Wilber (1996), whom many see as the leading transpersonal-perennialnondual virtuoso, one finds exactly this procedure:

> This is the phenomenon of transcendence—or enlightenment, or liberation, or moskha, or wu or satori. This is what Plato meant by stepping out of the cave of shadows and finding the Light of Being; for Einstein's "escaping the delusion of separateness." This is the aim of Buddhist meditation, of Hindu Yoga and Christian mystical contemplation.... there is nothing spooky, occult or strange in any of this—and this is the perennial philosophy. (p. 9)

If Wilber's perennial philosophy is a site for disembedded and re-embedded spiritual objects (cf. Giddens, 1991), it is also a product of what Hammer called *synonymization*, a process which lends the writer a mask of authority. Synonymization is linked to a psychological process in which one is invited to "return to the trust in experts" (Hammer, 2003, p. 55). The crafty use of exotic words (e.g., moksha, wu, satori) in English texts expresses a double meaning and gives an "air of authenticity" hinting that the author is "cognizant with the writings of an exotic culture" (or many cultures) or at the least a grasp of "specialized and arcane vocabulary" (p. 55) not accessible to the layperson. Hammer pointed out that

> the sheer incomprehensibility and untranslatability of the terminology ensures that the reader will have little choice but to accept the interpretations of the writer. To what extent is it reasonable to claim that mana equals prana? The average reader has little possibility to evaluate the author's claims" (pp. 55-56).

This all goes to the securing of charismatic, religious, and esoteric authority.

The supposed esoteric core of perennialist transpersonal psychology is thus exposed as more of a trick of the light or sleight of hand than an eternal truth—a religious globalization, a One-Truthism that has more in common with authoritarian religion than it does with an envisioned New Age paradise. Yet even if perennialism is thrown onto the philosophical funeral pyre, this cultural tradition of cosmological hybridization runs deep in America's cultural psyche (and beyond), and many remain bound to it. Nevertheless, with New Age transpersonalism's paradise unbound, spiritual alternatives become available to the grassroots contemporary spiritual community which are perhaps closer to the original New Age values that existed before the upsurge of its more narcissistic or totalitarian elaborations—values such as collaboration, healing, and participation in divinity. The recovery of Martin Buber's relational spirituality becomes a possible alternative—perhaps even a crucial one.

The Participatory Turn and Relational Spirituality

Recently, with what has been called the participatoryturn in transpersonal psychology (e.g., Ferrer 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008; Heron, 1992, 1998, 2006; Lahood, 2007), there has been a call for a more relational spirituality in transpersonalism in which human needs, interests, and identity—is the linga franca.

Prior to this proposed participatory turn Brant Cortright (1997) was straightforward about the transpersonal cosmos:

> The fundamental assumption of transpersonal psychology is that our true identity is more than a psychological ego or self but a spiritual being. This spiritual context, founded on the two perennial traditions of theism and nondualism see the psychological healing and growth of this self as part of its journey toward realizing its identity with its spiritual source. (p. 230)

Here, according to this statement, the axiomatic, fundamental, and first principle of transpersonal psychology is perennialism—even though the theistic branch has received less emphasis (e.g., Washburn, 1996). Much of current transpersonal therapy and inquiry are bound to the idea that eventually one will come to know the Real, our True Self, or, as the Zen Buddhist puts it, our Original Face... before we were born.

The scope of this turn should not be underestimated, as it stands to change the original face of transpersonal theory—and potentially New Age thinking—beyond recognition. This radical restructuring of relationships and spirituality without fealty to the assumptions inherent in a New Age perennial overseer or idealized nondual Eastern religions heralds a major rebirth. Such a project is more than a rebranding of transpersonalism; it is a reordering of the transpersonal cosmos, nearer to what Peter Berger

(1967) called "cosmization," which is the "enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established" (p. 25). In this case the older perennial cosmos is being contested by a participatory cosmos, one that may lead to genuinely new spiritual shores (cf. Ferrer, 2002). This thesis is discussed more fully in "Relational Spirituality, Part 2. The Belief in Others as a Hindrance to Enlightenment: Narcissism and the Denigration of Relationship within Transpersonal Psychology and the New Age" (in this issue).

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Notes

1. Prothero (1997) noted that this is in fact not true– various American Indian tribes had practiced cremation.
2. I am much indebted to Prothero's (1997) excellent study entitled, "Lived Religion and the Dead: the Cremation Movement in Gilded Age America."
3. Olcott and Blavatsky constructed a lineage of multiple sources, an early example of the Western esoteric tradition as a "locus of massive globalization" (Hammer, 2001, p. 50).
4. This paper is not an attempt to theorize hybridity (see Lahood, 2008) nor is it an attempt at an exhaustive account of the hybridities blending on the ground in the transpersonal and New Age imagination; because of space limitations I will focus on the blend of Asian and Christian religion in America as it pertains to transpersonal psychology. Left out of this version is the important African-American hybrid cosmology that grew from slavery, Christianity, and African religion, which bred a powerful religious ethos with resilience and resistance at its heart (Akinyele, 2003)—an ethos in many ways adopted by the counter-culture. Another important cosmological hybrid (also to be elaborated on at a later date) is the peyote religion with its blend of Aztec, Christian, and sacred (psychotropic) plant elements. This religion spread rapidly in the 1890s and came to exert a profound influence in the world view and religious imagination of the 1960s counterculture. It is perhaps no surprise that young Americans of the time, in their resistance of materialist America, found their patterns of religion and psychedelic drug taking from two peoples oppressed by European colonization: African Americans and American Indians.
5. Author's Note: Paradise Bound was published with several mistakes made during the typesetting phase of publication. The publishers agreed to reset a version without the mistakes and this can be found at www. relationalspirit.com
6. In Huxley and Watts one can see what are perhaps the first sprouts of the discipline that came to be the transpersonal movement and eventually the New Age; indeed Anthony Sutich (1969) defined the transpersonal movement some years later as "a group... who are interested in those ultimate human capacities and potentialities that have no systematic place in positivistic or behaviorist theory" (p. 15, emphasis in original). The description of the transpersonal movement's interests that followed has been called "one of the earliest descriptions of what would later become the New Age" (Drury, 1989, pp. 38-39); this description listed, among others, the following topics: "individual and species-wide metaneeds, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, B-values, ecstasy, mystical experiences, awe, being, self-actualization, essence, bliss, wonder, ultimate meaning, transcendence of self, spirit, oneness, cosmic awareness... maximum interpersonal encounter" (Sutich, 1969, p. 16).
7. Here are Spretnak's (1982) observations:

> From the overtly political dimension of the sixties, we carried forth an awareness of power dynamics and structures of dominance within religious and other institutions. From the counterculture dimension of the sixties came additional political challenges to deeply held assumptions. A range of exploratory experiences had peeled back the tightly proscribed "normalcy" to reveal unimagined richness and depth of being. A number of experiential awakenings lingered well into the seventies: the honoring of the body; the revelation of an expansive spirituality; the realization of human embeddednesss in nature and in the dynamics of the cosmos; the liberty of nonrigid, egalitarian social forms; and the confidence to create such forms and practices according to personal and communal needs, dreams and desires. (p. xii)

8. In my opinion notions of higher or evolved consciousness are easily adopted (introjected) and become spiritual defenses.
9. This will be here referred to as the nirvanic defense.
10. Another popular perennial system, Hameed Ali's diamond approach (1996), requires some comment on the subject of narcissism and perennialism. It is an Americanized hybrid blend of Western object relations with Sufism and gestalt awareness (Cortright, 1997, p. 91). Interestingly, Heron (1998) has identified Hameed Ali's work as Western

Buddhism (p. 109). This perhaps points to the slippery nature of hybridity. According to Cortright (1997), the founder of the approach "positions himself in the nondual tradition with its accompanying biases and accepts the Buddhist notion of no self, yet speaks of essence as something that mediates between the individual and the Absolute" (p. 94). Thus his praxis appears to be a version of Americanized One-Truthism (which as I am suggesting here as deep implications in the creation of narcissistic modes of consciousness).

Narcissism is the dominant leitmotif in this system but, according to Heron (1998), there is a problem here relating to

> the Western Buddhist's definition of narcissism as contraction upon the separate self and alienation from the presence of Being (Almaas, 1996). If a person is defined in theory and represented in spiritual practice as *nothing but* a separate self, then... it is an open question as to what degree the various forms of higher narcissism—supposedly a reaction to spiritual transformation... are themselves the product of the restrictive nature of the definition and the practice.... To raise the question certainly not to deny the pronounced tendency of a person to contract into an egoic and separate self-sense (p. 109).

With nondual traditions everything but the Atman-Brahman or Buddha-mind is defined as nothing but egoic clinging—which means that any attachment to the world would be deemed narcissistic including the person's relationships. Indeed Cortright (1997) noted that in Hameed Ali's practice "the focus on inner states neglects the reality of interpersonal relationships [and] keeping an intra-psychic focus downplays the importance of the inter-subjective field" (p. 94)—another non-relational, one-sided self spirituality.

Grof's holotropic breathwork also falls into this category. It is practiced under a nondual perennial umbrella within what Jorge Ferrer (2002) has called perspectivist perennialism (p. 81). According to Ferrer, Grof's transpersonalism is a brand of neo-Vedanta and he has pointed out that Grof's writings repeatedly devalues the "material world as ilusory, imperfect or even defiled (p. 82). Almost 20 years ago Richard Tarnas (1991) placed Grof's findings into a more participatory framework, yet a strong perennial message is still foundational in Grof's transpersonal training, coupled and with a strong emphasis on inner states and individually-focused vertical spirituality. For all its merits (see Lahood, 2008), Grof's holotropic breathwork—lying on a mat couch with eyes closed, or at times used as an adjunct to Buddhist vipassana meditation (sitting with no eye contact)—is a non-relational practice.

Breathwork can also be conducted in a more collaborative/action research approach which can also serve to bypass the subtle Oriental authoritarianism inherent in perennial/evolutionary schemes. Heron (1998) has pointed out that Grof's work is not entirely free from Oriental authority. I recently attended two Grof transpersonal training and noted that the head trainer on both occasions recommended the approach of Buddhist teacher Tsultrim Allione (2008) which advocates a strong disembodied nondual message. She wrote for example that the value of her practice comes from "dissolving our own bodies... and the experience of non-dual meditative awareness that occurs in the final step of this process" (Lahood, 2008, p. 7).

