

NEW AGE TO POSTMODERN AGE  
the cultural location of metaphysical belief

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Fiona Smyth  
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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Arts in Communication Studies (Research) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Nana Sufi ID No.: 95453946  
Date: August 2001

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## ABSTRACT

As a cultural trend or a religious force the nature of the New Age has been persistently unclear. This paper proposes that, as a movement, it manifests an older set of concerns and an ancient worldview, according to the particular cultural conditions of the time. The first section provides a comprehensive analysis of the New Age, outlining its origins in the Western occult metaphysical tradition, through its assimilation of aspects of Eastern philosophy and modern science, to its current status as an influential, and increasingly mainstream, cultural phenomenon. The second section assesses the relationship between the new age and science, forming an illustrative example of the proposed influence of contemporary cultural values on the characteristics and forms of the movement. The final section places it within the debate on secularisation and the status of the religious as we move from the modern to the postmodern era.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to establish a comprehensive theoretical background to enable an understanding of the position of New Age or occult-mystical beliefs in contemporary culture.

The first chapter introduces the New Age movement as the contemporary manifestation of a long-standing occult tradition in the West. Tracing its development from Hellenistic Greece to its peak in the United States in the 1980s the influence of social and cultural factors on the forms and practices of the movement become clear. However, the New Age also continues to influence almost every aspect of society as its ideas increasingly pervade the mainstream of our culture, becoming less readily associated with their origins.

This two-way influence is the subject of the second chapter, which examines, as an illustrative example, the relationship between science and religion, and especially between physics and mysticism. The emergence of a 'new physics' has been wholly adopted by new agers in support of their beliefs, but it is argued that the literature which draws parallels between the fields of physics and mysticism cannot be taken as objective fact in the manner it is presented, subject as it is to cultural influence.

The third chapter analyses the particular conditions of our time which have formed and nurtured the contemporary new age. Set against theories of secularisation the persistence and evolution of New Age spirituality raises questions about the religious in modernity, and, as we enter the new millennium, postmodernity.

A final discussion section will suggest some of the ways in which New Age concerns continue to exist in late-capitalist, postmodern conditions.

## CHAPTER ONE

## CHAPTER ONE – THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In his 1995 book *The New Age in American Culture* Richard Kyle provides one of very few academic works on the new age movement, most publications on the subject on a popular level come from either New Age writers themselves or from evangelical Christians, and he calls for more serious studies 'analysing it as a cultural movement' and relating its most important aspects 'to their historical context'.<sup>1</sup> While the new age is a contemporary movement it is possible to identify its roots in ancient Western civilisation, its immediate backdrop in countercultural America in the 1950s and 60s, its peak visibility in the 1970s and 80s, and it is contended, its persistent influence in the 1990s and the new millennium as its forms and beliefs are assimilated into mainstream culture in the 'postmodern' era.

The new age movement is the current expression of the older mystical/occult tradition in the West but the manifestation of its central beliefs have been shaped at every point by the cultural conditions of the time. Evidencing heavy influence of post-World War II developments such as the emergence of Eastern spirituality in America and developments in science and psychology it reflects its culture, exaggerating trends or rejecting them, it provides insights into the status of religious and secular thought as we pass from modernity into late-, or post- modern times.

The first part of this section will place the new age movement in historical context, first tracing the origins of its forms and beliefs from the Hellenistic period through to 19<sup>th</sup> century America, then, assessing its various influences, through the 20<sup>th</sup> century to its peak in the 1980s. This is followed by a comprehensive outline of the common beliefs of the various aspects of the movement. Next is an analysis of the proposed 'emerging culture', a description of the features new agers attribute to the 'old' or 'dominant' paradigm, and an exploration of the elements they believe it suppressed. Finally the influence of the 'new science' on the movement is explored, paying special attention to the work on perceived links between physics and mysticism (in particular that of Fritjof Capra and David Bohm), but also looking at the place of psychology and health in the 'new paradigm'.

1.1.1 During the 1980s mainstream popular culture became saturated by new age concepts more thoroughly than ever before. Crystals and channelling gained media attention, shamanism and Native American spirituality captured the public imagination and people turned to holistic health practices in huge numbers. Self-help and popular psychology books such as M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* sold in their millions making the genre one of the most popular in the business, and commercial success was also recorded in increased sales health foods and herbal remedies. The advertising industry caught on too, MasterCard borrowed the slogan 'Master the Possibilities' from Werner Erhard's est and the U.S. Army urged recruits to 'Be All You Can Be'.

The movement attracted high profile celebrity champions such as Shirley MacLaine with her 1983 book *Out on a Limb* and its 1987 television version, and in December of that year *Time* magazine published 'New Age Harmonies', the most significant article on the subject to appear in the news media.<sup>2</sup>

This faddish element of the new age, the on-line tarot readings, psychic phone lines, magazine astrological predictions, had already begun to fade by the early 1990s, but the ideas and ethos of the movement which have penetrated aspects of society from environmental science and health care to education, business enterprises and innumerable self-help psychologies will continue to influence, though perhaps not called 'New Age' in the future.

In 1994 a *Newsweek* article entitled 'In Search of the Sacred' reported a poll on the number of Americans 'on a quest for personal meaning' found that 58% 'feel the need to experience spiritual growth' and 33% 'have had a mystical or religious experience'. While these interests are by no means new, they have, in Western culture at least, traditionally been the preserve of an educated elite. The modern new age has seen an extensive democratisation of these essentially religious pursuits, and the extent of their 'secularisation' is such that their 'new age' or mystical status is often unacknowledged. As Russell Chandler wrote in *Understanding the New Age*:

The New Age has touched you. You have heard its ideas, listened to its music, viewed its art work, watched its superstars, read its literature, and bought its products. You may even have participated in its rituals, and embraced its philosophies – all without knowing them as New Age.<sup>3</sup>

The 'new age' is difficult to define because it is not a movement in any formal sense, it has no central organisation or membership, no holy text or agreed-upon doctrine and no geographical centre. Richard Kyle summarises the problems posed as follows:

Is it a passing fad? In some ways, yes, but aspects of the New Age have deep roots and will probably be around for quite a while. Is it a religious cult? No, but some cults teach New Age beliefs and might be classified as New Age groups. Is

it a conspiracy? Despite what fundamentalists allege, the New Age is not organised well enough for this. Is it a political movement? No, but many entrepreneurs have sold New Age products for billions of dollars. Is it new? Definitely not. The New Age has roots that go way back. Indeed it may not even be a movement.<sup>4</sup>

In their book *Networking* Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps suggest it is best understood as a series of networks, defined as informal, loosely knit organisations 'spontaneously created by people to address problems and offer possibilities primarily outside of established institutions'. Elliot Miller has similarly described it as a metanetwork (or network of networks) and Marilyn Ferguson characterises it as a 'leaderless but powerful network'.<sup>5</sup>

One of the primary problems in attempting a definition of the new age is that the movement does not have distinct boundaries. For example the new age grew out of the long-standing occult metaphysical tradition, but although it borrowed many elements from Theosophy and New Thought it did not absorb them, and they have continued to exist in their original form. Similar boundary problems occur in relation to several contemporary Eastern religions and occult metaphysical movements, the new age shares much in common with feminist spirituality for example, they are not identical movements but they do overlap to an extent.

A further identity problem is caused in sense in which the term is used; it can imply either the narrow, faddish element, usually in reference to 'phenomena, personalities, and events given prominence by the media', or in a broader meaning, referring to a more serious adherence to the occult metaphysical tradition and the attempt to transform society. In his book *A Pilgrim in Aquarius* David Spangler draws a distinction between the New Age and the New Age Movement:

The latter is a modern confluence of ideas, events, groups, and activities which align themselves in some fashion, however trivially and minimally, with the ideas of personal and planetary transformation and provide various ways of seeking to attain it... The New Age on the other hand, is an idea that is timeless. It is much larger than the movement that bears its name.<sup>6</sup>

Essentially what causes most difficulty in forming a distinct definition of the new age is the highly eclectic nature of the movement

*Conspiracy* Marilyn Ferguson argues that we are in the midst of 'the most rapid cultural realignment in history', this great shift is not a 'new political, religious or philosophical system. It is a new mind – the ascendance of a startling worldview'.

Appropriating Thomas Kuhn's theory of 'paradigm shift', the notion that there is a 'larger cultural shift' underway, of which 'the New Age is but the most visible aspect' is a central theme.

Professor Diogenes Allen has written that there is a massive intellectual revolution underway, 'as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages', arguing that the intellectual foundations of the world formed in the Age of Reason are 'collapsing and we are entering a postmodern world'.<sup>7</sup>

The combination of this shift in worldview, the loosely networked structure and the convergence of Eastern and Western philosophies and the philosophies of science have all combined to create a highly eclectic movement, described by Robert Ellwood for example, as 'a contemporary manifestation of a Western alternative spirituality (occult-mystical) tradition going back to at least the Greco-Roman world'.

At the heart of the new age message is the belief that society is poised between two epochs, the Piscean Age and the Age of Aquarius. During the Piscean Age, they argue, Christianity dominated and occult knowledge was undervalued, but their optimistic view of the future predicts a convergence between science, religion and art, as the dawning Age of Aquarius ushers in a 'new golden age of peace, brotherhood and progress'.<sup>8</sup>

The new age, as 'a cultural trend with religious dimensions', shares both objectives and methods with other religions but marks a break in structure and worldview.

While these categories provide a useful framework for viewing the new age, a more complete characterization can be formed by the assessment of the common underlying beliefs of the movement, provided in section 1.4.

1.1.2 The lineage of the new age movement in the West is most often associated with the occult-metaphysical tradition which ran 'like an underground river through the Christian centuries, breaking into high visibility in the Renaissance occultism of the so-called Rosicrucian Enlightenment, eighteenth century Freemasonry and nineteenth century Spiritualism and Theosophy'. The following section will trace the development of new age through its historical precursors, beginning with the explosion of religious interest that characterized the Hellenistic era.

While the specific worldview of the new age movement may be described as a 'fusion of Western occult monism with that of the Eastern religions', it also draws historically from

pantheism, animism and natural humanism.<sup>9</sup> It may be useful at this point to provide a description of the terms involved.

Monism in the West developed through Platonism and Neoplatonism. It suggested that there is only one base 'substance' of which whatever exists is composed. This inclusive view meant that human beings are part of nature and have a divine essence.

Christian theism, which was the dominant ideology in the West from the early middle ages, built on Hebrew and Homeric Greek assumptions that human beings were dominant over nature. Theism proposed a personal god who is both immanent and transcendent.

Pantheism, as a variation of monism, has traditionally informed much new age thinking on nature and ecological issues. The term (meaning 'everything is God') describes a view of the world and God as existing in an indissoluble unity and underpins much Eastern philosophy.

Early Greek thought also espoused a specific form known as hylozoistic pantheism.

Animism, the belief that all things possess a life-force or soul, is thought to have given rise to primitive religion and commonly appears in occult spiritist practices.

The term dualism was first used to characterize the good/evil conflict in Zoroastrianism and has also been employed to describe Gnostic and Taoist, as well as Cartesian thinking. A modified form of dualism also permeates Christianity.

New age beliefs are also humanistic in that human values and concerns are central.

Humanism developed with the doctrines of Protagoras, but the secular aspect in the West developed with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and worked in opposition to Christian theism – the new age has been characterized as 'a spiritual force rushing in to fill the void' left by the decline in Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 ROOTS OF THE NEW AGE – THE OCCULT METAPHYSICAL TRADITION

The new age movement can be viewed as the shape taken by the occult in response to conditions in the modern world. Arguing that the larger occult-metaphysical tradition responds and reacts to, and is shaped by its cultural context, its relationship to the new age should be viewed as one of 'type', with more direct links becoming evident in the religious 'explosion' of the 1800s. This section will trace the influential aspects of the occult mystical tradition from the Hellenistic era, through the Middle Ages and the scientific revolutions of the early modern world to its precursors in nineteenth century America.<sup>11</sup>

1.2.1 In tracing the roots of the new age through the Western occult and metaphysical traditions Kyle and Albanese begin with the Hellenistic period. The considerable growth in religious interest in this era (lasting from approximately 300BC to 200AD) saw the convergence of Egyptian and Near Eastern culture with the native Greek philosophy resulting in a remarkable plurality of beliefs and practices, comparable in many ways to present day situation in developed countries. In this cosmopolitan and 'in some respects... liberal' empire there existed a choice of hundreds or even thousands of cults and sub-cults, 'appearing and dissipating while attempting to assert themselves'. By the end of the fourth century A.D. Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, but elements of this older Hellenistic synthesis 'provided the ingredients for a metaphysical combinationism that would persist'.<sup>12</sup>

One such movement was Neoplatonism, a mystical interpretation of Platonic thought which saw God as 'completely transcendent, and related to the world by means of a series of intermediaries, who (or which) derive from the One by a principle of emanation. In this view reality is a graded series from the divine to the material, and man, who has in him some part divine, longs for union with the eternal source of things'.

The term Hermeticism is used to cover this body of thought, as well as those of gnosticism, astrology, alchemy and magic. Also known as *corpus hermeticum*, it regarded by some as 'the oldest accessible human wisdom'.<sup>13</sup>

Gnosticism is perhaps the ancient religion most often associated with new age thinking. Meaning literally 'to know', it is the name given to a set of beliefs and practices which first appeared in coherent form in the second century and which, at its highest point, presented real competition to the Christian Church. Markedly dualistic and espousing a system of emanations from god to the material world, gnosticism held the goal of mystical merging, but

specifically through secret knowledge available only to the initiated few. Always on the fringes of Christianity and denounced by Church leaders as heresy, Gnosticism eventually gave way in prominence to Manicheism in the third century.

Philip Lee, writing on the Gnostic influence in American religion, states that the religion has no *continuous* line through history, but that the connection between ancient and modern Gnosticism can be characterized as one of 'type'. Among many purported links to modern movements and beliefs are Christopher Lasch and Carl Raschke's contention that many aspects of science are Gnostic in their equation of knowledge with salvation.

Rachel Storm makes the connection between and the teachings of the influential Russian mystic Gurdjieff and the Gnostic effort to 'rouse the soul from its sleepwalking condition and to make it aware of the high destiny to which it is called'. This is also a familiar motif in later new age writing, for example in the seminal *Aquarius Conspiracy* Marilyn Ferguson devotes a chapter to the centrality of 'direct knowing' in efforts to secure 'awakening'. In his book *Studies in Gnosticism and the Philosophy of Religion* Gerald Hanratty provides evidence of Gnostic thinking throughout history in the teachings of Joachim de Fiore, Meister Eckhart, the Kabbalists and comprehensively in the work of C.W.F. Hegel, Simone Weil and Martin Heidegger.<sup>14</sup>

Although the precise origins of astrology are unknown Gordon Melton suggests it developed independently in both China and Mesopotamia, the latter version, influenced also by the cultures of Iran and Iraq, is the precursor of that most studied in the West today. It was among the most popular occult activities of the ancient Near East and has remained enduringly so throughout history.

Alchemy is regarded as the ancestor of modern chemistry. Its main practical aim was the transmutation of base metals into those more valuable, but it also had a profoundly spiritual aspect in the belief that, by similar process, the soul of man could be purified and exalted. This view of knowledge as a secret, redemptive force which could ultimately bring about mystical union between the self and God has persisted throughout centuries in many influential guises and for Carl Jung was a direct precursor of psychology, thereby ultimately informing humanistic psychology and the Human Potential movement.

