International Journal of Transpersonal Studies

Volume 29 | Issue 1 Article 8

1-1-2010

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

Gregg Lahood
Northern Rivers Gestalt Institute

Recommended Citation

Lahood, G. (2010). 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. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 29* (1). http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2010.29.1.58

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

Gregg Lahood
Northern Rivers Gestalt Institute
Lismore, NSW, Australia

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 Vedantist 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 Jc 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.

References

Anonymous (1992). *A course in miracles: Text, workbook for students and manual for teachers*. Glen Ellen, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace. (Original work published 1976)

Akinyele, M. (2003). Battling the serpent: Nat Turner, Africanized Christianity, and a black ethos. *Journal of Black Studies*, *33*(3), 255-280. DOI: 10.1177/0021934702238631

Armstrong, K. (1991). *Muhammad: A biography of the Prophet*. Guernsey, Channel Islands: Guernsey Press.

Arnold, E. (1885). *The light of Asia, or the great renunciation, being the life and teachings of Gautama, prince of India and founder of Buddhism.* Boston, MA: Trubner & Co. (Original work published 1879)

Atkinson, J. (2008). Educare and human rights: An indigenous Australian response to the effects of colonization and trauma. In C. Newell & B. Offord (Eds.), *Activating human rights in education: Exploration, innovation and transformation* (pp. 119-132). Mawson, ACT, Australia: Australian College of Educators.

Avens, R. (1984). Re-visioning resurrection: St. Paul and Swedenborg. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *23*(4), 299-316.

Baker-Eddy, M. (2000). *Science and health*. Boston, MA: Christian Science Publishing Society. (Original work published 1917)

Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bharati, A. (1985). The self in Hindu thought and action. In A. Marsella (Ed.), *Culture and self: Asian and Western perspectives* (pp. l85–23l). New York, NY: Tavistock.

Blackstone, J. (2006). Intersubjectivity and non-duality in the psychotherapeutic relationship. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *38*(1), 41–54.

Bridges, H. (1969). Aldous Huxley: Exponent of mysticism. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *37*(4), 341-352.

Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou.* W. Kaufmann (Trans.). New York, NY: Scribner.

Capra, F. (1975). *The Tao of physics: An exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern religion.* London, UK: Wildwood House.

Capriles, E. (2009). Beyond mind III: Further steps to a metatranspersonal philosophy and psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *28*(2), 1-145.

Clarkson, P. (1989). *Gestalt counseling in action*. London, UK: Sage.

Clarkson, P. (2003). *The therapeutic relationship.* Philadelphia, PA: Whurr Publishers.

Corbin, H. (1969). *Creative imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Trans. R. Manheim). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cortright, B. (1997). *Psychotherapy and spirit: Theory and practice of transpersonal psychotherapy.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Evans, D. (1993). *Spirituality and human nature*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Ferrer, J. N. (2002). *Revisioning transpersonal theory: A participatory vision of human spirituality.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Fewster, G. (2000). When the subject becomes the object: The art of bringing life into classrooms. *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, *14*(1), 75-88.

Furst, P., & Schaefer, S. (1996). Peyote pilgrims and Don Juan seekers: Huichol Indians in a multicultural world. In S. Schaefer & P. Furst (Eds.), *People of the peyote: Huichol Indian history, religion and survival (*pp. 503–521). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico.

Glock, C., & Bellah, R. (1976). *The new religious consciousness*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Grof, S. (2008). Brief history of transpersonal psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *27*, 46-54.

Grof, C., & Grof, S. (1990). *The stormy search for the self*. Los Angeles, CA: J.P. Tarcher.

Grof, S. (1998a). *The cosmic game: Explorations at the frontiers of human consciousness.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Grof, S. (2000). *The psychology of the future: Lessons from consciousness research*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gross, R. (1993). *Buddhism after patriarchy: A feminist history, analysis, and reconstruction of Buddhism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hanegraaff, W. (1996). *New age religion and Western culture*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.

Heron, J. (1992). *Feeling and personhood: Psychology in another key*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Heron, J. (1998). *Sacred science: Person centered inquiry into the spiritual and the subtle*. Ross-On-Wye, UK: PCCS Books.

Heron, J. (2006). *A farewell to authoritarian religion*. Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press.

Heron, J., & Lahood, G. (2008). Charismatic inquiry in concert: Action research in the realm of the between. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of Action Research* (2nd edition; pp. 439–449). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2007). Extending epistemology within a co-operative inquiry. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (2nd ed; pp. 366-380). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Holland, C., & MacDonald, D. (2006). Gebser's integral consciousness and living in the real world: Facilitating its emergence using *A course in miracles*. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *25,* 70-76.

Kalu, O. (2001). The sacred egg: Worldview, ecology, and development in West Africa. In J. Grim (Ed.), *Indigenous traditions and ecology: The interbeing of cosmology and community* (pp.225-248). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Katie, B., & Mitchell, S. (2007). *A thousand names for joy*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

Klass, M. (1995). *Ordered universes: Approaches to the anthropology of religion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. (1996). *Continuing bonds*. Washington, DC: Taylor Francis.