11. Interestingly, Maslow appears to have been either confused or conflicted about the nature of or validity of personhood and in his writings he swings from person-centered views to cosmos-centric views of personhood and reality (Taylor, 2006). According to Maslow (1968) in the healthier person "anger is reactive (to a present situation) rather than a characterological reservoir from the past... it is realistic effective response to something real in the present, for instance to injustice, exploitation or attack, it takes the form of decisiveness, selfaffirmation, self-protection, justified indignation, fighting against evil or the like" (p. 62). Evil, according to Evans (1993), amounts to self-deceptive "hidden narcissism" (p. 200); thus when someone enacts the New Age nirvanic or yogic defense, that is, the self inflating claim to higher consciousness, they are in my opinion, more often than not, trafficking in something akin to evil. In my opinion it is right and proper in the immediate present experience to confront and oppose this narcissistic spirituality with healthy human anger. However, nirvanic defenders will then claim that this simply shows

them how unevolved the angry respondent really is because spiritual people do not get angry (cf. Batista 1996). This partly because spiritual defenses justify and constrain parts of the self including healthy feelings and affect. It is also in part due to the fact that many of the mindfulness practices characteristic of the New Age and/or contemporary Western spirituality derive from Buddhism, and according to Robert Masters, there has been an unfortunate and unquestioned adoption of Buddhist views in the development of a Western spirituality that is uncomfortable with anger (2000). The term, anger, is often conflated with such terms as hostile, vicious, nasty, hateful, and malicious without any real discrimination. In Buddhism anger is generally conceived as an unwholesome and afflicted state devoid of morality and skill (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 92). Masters (2000) has pointed out that the predominate way anger is handled is to unskilfully push it into a subterranean realm where it really does become malignant and rank (2000). This congealed excrement in the basement then pushes the spiritual nose too high air (cf. Heron, 1992) again promoting a form of spiritual narcissism fuelled by unprocessed distress.

12. Support is not generally given to the inflated shell with its self-entitlement but to the authentic person imprisoned inside it who felt unlovable and unworthy and erected the shell in the first place: "This does not mean protecting the person from disappointment by supporting the outer compensatory self (Battista, 1996, p. 258). The outer shell needs "disconfirmations... which manage to break in and poke holes in one's inflated system" (Rosenthal, 1987, p. 312) until the structure dissipates and the person opens to more authentic relational modes of being. Collaborative inquiry (see Lahood, 2010, the second part of the current paper, in this issue) could certainly be used as a process to reduce narcissism, with some important caveats: personal psychodynamics can be so entwined with her false spiritual persona that it can be difficult for her to participate relationally. It is difficult to confront such a person about her entitlement because this is met with deep hurt, rage, and withdrawal—if not en-guard the whole inquiry runs the risk of being tilted toward a private therapy session—still focused on her. Secondly, cooperative inquiry is not to be mistaken for psychotherapy for while some skill in co-handling unfinished business stirred in the inquiry is important and warranted (Heron, 1998), fundamentally collaborative inquiry is a series of inquiry cycles oriented toward transformation, self-transfiguration, and the co-creation of a social/spiritual event; it is categorically not psychotherapy, although it does have transfiguring power for those who are fortunate enough to get beyond the breakers of self-centeredness. In such a situation the helpful thing to do is sensitively suggest that she or he seek some solid psychotherapy, but of course this is to risk upsetting the whole applecart even further. Chakra balancing, tantric sex, and singing in Aramaic, while potentially enjoyable New Age pastimes, are not quite the same as those processes that can break down and reduce self-centeredness.
13. I do not mean to imply that it is only New Agers who traffic in spiritual ethnocentricy and narcissism.
14. Détente is a French word meaning to relax or ease tensions between rivals, a term that came into vogue in the 1970s with Cold War diplomacy.
15. With the failure of Western religion and secular materialism, some drew a parallel with what Hindu religion described as the age of *Kali-yuga* (not to be confused with the destructive dance of the Goddess Kali). The Kali-Yuga is the last of four millennium cycles or yugas (a cosmic saga in complexity and temporal scope which dwarfed Christianity) in which civilization and spiritually were held to degenerate into a Dark Age in which people would turn away from God, and eventually the world would be enveloped in a fire that would destroy all evil and give birth to a new age.
16. However, for sociologists, there is a problem with this position. As Heelas (1996) has pointed out, in New Age religion *unity firmly prevails over diversity*. Wouter Hanegraaff (2003) has argued that this creates an underlying incoherence in New Age perennialism (wholeness/unity/one-truthism) which has serious implications for other cultures and the state of mind of the New Ager herself. New Age Unity, he said, must inevitably translate into a form of spiritual totalitarianism. He argued that New Age spirituality is more appropriately seen as an aspect of the global Americanization. American values of democracy and religious freedom are intimately linked with the New Age phenomenon

of a spiritual supermarket. According to Hanegraaff the problem lies at the heart of the primary New Age mission: that of healing the world from global fragmentation which the New Age envisions as a movement toward global wholeness, and to "bring the cultures and religions of the world together by overcoming dogmatic differences and emphasizing universal wisdom traditions common to all of them" (p. 16). But this in itself, while an understandable and commendable sentiment, is a form of ethnocentrism, which while attempting to go beyond the dualism and exclusivism of Christianity falls into the same trap. The logic is simple but usually unquestioned by New Agers who tend to think that thinking itself, particularly critical thinking, is seen as negative and therefore part of the problem.

17. Shamanism, now an important part of the New Age, is another area that can potentially breed spiritual narcissism.
18. Commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, Heron believed his spiritual projection theory could, in principle, apply to the New Age scenario and argued that "New Agers have culturally soaked up Orientalized nondualism with its authoritarianism and projected their innate spiritual authority onto their internalized beliefs—resulting in the unaware giving away of their spiritual autonomy" (personal communication, December 17, 2010).

    However, I do not think it is common to project onto unconsciously internalized beliefs. Rather, I hold these as introjections—which is to say, unawarely internalized cultural beliefs and fantasies, along with the authority, meaning, and charisma that they have come to embody and which they pass on to others in speech acts. Examining these internalized beliefs to find out where they help or hinder one's spiritual development is the important issue. But here readers must discern for themselves.
19. Persons claiming elite membership in globalizing religious groups with the special status apportioned to Oriental enlightenment (in the form of masters and gurus) can, in my observation, use this membership as a source of narcissistic supply.
20. Just as the afterlife is imagined differently, so do the ultimate mystical goals of different cultures and traditions differ. Wulff (2000) here summed up the contextualist position:

    > The Jewish "preexperiential" or "conditioning pattern," Katz pointed out in illustration, includes the teaching that experiences of unity with the divine do not happen, given the Jewish conception of God as radically Other and the principles traditionally recommended for reaching the mystic goal. The result is that ecstatic, self-forgetting moments of unity, of absorption into God, are rare among Jewish mystics, who are far more likely to experience "the Divine Throne, or the angel Metatron, or aspects of the *Sefiroth* [Divine Emanations], or the heavenly court and palaces, or the Hidden Torah, or God's secret Names" (Katz, 1978, p. 34). The complex Buddhist preconditioning, in contrast, prepares the Buddhist mystic for a rather different experience, *nirvana*, a state not of relationship but apparently of selfless tranquility. (p. 426; italics in original).

21. Ken Ring (2000) has noted in Religious Wars in the NDE Movement, the attempt by various religious groups including A Course in Miracles, Theosophists, Anthroposophists, and certain Tibetan Buddhists, among others, to annex and co-opt the near-death experience (NDE) territory. Soteriologically speaking, each religion offers different perspectives on the afterlife. To unify religion with a transcendental unity is again to relax these tensions.

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Relational Spirituality, Part 2
The Belief in Others as a Hindrance to Enlightenment: Narcissism and the Denigration of Relationship within Transpersonal Psychology and the New Age

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The aim of this paper is to tease out from the New Age religion and religious transpersonal psychology a more relational spirituality. Humanistic and transpersonal psychologies were important forces in the emergence of the social phenomenon of the New Age. New Age transpersonalism leans toward a restrictive non-relational spirituality because of its historical affirmation of individualism and transcendence. Relational spirituality, which is central to the emerging participatory paradigm, swims against strong and popular currents in New Age transpersonal thinking which tend to see spirituality as an individual, personal, inner pursuit, often into Eastern/Oriental nondualism. Whatever the merits of impersonal Advaita Vedanta or Buddhism—and there are of course merits—these are categorically not relational spiritualities.

Keywords: ***cosmological hybridity, New Age religion, transpersonal psychology, spiritual narcissism, relational spirituality***

> *In India we find perhaps the most radical of all versions of world rejection, culminating in the great image of the Buddha, and the world is a burning house and man's urgent need is a way to escape it.*
>
> *—Robert Bellah, 1972, p. 264*

> *While the transpersonal movement has been informed and inspired by peak experiences of virtually all religious traditions, it not surprisingly has drawn most comfortably from Buddhist theory and practice.*
>
> *—Robert McDermott, 1993, p. 208*

Horizontal or relational spirituality can be seen as an intervention in overly vertical, non-relational trends in New Age-transpersonalism's thinking and practices. This paper continues the points made in "Relational Spirituality, Part 1: Paradise Unbound: Cosmic Hybridity, and Spiritual Narcissism in the 'One Truth' of New Age-Transpersonalism" (Lahood, 2010, in this issue), demonstrating how a relational approach can surmount many of the difficulties that inure to New Age-transpersonalism. Ironically, Martin Buber's relational ethos was also present in both the humanist and transpersonal movements in the form of Gestalt therapy which had assimilated Buber's ideas to its canon (although Buber argued that true mutuality could not be achieved in the therapeutic relationship). Perhaps the most central of the psycho-technologies employed in the humanistic era, along with the encounter group, gestalt therapy strongly embraced one of Buber's central ideas—the contrast of what he called *I-it* relating and *I-thou* relating. In the words of Brant Cortright (1997):

> I-it relating is normal, secular relating in which the other is a seen as an object, a thing to be used, a means to an end. I-thou relating, on the other hand, brought a person into a sacred relationship in which the other is viewed as an end in itself (p. 106).[1]

It was this appreciation of the authentic, the inter-subjective and the call for equality that could potentially push Buber's I-thou intention to "its highest culmination in a transpersonal perspective which truly embraces the

sacredness of relationship" (p. 106). Here, potentially, the transpersonal is in the interpersonal (Naranjo, 1978). However, there is a serious question as to whether this central tenet of Buber's was ever really fully embraced by the transpersonal movement. Wilber (1999), for example, ranks Buber's spirituality beneath his Oriental non-dualism. For Buber the true estate of authentic spiritual realization was not based in an individual's inner experience but in this realm of the Between, a realm to which he gave ontological status (Ferrer, 2002, p. 119).

It seems to me that Buber's relational ethos was lost in the stampede for higher consciousness. The blending of the American Transcendentalist trinity (Christianity, Buddhism, and Advaita; Lahood, 2010—this issue) in the psychedelic imagination, coupled with humanistic psychology, brought transpersonal psychology into being—which in turn gave rise to a Wilberian paradise to which the movement was bound for at least 20 years (Lahood, 2008, 2010). Indeed, a close look at the early transpersonal movement's commitments shows that they were not particularly relational, but tended instead to overtly devalue relationship.