Another enduring spiritual practice is shamanism. A mediumistic gift associated with healing, prophetic or paranormal power, the role of the shaman in traditional society has been studied in many cultures and has enjoyed a revival in the Neo-shamanist movements of the new age.<sup>15</sup>

1.2.2 It can be said that in basic form, the important occult and metaphysical beliefs had been established by the end of the Hellenistic period, and so later manifestations can be understood as culturally influenced combinationism.

The religious diversity which characterized the Hellenistic era was replaced in the Middle Ages by the dominance of the (Catholic) Christian church.<sup>36</sup> In the early Middle Ages however, division existed within the Church and paganism persisted even during the height of Church strength (1050 to 1350 A.D.).<sup>16</sup>

Catharism, a form of Eastern dualism with strong Gnostic elements, developed around this time and established an influential dissent movement which claimed a new secret understanding of Christianity. Gnostic influence also persisted in the teachings of the late twelfth century abbot Joachim de Flora (specifically ‘Chiliastic’ gnosticism) and of late-medieval mystic and theologian Meister Eckhard, reputedly the inspiration the instigators of the Romantic movement.<sup>17</sup>

Modern wiccan religions trace their origins to medieval witchcraft and, along with neo-paganism, much common ground with new age belief. Hermeticism and Kabbalism also moved into the Christian occult in the Middle Ages. Interest in the Kabbalah and the *corpus hermeticum* flourished with the Renaissance as educated people translated metaphysical manuscripts and began to engage in occult practices. As a movement of cultural rebirth such activities were no longer viewed as mindless superstition, but rather ‘a plunge into the unconsciousness in order to prepare humanity for a leap into the modern world’.<sup>18</sup>

The Rosicrucian Manifestos first appeared in the early seventeenth century. Rosicrucianism attempted to concretize the sacred culture envisioned in the Hermetic tradition by giving it political and religious expression, influenced by Gnosticism and alchemical beliefs, the group is still in existence today, and has parented many splinter groups though the years, (AMORC for example). It has close ties with Freemasonry, and also shares much in common with Christian Science and Theosophy.<sup>19</sup>

1.2.3 Up until the time of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, occult beliefs ran more or less with the mainstream of thought in Western Europe, largely agreeing with the science of the time on the nature of the universe and man’s place within it. However, with the intellectual and scientific developments of the period 1650 to 1800 came a shift in worldview that rendered religious and mystical explanations obsolete for the educated classes.

At this point Catherine Albanese notes that there arose a distinction between the 'historically elite forms of occult religion crystallized in a secret body of knowledge and practices passed on by a small group in every age' and, among the less educated classes, a traditional and often rural counterpart used for example to guide agriculture which 'shared implicit religiophilosophical presuppositions with the elite varieties, (but) emphasized secrecy less than practicality and performance'.

With the growing influence of the Enlightenment, Herbert Levenshal points out that it was the former of these elements which 'declined more rapidly and thoroughly (than did) the simple folk beliefs'.<sup>20</sup>

The most significant ancestors to the new age of this time were perhaps the secret societies. As one such society Freemasonry combined elements of standard Christian religion with an emphasis on reason and the scientific worldview, but Edmond Mazet concludes in his article on the esoteric aspect that it also continues the hermetic tradition, with influence from Gnosticism, alchemy and Kabbalah as well as more markedly Eastern traditions.

The teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) are also cited as directly influencing, for example, the transcendentalist movement. As a seer he shared many beliefs regarding the spiritual state with earlier traditions but as an engineer and scientist he preempted later developments in physics and anatomy, and his combinative vision later inspired a resurgence in occult interest in the nineteenth century which became known as the Metaphysical Revival.<sup>20</sup>

1.2.4 In her analysis of the roots of the new age in America, Catherine Albanese argues that main movements of the nineteenth century, transcendentalism, spiritualism, New Thought and Theosophy can be seen as its immediate precursors. She charts the development of an additional form of metaphysical belief or practice (alongside, and without fixed borders with, the more vernacular, organic occultism and the deliberate, knowledge-based version) which she terms 'mind-oriented religion'. The rapid social change of the time marked by major demographic shifts, immigration and urbanization went hand in hand with a flood of new religions of all types. These mind-oriented forms which stressed spiritualizing theories about life and were mostly uninterested in ceremonialized ritual forms and found it 'easy... to relate to the American public in general.'<sup>21</sup>

Transcendentalism had as members some of the leading literary figures of the time. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was a leader, and the Brook Farm community was home to

Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville. As a work of construction and reconstruction of older metaphysical beliefs, by a group of idealistic intellectuals, Transcendentalism was an example of the new self-conscious form of occultism 'which echoed contemporary American values of individual freedom and personal responsibility in its spirituality'.

It has been recorded as the first American religion to seriously incorporate an Eastern element and the first to attempt to 'retain the spiritual experience of the Christian faith without the substance of its beliefs'. It paved the way for the New Thought and Christian Science movements and, according to Marilyn Ferguson, has directly influenced both new age ecological and political thinking 'inspiring generations of social reformers and activists'.<sup>23</sup>

The growth of a spiritualist movement in nineteenth century America saw a popular swell in interest in spirit contact and communication and a formalization of the procedures which today form the basis for the new age practice of channeling. Although the concept was familiar to many cultures throughout the course of human history, this popularized form is considered to have developed in the decade after 1848. Its theoretical lineage is traced directly to the teachings of Franz Mesmer's 'mental healing' movement (mesmerism, a forerunner of hypnotism) and again, Swedenborgianism.

Andrew Jackson Davis wrote and lectured extensively on their beliefs and associated the spiritualist movement with his campaigning on women's rights and marriage reform. As a religion spiritualism appeared to offer a reasonable and scientific alternative to the rejected traditional systems in that it offered empirical and tangible evidence of a world beyond this one and willingly opened its meetings and seances to investigators who might authenticate the communication and kinetic phenomena.

Although spiritualist beliefs were exceptionally widespread, at the time, with interest and literary influence extending back to Europe from its New York origins, the formation of the Theosophical Society in 1875 caused a splintering of the organization and its influence on new age thought is more accurate an assessment of its impact than the number of surviving spiritualist churches in America which is estimated at around only 1,000 to 2,000.<sup>24</sup>

Sellon and Weber have traced the impressive ancestry of Theosophy in the West to Pythagorean Greece, through the Neo-platonic movement, noting its associations with the Kabbalistic and Gnostic traditions, Islamic sufism, hermeticism and alchemy as well as later movements such as Rosicrucianism and freemasonry and the teachings of Meister Eckhart and Emanuel Swedenborg. In the East, although the spiritualist movement, and by 1930 there were 50,000 members in forty countries. Members were

‘typically urban middle class professionals’ and included ‘influential intellectuals and literary figures such as poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats’.

Theosophists believe that man is ‘perfectible... (and) on a pilgrimage of consciousness toward a wider and wider universality’. Theosophical teachings are pantheistic, believing in the immanence of God in all aspects of life and nature. They borrow from Buddhist teachings on reincarnation and the coming of a saviour for humanity, and have introduced to new age thinking the central idea that we are entering a new phase in human history. Theosophy has been called the ‘mother of the occult’ in modern America, a suggestion echoed in Mary Farrell Bedarnowski’s statement that ‘modern new age thought is both a continuation and an expansion of many religious concepts that Theosophy pulled together’.<sup>25</sup>

Another movement of nineteenth century origin to contribute substantially to the development of the new age, is that of New Thought. New Thought was not a coherent religion so much as a movement, which in summary, ‘wedded the spiritual idealism of Ralph Waldo Emerson with the pursuit of healing alternatives through various mental and psychological processes’. Its origin is generally attributed to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866). Originally a mesmerist Quimby wrote of the healing power of the transfer of healing thoughts, but he eventually came to reject mesmerism in favour of a more obvious Swedenborgian influence. His ideas were adopted and later adapted by patient and student Mary Baker Eddy who used them as the basis for what would become her Church of Christ, Scientist in 1879. In turn, one of Eddy’s students, Emma Curtis Hopkins, formed her own school to teach and train practitioners.

The network of associations eventually being managed by her disciples became known first as mind science, and then, by the 1890s as the New Thought movement. By the mid 1890s some divisions of the movement had begun to stress, in individualistic terms, the power of the mind to heal disease, achieve prosperity and enjoy personal success. Ralph Waldon Trine’s 1897 *In Tune with the Infinite* sold well over two million copies and is considered one of the earliest examples of the ‘self-help’ genre of literature.

A later example in Norman Vincent Peale’s 1952 *Power of Positive Thinking* brought the message of mental healing and the success ethic to millions outside the movement and unobtrusively in to the mainstream of American culture ‘dissolv(ing) the mystery that surrounded occult metaphysics’.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3 THE MODERN NEW AGE

The modern new age, it is argued, took off in the seventies and reached its peak in the eighties, but developments much earlier in the century ensured all the conditions were in place. This section will look at the influence of the scientific discoveries of the early twentieth century and the impact of Eastern religions, as well as outlining the involvement of influential cultural factors. The forms of the new age, first in the nineteen fifties and sixties, and then in the seventies and eighties are the subject of the final part of this section.

1.3.1 After the second World War Eastern religions experienced a dynamic growth period in the United States, and came to form a major component of the modern new age movement, but that this situation could arise was partly due to an older presence. Andrea Diem and James Lewis have outlined at least three distinct waves of Asian religion entering the U.S. The first wave was 'almost purely literary', consisting of the importation of Hindu religious scriptures by the British East India Company in the late eighteenth century and ultimately paving the way for the new age through their influence on the transcendentalist, Theosophical and New Thought movements of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw Indian religious teachers such as Swami Vivekananda and Swami Paramahansa Yogananda inspire the founding of the Vedanta Society and the Self-Realization Fellowship but this small stream of Eastern teachers arriving in the U.S. came to a halt with the Oriental Exclusion Acts of early twentieth century. The result was that the second wave of Hindu and Buddhist teachings to reach the U.S. did so largely through the writings of American occult teachers and it was such a synthesis that later provided much of the basis for new age thought.

Immigration restrictions were lifted in 1965 and the resulting third wave of Eastern religion and its influx of gurus eventually formed the basis of the spiritual subculture leading directly to the new age movement.<sup>28</sup>

Writing in the first decade of the twentieth century William James (1842-1910), chair of philosophy at Harvard University, brought together themes from religion and science in a scholarly account of the psychological aspects of altered states of consciousness. His interest in Emerson's transcendentalism, mental healing and religious or mystical experiences led him to develop what later became known as pragmatism. This philosophy emphasized the

interpretation of ideas through their consequences, and he held that if they created a meaningful universe for a person their truth could not be disputed. The legacy of this work is suggested in Aldous Huxley's inquiry into altered states of consciousness in *The Doors of Perception* (1954).

Meanwhile the world of physics was also breaking ground with discoveries that would influence and inspire new age thinking. In 1900 German physicist Max Planck challenged received wisdom with evidence that light in fact behaved like a particle, beginning the 'new physics' of quantum mechanics. Later elaborations from Albert Einstein and others seemed to echo the cosmology of metaphysics with the revelation that at the sub-atomic level matter was not the solid entity that it appeared, and that the line between matter and energy was fluid rather than fixed.<sup>29</sup>

The modern study of psychology developed in the late nineteenth century and by the early twentieth century there were two main schools were established in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Ivan Pavlov and W.B. Watson's behaviourism. While psychoanalysis based its interpretation of human behaviour largely in terms of the subconscious or unconscious mind, behaviourism is concerned with the human being as a physiological organism. Both of these approaches however are essentially reductionist in their approach and have been less directly influential for new age thinking than the work of C.G. Jung. The founder of analytical or archetypal psychology Jung had studied esotericism in religious and cultural history and 'took motifs and contents from the spiritual tradition both to compare and to interpret the products of the unconscious, not only the unconscious of his patients but his own and that of all those who were concerned for a deeper knowledge of themselves'. Jungian psychology (as well as humanistic and transpersonal psychologies) came to form one of the major theoretical and practical components of new age beliefs from the mid-twentieth century onwards.<sup>30</sup>

Aspects of transpersonal psychology, the work of William James and the spiritualist tradition are echoed in parapsychology, a study popularized in the early twentieth century by J.B. Rhine (1895-1980). Described by the Parapsychological Society as 'the scientific and scholarly study of certain unusual events associated with human experience', it attempts to provide positive evidence through laboratory testing for such phenomena as extrasensory perception (ESP) and psychokinesis (PK), traditionally accounted for in religious or quasi-religious terms as miraculous or magical. Dogged by associations with 'anything paranormal or bizarre... bigfoot, paganism, vampires, alchemy or witchcraft', it gained legitimacy with the admission of the Parapsychological Society into the American Academy for the

Advancement of Science in 1957. Its version of the relationship between science, religion and mysticism continues to hold interest for the new age movement.<sup>31</sup>

1.3.2 Religious pluralism has been a longstanding feature of the American landscape, but the late twentieth century has been marked by a period of intense religious experimentation. Pluralism described the religious and cultural facts of American life but it also became an internalized condition, an ideology which 'prescribed how to live'. The expansion of cultural pluralism was one of the most influential factors in the growth of new religions in the 1960s and 1970s.

Gordon Melton identifies the important events in this respect as, firstly, the spread of new and formerly suppressed religious groups from Japan following the end of the second World War, secondly, the influx of swamis and gurus from India following its independence in 1948, and finally, the 1965 revocation of the Oriental Exclusion Acts by President Johnson. The resulting immigration from Asia he describes as 'the single most important factor in the rise of new religious in America'.<sup>32</sup>

As noted, these traditions had already infiltrated the American religious milieu via Transcendentalism, New Thought, Theosophy et al., but this mass immigration meant that they could assert a more direct presence with millions of practicing Hindus and Buddhists and their teachers, thus making the 'alternatives' more visible and more accessible. Roof and McKinney note that up to this point 'in self-perception if not in fact, the U.S. was a white country in which Protestant Christianity set the norms of religious observance and conduct' and white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture shaped much of public life.

This consensus was finally challenged with the rise of secular, rational, occult-mystical and Eastern beliefs to compete with the Judeo-Christian and the resultant plurality of culture, values and beliefs provided a seedbed for the birth of the new age movement in the 60s and 70s.<sup>33</sup>

Another aspect of American society which came to the fore at this time was the prizing of individualism. The freedom to decide on one's own choice of religion is enshrined in the constitution and is also central to the new age vision. Individualism in new age religion is also evident the centrality of the 'self' and in its aim of personal transformation.

A revival in occult interest and activity in the 1960s and 70s is also implicated in the evolution and reception of the modern new age. Two defined, if overlapping, trends were noticeable in this 'revival' – the popularization of pursuits such as astrology, palmistry, numerology and the *I Ching* and, perhaps more significantly for the new age, 'the worldview

of occult-mysticism became widely accepted during the 1970s and 1980s. ... (more so) than at any time since the seventeenth century'.<sup>34</sup>

1.3.3 Kyle asserts that the new age movement is a post-countercultural development that reflects a modification of the more radical beliefs and concerns of that time. The political and social turbulence of the era was the result of rapid change in the preceding decades. Fiscal and political practices had been left unable to cope with the burgeoning urban and industrial problems which had developing since the late nineteenth century. The seemingly endless scientific and technological advancements 'depersonalized human relationships, creating a thirst for intimacy and community that some fringe religions would fill... (and) all of this emphasis on rationality, technology and science caused a backlash' which 'promoted the subjective, experience-oriented approach to learning, so prevalent in the new age'.<sup>35</sup>

Although Zen Buddhism arrived in the U.S. in the early part of the nineteenth century, it was in the 50s that it experienced its greatest growth, as a 'religionless religion' it became the symbol of the spiritual counterculture of the decade.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi brought the most successful of the Hindu groups, Transcendental Meditation (TM) to the U.S. in 1959, and, although its popularity leveled off in the mid 1970s, it remains a cornerstone of new age practice.