Klimo, J. (1988). *Channeling: Investigations on receiving information from paranormal sources*. Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy P. Tarcher & St. Martin's.

Kohut, H. (1971). *The analysis of the self: A systematic approach to the psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic personality disorders*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

Lahood, G. (2007). The participatory turn and the transpersonal movement: A brief introduction. *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation, 29*(3), 2–6. DOI 10.3200/RE VN.29.3.2-6.

Lahood, G. (2008). Paradise bound: A perennial philosophy or an unseen process of cosmological hybridization. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, *19*(2), 1- 57. DOI: 10.1111/j.1556-3537.2008.00008

Lahood, G. (2009). Secreting religion: Perinatal dynamics, ego death and reproductive consciousness in childbirth. *Australian Religious Studies Review*, *22*(2), 162-189.

Lahood, G. (2010). Relational spirituality, Part 1. Paradise unbound: Cosmic hybridity and spiritual narcissism in the "one truth" of New Age transpersonalism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *29*(1), 31-57.

Laughlin, C. (1990). Womb = woman = world: Gender and transcendence in Tibetan tantric Buddhism. *The Journal of Pre- and Perinatal Psychology and Health*, *5*(2), 147-165.

Loy, D. (1988). *Nonduality: A study in comparative philosophy.* New York, NY: Humanity Books.

Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being.* 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand. (Original work published 1964)

Morris, B. (1994). *Anthropology of the self: The individual in cultural perspective*. London, UK: Pluto Press.

Morris, B. (2006). *Religion and anthropology: A critical introduction*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Muesse, M. (1999). Religious studies and "Heaven's Gate": Making the strange familiar and the familiar strange. In R. T. McCutcheon (Ed.), *The insider/outsider problem in the study of religion* (pp. 390-394). New York, NY: Cassel.

Naranjo, C. (1978). Gestalt therapy as a transpersonal approach. *The Gestalt Journal*, *1*(2), 75-81.

Nhat Hahn, T. (1998). *The heart of the Buddha's teachings*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax.

Owens, C. (1975). Zen Buddhism. In Charles Tart (Ed.), *Transpersonal psychologies* (pp. 153 -202). London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Parlett, M. (1991). Reflections on field theory. *The British Gestalt Journal*, *1*(1), 69-80.

Perls, F. (1969). *Gestalt therapy verbatim*. Boulder, CO: Real People Press.

Prince, R. (1974). Cocoon work: An interpretation of the concern of contemporary youth with the mystical. In I. Zaretsky and M. Leone (Eds.), *Religious movements in contemporary America* (pp. 255–271). Princeton, NJ: University Press.

Rajneesh, Bhagwan Shree. (1976). *The book of the secrets.* Volume 4. Poona, India: Rajneesh Foundation International.

Ram Dass, Baba. (1971). *Be here now.* San Cristobal, NM: Lama Foundation.

Renard, G. R. (2003). *The disappearance of the universe*. Berkeley, CA: Fearless Books.

Resnick, R. (1995). Gestalt therapy: Principles, prisms, and perspectives (Interviewed by M. Parlett). *British Gestalt Journal*, *4*(1), 1-31.

Saner, R. (1989). Cultural bias of gestalt therapy: Made-in-USA. *The Gestalt Journal*, *12*(2), 57-73.

Scheper-Hughes, N. & Lock, M. (1987). The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, *1*(1), 64-41.

Skutch, R. (2004). *Journey without distance: The story behind* A Course in Miracles. Glen Ellen, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace.

Spiro, M. (1987). *Culture and human nature.* B. Kilborne & L. Langness (Eds.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Stone, D. (1976). The human potential movement. In C. Glock & R. Bellah (Eds.), *The new religious consciousness* (pp. 93-115). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Suzuki, D. T. (1980). *The awakening of Zen*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Tart, C. (1975). *Transpersonal psychologies*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Tolle. E. (2003). *Stillness speaks*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Namaste Publishing.

Turner, V. (1979). *Process, performance and pilgrimage*. New Delhi, India: Concept Publishing House.

Walsh, N. D. (1996). *Conversations with God*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Washburn, M. (1995). *Ego and the dynamic ground*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Wiber, K. (1999). An approach to integral psychology. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *31*(2),109-136.

Wright, P. (1996). Gender issues in Ken Wilber's transpersonal theory. *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousnes and Transformation*, *18*(4), 25-37.

Young, R. (1995). *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race.* London, UK: Routledge.

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*.

About the Author

Gregg Lahood, PhD, is an anthropologist, psychotherapist and educator in private practice in Australia. He teaches and practices Relationship Based Spiritual Inquiry in Australia and internationally. Dr Lahood is the co-director of the Centre of Relational Spirituality, Byron Bay and can be contacted at info@gregglahood.com

About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is published by Floraglades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).