The Marriage of Maslow and Zen

The affirmation of self was a central aspect of humanistic psychology, central to the self realization or self actualization espoused by Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, and Abraham Maslow. It called for a kind of autonomy and independence that suggested not needing other people—a sort of, you go your way I'll go mine, approach that is attested to by the so-called gestalt prayer:

> 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 (Fritz Perls, 1969).

It has been claimed that this kind of robust Nietzschean philosophy found an expression in Mary Daley's elitist feminist theology that urged self-sufficiency and a willingness to abandon obligations and commitments to others without feelings of guilt or emotional ambivalence (Morris, 1994, p. 181).[2] These rugged humanistic ideals would be coupled with the extreme individualism of Buddhism—compassionate, maybe, but not very relational; this attitude still appears to be a central foundation of transpersonalism and its New Age shadow.[3]

Here is an example of Buddhism's historically non-relational ethos: The psychoanalytic anthropologist Melford Spiro (1987), who studied Buddhism on the ground in Burma, viewed Burmese Theravadan Buddhist religion as a culturally constituted psychological defense mechanism. In a discussion about Buddhist "goers forth," the men who leave home to join the fraternity of monks, he recounted a famous Buddhist teaching story about an earlier incarnation of the Buddha who leaves his children with dubious caregivers as he sets out on his quest for enlightenment:

> Beginning with the Buddha himself, "leaving home" has meant abandoning not only parents, but also—since some "goers forth" have been married when embarking upon their quest for enlightenment—wives and children as well [the classic locus of this story] is the Vessentara Jakata, the most famous Buddhist myth in Theravada Buddhist societies (The Jakata 1957: vol. 6). The Prince Vessantara, abandoned his beloved wife and children in order to seek Enlightenment. To attain his quest he gave his children as servants to a cruel Brahmin, and his wife to yet another. When his children, beaten and oppressed by the Brahmin, managed to escape and find their way back to Vessentara, he was filled with "dire grief"—his heart palpitated, his mouth panted, blood fell from his eyes—until he arrived at the insight that "All this pain comes from affection and no other cause; I must quiet this affection, and be calm." Having achieved that insight, he was able to abandon his children. (p. 279)

Thus when faced with the parental responsibility that comes with procreative relationship the hallowed Buddha-to-be had no raft of emotional skills or interpersonal competencies to draw on, and could only redouble his efforts in the practice of *tanha* (severing of bonds). Having achieved his own serenity, he turned his back on his abused children, children whom he put in harm's way in the first place, diligently leaving to them to work out their own salvation.

Spiro explained that the primary responsibility for the Buddhist is his attempt to attain *nirvana*, relationships with parents, beloveds, wives, and children notwithstanding. Reflecting on the cosmological design of the Buddha, anthropologist Morton Klass (1995)

wrote, "Nothing really exists in the universe but desire and the manifestation of desire, since all of these offer nothing but continued suffering, each person should strive to relinquish desire in all its forms and by doing so achieve nirvana, which, for the Buddhist, means the blessedness of nonexistence" (p. 52). Once he or she has a "comprehension of the true characteristics of existence *viz*., impermanence, suffering, and the absence of ego. This comprehension, in turn, is believed to lead to the severance of all desire for, and cathexis of, the world" (Spiro, 1987, p. 152). "Son and wife, father and mother… and relatives [are] the different objects of desire" (p. 279), and therefore a hindrance to enlightenment.

Spiro wrote that this attitude is also present not only in other Asian religions such as Taoism, but also in Christianity: [4]

> Lu Hsiu Ching retired from the world to the mountains where he studied. He left the mountains for a while to look for some medicine. When he passed through his native place he stayed at his home for a few days. At that time his daughter began to run a fever all of the sudden and fell into a critical condition. The family pleaded with him to cure her. But Hsiu Ching left, saying: "having abandoned my family, I am in the midst of training. The house I stopped by is no different from an inn to me." (p. 279)

The sage's critically ill daughter and distressed family were of no more interest to him than a transient stranger in a bar. Are these Buddhist and Taoist teachings and demonstrations really the skillful means of the highly evolved or are they more like psychologically defensive behaviors aggrandized as high spirituality?

As the human-potential movement became enamored with deterritorialized, detraditionalized, and idealized Eastern religion—particularly Hindu Advaita, Tibetan Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism—it naturally enough began to evolve away from secular humanistic psychology, away from interpersonal encounter, and toward a more *impersonal* discipline.[5] Transpersonal New Agism began to take shape in a milieu that brought together the very powerful ego-burning experiential therapies of the human potential movement (e.g., the encounter group, neo-Reichian/gestalt techniques) and the psychedelic experience of the consciousness expanding movement with the Eastern liberations espoused in the languages of Hinduism and Buddhism. In one very real sense, Western humanistic psychology with its peak experiences was joined at the hip with Eastern spiritual concepts—a marriage of Maslow and Zen.

Mahayana Zen Buddhism was the most important influence on the counterculture with its philosophy of *emptiness* (Sanskrit, *sunyata*; Japanese *ku;* Glock & Bellah, 1976, p. 2). As transpersonal philosopher Michael Washburn (1995) had it, "In the early years transpersonal theory was predominantly humanistic in its psychology and Eastern in its religion, a *synthesis* of Maslow and Buddhism (primarily Zen)" (p. 3, emphasis supplied). The term Zen here may be a misnomer, since what came to be popular American Zen was not very Zen at all.[6] Washburn's term "synthesis" is therefore worthy of scrutiny. In understanding the marriage of Maslow and Zen in the young American mind-world of the 1960s, one finds an important key to understanding New Age transpersonalism, the marriage of East and West, self-spirituality, and the phenomenon that is given a superficial gloss as the perennial philosophy.

The philosophical fly-in-the-ointment for early transpersonal psychology may well have been the Buddhist concept of *anatta* (no-self; Morris, 1994, p. 66). While Buddhism shares many doctrines with Hinduism, what really separates Buddhism from Hinduism is this radical doctrine—a doctrine that belongs wholly unto Buddhism. The crucial difference between Buddhism's *anatta* (and its correlates: sunyata, void, nirvana) and the godheads found in Brahmanic Hinduism (e.g., Advaita Vedanta, Kashmiri Shaivism) and Mahivarian Jainism is that Buddhist Nirvana has no ontological status (Bharati, 1965, pp. 26-27). When the Buddha denies the Hindu's *atman* he also denies his eternal *Brahman.* As feminist Rita Gross (1994) has written, "Philosophically, the teachings about ego-less-ness deny that there is any permanent, abiding, unchanging essence that is the 'real person,' whether the essence denied is the Hindu *atman*… or the more familiar Christian personal and eternal soul" (p. 159).

Nevertheless, there is still an overlap between Buddhism and Hinduism in that the personal self fares no better in Hindu traditions than it does in Buddhism, for in Hinduism it is only talked about long enough to denigrate it and reject its ontological and empirical status. The self (in contrast with the Self) is at best assimilated to a theological construct; in other words, the person is identified with a metaphysical Self (capital), with no self (lower case) remaining (Bharati, 1985, p. 89). This is also the Wilberian position, as Washburn (1995) wrote,

"On this point Wilber and the structural-hierarchical paradigm concur with the principle Eastern view espoused by Buddhism and nondualistic Advaita Vedanta: the individual self, although seemingly real, is ultimately an illusion" (p. 35). In Buddhism the Big Self of the Vedantis also disappears—there is no *satchitananda*, no sentient cosmos awash with absolute being, consciousness, and bliss—only the blessed release from existence, the flame blown out.

Morris (1994) has pointed out the "the great pains" to which transpersonal theorists have gone in their attempts to "reinterpret Buddhism and make the doctrine of anatta less disturbing, and more in harmony with Western conceptions of the self" (p. 66). He showed how various writers in the field (Mokusen Miyuki, Claire Owens, the Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki, and later Ken Wilber) have conflated and overlapped or hybridized Zen Buddhism with what appear to be Hindu/Gnostic descriptions of Self and the process of merging with the divine. These efforts are reminiscent of the Romantic version of Buddhism offered by Arnold (1879/1885), which envisioned Buddhist extinction as a dewdrop that "slips into the shining sea" (p. 275). This blend was mixed in with a liberal helping of Carl Jung's analytical psychology and his self realization project:

> Whereas Buddha questioned the reality of the self... contemporary transpersonal psychologists, influenced by Jung, find a "deep" self in the unconscious and see "self realization" as the "merging" of this ego or self with some Universal Consciousness or Mind (equated with the void [sunyata] as the ultimate reality). (Morris, 1994, p. 66).

Whatever this construction might be—to return to Washburn's comment for a moment—it "ain't" very Zen.

It appears that the transpersonal way around Buddhism's thorny crown of anatta/no-self was to blend Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—a process long alive in the hybridizing American religious imagination (Lahood, 2010, in this issue). This is no mean feat because Vedanta, according to Shankara, claims its nondualism as the final and highest order of consciousness—that is, asserts it to be above Buddhism (Morris, 1994). In constrast, Nagarjuna, the important reformer of middle way Buddhism,

> trenchantly criticized, following Buddha's example, the Upanishad and Vedanta doctrine that Brahman (absolute spirit) was the sole reality in the word. There was no "ground" or creator of the phenomenal world, and no "soul" within the human subject, identical with Brahman. (p. 65)

Nagarjuna along with the Buddha claimed that the famous central tenant of Hinduism, *tat tvam asi* (thou art that), was nothing but an illusion. Thus it would seem that the spiritual ulimates found in Vedanta and Buddhism are not comfortable bedfellows.

Nevertheless, observe the bewitching way in which Grof (1998) easily joined Hindu and Buddhist postulates together from data gathered from persons with hybridizing minds amplified in psychedelic states:

> On several occasions, people who experienced both the Absolute Consciousness and the Void had the insight that these two states are essentially identical and interchangeable, in spite of the fact that they can be experientially distinguished from each other and they might appear conceptually and logically incompatible. (p. 32)

Grof's apparent forcing together of two competing systems guts the authority within each system through a crafty amalgamation and does away with the inherent dualism of competing truth claims, and the dualism of Us and Them, but in doing so he creates a new and more slippery authority, a third liminal space (cf. Bhabha, 1995; Young, 1995)—the so-called esoteric core of the perennial philosophy. With it came the rhetoric that beyond the taint of doctrinal difference, beyond the Buddha, Nagarjuna, and Shankara, beyond the stain of culture and language, and beyond the colorful clothing of religion, was the transcendental unity of all religions; for the faithful, One Pure Truth—undefiled by the gross relational world in which humans live and breathe. To perennialize the religious universe—to claim a transcendent unity of all religions—is to both appropriate Buddhism and to put it on an even footing with the liberations of the other religions. Morris (1994) is adamant, however, that this conflation of the Absolute deity of Vedanta with the no-self of Buddhism is "woefully misleading" and warns that Buddhism can be simply "twisted" to "serve the needs of the adherents of religious mysticism" (p. 69).