The introduction of Sufism, the mystical wing of Islam, followed a similar trajectory but its teachings, of oneness in world religions and the coming of a new world era, are still resonant in new age thinking.

A similar process of assimilation saw the spiritual traditions of native Americans (especially ecological and shamanistic beliefs) introduced and adapted to mainstream America through the teachings of, for example, Sun Bear (Chippewa) and his Bear Tree Tribe Medicine Society which he established in 1966.<sup>36</sup>

Astrology was probably the most popular aspect of the occult revival of the 1960s. It served as a symbolic science for many and lent to the belief in a new dawn so central to new age ideology its symbol of The Age of Aquarius.

Spiritualism also resurfaced in the 60s and its practice of channeling became one of the most recognizable aspects of the modern new age.

Similarly, modern forms of witchcraft with special interest in 'white' magic, herbology and nature in general gained heightened visibility in this decade.

Parascientific interest in the world of spaceships and their paraphernalia brought together aspects of shamanism or channeling with the new technologies of the age in movements such as George King's Aetherius Society in London in 1956.

Developments in psychology in the 50s and 60s also had impact on what would become the new age movement. Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology began to move the focus away from the treatment of only the mentally ill, helping well people to improve themselves and achieve their potential, using, among other techniques, 'peak experience' and 'life force'. The basic assumptions of humanistic psychology have been widely accepted in Western society and also formed the basis for the influential transpersonal psychology.<sup>37</sup>

In 1962 the famed Esalen Institute at Big Sur in California became a center for those interested in the implications of these psychologies, and, 'combining material taken from comparative religion with mystical and meditation theory... worked with psychotherapeutic language and techniques toward goals of emotional growth and consciousness expansion'. Esalen became a prototype for other centers and smaller less formal groups who would propagate their message.

Other early groups include 'light' groups such as the Findhorn community established in northern Scotland in 1965 that saw the development and articulation of a comprehensive and self-conscious new age ideology.<sup>38</sup>

1.3.4 By the early 1970s new age people increasingly found each other. A loose network of groups and organizations became gradually self-conscious and slowly began to gain attention and, eventually, national recognition. Word-of-mouth recommendations and bulletin boards in health food stores, specialist book stores and yoga centers were gradually supplemented by newsletters and directories such as *Common Ground* in the San Francisco area and *Free Spirit* in New York City which circulated local new age information and services. By 1971 the *East-West Journal* was beginning to articulate the new age vision and it was soon joined by journals and periodicals such as the *New Age Journal*, *New Directions* and *New Realities*. Such publications served not only to spread the ideas of the movement but also to increase its visibility in the public arena. These purposes were further served by the publication of numerous books by those who would become spokespersons for the new age vision.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the beginnings of what would become a widespread interest in holistic health could be seen emerging in, for example, Dr. Evarts Leonis's Meadowbank health center and indeed

at Esalen where pioneering research work promoted a comprehensive approach to health which promised to care for mind, body and spirit.

Richard Alpert, a former Harvard psychologist expelled for experimentation with LSD, published the landmark book *Be Here Now* in 1972 under his Eastern-influenced name Baba Ram Dass. The practice of channeling was brought to the fore by the 1975 publication of Columbia University psychologist Helen Cohn Schucmann's apparently 'automatically' written, 1,200 page *A Course in Miracles*. The book, which reiterates new age themes combined with Christian Science and Christianized Vedanta teachings, had sold over 500,000 copies by the late eighties and had spawned user groups all over the U.S.

A sometime resident of the Scottish Findhorn Community, David Spangler has, through his writing and public speaking, become an important architect and interpreter of new age beliefs from his 1976 *Revelation: The Birth of the New Age* to 1996's *A Pilgrim in Aquarius*. Marilyn Ferguson began reporting on trends in psychology and brain/consciousness research in the *Brain/Mind Bulletin* in 1975, and, despite not being overtly concerned with new age ideology, produced what has been called the 'Bible of the New Age' with her 1980 publication *The Aquarian Conspiracy*.<sup>40</sup>

Other intellectual theorists of the new age include Fritjof Capra whose 1975 *Tao of Physics* also sold over half a million copies, a pioneer of 'new physics', Miller argues that his 1982 *The Turning Point* 'has served as a sort of manifesto of New Age ideology'. Away from the intellectual field celebrity proponents often provided leadership as well as heightened visibility to the movement. In 1983 Shirley MacLaine sold several million copies of her *Out on a Limb* with the 1987 ABC miniseries proving just as popular. In the same year the Harmonic Convergence of new agers on 'sacred sites' around the globe to usher in the New Age became a major media event.

Organizations, groups and communes have also formed important bases for the fostering of new age thinking and the spread of its ideology. Some of earlier origin maintained activity throughout the 70s and 80s (for example, Theosophical bodies such as the Arcane School, 'I AM', AMORC, and Eastern-variant groups such as Zen, Vedanta Foundation, TM and the Sufi Order in the West), while others such as Rajneesh Foundation and Scientology finally flourished in this period.<sup>41</sup>

Management training groups such as est and MSIA were employed by business corporations to improve employee productivity by teaching stress management, interpersonal relations and employee. This practice became so widespread that, in 1986, the New York Times reported

on a Californian survey which found that more than half of company owners and presidents questioned had resorted to some form of 'consciousness raising' technique. It also listed some of the nation's largest corporations (including IBM, AT&T and General Motors) who had sent representatives to a New Mexico seminar that year to discuss 'how metaphysics, the occult and Hindu mysticism might help executives compete in the world marketplace'.<sup>42</sup>

Werner Erhart's est (Erhart Seminar Training) became a multimillion dollar corporation, training hundreds of thousands of people since its inception in 1971. Kenneth Woodward has described it as 'the *Reader's Digest* of the consciousness movement – a distillation of every self-help technique from Dale Carnegie to Zen, packaged for quick consumption'. Stridently 'self' based, est denied being a religion, but 'propounded a worldview and attempted to transform people and deliver them from difficulty'.

According to Rachel Storm, the 'self-religions' focused on enabling the individual 'so that they could become enlightened members of the capitalist mainstream, and while enjoying all its benefits, help to transform it... by taking their inner paradise into the office, so it was reasoned, big business itself would become the engine room of utopia'. She notes that the early 1980s 'were busy years for the self-religion gurus' and est latterly transformed into the less confrontational Forum, which itself gave rise to the similarly successful Transformational Technologies (TT) and Programmes Ltd.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Lifespring and its offshoot John-Roger Hinkins' MSIA (Movement for Spiritual Inner Awareness), borrowing heavily from the belief systems of Theosophy, AMORC and Eckenkar, began to operate training courses following the success of est, and, by the mid eighties had had more than .25 million participants. In a 1998 article on the origins of this movement Massimo Introvigne notes its contribution to the establishment of the 'seminar religion' of the era as well as of the 'self-help subculture'. The publication self-help books presenting the ideas of the group to much broader audiences and in explicitly non-religious terms resulted in a succession of best-sellers (the *Life 101* series), beginning with *You Can't Afford the Luxury of Negative Thought* in 1981.

The popularity of holistic health took off in the 1960s. Melton identifies the landmark years of the movement as 1968 to 1976 but a crucial event for the movement was the 1978 establishment of Dr. Clyde Norman Shealy's American Holistic Medical Association.<sup>44</sup>

While channeling gained high visibility especially in the 1980s, other occult practices were only slightly behind in terms of media attention as astrology, crystals, shamanism and interest in the paranormal and science fiction all entered American and Western mainstream culture in

their own right, largely leaving behind necessary association with the occult, they have gradually assimilated into popular consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

## 1.4 COMMON BELIEFS OF THE NEW AGE

The highly diverse and eclectic nature of the new age makes it difficult to determine its beliefs. Without a centralized organization followers tend to hold disparate combinations of belief, influenced to varying degrees by sources such as Western occultism, Eastern spirituality, modern psychology, natural science, and even Christianity. It is however, possible to identify shared concerns and underlying beliefs common to the majority of the movement and these are outlined in broad terms in the following section. In order to better understand where the movement lies in relation to the religious in our society additional characterizations are provided in Appendices A to C, and in section 3.2 of the main text.

1.4.1 The Age of Aquarius was an early name used by new agers to describe the new consciousness which would come to replace the old. This era of peace and mass enlightenment will arrive with the end of the Piscean Age (or the Age of Christ) a time marked by conflict and a duality or polarity of vision. It is in defining the nature of the transformation that differences emerge. Kyle contends that this notion must be considered part of the longstanding Western millenarian tradition, but Spangler asserts that it is not a classical millenarian movement although some of the characteristics of such groups can be found in certain aspects of the new age cultic fringe. The apocalypticism of such groups and even the pessimism of Eastern views of the cycle of reincarnation and karma are absent from much new age thought, which is marked instead by optimism and a utopian vision of the coming golden age.

In this way, for Marilyn Ferguson, the idea of a paradigm shift has become central to new age thinking in the belief that products of the old paradigm, such as patriarchy and the authoritarian political system, will be balanced by a more inclusive tolerant and equal worldview. Similarly, for Fritjof Capra, the damage wrought on Western society by the mechanistic and reductionist Newtonian/Cartesian worldview will be offset by the adoption of a holistic and ecological view 'similar to the views of the mystics'.<sup>46</sup>

New age belief sees this shift as being brought about by a process of transformation, both on an individual and societal level. Elliot Miller notes that 'evolution is central to New Age belief', where evolution has a progressive and comprehensive meaning, 'referring at its highest levels to the psychological and spiritual growth of humanity'. Ferguson tells us that personal transformation is 'a journey without a final destination' while the reward for the transformed individual may be variously, breaking with 'the cultural trance' in which we

otherwise exist, a spiritual reunification with our innate divinity or more practically, awakening of the intuition or natural knowledge which might allow a more full realization of our potential. This process can be triggered by a mystical experience or it might comprise a series of stages which can be induced by use of such psychotechnologies as biofeedback, hypnosis, meditation, self-help systems, psychotherapies or systems such as Theosophy, Gurdjieff, Lifespring and est.

According to Melton 'the New Age is ultimately a vision of a transformed world, a heaven on earth, a society in which the problems of today are overcome and a new existence emerges', such a condition will come about, according to new age thinking, when a sufficient number of people have achieved a personal transformation – the so-called critical mass. Related to this theory, Kyle notes, is James Lovelock's hypothesis of the earth as a single living creature/civilization and also has resonances with evangelical emphasis on conversion.<sup>47</sup>

Ours is said to be an Information Age, our technologies have made information currency, knowledge power. The theme of gnosis as a salvational knowledge has been noted through the history of Western occult thinking and Eastern philosophies. Where union with the immanent divine is the goal, transformation is the method and knowledge the key to that transformation.

New age thinking continues this tradition – Ted Peters notes the equation of ignorance with darkness or sleepwalking, and Marilyn Ferguson describes 'direct knowing' as 'the awakening... (that) reveals the context that generates our lesser reality'.

This direct knowing is regarded as mystical, it is intuitive, subjective understanding which 'does not reject science or rational thought; it transcends it', it is fundamentally experiential and rejects 'belief'.

The new age focus on intuitive knowledge is a move away from the discredited linear or fragmented thought of the old paradigm. Miller notes the links with the new scientific thought, as exemplified by General Systems Theory (GST) – 'systems thinking requires synthesis as much as analysis: an intuitive ability to recognize wholes, or pattern of relationship' and points out that this view of reality 'is also supported by quantum physics'. Peters notes evidence of the new age view of knowledge, or 'neognosticism' in literary criticism (Ihab Hassan) and science fiction literature (Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*).<sup>48</sup>

While some dualistic thinking persists in sections of the new age, the worldview of the movement largely continues the tradition of monism, believing that 'the cosmos consists of one all-embracing reality'. In this view, all that exists, matter, energy, spirit/god is composed of the same basic material and is in reality, therefore, one, with any apparent differences

being just that, transient and illusory. According to Marilyn Ferguson 'there is no... separation of body, self and others'. This notion extends therefore into a concept of pantheism, if all is one then all is god, human beings, animals, plants, inanimate objects – as Benjamin Crème puts it 'god is the sum total of everything that exists in the manifested and unmanifested universe'. It is this idea which underpins much new age thinking on ecological issues, especially 'deep ecology', a movement which advocates a radical approach to environmental matters based on our 'direct spiritual relation to nature'. It also directly informs the belief that within each human there is a 'spark of divinity', as Shirley MacLaine put it: 'the great tragedy of the human race was that we had forgotten we were each Divine'.

The realization of this is enlightenment or transformation thus provide the basis for the new age vision of the evolved individual and, by extension, society. It also contains the implication of potential – 'the only limitations that the transformed individual has are self-chosen', it is the mission of much of the self-help industry as well as est-style management training to help us to discover this potential.<sup>49</sup>

Central to the new age vision is the idea of holism, or wholism. Ted Peters quotes David Bohm in pointing out that the word health is derived from the old Anglo-Saxon word for 'whole', so that to be healthy is to be whole since 'that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living'. While this certainly applies in the literal sense to new age views on holistic medicine, Kyle argues that it is an important concept in many areas of intellectual inquiry in a time when 'the assumptions of the Enlightenment have broken down'.

In the new age, holism represents 'the reintegration of what modern thought has pulled apart' – body and soul, individual and society, masculine and feminine. For Fritjof Capra, the reductionist thinking of the Cartesian/Newtonian worldview has been rejected by emerging evidence from the new physics and from General Systems Theory which support a more holistic, organic approach – 'the world is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one, indivisible, dynamic whole'. Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* posits the view that this thinking has also penetrated economic, political and educational thinking, acknowledging diversity but striving for unity within it.<sup>50</sup>

The acceptance of many occult beliefs and practices (such as reincarnation and past-life regression, channeling and shamanism, astrology, psychic phenomena and UFO encounters) within the new age subculture can be explained as an extension of the new age worldview. If all is god and god is all then there cannot be a clear distinction between the natural and supernatural realms. This leads to a belief in a multidimensional reality common to

paganism, Eastern religions and most pre-modern Western religion also – only humanism has made superstition of the possibility of supernatural causes and spiritual beings.

The doctrine of reincarnation holds that soul becomes incarnate in a succession of bodies until, by the necessary purification or the using up of one's karma, final release from the body occurs (where karma is defined as the structure of one's life as resulting from one's prior actions in earlier existences, equating justice with retribution). The doctrine of reincarnation or *metempsychosis* probably originated in India, but has been widely held in both oriental and occidental cultures since, as Ted Peters notes, it was 'repudiated in the West first by the Christian Church for which reincarnation is incompatible with its belief in the resurrection of the body, and then by modern naturalism for which it is mere religious superstition'. However, along with its twin concept of karma, belief in reincarnation is strong within mainstream culture.<sup>51</sup>

## 1.5 THE EMERGING CULTURE OF THE NEW AGE

This section introduces the 'new ideology' of the movement. Outlining the theory of *paradigm shift* central to new age debate, it also offers a characterization of the 'old paradigm', and a discussion of what the new age critique claims it has suppressed in our society. It will conclude by assessing the debate on how and why such paradigm shifts occur, citing the evidence offered by the theorists most influential to new age thinking, Marilyn Ferguson and with special reference, here and throughout, to the work of Fritjof Capra.

1.5.1 Elliot describes the emergence of 'an ideology among an intellectual, interdisciplinary elite developing scientific and sociopolitical theory with a global perspective' which, 'concerned above all with threats to world survival... its distinct emphasis is on finding *holistic* solutions to planetary problems'.