Be that as it might, between 1963 and 1974 the motivation behind the intense desire of young people to experience and perform another reality through "chemical Nirvanas" (Furst & Schafer, 1996, p. 507)

was agonizingly bound to America's war on Vietnam and a felt loss of innocence. The world is indeed a burning house and the Buddha's salvific, if solitary message is that suffering ends when one relinquishes all attachment to the world (in the Buddha's day there was no napalm, mechanized warfare, or nuclear weaponry, nor the threat of WWIII). Oppressed by the power and policies of the Christian American nation state many turned from the horrors of man-made war and politics and sought refuge, release, and revitalized spiritual power in the alternatives proffered by the East. A unique and highly culturally-relative spiritual response was sought to counter the war. The following paragraph is a description of that culture's psychotropic quest, in the words of anthropologist Raymond Prince (1974):

> The individual's ego regresses to earlier levels of adaptation in an attempt to discover an alternate solution…the mystical descent is to the earliest level of experience, before the creation of the world as it were, in the primal chaos, long before self and other have become differentiated, before space and time, before language…the mystic state is a "flashback" of that experience. The mystic returns from his descent with the perennial mystical message: at the root of things all is one, all is good, the universe may be trusted; salvation lies in simplification, in the de-institutionalization, and above all in love. (p. 257)

According to sociologist Donald Stone (1976), members of the religious counter-culture of that time sought to "transcend the oppressiveness of the culture by transforming themselves as individuals" (p. 93). It is this action, this social imperative to transform the self (self-spirituality), that prepares the way for New Age transpersonalism. This early movement had at its core what Stone called "gestalt consciousness" (p. 94), a form of awareness training (as noted with a foot in Zen Buddhism) that advocated a non-judgmental attitude to the contents of attention and an emphasis on the awareness of the present moment.

The gestalt attitude was the basic foundation of human potential groups and practices as it enabled both bodily awareness and personal insight (Stone, 1976). Exquisite phenomenological attention to present experience could also apparently result in a so-called *satori*—appropriating a Japanese Zen Buddhist term—a non-dual experience, an awakening, and a seeing-though of illusion. Thus, its powerful techniques were capable of opening one to transpersonal awareness; with this the secular human potential movement soon evolved toward a more mystical orientation. Stone also pointed out that the descriptions of consciousness pervading this movement were similar to psychedelic experiences on which the early innovators had conducted research. He wrote:

> Participants in these "transpersonal" disciplines report experiences of tapping into cosmic energy, of being at one with the universe, or of realizing the true Self… to the extent that this movement increasingly provides experiences of transcendence, cosmic consciousness, the Self beyond the self, or of nothingness, it may be considered religious. (pp. 104-105)

Hence comes a religious transpersonalism.

It seems evident that what one sees in this evolution from the gestalt attitude (which carried with it the promise of Buber's I-thou relational spirituality) to a more transpersonal orientation toward cosmic consciousness (cf. Ram Dass, 1971) is an evolution that seems to prefer the liberations favored by specific nondual Eastern religions. As Stone (1976) observed, "the self-transcendence of merging with infinite cosmic energy or the ground of all being" (p. 96) had become the coin of that realm. Buber and his appreciation of the Between and the attention to relationship as a potential transpersonal domain of *praxis*, seems to have become a lover left at the altar in favor of realizing one's Original Face, Essence, or True Self—an impersonal nondual eradication of the many in favor of the One. In this way the transpersonal movement lost touch with its relational foundation, prefigured in the human potential movement and the more relational commune culture.

According to the new discipline's founding father, Abraham Maslow, transpersonal psychology—a term coined for the movement by Stanislav Grof (2008)—was to be "centered in the cosmos *rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity and self-actualization*" (Maslow, 1968, iii, emphasis supplied). Maslow's ideas were to become elaborate and pervasive.

Seven years later in a popular text, *Transpersonal Psychologies* (Tart, 1975) Claire Owens (1975) claimed Zen Buddhism as a "psychology of self realization" and wrote that the Buddha's purpose for man was that he "awaken his original mind that has been covered by the dust of intellection and delusions of the relative world" (p. 165). "The individual's unconsciousness (self)

merges with Pure Consciousness or Formless Self"—the dewdrop slips into the shining sea—this Zen, as Morris (1994, p. 66) has pointed out, is not very Zen. One can see that the stage has been set for transpersonalism to become a largely impersonal, non-relational, cosmo-centric psychology—the motivation for its social actors: transcendence, detachment, dissociation, merging with the One. It was at this same moment in time, just after the end of the Vietnam war, that Ken Wilber's star rose as the virtuoso of the movement's neo-perennial epoch.

Some two decades later a book focused on transpersonal psychotherapy (Cortright, 1997) claimed that transpersonalism was coming of age and that its bourgeoning worldview was to be found reflected in all manner of media—books, workshops, and psychotherapy trainings, and so forth. That same book observed that Ken Wilber was without doubt "the most widely known and influential writer in the field of transpersonal psychology today" and that Wilber's "historical importance should not be underestimated" (pp. 64-65). However, Wilber's perennialism has come under sustained criticism from within the transpersonal movement (Capriles, 2009; Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 1998; Lahood, 2008; Rothberg & Kelly, 1998; Wright, 1996) among others.

Satsang and Internalized Self-Rejection

One of the claims of critics is that Wilber's system over-privileges patriarchal, world-denying religions such as the Gnosticism of Plotinus, the Buddhism of Gautama Siddhartha, and the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara. These religions, as suggested above, historically tended to devalue the phenomenal world, the human body, womb, women, world, sex, and relationship (cf. Laughlin, 1990): Buddhism with its doctrine of no-self and its desire to sever ties from the world; Gnosticism with its rigid divide between the material world and spirit; and the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara with his well known modern follower, Ramana Maharshi, who made it very clear "that the Self is in no way related to the body but is identified with an impersonal deity" (Morris, 2006, p. 120).

Wilber held out Maharshi as "an exemplar of nondual realization" (Cortright, 1997, p. 73), However, Heron (1998) was less impressed with Wilber's nonduality, writing that the "return of the one to the one, the absolute realization of the identity of ineffable formlessness and the infinitude of forms, is simply a pneumatic illusion, the final most impressive defense against coming to terms with embodiment" (p. 85). Nor was he inspired by Maharshi's lifestyle or the implication (by Wilber) that it could be a model for the "future spiritual development of mankind" (p. 85). Heron wrote:

> Ramana Maharshi, often proclaimed as a supreme modern exemplar of nondual attainment, achieved this state by a massive rejection of his own embodiment. At age, 17, while perfectly healthy, he had a sudden pathological fear of death, fell on the floor and simulated being dead, and so awoke, he believed, to the self as spirit. He sustained this state by going off to sit in a dirty pit, attending to the One, while neglecting and abusing his life. He let his unwashed body rot, attacked by bugs and covered in sores, leaving it to others to provide some minimal care. Such sustained abuse of his body led to life-long asthma and arthritic rheumatism. While being consumed with terminal cancer, he said "The body itself is a disease".... He achieved an intense state of spiritual consciousness at the cost of a sustained, repressive constriction of immanent spiritual life. (p. 85)

The following description of a practitioner's experience with a contemporary Advaita Vedanta teacher speaks to the disembodiment validated in satsang practices:

> Papaji's words were heard but there was *no one left* to whom he could address them. The speaking and the hearing were occurring as one single, impersonal event. (Blackstone, 2006, p. 27)

"No one left," just a single impersonal event… the One... it is hard to have a relationship when someone else is busy being an impersonal event. In this sort of experience there does not appear to be the distinction or differentiation needed to give and receive in relationship. To be clear, if one is predisposed to follow the Advaitin way and this spiritual realization, then all well and good; but if one values relationship and embodiment then an orientation to impersonal nondualism will not be useful.

As an example of impersonal nondualism in action, consider the following: The one-time wife of an American Advaita Vedantan guru told me when I was doing a small anthropological project on New Age beliefs and childbirth (Lahood, 2009) that she had confronted her guru husband about his repeated infidelities, asking him, "did you have sex with such and such." The satsang leader's response was to say, "I neither fucked her or not fucked her." The apparent rationale for this statement

was that this relating embodied world is simply *maya* (illusion). Psychologically this posture functioned as a massive psychological defense parading as high spirituality, based on the notion that the relating world is not really here—exemplifying the casual, crazy-making indifference and superiority of the nirvanic defense (see Lahood, 2010).

Another example occurred when I attended a transpersonal conference sponsored by a university in England. At one stage in the proceedings a well-know transpersonalist, a follower of Wilber and a champion of nondualism, took a workshop. The elderly gent invited people in the audience who had had a non-dual experience to join him in an inner circle and talk with each other about their experience; the rest of us were not allowed to speak unless we had a nondual event, and our place was to look on as they compared notes together their backs to us. After this rather privileging exclusive/inclusive exercise the older gentleman asked for questions from the rest of the audience, and a woman sitting next to me in her mid 40s asked him, "but what about relationship?" He snapped at her rather brusquely, "Oh you don't need all that shit." As an anthropologist among the New Age transpersonal tribe I am not yet convinced that popular transpersonalism has truly embraced or felt the embrace of sacred I-thou relationship.

A[n] (Americanized) Course in (Vedanticized) Miracles

A recent volume of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (2006) included a special topic section on syncretism in transpersonal theory. Among other papers it featured an attempt to blend Gebser's integral conceptions of consciousness—Gebser was a powerful influence on Ken Wilber's nondual perennialism—with A Course in Miracles (ACIM; Holland & MacDonald, 2006). While it is vitally important to explore transpersonal theory for its syncretism, or hybridity, the authors seemed unaware that transpersonal psychology and ACIM are themselves hybridizations of hybrids of hybrids.

The authors wrote, "Christian in statement but expressing the wisdom of the perennial philosophy [ACIM] interweaves an intricate non-dualistic metaphysics" (Holland & MacDonald, 2006, p. 70). The bit further on they stated, "The basic premise of ACIM is that reality is spirit. The system is founded upon a nondualistic metaphysics which views the physical universe, including the body, as an illusory fabrication of consciousness" (p. 74).

In the canon of ACIM and its various offshoots the world and body simply disappear—a pattern found in Advaita Vedanta, in which the world is relegated to "dreamlike maya" (Loy, 1988, p. 30). This is a pattern similar to that enacted by Jesus of Nazareth when he "discarded his physical vessel in exchange for a spiritual one" (Muesse, 1999, pp. 391).[7] According to Hanegraaff (1996), of all the New Age movements none come close to the "uncompromising world-rejection found in the Course" (p. 115)—a world rejection that reflects the spread of Vedantic thought in America. In other words, the Course represents a reproduction of Hindu thought.

The Vedantist Ramakrishna has been cited by Richard Bache (2001) as saying, "For the *avatara,* there is no karma, no limiting or binding impressions from the history of personal and collective embodiment… including both individual and collective ego centricity, including as well the very nature of a substantive universe" (p. 296)—in other words, the universe disappears. It was Swami Vivekananda, the principle disciple of Ramakrishna, who was the key figure in the dissemination of Advaita Vedanta in the America of the 1890s. Speaking in private and public forums including clubs and universities on lecture tours, he also organized centers throughout the United States. Historian Hal Bridges (1969) wrote,

> The Vedanta taught in the American centers embraces... Vedantic nondualism of Shankara (Advaita Vedanta) and the Yoga of Patanjali. It conceives of the world of time and space as maya, lacking ultimate reality, and of the one God as being at once transcendent (*Brahman*) and immanent as the divine Self *(Atman)* within every man. It teaches that man's goal in life is to overcome desire, which binds him to a weary round of karma-fettered reincarnation, and to realize that his true, indwelling Self is one with God— 'That thou art," in the profoundly simple Vedic phrase *Tat tvam asi*. (p. 341)

Yet Advita Vedanta has a history going back beyond Vivekananda to Emerson and the New England Transcendentalists (see Lahood, 2010). What ACIM draws on, then, is a deeply-embedded deposit of Vedantic thought in the American psyche.

A Course in Miracles (Anonymous, 1992) is an important if not canonical text for the New Age: two

American academics living and teaching in New York were involved in channeling and transcribing messages ostensibly from Jesus Christ during the years 1965-1972. This was in the middle years of America's War on Vietnam (1963-1974), a timing that is vastly important to the cultural shaping of ACIM. Helen Schucman received the messages and William Thetford scribed them. Interestingly, both parties claim to be spiritually naive and unexposed to spiritual teaching and doctrine. Schucman, in true Carlos Castaneda style, claimed to be a well educated atheist psychologist working at a New York university with absolutely no knowledge of things spiritual when she received the purported lessons.

But Schucman's claim of spiritual naivety does not quite ring true in that her nanny was Catholic and her mother was committed to Theosophy—a movement that blends Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Western esotericism in the mind-worlds of it believers. I would argue that ACIM is yet another hybrid cultural system—an expression of American blending in which Christian symbolism meets Vedantic philosophy meets spiritualist channelling. Theosophy's founder Madame Blatavasky claimed to have received a secret doctrine (not unlike Emmanuel Swedenborg) through automatic writing from supposedly ascended masters—a kind of channeling—that is reproduced in the scribing of ACIM. Furthermore, according to Journey Without Distance (Skutch, 1996), William Thetford's parents were Christian Scientists. Mary Baker Eddy (1917), who founded Christian Science, claimed a doctrine in which "Sin, sickness and death must be deemed as being devoid of reality" (p. 525) a theme copiously reproduced in ACIM.

Thetford had worked under the important humanistic psychologist and therapist Carl Rogers and was very much taken with Roger's powerful affirmation of unconditional love. He was also familiar with the mystical and esoteric writing of Edgar Cayce. Cayce, a world renowned psychic, would lie on a couch and enter a kind of trance state. Then, provided with the name of an individual from someone somewhere in the world he would speak in a normal voice and give answers to questions about that person. These answers, which came to be called readings, were written down by a stenographer. Thetford (1996) was also familiar with the worldview of Theosophy; in fact he claimed ACIM was "closely related to the teachings of a nondualistic Vedanta form of Hinduism… he realized that basic spiritual teachings of both [ACIM and Vedanta] had many striking similarities to each other, and that the main difference between them was that The Course was stating the perennial philosophy of eternal truths in Christian terminology" (p. 72). This is a sophisticated religious analysis from one who claimed spiritual naivety.

The authors' claims to spiritual naivety, along with the repetitious denial of the reality of guilt and the incessant theme of forgiveness and an overt need to return to innocence, become stark when set against the backdrop of the extreme chaos and civil strife in America during those times.[8] Student revolts and anti-war protests were common and included highly charged events such as the gunning down of several students at Kent State University by national guardsmen. Several Buddhist monks, followed by Christian pacifists, committed ritual suicide by self-immolation as protest against the war. During this time Eastern religious ideas were embraced by the outraged American youth culture in an attempt to deal with the horrors of the Vietnam War.

As noted the explanation for this intense desire has something to do with a loss of innocence:

> But something else was going on in the same decade. There developed a burgeoning interest, mainly among young people, and not only in the United States, in exploring "inner worlds" and "alternate realities" through the use of psychedelic substances…It was in the 60s, at a time when, coincidentally, America was losing an innocence it may never have possessed but which many people bought into, by involving itself in what was to become its most divisive and unpopular war, that the inner journey and the search for instant chemical nirvanas became a growth industry (Schaefer & Furst, 1996, p. 507).

It seems unlikely to me that Schucman, given her position as a university professor was unaware or unaffected by the intense religious climate of her times. However, I would suggest her claims of naivety are maintained to reinforce the other worldly authority of the Course—the miraculous power of charisma bestowed by God; knowledge beyond culture—of innocence and transcendence.

It is a familiar and often repeated trope that the channel is unwittingly selected by the purportedly channeled identity—whatever else it may be, it is also

narcissistic capital to be the special chosen recipient and mouthpiece of Jesus Christ or various other otherworldly entities.[9] The authority of the message is vouchsafed by the mystery on high disentangled from politics, dissociated from the stain of culture or society—an allegedly holy message of truth, purity, and innocence. Yet all around Schucman, in her family, her mother, her students, her culture one could see that powerful and strange religious forces were at play on the ground—against the backdrop of the very real nightmare of war in the supposedly unreal world.

Perhaps equally pertinent in the success of ACIM is the fact that from the 1920s the Cartesian universe—alienated, dualistic, and materialistic—had been rendered partially unreal by Western theoretical physicists who described a strange new world of light, time, and space. Some among their numbers used Hindu and Buddhist religious imagery to describe their new quantum universe (see Lahood, 2007; Capra, 1975). This re-ordering of the Western materialistic universe into a whirling dervish of a universe, a misbehaving dancing quantum cosmos tinged with an Eastern gloss, would drip down into the American psyche and beyond, and become an important feature of early transpersonalism.

In short, a quantum universe robed in Eastern mystical imagery was a radical cosmological rebirth out of the dualistic Cartesian epoch. Fritjof Capra's (1975) hugely popular book *The Tao of Physics* specifically hybridised the new physics with Eastern mysticism. In this book Eastern religious imagery of the Buddha, the *yin yang* symbol and the *Shiva Nataraj* among others, were overlaid with mathematical equations, waves, and particles of light as if the whole pan-Hindu pantheon had been discovered in an atom smasher.[10]

> The parallels to modern physics appear not only in the Vedas of Hinduism, in the I Ching, or in the Buddhist sutras, but also in the fragments of Heraclitus, the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, or the Teachings of the Yaqui sorcerer Don Juan (p. 19).

Capra claimed that the ingestion of sacred plants (psychedelics) had aided him in his intuition of this radical Eastern/quantum worldview. Capra's work, emerging the same year as ACIM—in 1975, exactly one year after the end of the war, oddly paralleling Huxley's post-WWII perennializing effort which appeared in 1946—was profoundly influential on both the New Age and the transpersonal movements. All of this points to a gradual *Orientalization* of the Western image of the universe, and the *Easternization* of America's collective cultural unconscious.

A Course in Miracles, at one important level—is a *cultural* artifact of religious themes relative and peculiar to the American religious situation. It is not a tablet writ in adamantine and handed down from heavens high to a new Christ, but rather a sign of cultures in collision. It is, to borrow from Baba Ram Dass, something of a Hinjew, a blend of Judeo-Christianity with Hinduism—a product of globalization. As such ACIM can be read as a cultural text, a performance of the American psyche in its attempt to assimilate (and perhaps, undermine, appropriate, and dominate—as is the way of the hybrid) the power of Eastern nondualism (including its doctrine of an illusionary world) with very patriarchal Christian symbols. The associated channelling performance is, I believe, more akin to a shamanistic emergency—a performance wherein the shaman assimilates, interprets, and tames alien cultural forces creating strange hybrid religious cosmologies (for some interesting cases of cosmological hybridization see Bankoff, 2003; Akinyele, 2000; Lahood, 2008, 2009).

Perhaps the impact of pan-Hindu thinking seeping into the American mind created for Schucman an emergency of sorts, triggered by the war. This performance is to maintain the shaman's ability to manipulate the universe—to claim, negate, and appropriate the symbols of the alien Other to herself—and it is here in the hustle and bustle of life, on the ground-floor where religions meet, mix, and mingle, that hybrid cosmologies are forged. Schucman and Thetford's ACIM is just such a form of religious Orientalization and one of a tradition of East-West meshes, among them Rajneesh's globalizing religion, that emerges in the late 1960s. A blend of Indian Guru-worship and so-called tantra with Esalen's human potential therapies, it has attracted legions of Euro-Americans who appropriated the term sannyasin for themselves—and is another Maslow-Zen, East-West hybridization.[11] The ACIM phenomenon begs the question: how much if any of it was actually hyper-world wisdom from a supra-ordinate celestial being such as Jesus Christ, and how much issued from the personal and cultural unconscious of Schucman and Thetford in their attempt to bind Eastern thought to Christian symbols and come to terms with the religious traces deposited in their psychic inventories by their parents' involvement in Theosophy and Christian Science?

Some 30 years later the writings of Eckhart Tolle would become very popular. Tolle (2003), too, presents a hybrid image: a Western quasi-Christian/Vedantic guru spreading an evolutionary, message:

> Your inner most sense of self, of who you are, is inseparable from stillness. This is the *I AM* that is deeper than name and form. (p. 3)

Tolle's teaching is loaded with the normative assumptions of popular New Age spirituality, citing Meister Eckhart, ACIM, Ramana Maharshi, and Advaita as influences. For Tolle, your inner self is who you really are beyond name and form (Sanskrit, *nama* and *rupa*: illusory body and person)—there is no separation, you are the I AM. The problem, from a relational point of view, is that the distinct and potentially divine human presence is conflated with the distressed ego, and the person and her world reduced to illusion. This dovetails with the work of another popular Western teacher of nondualism, Byron Katie (2003), who has claimed that there is not really a thing such as interpersonal love: "in the apparent world of duality people are going to see it [love] as a you and a me but in reality there is only one" (p. 64). If there is no personal, embodied self, then the bonds and bounds of personal relationship are illusory.