This new ideology is represented by groups such as The Club of Rome, the Institute for World order, the Society for General Systems Research and the International Federation for Systems Research and he names among its leading theorists futurist Marshall McLuhan, philosopher Ervin Laszlo and economist Kenneth Boulding, as well as cultural historian Theodore Roszak, psychologist Jean Houston and U.N. consultant Donald Keys. Though he warns against indiscriminately associating this work specifically with the new age movement he points out that many among the ranks are interested in mysticism as a possible spiritual dimension to 'complete their worldview'. In turn their scientific and sociopolitical philosophies have been adopted by many in the new age and to some extent the two have joined forces. In his words:

the primary glue being those intellectual mystics who fully take part in both movements... As a result of this convergence the new ideology is building momentum, not only among an influential but small class of intellectuals, but also a large, socially and politically active grass-roots movement.<sup>52</sup>

The work of translating this highly technical, somewhat abstruse ideology into more popular new age terms has been undertaken by a host of writers, though probably none have been more successful or influential than Fritjof Capra in *The Turning Point* (1982) and Marilyn Ferguson in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980). While these books may never have been intended to take part in any 'new age movement' they share and lend ideology to it, and their very existence at such a time makes them a part of the broader social sea-change with which we're concerned.

1.5.2 Science historian Thomas Kuhn introduced the concept of the *paradigm shift* in his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. From the Greek *paradigma*, a paradigm is a framework of thought employed for understanding aspects of reality, and although, as the title suggest, Kuhn originally applied it to scientific theories it has since been widely adopted, including by new agers who apply it to world views of entire cultures. David Spangler notes that it is possible to 'read today about paradigm shifts in business (from hierarchical to non-hierarchical organizations, for example). In politics, in religion, and in society in general'.<sup>53</sup> Marilyn Ferguson describes the Kuhnian model and how it can be of use:

A paradigm shift is a distinctly new way of thinking about old problems. For example, for more than two centuries, leading thinkers assumed that Isaac Newton's paradigm, his description of predictable mechanical forces, would finally explain everything in terms of trajectories, gravity, force. It would close in on the final secrets of a 'clockwork universe'.

But as scientists worked toward the elusive ultimate answers, bits of data here and there refused to fit into Newton's scheme. This is typical of any paradigm. Eventually, too many puzzling observations pile up outside the old framework of explanation and strain it. Usually at this point someone has a great heretical idea. A powerful new insight explains the apparent contradictions. It introduces a new principle ... a new perspective. By forcing a more comprehensive theory, the crisis is not *destructive* but *instructive*....

A new paradigm involves a principle that was present all along but unknown to us. It includes the old as a partial truth, one aspect of How Things Work, while allowing for things to work in other ways as well. By its larger perspective it transforms traditional knowledge and the stubborn new observations, reconciling their apparent contradictions....

New paradigms are nearly always received with coolness, even mockery and hostility. Their discoveries are attacked for their heresy...

But the new paradigm gains ascendance. A new generation recognizes its power. When a critical number of thinkers has accepted the new idea, a collective paradigm shift has occurred.... After a time that paradigm, too, is troubled by contradictions; another breakthrough occurs, and the process repeats itself. Thus science is continually breaking and enlarging its ideas.<sup>54</sup>

The symptoms ailing our modern culture – 'the spoliation of nature, the continuing suicidal build-up of nuclear weapons, toleration of apartheid, racism and economic oppression, spreading illiteracy, the breakdown of personal relations, a haunting sense of futility, cynicism, incivility and outright violence' are all considered the result of the 'wrongheadedness' of the 'modern' worldview. It is felt that at this point in history we have reached a state of global crisis. Capra blames these deficiencies and almost everything that is wrong with modern civilization on a collective intellectual blindness symptomatic of the 'old

paradigm'. Formed by the Cartesian worldview, Newtonian physics and the Judeo-Christian tradition, he contends that it is marked by linear reasoning and the rejection of mysticism and intuition, a mechanized world view and the desacralization of nature, patriarchy, and authoritarian and centralized political system and a hierarchical social organisation.<sup>55</sup>

1.5.3 The 'old' paradigm, the one from which we are now moving, has, according to Fritjof Capra, dominated our culture for several hundred years, shaping Western society and significantly influencing the rest of the world.

The particular values of this paradigm are summarized by Capra as follows: 'the belief in the scientific method as the only valid approach to knowledge; the view of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary material building blocks; the view of life in society as a competitive struggle for existence; and the belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through economic and technological growth'.

Capra cites the work of both Sorokin and Toynbee as support for the paradigm shift theory, tracing the cycles of maturation and decline of the various worldviews throughout human history. He traces the origins of Western science to the Milesian school of sixth century (B.C.) Greece, which, rather than separating religion, philosophy and science instead evidenced a 'mystical' flavour and an 'organic' view resembling the philosophy of ancient India and China.

The separation of spirit and matter that characterizes the dualism of Western thought began with the Eleatic school and was furthered by the Greek atomists and Aristotelian thought. During the Middle Ages however, philosophy was little concerned with the material world, concentrating instead on God and spiritual matters and it was not until the birth of modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the sharp division between spirit and matter was made.<sup>56</sup>

It was Copernicus who overthrew the thousand year old dogma of the earth as centre of the universe and Johannes Kepler who formulated empirical laws of planetary motion, and when Galileo was able to discredit the old cosmology and establish the Copernican hypothesis as a valid scientific theory he was established as the father of modern science. His empirical approach and use of a mathematical description of nature were the aspects of his work which would become the dominant features of science in the seventeenth century and have remained so up to the present day.

Francis Bacon is credited with changing the nature and purpose of the scientific quest, from a pursuit of wisdom and an understanding of the natural order to the pursuit of knowledge which can be used to dominate and control nature – Capra quotes Bacon's view that nature

must be 'hounded in her wanderings', 'bound into service', and that the goal of the scientist should be to 'torture nature's secrets from her'. In Capra's words 'the ancient concept of the earth as nurturing mother was radically transformed in Bacon's writings, and it disappeared completely as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to replace the organic view of nature with the metaphor of the world as machine'.

This shift was initiated and completed by 'the acknowledged fathers of modern thought', Rene Decartes and Isaac Newton.<sup>57</sup>

Like Galileo, Descartes strove to describe nature in mathematical terms and, for Capra, the crux of the Cartesian method is radical doubt – all traditional knowledge and even the impressions of the senses he doubted until reaching the one thing he could not doubt, the existence of his own mind – from his celebrated statement 'cogito, ergo sum' he deduced that the essence of human nature lies in thought, thus making mind more certain for him than matter, and leading him to the conclusion that the two were separate and fundamentally different.

For Descartes the material universe was a machine and there was no purpose, life, or spirituality in matter – it was this mechanical picture of nature which came to guide scientific observation and the formulation of all theories of natural phenomena up until twentieth century physics brought about change.

Isaac Newton synthesized the work of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Bacon and Descartes into his theory of the Newtonian universe as 'one huge mechanical system operating according to exact mathematical laws', which would remain the solid foundation of scientific thought well into the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup>

Grof describes our resulting view of Newton's cosmos as a super-machine governed by linear chains of cause and effect where solid matter has as its building blocks indestructible atoms which interact according to fixed and unchangeable laws. Time is uni-dimensional, flowing evenly from the past to the future.

Capra notes that the success of this mechanical model in its pragmatic, technological applications resulted in its emulation in all scientific thinking, in disciplines including psychology, sociology, economics, politics and relation fields. The mechanical model, with matter as the basis for all existence, gave rise to the 'reductionist' view which held that complex phenomena could be understood by examining their basic building blocks and the mechanisms through which they interacted.<sup>59</sup>

The negative result of this, and the core of the social crisis in which we find ourselves at this point is, according to Ted Peters:

that we think badly, we think atomistically and divisively. We perceive the world as divided up into quantifiable and isolatable parts, (and) in an effort to control them... modern scientific epistemology separates the object of study from the inquiring subject. (The result is that) ...it leaves out all the affective dimensions of life – feeling, intuiting, valuing, willing, supposing them to be of no interest to scholars and scientists... (and) being concerned with quantitative relationships it has nothing to do with qualitative relationships such as the ultimate meaning of existence; yet these issues are part of reality as well.<sup>60</sup>

This has in turn caused the emergence of two cultures, or a split between sciences and the humanities, thereby ‘unnecessarily fragmented human consciousness and thereby fragmented the human community as well’.

Marilyn Ferguson has likewise condemned the influence of academic specialization which ‘has kept most scientists from ‘trespassing’ into fields other than their own’.<sup>61</sup>

Feminists and ecologists identify these tendencies as root problems. According to Shiva:

fragmentation and uniformity as assumed categories of progress and development destroy the living forces that arise from relationships with in ‘the web of life’ and the diversity in the elements and patterns of those relationships.<sup>62</sup>

Linda Shepherd notes the essentially masculine nature of logical analysis based on ‘separating’ and ‘compartmentalizing’ which, despite producing the marvels of modern technology has simultaneously given rise to many environmental and social problems.<sup>63</sup>

1.5.4 Capra notes that the Chinese concepts of yin and yang that have come into popular usage in the West have had their original meaning severely distorted by Western cultural preconceptions. In Chinese culture yin is associated with the feminine and yang with the masculine. What is good and desirable is a dynamic balance between the two since the personality of each man and each woman is not static, but rather a ‘dynamic phenomenon’ resulting from the interplay of these elements.

This view contrasts sharply with that of patriarchal culture which has established a rigid order based on the polarization of gender characteristics, distorting the meaning of the terms masculine and feminine by ‘giving men the leading roles and most of society’s privileges’. Capra posits that the association of the feminine with passive and receptive qualities and the masculine with active and creative can be traced to Aristotelian theories of sexuality which

were used for centuries as a 'scientific' rationale for keeping women in a subordinate, subservient role.<sup>64</sup>

Linda Shepherd also notes Aristotle's description of femaleness as 'a deformity' or 'mutation', and links such thought to the patriarchal and masculine nature of the institutions of science itself, compounded further during the Scientific Revolution when Francis Bacon would state the business of the newly formed Royal Society of London was to raise a 'Masculine Philosophy'. Shepherd argues that as masculine values defined science, so they became a tool to disenfranchise women.

In 1980 Merchant wrote:

In investigating the roots of our current environmental dilemma and its connection to science, and technology and the economy, we must re-examine the formation of a worldview and a science that, by re-conceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women.<sup>65</sup>

Capra notes the ancient association of nature, and especially the earth, with the feminine aspect. Traditionally seen as a wild and uncontrollable female but also as a benign and nurturing mother, under patriarchy this image gave way to one of passivity, and her dangerous aspects to the idea that she should be dominated by men. He notes that the rise of the Cartesian view of the world as a mechanical system gave scientific sanction to the domination and exploitation of nature for human benefit.

This view is echoed by Linda Shepherd, quoting Robert Boyle's seventeenth century description of nature as 'God's great pregnant automaton' and his assertion that 'there can be no greater male triumph than to know ways of captivating Nature and making her subserve our purposes'.

Capra also notes the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the attitude of the dominant paradigm toward nature. The image of a male God ruling the world from above by imposing divine law was used to dominate both nature and women by propagating a belief in the superior role of the rational mind. In this manner the scientists' search for the laws of nature as reflections of this divine law.<sup>66</sup>

Again drawing on the concepts of yin and yang, Capra explains that the rational and intuitive kinds of knowledge or modes of thought are complementary modes of functioning of the human mind. Intuitive knowledge is based on direct, non-intellectual experience of reality arising in an expanded state of awareness, it tends to be synthesizing, holistic and nonlinear and has traditionally been associated with mysticism or religion. Rational knowledge is

linear, focused and analytical, its function is to discriminate, measure and categorize. It tends therefore to be fragmented, and has traditionally been associated with scientific inquiry.

Capra notes that our current culture is referred to as the Scientific Age. It has established the latter form of knowledge as the only valid one, disregarding that which cannot be measured and denigrating the intuitive function. This has led to a 'profound cultural imbalance' which Capra believes lies at the root of our current crisis.

Shiva notes that the Western assumption that intuitive knowledge is less valuable and somehow primitive or even unreliable/dangerous has had far reaching consequences in attitudes to ecology and development in the non-West.

Shepherd notes that its association with the 'feminine' is also connected to patriarchy and its denial of female intellectual equality. She also observes that by denying intuition and the frontier of science that includes the study of consciousness and phenomena, we risk missing out on important aspects of reality and innovation.<sup>67</sup>

The development of biology has gone hand in hand with that of medicine throughout the history of Western science, and according to Capra, the influence of the Cartesian paradigm on medical thought culminated in the emergence of the 'biomedical model'. In his opinion the main shortcoming of this model was that it came to view the human body as a machine that could be analyzed in terms of its parts; disease was seen as a malfunctioning of biological mechanisms which are studied from the point of view of cellular and molecular biology; the doctor's role is to intervene, whether physically or chemically, to correct the malfunctioning of a specific mechanism. But, Capra argues, health is more than an absence of disease, it involves a complex interplay between the physical, psychological, social and environmental aspects of the human condition and therefore cannot be precisely defined or understood in reductionist terms.<sup>68</sup>

Traditional wisdom, on the other hand, has seen illness as a disorder of the whole person, involving not only the patient's body, but his mind; his self-image, his dependence on the physical environment as well as 'his relation to the cosmos and the deities'. The folk healers who have been informed by this wisdom throughout the ages use a wide variety of therapeutic techniques, which are holistic to different degrees, and which often attempt to influence the patient's mind to help stimulate the natural healing power that all living organisms possess. He also notes that such practices have traditionally been the prerogative of women since the art of healing is usually associated with the tasks and the spirit of motherhood. However, with the appearance of organized, high-tradition medicine 'patriarchal patterns assert themselves and medicine becomes male dominated', leading to the intrusion of medicine into

such domains as childbirth – ‘one more manifestation of the control of women’s bodies by men’.<sup>69</sup>

Just as new agers hold the mechanistic worldview of patriarchy responsible for the suppression and suppression of women and nature so, through the combined use of knowledge and power, has it justified the domination of non-European peoples. Vandana Shiva argues that for more than three centuries this Western reductionism has:

hidden its ideology behind projected objectivism, neutrality and progress. The ideology that hides ideology has transformed complex pluralistic traditions of knowledge into a monolith of gender-based, class-based thought and transformed this particular tradition into a superior and universal tradition to be superimposed on all classes, genders and cultures which it helps in controlling and subjugating.<sup>70</sup>

She also associates the growth of the nation state with the Cartesian/Newtonian worldview and notes that the view of the capitalist and industrialist model of development as desirable has had a disastrous effect on non-Western countries. Economic biases and values against nature, women and indigenous peoples have culminated in the view of traditional societies as ‘non-productive’.

The beliefs and practices of the occult have also been suppressed by the domination of the Cartesian/Newtonian worldview. In the pre-modern world the occult arts were regarded primarily as practical devices for assisting the everyday inquiry of the time did not make distinction between the natural and supernatural worlds. The tradition had co-existed with science and religion until it was eventually driven underground by the Scientific Revolution of the Enlightenment.