The problem with this end-state enlightenment that Tolle and others have put out as the pinnacle of evolution has been pinpointed by Heron (1998):

> In the final stage, since there is no self of any sort left, no further development is possible, the absolute limit of human unfoldment is reached, the human is *the* one and only divine [rather than the many divinities within a unifying divinity]. This throws out the baby with the bathwater, by conflating the distinctness-within-cosmic unity of the person, with the separate, fear-numbed, contracted ego. In elevating the human to the absolute, it ignores the asymmetrical relation between the finite divine and the infinite divine. To overlook this asymmetry and insist there is no distinction of any sort between finite human awareness and infinite divine awareness is, in my scheme of things, an illusory state of spiritual inflation (p. 79)

Whether it be spiritual inflation or narcissism, it certainly sells well in the marketplace of popular ideas.

Relational Spirituality

In no way do I feel anything like an expert in interpersonal skills nor the field of relational spirituality, but I am committed to the inquiry. With that caveat in place, I will suggest that relationship-based spirituality affirms a real person in a world, in a subjective-objective reality, and in a one-many divine disclosure. Relational spirituality is therefore categorically not a secular practice—it is a transpersonal practice and it starts with the premise that we are presences approaching and encountering other presences as divine disclosures or theophanies (cf. Corbin, 1969). Relational spirituality is about exploring and liberating that encounter from past wounds, everyday narcissism, and present fears. It then has the potential to become a practice in which we abide in sacred relationship. In the words of Fewster (2000), health exists

> when a person experiences Self as an integrated whole that encompasses the body, the emotions, the mind and the spirit. This state of health experienced as a pervasive sense of well-being can only occur through connection with other Selves—"without you there can be no me." To become whole the Self needs to be experienced and expressed from the inside and recognised from the outside. Hence the critical context for both health and healing is the interpersonal (Self-Other) relationship. (pp. 1-2)

Heron (1992, 1998, 2006) has offered a vision of relational spirituality and the enaction of situational spirit as the "realm of the between" (cf. Buber, 1970, who coined the term). Heron and Lahood (2008) have also outlined how action research can be construed as a relational spiritual practice; Ferrer (2002) has developed a theoretical account to reframe transpersonal phenomena as "multilocal participatory events" (pp. 116-117) that arise in different loci, such as an individual, a relationship, or a community. Within this frame I propose that co-active-relationship-based spiritual inquiry with its particular attenance to recognizing and letting go of spiritual narcissism, divine encounter between persons-as-theophany, attending collaboratively to the seven pivoting relationships, and abiding in sacred relationship, is very much a relational spiritual practice.

The basis for my understanding of relational spirituality comes from my participation in a 12-year peer inquiry group initiated by John Heron in New Zealand (Heron & Lahood, 2008).[12] Concurrent with that group I

initiated a small inquiry group that ran for five or six years which came to be called the Buddhas' Bakery because of the resonance between charismatic collaborative inquiry and cooking. I also initiated a dozen or more five-day inquiry trainings; some of these were highly structured, Apollonian-deliberate excursions, while others were free-wheeling, Dionysian-spontaneous inquiries in which the group came together only with a vague agenda around creative explorations into charismatic being (see Heron, 1992). In more formal introductions we would combine a more participatory, embodying version of breathwork (Lahood, 2008) as a way of disrupting compulsive patterns, processing stirred-up inquiry transference, and widening the horizon of participatory feeling.

In the following section I will set some context for this sort of relation-based inquiry, then report retrospectively on the salient points of a two-day relational inquiry initiated in England last year, part of a series of back to back inquiries over several weeks. The tone of this reporting is less formal; "we" in this context will refer to the participants, who will at appropriate times be identified by first name, or first name and initial. A full discussion of validity and extended epistemology in cooperative inquiry can be found in Heron (1996, 1998) and Heron and Reason (2007); see Heron and Lahood (2008) for a discussion of collaborative inquiry as a spiritual practice.

The Lahood Model of Relational Inquiry

In my model of relational inquiry there are at least seven overlapping relationships to manage and these should pivot among co-inquirers. Petruska Clarkson's (2003) well known five-relationship model in psychotherapy can serve as a jumping-off point—but because it is located in various therapeutic universes it is somewhat unserviceable. The obvious difference is that Clarkson was writing as a therapist, with its inevitable and unending power divide, and not as a co-researcher. The relationships are not static nor are they roles taken rigidly; they are shared, they change and pivot from one person or sub group to another…they are mercurial, holonomic, and shifting. The group will periodically stop and explore these roles to determine whether they are in some way co-opting the validity of the inquiry. The inquiry, especially if it takes place over time, will give these relationships a chance to find a healthy balance. These relationships do not follow any kind of sequential or linear pattern but emerge with the (transpersonal) gestalt of the group. Here are the seven relationships as currently formulated:

1) *The initiator/initiate relationship* is moving toward and eventually becoming peers in a power sharing collegiality.
2) *The anticipated relationship* is an interfering, transferential and counter-transferential, unconsciously unfinished relationship, it is obstructive and defensive, untrue, wounded, and compulsive.
3) *The reparative relationship* is the other side of the anticipated relationship—it is one that is developmentally needed and requires holding, empowerment through new roles, learning to trust in one's own authority, testing new behaviors, seeking support, seeking greater contact, and re-embedding in new positive constellations.
4) *The collaborative relationship* is where we take shared charge of the working alliance, of creating a secure base (in terms of attachment) build foundations through cooperation explore roles of co-designer/co-decision maker/ co-enactor/co-reflector, a collegial cosmic citizenry (cf. Heron, 1998, p. 122)
5) *The I–Thou relationship* is where collaboration seems to create a greater sense of peerdom, equality and person to person relating; Buber's I-thou can begin to flourish (this leads to the transpersonal relationship), leading to pleasure and participation in present time and space, authentic, open-hearted relationship.
6) *The erotic relationship* is where my feeling for the world is erotic, in meeting and encountering the group, presences, the occasion, the location; there is Eros: the world and all that is embraced erotically through love, union, and communion. Some examples are Washburn's (1995) polymorphous eroticism and the Sufi approach to the beloved as a lover.
7) *The divine relationship* or the angelic/theophanic relationship is the one open to the dynamic ground; we participate with relish in the local and situated spirit as the expression of divinity, both distinct and unified—the world is revealed as a divine participatory disclosure in which we are embedded as unique divine presences. This is a relatively free and autonomous person in relationship with others, in touch with her own unique indigenous relationship with all that is. Experiences of vertical or transcendent spirituality are civilized, grounded and horizontalized in the court of charismatic relationship.

This model presupposes a reasonably healthy autonomous self capable of reflexivity: an understanding that beliefs, feelings, thoughts are inherently biased. It assumes a creative self-authoring person who is willing to participate in co-decision making: a person who can balance surrender to group needs with a healthy sense of self-determination. Underlying this is the assumption that adult persons are sovereign beings and make choices that they are responsible for. It assumes that the core of personhood is both relational and autonomous. One must be able to say an honest yes, and an honest no; nevertheless the inquiry process itself can reveal where our decision making is hampered by familial, cultural, or spiritual introjects which will give an opportunity for further chewing over our attitudes and beliefs.

The following thoughts are based on my own participant-observation (the stock in trade of anthropological research—which has a near neighbor in collaborative inquiry: a balance of attention with which a person does research on herself while participating with others in a relational context. I would define a cornerstone of relational spirituality as the intentional *practice* of mutuality and co-responsibility: care for each-other and for nurturing along the outcome. This way of relational being and practice, according to Kenneth Gergen,

> places special significance of the process of co-action, the mutual creation of meaning. In particular, when our actions contribute to the continuous generation of meaning—to coordination rather alienation—we are engaged in a sacred practice. Through positive coordination we engage in the very processes from which issue, meaning, value, and the continued sustenance of the sacred. Holiness is neither state of heaven nor mind, but may be realized in our next moment together (2009, p. 393).

It is generally held that Buber believed mutuality could not be achieved in a therapeutic relationship because the care-giving and concern for outcome is largely one-sided—the therapist is in a care-giving role the client is there for healing. Intentional "ceremonies of mutual care" such as the Australian Aboriginal practice of *dadirri* (intentional respectful listening; Atkinson, 2008, p. 10) suggest an attitude of co-responsibility, relational obligation, and collaboration in which all persons must be willing to become other-attuned.[13]

Spiritual narcissism, as noted, is fundamentally a failure in the ability to authentically care or attune to others—an attitude that closes the door on any authentic collaborative venture. In contrast, maturing human *care* coupled with a certain canniness and willingness to confront distressed interactions such as authoritarian plays, defensive ploys, and narcissistic self entitlement, emerges from the integrating person as that person becomes more other-attuned. This basic attitude toward others when coupled with collaborative research principles and skills, among them critical subjectivity (Heron, 1998) opens the door on true collaboration, social and somatic openness, and authentic participation in ritual life. With due attention to the political economy of the group a co-creative spiritual event can unfold, marked by what anthropologists call *communitas* or flow (cf. Turner, 1979); I will refer to this latter as a charismatic event.

Relational rebirth

The whole collaborative inquiry process can be construed as a relational spirituality practice (see Heron & Lahood, 2008) which, when it works well, enables a profound kind of spiritual rebirth:

> This rebirthing is relational—consequent upon the co-creative resonance among us all. And it empowers us to come into the presence between. In short: immanent spirit becomes manifest, through collaborative action, as relational and situational sacred presence. Participation in this presence engenders a liberating wholeness, a personal regeneration—which is given expression amidst the practicalities of everyday life and work, empowering whole relations with others. (Heron & Lahood, 2008)

While this reads simply enough there are some interesting problems that can beset such an endeavor, making participatory research with others infinitely complex. We have learned that personal psychodynamics are often neatly woven into a person's spiritual persona including spiritual defenses. Participants can bring with them introjected collective and cultural beliefs that are prevalent in New Age transpersonalism such as spiritual ranking, spiritual authoritarianism or One-truthism, or a belief that all spirituality is about not being here, undermining their own ability to collaborate and produce the tasty fruits that can accompany the relational process. Furthermore

New Age transpersonalism tends to uphold an inner transformation outside of the everyday sphere:

> One difficulty in construing action research itself as a spiritual practice is the subtle Cartesianism of recent transpersonal studies. This tacitly assumes that spirituality is a subjective experience, within a nonspatial individual consciousness, of transpersonal objects which transcend the everyday public space of social interactions (Ferrer, 2002). (Heron & Lahood, 2008, p. 440)

This can mean for New Age transpersonalists that the everyday public space and social relations are deemed, *ipso facto,* devoid of any spiritual relevance. By relational spirituality we refer to a more horizontally oriented immanent spirituality grounded in the every day, the public space and social interactions. Relational spirituality conceives personhood itself coupled with a "transfigured embodiment" (Heron, 1998, p. 77) as an end in itself. Rather than seeking Eastern non-dualism we cultivate a charismatic person, a being-in-a-world relatively skilled at unfettering herself and others from past wounds and committed to relate relatively free of the need to compete with, over-power, manipulate, or capitalize on the other—but rather to cooperate with each other in co-creating a charismatic relational spiritual event (Heron & Lahood, 2008). Following is an account of such a co-constructed event.