However as the scientific method of the dominant paradigm left little room for the immeasurable or intangible, so the onset of the Enlightenment combined with the Protestant rejection of idolatry to push the occult tradition even further underground. Grof notes the rejection of mystical or religious concepts in modern thought, using the examples of the psychoanalytic interpretation of the unitive or oceanic state of the mystic as a regression to primary narcissism and infantile helplessness, and the description of religiosity as the ‘obsessive – compulsive neurosis of humanity’.<sup>71</sup>

1.5.5 Marilyn Ferguson writes that Kuhn’s ideas on paradigm shifts are enormously helpful, not only because they help us understand how a new paradigm emerges but also how and why

such new views are invariably resisted to begin with. Grof notes that a paradigm defines not only what reality is, but also what it is not and cannot be, once the paradigm is accepted scientists do not question its basic philosophical assumptions but rather focus their efforts on its further elaboration and articulation. Initially the new paradigm has a positive and progressive role, defining legitimate problems, offering methodologies for experimentation and criteria for evaluation, but eventually research will invariably produce data which are incompatible with even the most sophisticated and complex scientific theory.<sup>72</sup> As Ferguson puts it:

eventually too many puzzling observations pile up outside the old framework of explanation and strain it (and then,) ...usually at the point of crisis, someone has a great heretical idea... a powerful new insight that explains the apparent contradiction..

and so the crisis is *instructive* rather than destructive.<sup>73</sup> She notes that such heresies are nearly always received with coolness, if not even mockery and hostility. Such ideas will often appear bizarre since the discoverer has made an intuitive leap and may not have all the data in place, and those established figures who have worked fruitfully in the old view are rarely converted to the view. Hence the new paradigm gains ascendancy only when a new generation recognizes its power, or 'when a critical number of thinkers have accepted its ideas'.

Historian Richard Tarnas echoes this, when, writing from a Jungian perspective, he describes shifts in worldview as basically shifts in the 'collective unconscious'. He asserts that the project of the 'old' paradigm was 'to increase knowledge of the world in order to gain control of that world and of nature for human benefit'.

He points out its successes in the promotion of greater human autonomy, freedom, self-determination and the 'adventurous exploration of new horizons' while acknowledging that the one-sidedness of the development has created more psychological and spiritual problems for humanity as well as an enormous ecological problem. He also notes the re-emergence of the feminine principle as an element in the new worldview, in the collective sense of a connection with the whole and with nature, as well as in the advent of feminism and female empowerment.<sup>74</sup>

Capra echoes this, describing the doctrines of patriarchy as 'so universally accepted that they seemed to be the laws of nature; indeed, they were usually presented as such' but noting that the feminist movement 'is one of the strongest cultural movements of our time and will have a profound effect on our further evolution'.<sup>75</sup>

Dr. Beverley Rubik, Director of the Center for Frontier Studies at Temple University, Philadelphia sees the paradigm shift on a personal level as a 'religious shift' or a 'deep conversion experience', and predicts the new generation of scientists will embrace the ideas

of the emerging worldview as they are 'more open-minded' and have less of a vested interest in dogma.<sup>76</sup>

For Linda Shepherd, Kuhn's description of the shift in worldview can be equated with the alchemical process, a process which will in science, she contends, give rise to a radical new theory.<sup>77</sup>

In an attempt to establish the relationship between science and the new age this section will introduce the new age assessment of the 'new physics' of relativity theory and quantum mechanics, the influential work of David Bohm, and provide an outline of the movements arguments on General Systems Theory, emergent evolution and conscious evolution. The final part of the section will concentrate specifically on the new science and eastern mysticism, and by outlining the new age position on these subjects, provide a backdrop for the discussions of Chapter two.

1.6.1 Columbia University professor of Education David Sloane believes that societal problems caused by divisive thinking can be cured with 'insight' and 'imagination':

the recovery of the wholeness of imagination is also a healing (a making whole) of the human being – ideas from the 'new physics' of relativity theory and quantum mechanics, specifically the work of philosopher/scientist David Bohm who demonstrates that the 'sciences and humanities can be united in a world view that incorporates both physical and mental processes, paving the way through the debris of divisive modern thinking toward a postmodern wholistic form of thinking.<sup>78</sup>

Newton's mechanical view of the universe dominated scientific thought up until the early twentieth century, when, causing similar shockwaves as had the views of Copernicus and Galileo several centuries earlier, in 1905 Einstein unveiled his theory of relativity, thus shattering the view of time and space as absolute. He argued that the two could not be seen as absolute and distinct as they were in fact relative to each other, to the speed of light, to energy and to gravity, thus replacing Newton's three dimensional space and uni-dimensional time with a four dimensional space-time continuum.

Quantum theory, or quantum mechanics was formulated then, over the first three decades of the century by an international team of scientists which among others included Einstein himself and German physicist Max Planck. The term 'New Physics' was used to describe these two developments, theory of relativity and quantum theory.

According to Peters, perhaps even more than relativity theory, quantum theory disrupted the Newtonian worldview by introducing three revolutionary discoveries – firstly, atomic particles such as electrons so not appear to function like material objects, they move discontinuously from one location to another without appearing to traverse the distance between. Secondly, individual subatomic events are not predictable, they do not seem to be

individually causally determined and must be studied instead in groups, or quanta. Third, they display a non-causal, non-material influential relationship whereby interference with one electron can instantly affect another from the same atom regardless of the distance between them, indicating a sort of telepathy between the particles not dependent on spatial contact. As physicist Niels Bohr wrote: 'isolated material particles are abstractions, their being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems', so subatomic particles and ultimately all parts of the universe must be defined through their relationships and for this reason are better understood by holistic rather than reductionist thinking. Quantum physics also changed the relationship between subject and object, the scientist is no longer seen as an objective observer but rather an active participant which interjects an element of subjectivity into the process.<sup>79</sup>

1.6.2 Princeton physicist David Bohm sees a problem in quantum physics in that there is no consistent notion at all of what the reality might be that underlies the universal constitution and structure of matter. He contends that quantum physicists avoid this issue by concentrating on mathematical equations to predict and control the behaviour of statistical aggregates of particles – on this count, Peters notes, 'the practicing quantum physicists are still modern, still calculating the position and momentum of fragments, even though the fragments are of a different scale'.

Bohm's concept of this underlying reality is one of an 'undivided wholeness in flowing movement' from which 'by the tools of thought abstract from it patterns, objects, entities, conditions, structures and so on'. So mind and matter exist, but not by themselves, independently, in isolation but rather they are modes of the common underlying reality – 'mind and matter are not are not separate substances rather they are different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement' – a whole that is 'governed by holonomy – that is the law of the whole'.<sup>80</sup>

1.6.3 The thesis of Capra's *The Turning Point* is that this holistic perspective from the new physics must be adopted in other disciplines such as biology, psychology and economics, as well as by the institutions and individuals that make up society as a whole. He states that this new vision of reality is known as 'systems view' and explains that it:

...looks at the world in terms of relationships and integration. Instead of concentrating on the basic building blocks or basic principle substances, the systems approach emphasizes basic principles of organization. Examples of systems abound in nature. Every organism... is an integrated whole and thus a

living system. But systems are not confined to individual organisms and their parts. The same aspects of wholeness are exhibited by social systems such as an anthill, a beehive or a human family – and by ecosystems that consist of a variety of organisms and inanimate matter in mutual interaction... All these natural systems are wholes whose specific structures arise from the interactions and interdependence of their parts... Systemic properties are destroyed when a system is dissected, either physically or theoretically, into isolated elements. Although we can discern individual parts in any system, the nature of the whole is always different from the mere sum of its parts. Another important aspect of systems is their intrinsically dynamic nature. Their forms are not rigid structures but are flexible yet stable manifestations of underlying processes... Systems thinking is process thinking...<sup>81</sup>

Miller notes that the systems view was first formulated in the 1930s by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy and by 1972 his General Systems Theory (GST) had generated an interdisciplinary movement. GST proposes that there are certain natural laws which determine the functioning of all systems, physical, organic, psychological, social, conceptual, and Bertalanffy believed that interdisciplinary study of these systems would yield a 'mathematically precise, experimentally viable' description of such laws, thereby making possible the 'long dreamed of unification' of the physical and social sciences.

Thus, adopting the views of Systems Theory, new agers propose a switch from reductionist to systemic thinking is both the essence of the new paradigm and a matter of immediacy in dealing with the crisis of global civilization. However, they go further than the systems movement by suggesting that this change require acceptance of 'mystical modes of thought'. Miller explains that this is the case for two reasons – firstly, because of the equation between mysticism and intuition.

He notes that intuition 'undeniably plays a role in systems thinking' (for example, systems requires synthesis as much as analysis: an intuitive ability to recognize wholes, or patterns of relationship), and secondly, since altered, or mystical, states of consciousness tend to break down 'ego' boundaries and create a sense of unification with one's environment, so new agers believe that they offer an effective means for achieving this more holistic perspective that is necessary for both the individual and society.<sup>82</sup>

1.6.4 Von Bertalanffy felt that this 'self-organizing' force brings assorted objects into increasingly complex relationships or toward *higher* organization. This suggests an 'emergent' type of evolution is at work which is therefore not random but 'purposeful' and 'creative'. Where Darwin's theory implied life arose through strictly chance mutation and natural selection seemed to impose a certain futility on man, the addition of this creative principle to evolution seemed 'to guide things upward (and in some fashion) to legitimize

spirituality'. Thus a type of '*process philosophy*' emerged in the writings of, for example, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, which embraced evolution as the basis for rather than the destroyer of, man's spiritual aspirations.<sup>83</sup>

Evolution is central to new age conceptions of God, creation, man, history. In fact, in new age belief, evolution is 'God in process' and their distinctive optimism that the new paradigm will be able to rectify the world's situation is dependant on a significant portion of humanity being willing to make the sacrifices entailed in such a change in thinking – in effect an 'evolved humanity'.

There exists in new age circles the belief that 'the majority of human beings now alive may experience an evolutionary shift from ego-centred awareness to a unified field of shared awareness'. There is a conviction that for example, 'the rising number of people who have experienced altered states of consciousness' can be interpreted as evidence that the pace of evolution has been stepped up – as John White puts it (summing up the idea of an idealized new society):

The pace of change is now unprecedented in the life of our species. We are witnessing the final phase of Homo Sapiens and the simultaneous emergence of ...what I have named Homo Noeticus, a more advanced form of humanity... A society founded on love and wisdom will emerge. The change of consciousness underlying the passage involves transcendence of ego and recognition of the unity of life.<sup>84</sup>

But while many believe this new humanity, characterized by an intuitive/mystical perspective and individual awareness of oneness with innate divinity, is already emerging, Miller points out that in spite of what may be said for technological advances, an objective look at the world situation would indicate that things are instead getting more fragmented and out of hand. He quotes Keys in his description of 'the accelerating curves of overpopulation, wasteful use of resources, pollution, unemployment disappearing agricultural land, the un-met basic human needs in two-thirds of the world and the threat of a run-away nuclear arms race' which he says 'appear to be converging rapidly into a global mega-crisis'.<sup>85</sup>

In answer to this Marilyn Ferguson employs a scientific theory developed by paleobiologists to explain the emergence of evidence from the fossil record incompatible with Neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory. *Punctationalism* or *punctuated equilibrium* describes a mechanism by which a crisis in a species' environment can trigger rapid, radical evolutionary change. She employs it to explain the sudden appearance in geological evidence of a new species, not evolved gradually by the steady change of its ancestors but 'all at once and fully formed'.

She explains the significance of this evidence from the new scientific paradigm for the new age thus:

(1) It requires a mechanism for biological change more powerful than chance mutation, and (2) it opens us up to the possibility of rapid evolution in our own time, when the equilibrium of the species is punctuated by stress. Stress in modern society is experienced at the frontiers of our psychological rather than our geographical limits. Pioneering becomes an increasingly psychospiritual venture since our physical frontiers are all but exhausted, short of space exploration. Given what we are learning about the nature of profound change, transformation of the human species seems less and less improbable.<sup>87</sup>

1.6.5 Barbara Marx Hubbard, futurist and 1984 candidate for the US vice-presidency writes that 'we are at the dawn of a period of 'conscious evolution', when humanity first becomes aware of the process of Creation and begins to participate deliberately in the design of our world'.

In his foreword for Barry McWaters' 1981 book *Conscious Evolution* David Spangler describes it as 'a new cultural myth' and McWaters defines it as follows:

'conscious evolution' is that latter phase in evolutionary process wherein the developing entity becomes conscious of itself, aware of the process in which it is involved and begins voluntarily to participate in the work of evolution. This can happen in a number of dimensions, in a number of ways, and in fact has been happening for a long while both in individuals and small groups. We are now approaching that moment in evolutionary history when Humanity, as one self-conscious entity, will assume this role.<sup>87</sup>

He adds that 'in preparation for this unified function much work is required, and, in fact many individuals and groups are working diligently'. Miller elucidates the ideological significance of conscious evolution – 'it provides a context and impetus for social and political action' – a 'vision of the future' that new agers are 'working toward'.<sup>88</sup>

1.6.6 New age writers see a synthesis of concepts between the emergence science and the ideas of Eastern religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. New age science is seen as a return to the science of the premodern world. In Marilyn Ferguson's words: 'science is only now verifying what humankind has known intuitively since the dawn of history' while Fritjof Capra points out that if the new physics leads (us) to a mystical worldview it will be 'going back to the beginning, 2,500 years ago'. The two best-selling books on the subject were Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* which notes 'similarities between Eastern philosophies and physics' that seem to him 'obvious and significant', and Capra's *The Tao of Physics* which aims to demonstrate the 'essential

harmony between the spirit of Eastern wisdom and Western science'. It contends that the new physics forces us to see the world in a manner very similar to that of eastern mysticism, so that we become aware of 'the unity and interrelation of all phenomenon and the intrinsically dynamic nature of the universe'.<sup>89</sup>

Stanislov Grof sums it up thus:

The most exciting aspect of all the (above) revolutionary developments in modern Western science – astronomy, physics, biology, medicine, information and systems theory, depth psychology and consciousness research – is the fact that the new image of the universe and of human nature increasingly resembles that of the ancient and Eastern spiritual philosophies – the different systems of yoga, the Tibetan Vajrayana, Kashmir Shaivism, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Kabbalah, Christian Mysticism, or gnosticism.

It seems that we are approaching a phenomenal synthesis of the ancient and the modern and a far-reaching integration of the great achievements of the East and the West that might have profound consequences for the life on this planet.<sup>90</sup>

For new agers, the primary characteristics of the new science (or those which distinguish it most significantly from that of the old paradigm) are its subjectivity and its holism.

Peters uses the term 'Scientific Wholism' and says it combines three things: twentieth-century discoveries in physics, an acknowledgement of the important role played by imagination in human knowing, and a recognition of the ethical exigency of preserving our planet from ecological destruction.

Marilyn Ferguson believes that wholeness 'is a fundamental characteristic of the universe' and that 'modern science has verified the quality of whole-making'. She outlines where this concept was failed by modern/old science which 'tried to understand nature by trying to break things up into their parts', wholes, she says, cannot be understood by analysis, 'they just come together'.

Similarly, in arguing the fundamental agreement between the new physics and Eastern mysticism Capra points out that 'subatomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities but can be understood only as interconnections'. The revelations of the new physics, he believes, 'reveal the basic oneness of the universe. It shows we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smaller units'.<sup>91</sup>

The new science undoubtedly has a more subjective orientation than the old – Capra notes that while not ruling out the role of traditional scientific method, its rationality must be 'complemented by the intuition that gives scientists new insights and makes them creative'. Beverly Rubik goes so far as to deny the possibility of objective reality stating that 'objectivity is only a man-made concept', and Fred Alan Wolf expands by saying:

...in observing reality, an observer is creating mental reality, and that mental reality is affecting the 'out there' physical reality, however, in a very subtle way. That 'out there' really doesn't exist independently of such an observational act. Many people still don't believe that; they believe that there is an 'out there world' which is really independent of any kind of observational power that they may bear upon the world.<sup>92</sup>

Kyle notes that since the Western mind has traditionally seen science as dealing with objective reality and religion relating to issues concerning an objective personal God, so new age thinking has made both science and religion more subjective and thus more compatible. He goes on to describe consciousness, in its purest form as 'non-material, formless and void of all content' and notes that in many spiritual traditions this manifestation of consciousness is associated with the divine, as it is believed to be 'the essences of the universe and to manifest itself in all things... all forms of matter and all living things are seen as patterns of the divine consciousness'.

Marilyn Ferguson notes the belief among some new agers that this synthesis of science and spirituality could eventually bring about the end of objective science as we know it, or as Gary Zukav puts it, 'we may be approaching the end of science' since 'only direct mystical experience' and 'enlarged awareness' can 'carry as part the limits of our logic to more complete knowledge'.<sup>93</sup>

New age views on ecology are also informed by the themes of holism and monism and are in essence a further extension of the new age worldview. Kyle identifies a three tiered approach to environmental issues within new age leadership: they attack both the current practices of the industrial world and the mind-set which has fostered the destruction of the environment; they have proposed an alternative worldview, holistic in its approach which they believe will solve many of the current problems; and they have developed practical economic and political programmes for the implementation of their worldview.

Capra denounces shallow environmentalism which he defines as 'the efficient control and management of the natural environment for the benefit of man' as effecting no real break from the Cartesian mentality of the old paradigm. The emerging notion of a 'deep ecology' on the other hand, with its view of nature and the universe as being dynamic and of one essence, is one common in Eastern spirituality, especially Taoism but has also long been a minority view in the West since Heraclitus taught the concept in ancient Greece.

The teachings of deep ecology persisted in the Western occult tradition and Capra notes a form of it in the views of Christian mystics such as Saint Francis of Assisi, in the work of philosophers Baruch Spinoza and Martin Heidegger, as well as being deeply embedded in Native American culture.<sup>94</sup>

Linked to the idea of deep ecology is the Gaia hypothesis, developed by James Lovelock in the 1960s, which proposed that the earth is one single living organism:

The entire range of living matter on earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity capable of manipulating the earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers beyond its constituent parts.<sup>95</sup>

Miller notes that the implications of this hypothesis include the possible formation of a 'global brain' on the suggestion that the globe itself is 'now a conscious being or will... eventually evolve into one'. He states that such a belief may in respects be consistent with the underlying new age thought and value systems in three ways: firstly, belief in a living, sacred planet is perceived as having immense ecological value; an answer to the exploitation and abuse of the earth 'allegedly fostered by Cartesian mechanism and Judeo-Christian 'dominion' theology (based on Gen.1:23)'; secondly, belief that 'the integration of humanity with itself and all earth systems would cause something new and greater to emerge is perfectly consistent with the emergent evolution view that integrated parts create a whole greater than their sum'; thirdly, 'the new myth is consistent with New Age spiritual experience, which is the ultimate shaper of and for authority for their beliefs'.<sup>96</sup> Donald Keys write that:

There is a direct connection between the subjective or inner experience of the individual person and the emergence of myth. ...myths such as Humanity-as-Being, Earth-as-Entity, or Human Community are experienced as self-evident and unquestionable facts in the inner life. A life of active spiritual pursuit provides an ultimate basis to realize the unifying oneness through which all life flows.<sup>97</sup>

That the Gaia hypothesis is named after the goddess of ancient mythology also links with new age feminism and ecofeminism. The traditional association of the earth or nature with the feminine has been previously noted and Peters points out that in the new eminence within the new age of themes of 'intuition, receptivity, embodiment, attunement with nature and a sense of oneness with the whole planet earth' we are seeing 'a hitherto repressed feminine force... beginning to exert its power in our culture'. He quotes Jungian psychologist Marion Woodman stating that our task is to make this feminine principle conscious, we must:

connect with her... because the power that drives patriarchy, the power that is raping the earth, the power drive behind addictions, has to be transformed. There

has to be a counterbalance to all that frenzy, annihilation, ambition, competition and materialism'.<sup>98</sup>

But he notes that in new age practice consciousness raising in some instances goes well beyond a mere psychological process to a re-evocation of the Mother Goddess of pagan times, characterized not only by the Gaia hypothesis but also a resurgence in interest in a wide variety of pre-modern practices such as shamanism, root medicine, witchcraft and magic.

### A PSYCHOLOGY

In the new age, personal transformation equals salvation and this quest for the higher self, the search for divinity has, Kyle writes, both spiritual and psychological dimensions. Martin Gross tells us we are 'the citizens of the contemporary Psychological Society', living in 'the most anxious, emotionally insecure and analyzed population in the history of man'. Kyle states that psychology has come to replace religion as the primary vehicle for improving the quality of the inner life. In fact Jacob Needleman writes that psychologists came to judge, 'from a professional perspective', 'much of contemporary religion as psychologically harmful' and psychology therefore as better suited and equipped to address the concerns of the inner life.

As a suggested explanation for this Gross writes that our Psychological Society is one 'in which, as never before, man is preoccupied with *Self*', and, as Western religions have tended to focus on exhortations and commandments without telling us how to follow them, it is consequently not seen as being able to improve the quality of human life. In contrast psychology and Eastern religions are seen to focus on the individual, on his or her well-being and their primary goal is the 'release from suffering – personal suffering as well as the sufferings of humanity'.<sup>99</sup>

Kyle suggests that 'choice-fatigue', a term Alvin Toffler employs to describe our reaction to the vast array of ideas and moral codes available in our pluralistic society, causes us to turn inward for guidance and meaning.

Peter Beyer points out that this extreme plurality of the social structure means that 'the individual's experience of himself becomes more real to him than his experience of the objective world'.

But this turn inward can result in crisis of identity as 'the world of the psyche has few road maps' and the search within can 'fall short of the authenticity and assurance that is craved', leading to a state of anxiety and stress which is, in turn, dealt with by the therapies which 'attempt to give direction and guidance to the search for meaning'.<sup>100</sup>

These therapies cover a wide variety of experiences and operate in several related movements which overlap with, and to an extent are interchangeable with, the new age. The New Consciousness movement for example denotes a range of groups which embrace an alternative worldview drawn from occultist to Eastern spirituality to paranormal research,

while the human potential movement is concerned with the various therapeutic techniques designed to enhance psychological growth.<sup>101</sup>

## PSYCHOANALYSIS AND BEHAVIOURISM

As previously indicated the schools of psychoanalysis and behaviorism dominated psychology for the first half of the twentieth century. Freud's psychoanalysis has been termed a kind of psychic determinism, it held that personality was determined by inherited characteristics and the social influence of the early childhood years, humans were considered essentially as animals driven by instinct and belief in God was considered a neurosis, or an illusion needed by the weak. Jungian psychoanalysis later challenged the anti-religious stance of the Freudian system, insisting that the spiritual aspect of personality was both real and important. His theory of archetypes accommodated the mystical aspect of religiosity and many facets of his beliefs were compatible with humanistic and transpersonal psychology as well as eastern and occult spirituality.<sup>102</sup>

Behaviorism shared with psychoanalysis the supposition that people are determined by biological inheritance and social environment but was more scientific in its approach. Insisting on a return to observable methods of investigation it saw humanity as basically a 'collection of stimulus-response mechanisms'.

For Fritjof Capra the rigidity, determinism, dehumanization and anti-religious bias was evidence of the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa* – a 'manifest consequence of the Cartesian division'. He describes these psychologies as 'reduc(ing) all behavior to mechanistic sequences of conditioned responses' and asserts that the only scientific understanding of human nature is one that remains within the framework of classical physics and biology; 'a psychology, furthermore, that reflects our culture's preoccupation with manipulative technology, designed for domination and control'.

He does acknowledged Jungian influence however in its inclination to explore 'the subtler aspects of the human psyche that lie far beyond our everyday experience'.<sup>103</sup>

## HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Humanism is known as 'third force' psychology (where psychoanalysis is 'first force' and behaviorism is 'second force') and was effectively established with the publication of Abraham Maslow's 1954 *Motivation and Personality*. 'The greatest attainment of identity,

autonomy or selfhood is itself simultaneously a transcending of itself, a going above and beyond self', he wrote, promising the 'self-actualized' person would achieve 'acceptance and expression of the inner core or self' and experience fleeting moments of their higher natures, 'peak experiences in which time disappears and hopes are fulfilled', they can live in their inner psychic worlds of emotion and experience and 'enjoy it to such an extent that it may be called Heaven'.<sup>104</sup>

Thus Maslow's work repeatedly stressed the life-enhancing nature of the scientific, deterministic view of life but also infused modern psychology with a religious dimension, and, according to Rachel Storm, eventually developed into what became known as 'fourth force' – transpersonal or spiritual psychology. Carl Rogers developed the 'client-centred' approach whereby the role of the therapist is to guide the client to answers within rather than to instruct or direct, echoing the new age emphasis on experience. Kyle notes the following additional links to the new age:

First, human beings are good and their natural bent is 'toward goodness, toward growth'. Second, 'human potential is unlimited'. Such potential is tapped largely through personal experience. Human autonomy is necessary because growth and values emerge from personal experiences that are not restricted by beliefs and social conventions. Third, 'personal awareness is a valid life goal'. The more self-awareness an individual has, the more alive he or she is.<sup>105</sup>

## TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The term transpersonal psychology was first used by Stanislav Grof in the late 1960s, when he, along with Maslow, Anthony Sutich and John Lilly began to integrate the teachings of Eastern traditions with their understanding of humanistic psychology. In the launch issue of his *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* Sutich defined the study as:

interested in those ultimate human capacities and potentialities that have no place in positivistic or behavioristic theory, classical psychoanalytic theory, or humanistic psychology' and concerned 'with becoming, individual and species-wide meta needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences... mystical experiences and the transcendence of self.'<sup>106</sup>

Storm points out that their concern was with 'an existential psychology – that man, set down in an alien universe, has to be enabled to create himself, create his own reality and somehow give meaning to his life'.

Transpersonal psychology developed in the sixties in the midst of the counter culture and interest in, sometimes chemically induced, 'altered states' was high. The human potential

movement overlapped extensively with hippie culture allowing for an infusion of the counter culture into psychology.

While Groothuis notes the growing influence of transpersonal psychology (he gives examples of U.S. universities offering masters degrees in the subject), and growing popularization thanks to leading theorists such as Ken Wilbur, Woodhouse nonetheless observes that 'we are witnessing not so much the emergence of another school of psychology, as a transpersonal *perspective*, which cuts across traditional disciplines and nurtures various grass-roots movements'.<sup>107</sup>

## THE HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT

The human potential movement both provided an important backdrop for the new age and is an essential component of it. It is one of the vital networks of the decentralized new age and like the new age the human potential movement must be seen as a general rather than a specific movement. Sociologist Ray Wallis describes it as consisting of 'independent groups, leaders, communication media etc., which display no common structure of authority or membership' but sharing 'a common commitment to growth by self-directed means'.

The core of transpersonal psychology is humanistic psychology but it has moved on to fully embrace an occult and Eastern mind-set and has diversified to span a number of therapies which Alvin Toffler has described as 'the odds and ends of psychoanalyses, Eastern religion, sexual experimentation, game-playing and old-fashioned revivalism'.<sup>108</sup>

Kyle lists some of the groups who would consider themselves part of the human potential movement as follows: encounter groups, Gestalt awareness training, Transactional Analysis, sensory awareness, primal therapy, bioenergetics, humanistic psychology, psychosynthesis, biofeedback, transcendental meditation, Arica training, yoga, the martial arts, Synanon, Silva mind control, Gurdjieff groups, psychic healing and mind control training.

The Esalen institute at Big Sur in California has been described as 'the Harvard of the human potential movement', founded in 1961 by Michael Murphy and with one of its first lectures delivered by Abraham Maslow, it served as a place where academics and professionals gathered to share information on mental and physical health, government, education, business and so on, and to provide courses on mysticism, meditation, comparative religion, psychotherapy, expansion of consciousness and group awareness.<sup>109</sup>

## NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

As the movement turned East and became more mystical and spiritual it gave rise to the 'consciousness revolution' which shares most of the characteristics of the human potential movement while being even more eclectic, spiritual and mystical. It endeavors to give individuals a psychoreligious mystical experience, that puts them in contact with themselves and the universe, but, Woodward notes 'its practitioners, methods and rhetoric run the gamut from the serious to the sham ... (as) its ranks included thousands of psychotherapists and psychologists and legions of gurus, swamis and babas'.

Alvin Toffler estimates that by the late 1970s there were about 8,000 different therapies available in the U.S. and it had undoubtedly become big business, Woodward notes 'the consciousness revolution, once confined to the youthful counter culture, has mushroomed into a mass movement, particularly popular with the more affluent classes who can afford the time and money to develop their inner depths'. Peter Marin echoes this view of the proliferation of such therapies as an aspect of the 'new narcissism'.<sup>110</sup>

### B. HEALTH

Possible more so than any other aspect of the new age, non-medical forms of healing have both gained public attention and permeated popular practice in a manner Marilyn Ferguson considers 'a window to the transformation of all our institutions'. She notes its success:

Within a few short years, without a shot's being fired, the concept of holistic health has been legitimized by federal and state programs, endorsed by politicians, urged and underwritten by insurance companies, co-opted in terminology (if not always in practice) by many physicians, and adopted by medical students.<sup>111</sup>

Mark Woodhouse defines the three developments responsible for changing our attitude toward health practice as, alternative medicines, an increasing acknowledgement of role of personal responsibility and consciousness in achieving health and the political and economic difficulties increasingly facing conventional medicine.

Throughout most of history and in most cultures the practice of healing was the domain of faith healers, shamans and mystics, and it is only since the Enlightenment that the

supernatural has been removed from the study of the human body and of illness. Recent challenges to the dominance of the biomedical model came in the first half of the nineteenth century in America where the burst of religious interest which produced the Spiritualists, Shakers and transcendentalists also saw the development of alternative health systems such as homeopathy, hydrotherapy and Thomsonianism. The second half of the century which saw the rise of New Thought and Christian Science movements also saw the development of studies in chiropractic and osteopathy. From these precursors the modern holistic health movement began to emerge in the late fifties and sixties and it was solidified in the seventies when the founding of numerous health centres culminated in the 1978 establishment of the American Holistic Health Association. According to Gordon Melton, in these holistic health centres health is considered 'as a positive state, not merely an absence of disease' and comprehensive programs are put in place which, tailored for the needs of each client, seek to 'activate the individual's potential toward self-care', thus placing an emphasis on the promotion of wellness, including diet and exercise.<sup>112</sup>

## DEFINITIONS

The new age health movement has been described by both the terms holistic and alternative. The common approach is toward treatment of the whole person, mind, body and spirit in contrast to the more reductionist principles of Western medicine which are considered to view the human body as 'machine-like' and disease as 'a malfunctioning in a part of this machine'. Capra notes the move away from this latter approach thus:

Modern scientific thought – in physics, biology, and psychology – is leading to a view of reality that comes very close to the views of mystics and of many traditional cultures, in which knowledge of the human mind and body and the practice of healing are integral parts of natural philosophy and of spiritual discipline.<sup>113</sup>

Woodhouse notes that alternative practices tend to be concerned with the areas that conventional medicine is least well equipped to deal with: prevention and treatment of chronic or degenerative conditions, but points out that in general, practitioners prefer to work in ways *complementary* to conventional practice rather than instead of.