Living the dead:
A relationship based spiritual inquiry

The inquiry began with a synchronicity. My partner Jacqueline and I were in England, Jac for the first time, and she was reading Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles purchased in a nearby store. I had been taught the book in secondary school when I was around 15 and it had made a lasting impression on me. I recalled talking to her about a passage that had stuck in my imagination, a scene in which Tess, carrying a basket on her head after a night's dancing in the village, was heading home when a jar full of treacle broke and trickled down the heroine's back. Jacqueline got to the page and read it out loud and fleshed out my memories of the moment.

Oddly enough our host had departed for a few days' hiking and had cleaned out his cupboards the night before leaving. There was a can of treacle left on the bench in the kitchen. He left and we cleaned up the kitchen but did not know what to do about the treacle so we left it there for a few nights. We awoke one morning to find a strange sculpture—somehow the can had been knocked over and the treacle had emptied out into the plastic container it was sitting in along with a bottle; the whole effect was very strange. I come from New Zealand, Jac from Australia, and we have no relationship at all to the word, treacle. It seemed to us that the treacle flowing in the book and in our minds was now flowing in our world, and we marvelled at the timing and the content and it all seemed like something very magical had gotten loose indeed.

The group gathered the next morning there were six of us and we introduced the "miracle of the treacle" by placing the sculpture in the middle of the table and set about for a while chatting and talking and marvelling about the whole business—the way synchronicities seem to explode rational notions of time, space, and causality. Jac said that Tess's motivation had been to take the treacle to her grandmother. This led to a spontaneous check-in round in which we all spoke about our relationship with our grandmothers. Someone suggested that we put out an offering for our ancestors. This was met with general agreement and excitement and a flat bowl with water and flowers was placed in the center of the space next to what we had come to call "the miracle." I recall that James S. said something like that when we disinhibit ourselves into embodied charisma it was like making ourselves as angel food—sweet to the taste. Angels come to feed! Certainly the charismatic barometer seems to rise when such countercultural statements are made and lived. We then made a chair available for the spirit of our grandmothers and each had a turn a evoking her presence. Each of the invocations has a charismatic effect in what felt like a form of theurgy and for a while after everyone had spoken we quietly bathed in the communitas of shared intimacies, and the imaginal presence of our beloved grannies. Jane. S noted that we seem to have missed out the grandpas so we repeated the round after a discussion about the invocation of ancestors who might have been abusive or interpersonally oppressive. The group decided, after a declaration by Maggie. B, that our transpersonal theater was created with the reality shaping intention that it was strictly for our highest good and that we only welcomed energies, powers, and presences that were benign. This meant that we acknowledged the basic pattern of goodness of the deceased person and decreed that their distress-laden patterns be left at the door of our temple

(at this point we appeared to want to greet the dead to revere them and love them). It is hard to explain how profoundly powerful, in terms of feeling tones, that this encounter with the dead had on us individually and collectively. We were sitting in a richly open sonorous space that seemed to carry an echo of eternity when Jane. S said she had an image of a water-well. It seemed to me, retrospectively, that we had begun a spontaneous inquiry cycle, a perception I shared with the group.

Since we seemed to be already in the wake of something, it was suggested by Jac that we might come up with a retrospective launching statement. This phase was marked by much collaborative effort (and gentle chaos)—an idea that we could, so to speak, go inside and wait for a statement or an image to bubble up got some traction, and we did this. Next we took turns to write out statements on a whiteboard and then we all engaged in a collective sifting process in which words and phrases were mixed and matched, dropped and rearranged until we arrived at a launching statement that seem to suit everyone—that was made and shaped by everyone. The statement was: What is it to bathe in the well of our ancestors? We had removed at the last minute, "drink from," and changed it to "bathe in," because the feeling post-granny invocation had been one of bathing in a delightful, heart warming, reverential presence. I should mention too that I had buried and cremated three beloved family members in the past three years: my grandmother, father, and brother. I did not mind one bit in co-creating a funerary ceremony of respect and connection with our ancestors and those who had joined the realm of our ancestors, since in many cultures it is the afterlife where we come from. Two women on the group were also faced with impending death. Jacqueline's mother had for some three years been battling with cancer and Zana's brother was ill. At times, as a group, we seemed to open to a sense of grief and love and a kind of solidarity, and it was my personal observation that the invocation of death, or imaginaly living beyond death—this sitting with the ancestors—drew from the well some very potent feeling tones, shared resonances, and meaning.

The next critical step was planning a ritual of intensification. We agreed first of all to make a procession out into the back garden, which backed onto some beautiful foothills in Cumbria. We dressed ourselves in brightly colored scarves and sarongs, hats and sunglasses and made our way silently in a line out of the front door to the back garden. Here we had planned to charismatically disinhibit through waving, toning, rattling, and drumming (cf. Heron & Lahood, 2008). We had decided to become (identify with imaginaly/psycho-dramatically) the ancestor as we disinhibited ourselves. We were then to pass a Tibetan bowl from one to the other and when we were in possession of the bowl each of us (as the forebear) would give the generations to come a gift. This was performed differently by each person, some made silent miming gestures, others intoned evocations, some moved and gestured signalling to our offspring's offspring down through the generations the feelings of courage, love and respect. Once everyone had made their private invocation or declaration, then in unison, we toned and disinhibited again, this time creating a seemingly deeper more creative opening. After a time of silence we then began to move back toward the house and as we went we began to shed our ancestral garb. On entering the room, which had been prepared with candles, we became the children, heirs, and descendants of the ancestors and we ceremoniously brought forth the bowl/well of our ancestors. At this point the bowl was passed around and each of us drank deeply of its dark mysterious gifts. We then fell into a silent reverie for some time, simply breathing in the participatory goodness and bathing in and receiving the well wishes of our ancestors while simultaneously opening and giving it up to our imaginal future generations. I experienced this as a mystical relational event of collective shaping, action, and reflection of some fecundity. A sense of having participated with the dead, of having reframed and gifted our beloved children and their children while at the same time participating in, and enlivening the dead. To put it plainly, I was inestimably grateful to the dead for their lived lives.

Jacqueline's mother and Zana's brother died within days of the event. I understand that there are many ways to make meaning, interpret, analyze, and no doubt pathologize our experience. For some this endeavor might seem incomprehensibly quaint, deluded, ignorant or fanciful. For myself, I have a deep respect for situational spirituality and the spontaneous erotic life, the co-production of spiritual knowledge and creative participation in hybridized ritual (see Heron & Lahood, 2008) that seems to arise from rubbing shoulders with real people and the dead in our post-modern, New Age era. I also find a resonance in the following account by Ogbu Kalu (2001) of an African ritual,

> In the Owu Festival of riverine communities of the Niger Delta, the masqueraders arrive in canoes and wear masks depicting various kinds of fishes. The community dances to the waterfront, welcomes them as a chorus into the village, and the celebration begins. At dusk, the masqueraders are led back to the beach; as they paddle off, the people wave and cry for the departing ancestors. This is the crux of the cultural form: the masqueraders are ancestors; they are the gods coming as guests to the human world. With their arrival, the seen and the unseen worlds meet; the living and the living-dead reunite, even if only for a brief period. (p. 229)

On a healing level, traditional Eurocentric stage models of grief and loss that encourage *decathexis* (a severing of bonds, subject to prescribed stages) have, in recent years, been challenged by the healthier notion that the mourner maintains an ongoing relationship with the deceased (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). It could be said that attuning to these ancestral presences, at one level, is such a means of maintaining relationship, which is creatively and religiously held in the social life of the group.

Theologian Robert Avens wrote that two important figures in contemporary psychology, James Hillman and Jacques Lacan, both affirmed that much of the human suffering in modern Western culture arises from our refusal to remember the dead. Taking Freud's statement that neurosis is related to the incomplete mourning of "the unburied dead," Lacan argued that "therapy has as its major task the repairing of the relationship people have, not with other people, but with the dead" (p. 299). While the French analyst pushes the point too far for me, since I privilege the living, I certainly think the province of death, creative and ritual mourning, and the existence of discarnate but relational spirits is an important field of inquiry. Avens (1984) also pointed out that for Hillman, "the aim of archetypal psychology is to enable us to live in the company of ghosts… ancestors, guides—the populace of the metaxy" (p. 299).[14]

Erik Erikson believed that in human beings, the desire for relationship was inherent. In his model of human development there is in human beings "a succession of tendencies to relate to other human beings mutually and creatively" (Evans, 1993, p. 298). However, "If the natural tendency to become involved with others is frustrated in childhood, it is repressed. Narcissistic self-sufficiency then becomes dominant over the natural yearning to relate" (p. 298). The actualization of different relational tendencies occurs at different stages of a person's life so that for instance in adulthood there can be the "intimate mutual love between husband and wife and a deep parental concern for the next generation" (p. 298). It seems to me that our inquiry was toying with a little-known form of love—a para-generational form of relational knowing. The extending of love down through the coming generations seems a natural extension of non-narcissistic modes of being; it is in fact akin to cosmic love. It is this kind of love perhaps that is a motivation behind the ecology movements as the human community seeks to preserve something of our planet's ecological diversity for our children and their children. An inquiry into ancestors, those who have lived and who now inhabit the realm of the dead, cycles into the reverence for those gathered, and the gentle worship of those yet to come and is thus an extension of love into an unlived future.

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Notes

1. According to Raymond Saner (1989) there is an overlooked American cultural bias operating in much of U.S. gestalt practice. Saner referred to '"Gestalt Therapy Made-in-the-USA," in particular a bias of "over-done individualism" and a

> super valuing of taking care of myself, of individual identity, of emotional independence and what he calls a "calculative involvement with organizations"…. Saner in this important paper, stresses the need for a corrective, away from … the "I am who I am and if you do not like it, fuck off" ideology which has characterized some Gestalt therapy and writing. Saner's assumption is that is that most members of the American Gestalt therapy movement have overstressed "I"-ness because they are unaware of their cultural disposition toward individualism with its corollary, aversion or avoidance" (Parlett 1991, p. 69).