Ferguson believes that the most significant factor in the growth of these practices is a widespread and growing disenchantment with our established health care systems which are considered too costly, unfair to the poor, sexist, racist and generally inadequate.<sup>114</sup>

## HOLISTIC HEALTH PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of alternative health shares with the new age a monistic, holistic world view and a rejection of Cartesian dualism and Christian theism. Holistic health aims to heal by teaching people how to manipulate the invisible flow of life energy with which they are connected. In their 1983 book *New Age Medicine*, Paul C. Reisser, Terri K. Reisser and John Weldon offer a description of ten themes which characterize the holistic approach, which, while offering a conceptual framework for understanding the movement, they emphasize that all practitioners do not adhere to all ten:

- 1.) The whole is greater than the parts.
- 2.) Health or 'wellness' is more than the absence of disease.
- 3.) We are responsible for our own health or disease.
- 4.) Natural forms of healing are preferable to drugs or surgery.
- 5.) Most methods of promoting health can be holistic, but some methods are innately more holistic than others.
- 6.) Health implies evolution.
- 7.) An understanding of energy, not matter is the key to health.
- 8.) Death is the final stage of growth
- 9.) The thinking and practices of ancient civilizations are a rich source for healthy living.
- 10.) Holistic health must be incorporated into the fabric of society through public policy.<sup>115</sup>

## HOLISTIC HEALTH PRACTICES

There are a wide range of holistic health practices some of which are identified with occult traditions and have a metaphysical approach and many which have been given a new lease of life by the rise of the new age but which are part of a long-standing alternative tradition. As they are so numerous it would be impossible to deal with them all, however in the book *Wholistic Dimensions in Healing* Leslie Kaslof suggests a system of classification which provides a useful framework for an overview of the main practices: 1. *Integrative systems*, such as osteopathy, chiropractic, reflexology and homeopathy; 2. *Nutrition and herbs*, for the prevention and cure of illness, based on traditional wisdom; 3. *Heuristic approaches*, used for diagnosis and treatment, acupuncture, acupressure and iridology are examples; and, 4. *Biofeedback*, a technique from bringing non-voluntary bodily functions such as brain-wave patterns, heart rate and skin temperature under voluntary control.

Alternative medical practices work on the principle that both illness and healing can have nonmaterial and nonmedical causes. As society becomes increasingly alarmed by the incidence of stress related illness and the persisting uncertainty surrounding the causes of

cancer, the attractions of the holistic approach can only be expected to grow. The proliferation of alternative treatments and therapies available 'on the high street' is an indication that they are becoming less and less 'alternative', and their absorption into the corporate mainstream via the multi-billion dollar cosmetic industry and innumerable celebrity endorsements signal our capitalist consumer economy is rendering them less the exception than the norm.<sup>116</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In outlining the historical context and beliefs of the new age the centrality of science to its critique of the old paradigm and its vision of the new became clear in the previous section. As the following section will attempt to place the new age in a cultural context, exploring its position with regard to modernity and postmodernity, so this section will, as a sort of illustrative example, examine in depth the nature of the relationship proposed between religion and science, particularly physics and mysticism and assess the influence of societal factors on the study.

In a 1996 article for the journal *Zygon* Ted Peters wrote that ‘revolutionary developments’ in theology and science are moving the relation between the two ‘far beyond the nineteenth-century “warfare” model’. As both scientists and theologians engage in a ‘common search for understanding’, he outlined eight models of interaction, including ‘scientism’, or ‘secular humanism’, and ‘New Age Spirituality’.<sup>1</sup>

Diane Kennedy Pike expressly represented the sentiments of the new age movement when stating her belief that we are reaching a ‘level where there can be a reunification of religion and science...; a merging of the languages of science and religion will be one of the keys to the universality characteristic of the Aquarian Age’. Analysts such as Miller acknowledge that ‘indeed, in some scientific circles the traditional distinctions between science and religion do seem to be breaking down’, and Robert Kirsch has written that there is currently ‘a drive to enlarge the scope of science, a tendency to examine questions which previously would be asked or emphasized only by those outside the boundaries of science’.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis argues that one of the strong appeals of the new age is that it seems to offer a reconciliation of these two fields, allowing one to accept modern evolutionary science while still providing the comforts of religion (such as for example, a purpose to life, the prospect of a blessed afterlife, a basis for ethics, an optimistic outlook for humanity’s future), and it would seem that this factor has strongly contributed to the influential ‘parallel’-based theses of Fritjof Capra and Gary Zukav, and to their rapid and widespread acceptance. As demonstrated in the previous section, new age thinking from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds has attempted to marry science to (Eastern/occultic) religion. Such a union can be employed to vindicate the mystical worldview but also to offer powerful leverage in a culture where science ‘speaks almost *ex cathedra*’. As Marilyn Ferguson wrote:

Abraham Maslow observed, although our visionary artists and mystics may be correct in their insights they can never make the whole of mankind sure. 'Science', he wrote, 'is the only way we have of shoving truth down the reluctant throat'.<sup>3</sup>

But, even by their own arguments, the science which is so employed cannot either be objective truth, and its 'creation' as well as its use must be subject to cultural and societal influence.

The first part of this section will examine the arguments for links between science and mysticism with special reference to the work of Fritjof Capra. The next part will assess this genre as a strategy in intellectual conflict, offering sociological perspectives on both physics and mysticism and placing 'parallelist' arguments in a societal context. Finally, influence of such arguments on the suggested links between the 'new science' and postmodernist theories will be assessed.

## 2.2 THE PARALLELIST APPROACH

This section will assess the arguments claiming ‘parallels’ between mysticism and the new physics. The first two parts will introduce parallelism and place it in context, and the next will outline the specific parallels which are suggested between physics and mysticism. The fourth part will provide an overview of the pitfalls in parallelist arguments and the fifth will offer examples, the final sections offer a perspective on the study and introduce the possibility of the influence of social factors.

2.2.1 The theses which propose parallels between the ‘new’ physics and mysticism have come to form a strong counterpoint to the new age critique of science, as well as to anti-science and anti-religion movements. Such theses as developed by Capra in *The Tao of Physics* and Zukav in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* have largely shaped the literature on the postmodern status of physics according to Catherine Carson, and Sal Restivo argues that ‘parallelism’ is ‘an important intellectual current at the interface of science and religion, theology and mysticism’.<sup>4</sup>

However the nature of parallelism is unclear and Restivo suggests that the lack of critical attention it has received may be explained by 1.) its peripherality to the mainstream history of ideas, being nourished instead in the literature of the occult- and pseudo-sciences, and 2.) it has been characterized by extravagant claims, such as Sung’s thesis that the *I Ching* anticipated the central ideas of modern science, and Beau’s argument that Einstein’s theories were presaged by one of the Yellow Emperor’s advisors forty-five hundred years ago. This situation began to change in the 1970s however as increasing interest in parallelist arguments saw the founding of such educational-spiritual communities as the Lindisfarne Association and eminent scientists such as Robert Oppenheimer, Niels Bohr and C.H. Townes began to describe observations on complementarity and convergence between science and religion in general and between physics and mysticism in particular.

Restivo indicates that ‘this growing interest, advocacy and activity’ underlines the need for a critical analysis of the literature of contemporary physics-mysticism parallelism, the pitfalls of parallelism and ‘the social origins and functions of parallelism’.<sup>5</sup>

2.2.2 Parallelism is not a new phenomenon, using Ian Barbour’s 3-step description of the ways of viewing relations between science and religion it is possible to place it in context. This viewpoint, championed by liberal theologians and process philosophers, emphasizes

'general methodological parallels between science and religion', claiming that they are both characterized by empiricism, rationalism and the critical interpretation of human experience, as well as by presuppositions and moral commitments. Elements of process philosophy which turn up, in particular in Capra's arguments, include the view of the world as a process in becoming, reality as a set of interconnected events, a relational conception of things, organicism (as opposed to mechanicism), and the self-creation of events. Other version of parallelism vary in strength from Siu's 'tao of science', a relatively weak form which considers science and Taoism 'complementary' to stronger versions which emphasize complementarity or convergence.<sup>6</sup>

2.2.3 On being knighted in 1947, physicist Niels Bohr, author of the complementarity principle, chose the Chinese yin-yang symbol for his coat-of-arms and the inscription 'Contraria sunt Complementata'. In *The Tao of Physics* Capra attributes these choices to an acknowledgement by Bohr of the harmony between Eastern wisdom and Western science and to a symbolization of his thesis that the principle ideas of modern physics 'confirm', 'rediscover', or otherwise parallel the ideas of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism and, to and extent, their shared concerns in Western mysticism.

The basic parallels that Capra identifies between modern physics and Eastern mysticism can be summarized as follows: 1.) organicism, an 'ecological' or 'wholistic' view of reality; 2.) paradoxes, such as particle duality in physics and Koans in Zen Buddhism; 3.) transcendence of ordinary language and reasoning, and of traditional ideas of space, time, isolated objects and events, and causality; 4.) space-time, (intuitive comprehension, four-dimensional); 5.) oneness, that the infinite variety of things in the universe manifests one ultimate reality; 6.) empiricism, manifested as reliance on experimental methods in physics, and on meditative insights in mysticism. In addition he outlines the following 'equivalencies' between the two: 1.) the quantum field and ch'i; 2.) the 'physical vacuum'; 3.) S-matrix theory and the I Ching; 4.) complementarity and Tao; and 5.) the bootstrap model in high-energy physics and Buddhism.<sup>7</sup>

Capra's evidence for these parallels comes from statements from primary and secondary sources on how Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists and Physicists 'see' reality, however he admits that such statements cannot serve as rigorous demonstrations for his thesis and so instead uses them to 'stimulate an appreciation of parallelism as a subjective experience'. To this end he juxtaposes statements on physics and mysticism, drawing attention to common images of

reality, for example the metaphor of the 'cosmic dance', or statements on the 'physical vacuum' and ch'i.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2.4 THE PITFALLS OF PARALLELISM – OVERVIEW

The basic data for parallelist arguments are common language (for example, English) statements on the nature and implications of physics and mysticism; the methodology is their comparative analysis; and evidence is found in the similar rhetoric, imagery and metaphoric content of such statements.

In Restivo's words 'the basic assumption in this approach is that if the rhetorical, imagery, and metaphoric content of statements on physics and mysticism is similar, the conceptual content must be similar, and the experience of reality must also be similar among physicists and mystics'. One example of the application of this method can be found in Needham's studies on Chinese and modern medicine – 'characterized by the continuing discovery of Whiteheadian philosophy, dialectical thought, and anticipatory scientific attitudes, concepts and methods in Chinese texts'.<sup>9</sup>

Although this work has been widely applauded some strong criticisms have also been leveled at his claims. The main problem is that this method requires searching for, selecting and translating materials for comparative analysis. Restivo identifies three main difficulties accompanying this requirement.

The first is that representativeness 'must be achieved first in selecting a particular piece of literature, and then in selecting a particular word, sentence or paragraph', but he notes that no rigorous sampling procedures have guided such selections and in the case of ancient texts this can be problematic due to fragmentation and corruption, as well as to the certainties about what texts existed, and still exist, undiscovered.

The second arises in the attempt to compare statements derived from mathematical formalism and the specialized language of physics with the meditative insights of mysticism, which will, in addition, have to be translated from original texts written in one of a number of different languages often at different times, possibly centuries apart. The difficulties extend beyond those of translating, for example, the formalism of relativity into English sentences understandable to those unfamiliar with mathematical principles – Restivo notes that in advocating and evaluating parallelism it is also necessary to consider more carefully than has been thus far 'the ways in which ordinary words compromise the non-ordinary experiences' (of physicists and mystics).<sup>10</sup>

A third pitfall in comparing statements is the possibility of 'contamination' in that modern mystics will be at the very least aware of those references to physical concepts that have filtered into everyday language such as those regarding time, space and causality, and at the same time physicists will have come into contact with the ideas of mysticism. Restivo gives the example of the work of Gell-Mann who uses the term 'the eightfold way' in his application of group theory to the study of elementary particles, echoing the eightfold way or 'eightfold path' of Buddhist teaching'. 'Levels of reality' hypotheses and the idea of 'level-appropriate languages' are also relevant to the issue of translation in parallelism, note, for example, Feyerabend's (and, to a certain extent, Kuhn's) suggestions that 'translatability' is virtually impossible. Graves however suggests that it makes sense to assume that 'ontic levels are not completely independent, and that, therefore, cognitive levels are not completely independent', i.e., that there are commonalities across levels and that these are reflected in language.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of parallelism, Graves's hypotheses raise the following questions:

1.) can we consider mysticism and physics to be operating on different levels of reality; 2.) does it make sense to consider these levels of reality 'bounded' (that is, part of one reality in which the assumptions apply); or 3.) do mysticism and physics operate within distinctly bounded realms of reality ('separate realities') for which there are no cross level terms and relations? The latter case may hold, for example, if there are two realms of reality, one open to symbolic consciousness and expressible in language, and one open to non-symbolic consciousness and not expressible in language.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, parallelists and critics of parallelism must consider the possibility that the function of language may differ between the two fields, in that, while it may be more or less abstract of more or less remote from the world of the sense, in mathematics/science, language is used to reflect reality and to say significant things about the nature of reality. Within the literature of mysticism an example of a common device to communicate experience is the practice of making a statement and repudiating it almost immediately.

The resulting paradoxes and contradictions, if interpreted in terms of the function of language in scientific discourse, appear to be a string of absurdities, but if 'on the other hand, language in mysticism is applied to transcending the limitations and inadequacies of ordinary experience, then the situation not only lacks absurdity, but appears incompatible with the assumption of translatability and comparability in parallelism'.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2.5 THE PITFALLS OF PARALLELISM – EXAMPLES

### SPACE-TIME

The space-time parallel is one of the most frequently cited of parallels between physics and mysticism. In *The Tao of Physics* for example Capra argues that modern physics and Eastern mysticism 'reflect an awareness of the intimate interconnectedness and interpretation of space and time'. However, Restivo notes that the semantics and syntax of 'space' and 'time' in Plato or the Buddhist sutras are radically different to that of Einstein or Minkowski.

In physics the conceptual transformation of 'space' and 'time' has rested heavily on mathematization and that there is no reason to suppose the process has ended, whereas in mysticism there is no indication that the non-ordinary experience of space and time for the novice is any different today than it was for the ancients. As Restivo puts it 'mysticism does not seem to hold the same inherent promise of a new conception of space and time that physics does'.<sup>14</sup>

Further evidence to imply disparities includes the suggestion that mystical experience of space-time is the product of absorptive attention and not of the type of conceptual evolution which characterizes the physicist's experience of space and time. Restivo concludes that 'mystics may indeed experience space-time as a four dimensional continuum', but it is not clear that their experience is 'conceptually equivalent to the continuum experienced by physicists in thinking about physical reality and rendering their mathematical formalism'.<sup>15</sup>

### COMPLEMENTARITY

Complementarity parallelism is based on the idea of complementarity in quantum theory introduced by Niels Bohr in 1927. The idea, which has spawned a literature in which complementarity is applied to the relations between science and religion, between different religions, and between different aspects of religious traditions, has become probably the most debated version of the thesis. Restivo notes that Bohr never provided an unequivocal definition of the principle and the repeated revisions of interpretation from, among others, C.F. von Weizsäcker and Einstein, and concludes that:

the case of complementarity underscores the dangers of generalizing ideas of concepts which 1.) have not been rigorously defined within their original realm of application; 2.) are, insofar as they are explicitly defined or rigorously conceptualized, specific to the substance, logic, methods, and theories of their original realm; and 3.) may appear superficially to have a kinship with very general patterns of human thought (for example the complementary pairs notion) but which, because in part of the second point on specificity, may actually represent a different and perhaps a new pattern.<sup>16</sup>

## PARADOXES

Complementarity parallelisms have been employed to show that both religion and science deal in paradoxes. However the parallelist contention that paradoxes have the same function in the two fields may not be readily justified, bearing in mind that in mysticism they are 'generally part of the nature of things', while in physics, contrastingly, they are subject to study with the expectation that they will be resolved – that is, 'brought into the sphere of rational comprehension through the development of new levels of awareness associated with advances in mathematical and physical theory'.