   Gestalt therapy and field theory raise intriguing issues that are very difficult to research because Gestalt therapy itself may not be really open to examining its own sets of assumptions, authority, therapeutic power, the authenticity of an I-Thou established in a power relationship with economic stakes holders as Parlett suggested; truly collaborative research methods such as co-operative inquiry might be necessary to do the research.
2. Spiritual feminism and its related synonyms (religious, spiritualist, ecological, goddess, and cultural feminism) also got a kick-start in the 1960s. Stressing interpersonal encounter, community, and ecological concerns, it shares a group of related concerns with the *natural health movement* which includes a religious attitude of purity and pollution toward healing, food/eating and childbirth; this religious/consumer movement also got a powerful push in the 1960s. The central thesis of these papers is that self-spirituality is implicated in the structuring of spiritual narcissism, but, given that spiritual feminism has such relational values (encounter, community, ecological, non-patriarchal ethos), one would think that neo-pagan Goddess worshipping feminists would be free of spiritual narcissism, ego-inflation, grandiosity, and authoritarianism. My personal observations as an anthropologist and insider of New Age culture, is that this is far from true. Some Kali and Goddess worshipping feminists or feminist-tantric-New Agers seem to exhibit their own set of cultural conceits, ethnocentricities, and hubris, not to mention the offensive and defensive use of spiritually, capitalistic competitiveness, and the malady of spiritual narcissism. An examination of the hybridity of Western religious feminism with Eastern tantra is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that spiritual feminism's historical gestation and emergence from the self-spiritual milieu in which individual thoughts and feelings are held to be authoritative, even sacrosanct, can be problematic.To be clear, in no way am I suggesting the equation that spiritual feminism equals narcissism. What I am saying is that for a person with narcissistic wounds or a rigid fundamentalist disposition the inferior/superior ideology of Goddess religion may further inflate the false-self erected to cope with a diminished sense of self. In the end such defenses keep one from true holistic participation with others—the analysis offered here is but a cautionary observation.
3. Japanese Zen Buddhism, contrary to popular belief, was an imperial religion and actively promoted war in the Pacific.
4. In a footnote to this story Spiro (1987) wrote,

> That the pursuit of the religious life requires the rejection of family ties is, of course, not restricted to the salvation religions of Asia.

> Early Christianity (as the attitude of Jesus, both through his ties with his own family, as well as to family ties in general revealed) required an equally powerful rejection. (p. 279)

5. This was partly because of burn-out and economics–interpersonal encounter is both time consuming and exhausting (especially during the time of the sexual revolution when the boundaries of sexual behavior had changed dramatically); burn-out was common for leaders in the encounter movement and there was a swing toward more internal, less relational forms of practice such as Eastern meditation in which larger numbers could participate making the workshop more economically viable and reducing burn-out among facilitators.
6. D. T. Suzuki was a major transmitter of Zen to the West and a powerful influence on the nascent transpersonal movement. A charismatic Zen missionary, he was, according to Morris (1994), something of a non-traditional Buddhist, likening his Zen to Meister Eckhart's non-traditional Christian mysticism. But Suzuki's Zen also has an almost Romantic nature-worshiping element to it. He "contrasted Eastern and Western aesthetics and attitudes toward nature" suggesting that whereas Buddhists might, for example, behold or commune with a flower, Western medicalized science would rip the plant apart in the analytical manner of vivisection (Lock & Scheper-Hughes, 1987, p. 13). In *The Awakening of Zen* (1980) Suzuki described Zen in terms of, "I see the flower and the flower sees me" (p. 24), which seems to suggest a more eco-friendly enlightenment. Reputedly a pacifist, Suzuki, the romantic nature-worshiping, Christian, Buddhist sage is perhaps the template for the new religious consciousness.
7. Not limited to Asiatic religions, world-denial can also be found in Abrahamic traditions. According to religious scholar Steven Katz (1978),

> the Jewish mystic performs his special mystical devotions and meditations…[concentrative prayers were known as *kavvanah*] in order to purify his soul, i.e. to remove the soul from its entrapment in the material world in order to liberate it for its upward spiritual ascent culminating in *devekuth* [clinging to God]." (p. 38)

A pattern also observed in the Mohammed's Night of the Mirage where the Prophet was dismembered and purified by angels and flown through hell and up through layered heavens into a final self-annihilating encounter with the Throne of Allah (see Armstrong, 1991, pp. 138-141).

The Heaven's Gate suicide cult have reproduced an extreme form of up and out religiosity in their enactment of death. Their dis-attachment from the world would remove them to a promised land peopled by extra-terrestrials The leader of the group and some of his male followers had their penises surgically removed so that their attachment to the world would be lessened and make their departure easier. The idea of their sacrificial death was that they would then be able to join a space-craft on "the next level above human". The "starship in the comet's wake [Hale-Bopp] would rescue the faithful from Planet earth. Yet the members of Heaven's gate saw themselves as following the same pattern established 2,000 years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth discarded his physical vessel in exchange for a spiritual one" (Muesse, 1999, p. 391). Indeed the cult's presumed Kingdom of Heaven would provide "boundless care and nurturing" (http://www.wave.net/upg/gate/intro.htm—the cult's still-active website). According to the cult's leader "the Anti-Christ" was equivalent to "those propagators of sustained faithfulness to mammalian humanism."

8. Interestingly, Michael Washburn (1995) noted that the *flight* from guilt is a feature of narcissism, either from insufficient mirroring (cf. Kohut, 1971) or failure in the "identity project," the narcissist puts on "attention-getting performances" and becomes "excessively self-centered" (p. 115).
9. The channeling phenomenon has not escaped the scrutiny of transpersonal psychologists or clinical theologians in relation to spiritual emergency, that extremely shaky and psychologically challenging time in a person's development. Some channelers, through a process of unaware spiritual projection cast their disowned and disembodied spiritual wisdom onto other-world beings or entities which in turn can become a source of spiritual inspiration; however this is also problematic. According to John Klimo (1988), a well known and non-reductionist researcher sympathetic to the channeling phenomena, up to 85 percent of so-called channeled material

actually comes from personal unconscious of the individual effected. This can suggest a mishandled attempt to cope with a spiritual emergency in which the individual affected by the channel emergency engages in a kind of subtle splitting from their own wisdom. According to Stanislav Grof (2000), a preeminent researcher into the realms of the human unconscious:

> Spirit guides are usually *perceived* as advanced spiritual beings on a high level of consciousness evolution, who are endowed with superior intelligence and extraordinary moral integrity. This can lead to highly problematic ego inflation in the channeler, who might feel chosen for a special mission and see it as a proof of his or her own superiority. (p. 164)

Where a cult is based on channeling from some discarnate entity (e.g., Seth, Lazarus, Ramtha, Jesus), the status of the entity (and by association the channel or their works and books, e.g., *A Course in Miracles*, Anonymous, 1992; *Conversations with God*, Walsh, 1996; *The Disappearance of the Universe*, Renard, 2003) will become the screen for unaware projections, rather than a focus of critical scrutiny (Heron, 2006). The isolated spiritual ego is often inflated with a kind of fundamentalist certitude claiming, for example, that the "course" has come from "beyond," a claim which gives its followers their authoritative warrant and participation mystique which bolsters self esteem. However, this claim of beyond-ism requires critical scrutiny—in most cases the disavowal of the human and cultural context betokens a mystification of one's own ideals and will to power.

10. This quantum/Oriental blend has taken root in New Ageism. Watch here how the new physics of David Bohm (first quote) are overlapped by a well known Buddhist teacher in the West (second quote):

> Just as the vast "sea'" of energy in space is present to our perception as a *sense* of emptiness or nothingness so the vast "unconscious" background of explicit consciousness with all its implications is present in a similar way (Bohm, 1980, p. 210).

> If Buddhism is a science of the mind, then for me Dzogchen and the bardo teachings represent the heart essence of that science…David Bohm has conceived a new scientific approach to reality based, as the bardo teachings are, on an understanding of the totality of oneness of existence as an unbroken and seamless whole (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992, pp. 352-353).

11. In some nondual religious orientations such as Advaita Vedanta the phenomenological world is depicted as a dream, maya, and illusion and therefore relationships, morality, and ethics are secondary to realizing the illusion of the worldly. Let me give a brief example of what I am talking about from a discourse titled, "The Buddha's Inner Orgasm," by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1976; who later rebranding himself as Osho). The reader might note a relationship between religious globalization and the world becoming a dream. The guru spoke:

> In this age systems have become very heavy and confused. The whole point is lost, for so many reasons. One is—because it has never been so before—each system lived in its own world: a Jain was born Jain, lived Jain, died Jain. He will not study Hindu scriptures, it was prohibited. He will not go to the mosque or the church, it was a sin. He will live [with]in the walls of his system. Nothing alien will penetrate ever in his mind, no confusion will be there.
>
> But now all that is destroyed. Everyone is acquainted with everyone else. Hindus are reading Koran and Mohammedans are reading Gita and Christians are moving to the East and the East is moving to the West.... Jumbled up everything has penetrated your mind. Jesus is not alone there, Krishna has also penetrated, Muhammad has also penetrated. And they have contradicted each other within you. Now nothing is certain. The Bible says this, the Gita says exactly the contrary. Muhammad says this, Mahavir is just the opposite. They have contradicted. You are no more anywhere; you don't belong.... Jesus goes on speaking, Krishna goes on speaking; Mahavir goes on speaking—and Krishnamurti also enters. Your mind becomes the Tower of Babel—so many tongues and you cannot understand what is happening. You just feel crazy. (pp. 270-71)

Rajneesh was certainly skilled at capitalizing on this form of craziness (a condition which has to do, according to him, with not being "anywhere" and not "belonging"—conditions, I would argue, as many have, that are synonymous with globalization. Rajneesh's answer to these globalizing problems and others is to reduce the world and human existence to a dream. This approach, true to form in Oriental visions of Enlightenment and spiritual salvation (including A Course in Miracles), promote and elevate the nondual to the highest spiritual estate (Heron, 1998), which, to follow David Loy (1988) in his careful study of nondualism in Taoism, Buddhism, and Vedanta, relegates the phenomenal world to "dream-like maya" (p. 30)— in other words the world is unreal. The guru spoke:

> If you come to realize this point—that the soul cannot be destroyed—then the whole life becomes a play, a fiction, a drama. And if the whole life becomes a drama, even murder and suicide become a drama to you. Not just in thinking, you realize the fact that everything is just a dream. Death too will make you a witness, and that witnessing will become transcendence. You will transcend the world. The whole world becomes dream—there is nothing good, nothing bad, just a dream. You need not worry about it. (Rajneesh, 1976, p. 273).

12. I have also been involved in various open encounter, gestalt based scenarios, tranings, and communities, over many years, and have on-going interest in a hybrid form combining action research, gestalt practice, and re-evaluated transpersonal psychology that I think of as relational inquiry.
13. I do not mean here self-psychology's "constant empathetic response *à la* Kohut" which is an "attempt to establish and maintain 'atunement' with a *client*" (Resnick, 1995, p. 6, emphasis supplied) because (a) this collaborative inquiry is a peer group and there are no clients and (b) self psychology's empathy and attunement is formulaic and rote—the therapist has to be empathetic which, in a sense, is not to be there at all.
14. Metaxy, from the Greek meaning a middle ground between the human and the divine—what Corbin (1969) called the *mundus imaginalis* or the *alam al mithal*.

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