Capra uses as an example the Koans of the Zen master which appear to keep paradoxes intact in order to use them as devices for enlightenment but at the same time fails to accurately represent their function in physics by treating 'wave-particle duality' in a way that 'underscores its 'mystery' and obscures the 'resolution' of this alleged paradox in modern physics'.<sup>17</sup>

## ONENESS AND TOTALITY

The proposed correlation between concepts of oneness or unity, totality and interpenetration in mysticism on the one hand, and the 'wholistic' direction of modern physical theories, especially 'bootstrap' physics and monistic geometrodynamics (or modern general relativity) on the other form one of the two fields. Capra's view of these consistencies and the work of David Bohm as cited as support has been explored more fully in a previous section.

Restivo notes that, within physics a core consideration of this argument must be whether references by Bohm and others to a requirement in quantum theory that the universe be treated as a 'single indivisible unit' constitutes an 'updated version of 'wholism' in physics' or a 'new concept' which transcends the cycles of 'whole and parts' approaches in the history of ideas'.<sup>18</sup>

Convictions among physicists that the latter is the case are seen by parallelists as 'a movement in the direction of mystical conceptions of reality' but the latter case introduces the problem of whether this 'wholism' in modern physics is 'similar or otherwise analogous' to 'wholism' in mysticism, and to 'wholism' in pre-modern physics.

## KNOWING AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Two views of change in the scientific outlook are associated with parallelism, the first (conservative) view is that science and mysticism are independent but complementary ways of knowing, respectively, rational and intuitive – the second, more radical view introduces a third mode of knowing, for example Siu's 'no-knowledge' mode, experienced beyond the limits of rational and intuitive modes of knowing it is 'devoid of shape and time and

transcends events and qualities'. It is this 'realm of the silent apprehension' of the 'undifferentiable whole' which he employs in his discussion of mysticism (but which he associates with 'intuition'). Parallelist descriptions of a comprehensive consciousness involving dialectic interaction of these modes are purely speculative, we do not have a convincing theory of knowing and it is possible that modes of knowing are artifacts of analysis rather than a fact of consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Parallelists cite an agreement between mystics and physicists that 'ordinary sensory experiences must be transcended in order to comprehend reality' but there is a divergence in process in the extent to which the mystic 'remains constrained in quiet appreciation' while the physicist 'presses forward, transcending ordinary experiences and at the same time actively seeking to explain what he experiences'.

Capra further claims that physics and mysticism are both strongly observational, but Restivo argues that this is not self-evident since the mystic's distinction between 1.) seeking, looking and watching, and 2.) thinking may be a semantic trap:

The meditative state might be better described as a state of non-ordinary thinking than as an observational state. The centrality of mathematical thought in physics (consider Einstein's work or, or the role of group theory in elementary particle physics) could be pointed to in support of the argument that theory rather than experiment, or abstract reasoning rather than observation is the essence of modern physics. If there is any parallel here at all, it might more likely lie in the direction of abstract thought rather than empiricism.<sup>20</sup>

#### ANTICIPATION OR CONVERGENCE

The two pitfalls of interpretation in parallelism are that 1.) parallels suggest that discoveries in modern physics were anticipated in the mystical traditions and 2.) that its worldview is converging toward that of mysticism. However the anticipations thesis looks less and less likely and less reasonable the more deeply parallels are examined, reflecting weak analogies which are possible only 'because there are certain basic and recurring themes in human thought'.<sup>21</sup>

One explanation for the apparent convergence in thought is that as physicists probe deeper and deeper into nature they are forced to abandon the images and concepts of ordinary experience, and, assuming the non-ordinary reality open to them is the same as that which mystics have been probing for centuries, it should not be surprising to find correspondences in their verbal descriptions of such a reality. Restivo notes however that this may simply imply that physical inquiry is 'passing through a stage' of discovery which stretches the old vocabulary causing the employment of 'certain general linguistic patterns that people turn to if they have to describe the indescribable 'so that as their inquiries proceed 'and their

experiences become more ordinary for them and for the general public, the common language can be expected to change and the parallels with mysticism will disappear’.

If, as Capra claims, physicists ‘have made a step toward the world view of the Eastern mystics’ it is not logically necessary that the next step (or steps) will be in this same direction, or even that this ‘great step’ was in the right direction.<sup>22</sup>

## IDEOLOGY

Finally Restivo notes Capra’s reference to ‘the marked anti-scientific attitude’ of those often attracted to Eastern mysticism, and one of his main objectives in *The Tao of Physics* was to show that physics too can be a ‘path to the heart’, leading to self-realization and spiritual knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Parallelism can function therefore as both a tool for the ‘defensive justification’ for and explanation of the scientific approach and the image of science and scientists in general and also as a source of validation for religious ‘truth’ apparently supported by parallels with the more successful scientific ‘truths’.

2.2.6 By identifying the pitfalls of arguments for parallels between science and mysticism it has become apparent that these parallels may be spurious for reasons ranging from semantics to ideology and the fact that they can be identified along with analogies and convergence between the fields may reflect only a temporary condition in the development of physical theory, since as we have noted, physics, and scientific inquiry in general are expected to change and develop in fundamental ways as they press ever forward, whereas mysticism appears to have long arrived at ‘ultimate’ experiences and truths.

This does not mean however that parallelism has nothing to offer and examples such as Ten Houten-Kaplan’s ‘limited isomorphism’ and (Helier Robinson’s and) L.L. Whyte’s ‘relational hypothesis’ can serve to moderate the skepticism generated by the above considerations.<sup>24</sup>

2.2.7 A final consideration is the influence of a social factor operating in parallelism, Restivo summarizes the questions raised here thus:

Is it possible that parallelism and relationalism reflect and generalize our increasing awareness of sociological and ecological phenomena? Are these causally related, and if so which is cause and which is effect? Are these phenomena simultaneous effects of some underlying causal factor, perhaps a neurological one? Or are they outside the realm of classical cause and effect, self-exemplifying the emergence and development of relationalism? If a social force is indeed operative, is it one rooted in the evolution of our understanding of reality (for example sociology), or one that reflects a more immediate need to

offset the disastrous human and environmental effects of unfettered individualism, and specialization without interdependence? Obviously 'social factor' can involve all of these things as well as be a part of a general trend toward relational theory and a relational perspective.<sup>25</sup>

Parallelism therefore may be spurious, it may also however be a manifestation of emerging changes in the nature of science and indeed, that nature of inquiry, more broadly still, it may be implicated in social and cultural dynamics which reflect the working out of contradictions in prevailing social structures and value systems.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.3 SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The first part of this section will suggest the possibility that physics and mysticism are employed as cultural resources by parallelists, and the next will outline the sociological perspectives on both fields, suggesting ways in which this view can differ from that posed in parallelist literature. The challenges offered by *anti*-parallelism are introduced next, and the section ends with an attempt to place parallelism in the broader context of social intellectual change.

2.3.1 In *The Tao of Physics* Capra summarizes the two-fold argument of physics/mysticism parallelism with the assertions that: 1.) 'a consistent view of the world is beginning to emerge from modern physics which is harmonious with Eastern wisdom', and 2.) 'Eastern mysticism provides a consistent and beautiful philosophical framework which can accommodate our most advanced theories of the physical world'.<sup>27</sup>

Restivo defines a more general form of parallelism as one in which 'contemporary knowledge is viewed as a rediscovery of ancient knowledge' and suggests it is a recurring strategy in the history of intellectual conflict and change.

2.3.2 In their book *Natural Order* Barnes and Shapin highlighted for sociologists of knowledge the ways in which *ideas* are employed as cultural resources to further individual and collective interests, writing that ideas 'have no inherent properties whatsoever, and have features imputed to them entirely according to their mode of use'. For example a physicist such as Capra may present parallelism as a defense of science against the threat of anti-science movements – he states his aim in *The Tao of Physics* as seeking to 'improve the image of science' among the youth who have turned instead to 'Eastern ways of liberation'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly Gary Zukav in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* aims to translate the concepts of quantum physics and relativity theory for non-scientists to understand the 'extraordinary process' of convergence which he believes to be taking place.

However Restivo points out that these same physical ideas have been popularized by other authors, Gerald Feinberg for example, without attributing mystical aspects to them. Feinberg emphasizes the *continuities* and *overlaps* between modern and classical physics where Capra and Zukav stress irreconcilable changes and revolutionary breaks – the difference according to Restivo, being the audience to whom he is directing arguments.

2.3.3 Restivo asserts that, although there is no general sociological theory of mysticism it can be viewed as a social phenomenon and examining its social roots and effects on society serves to provide a critique of the parallelist portrayal of mysticism. Dumont for example highlights the links between mysticism and India's social structure (caste system) and Collins' study of the occult and mystical traditions through history and various cultures offers evidence that mystics have struggled among themselves and other intellectuals for privilege, wealth and prestige often manipulating ideas to further their own interests.<sup>29</sup>

Schutz, Horton, and Kuhn have all identified a manner in which science and religion, and physics and mysticism, account for failures and errors, developing a certain 'conceptual resiliency' to immunize against external criticism. For parallelists like Capra, who believe that there is a marked anti-scientific attitude among the young people who turn to Eastern mysticism, it would appear that the best strategy for improving the image of physics would be one which brings science closer to mysticism while simultaneously exempting mysticism from scientific analysis.

Capra mystifies and de-technologizes modern physics adopting a 'complementary' perspective: 'science and mysticism are two complementary manifestations of the human mind; of its rational and intuitive faculties'. Zukav adopts a similar stance, writing 'the practice of Tantra does not mean the end of rational thought'; notably neither one is prepared to sacrifice science and rationality in the interest of appealing to anti-rational sentiments.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, the sociological view of physics differs from that proposed by parallelists and can be said to be based on Merton's early statements on the dynamic interdependence of science and society, and more recent formulations about the interaction between the social structures of science and the 'larger structure' of society and the 'influence of the sociocultural milieu of a science on the values, beliefs and ideologies in its disciplinary matrix'.

Illustrative examples include Frankel's study of corpuscular optics and the wave theory of light in early nineteenth-century France, Wynne's study of physics and psychics in late Victorian England, and most notable, Paul Forman's study of the work of German physicists in Weimar Germany which asserts that 'scientists will take measures to counter a decline in prestige aimed at altering the public image of science to make it consonant with altered public values; this will, however, alter scientific values and ideology, and even doctrinal foundations'.<sup>31</sup>

Commenting on the extent to which parallelists claims may have begun to influence values, ideology, or doctrinal foundations in physics, Restivo cites recent labeling of David Bohm's work in quantum physics as 'mystical' and his friendship with Krishnamurti. Other studies

which have advanced our understanding of the social nature of science and scientific knowledge include Latour and Woolgar's account of the social construction of scientific facts and Harvey's account of how physicists self-consciously and confidently use non-empirical criteria in evaluating knowledge-claims, while Collins, Pinch and other have also written on the 'contextual, contingent, and constructivist nature of scientific facts and theories'.<sup>32</sup>

While the construction and use of ideas and facts in science are influenced by scientists' different interests and the different social milieux in which they are active, this does not necessarily mean that there are not areas of consensus in science. However, the parallelists' stress on the *consistency* of modern physics ignores areas of conflict, and the potential for theoretical, methodological and substantive changes and their arguments which depend on the various aspects of modern physics converging with each other are, at least to an extent, at odds with the sociological portrait of science in general and physics in particular. So Restivo concludes that 'the ideas of modern physics and ancient mysticism are cultural resources which are used in different social contexts to serve different individual and collective interests'.<sup>33</sup>

2.3.4 Contemporary parallelism can be viewed as an alternative response to counter-cultural critiques of science and a reaction to anti-science, anti religion and anti-mystical sympathies and movements, but it has in turn been opposed by anti-parallelists such as Isaac Asimov. Asimov rejects the suggestions made in *The Tao of Physics* that conclusions reached by scientists, based on observation and measurement can be equated with quotations from ancient mythology or philosophy and warns of the folly of deference to mystical beliefs, noting 'there has been at least one other occasion in history when Greek secular and rational thought bowed to the mystical aspects of Christianity, and what followed was a dark age. We can't afford another'.

Asimov thus defends the idea of science as a rational enterprise and without denying the role of intuition in science he asserts the truth or falsity of a conclusion in science must be decided by reason and reason alone.

A softer argument against parallelism can be found in work by, for example, Nasr and Sivin, which proposes that the ancient sciences should be studied in terms of their sociocultural contexts rather than in terms of their relationship to the development of modern science, allowing that the original meanings *might* be useful in dealing with current issues in science and society but maintaining this as a matter for study and not something to be taken for granted.<sup>34</sup>

Restivo notes that the defense of science in the face of potential challenge to its lofty position in our society is sometimes aligned against the rise of religious consciousness movements. So the critique of a mechanistic or materialistic science can have at least two consequences/alternatives – for Capra it is a complementary relationship between ‘new physics’ or ‘wholistic science’ and mysticism while the works of Theodore Roszak instead propose a ‘new gnosis’. While both cases see the resurrection of ancient wisdom Roszak has written of the mystic as ‘more truly scientific than the conventional scientists’ and in his 1969 book *The Making of a Counterculture* helped to articulate the offensive that had science as an intellectual activity as its object.

Finally Restivo notes evidence of internal conflict in parallelism. W.I. Thompson for example was openly suspicious of the type of collaboration undertaken by Carl von Weizsäcker and Gopi Krishna, similar to that noted between Bohm and Krishnamurti and indeed between Capra and Pir Vilayat Inayat Kahn, Head of the Sufi Order in the West. Both internal and external conflict, Restivo argues, can be understood as part of the struggle between scientists and other intellectuals for ‘societal resources’.<sup>35</sup>

2.3.5 Frances Yates proposed that the Scientific Revolution took place in two stages, the first of which was rooted in the idea of an animistic, magically operated universe, a ‘retreat from reason’ in response to the stifling effects of a rigidified system of thought, and, she hypothesizes, a necessary condition for the breakthroughs of stage two.

Mary Douglas followed this argument, echoing Kant with the statement that ‘thought can only advance by freeing itself from the shackles of its own subjective conditions’. The resulting hypothesis which suggests that parallelism is a reaction to a perceived closure (loss of adaptability) in modern science or rationality, has also been proposed by a number of scholars including Yinger and Tiryakian.

In an address to the American Sociological Association in 1977 J.M. Yinger urged sociologists to undertake intensive studies of counter-cultures as a way of understanding the planet-wide civilization transformation he believed to be underway, since they could be conceived of as ‘art forms’ which ‘highlight, dramatize and anticipate drastic problems’. Tiryakian also emphasized their importance as forces for social change, calling esoteric culture ‘a source of ideational innovation in Western modernization’ and heralding the approach of a new cultural synthesis in describing the occult revival as part of a new, international ‘cultural matrix’.<sup>36</sup>

Singer and Mendelsohn have identified periods of ‘speculative attitude’ within inquiry, in which traditional patterns of authority, dogma and consensus may be broken down by the

‘loosening of canons of rigor’ allowing new areas to be explored and helping science/inquiry out of the ruts into which it inevitable falls.<sup>37</sup>

Following on from the Yates-Douglas assertion that parallelism, like other strategies in intellectual conflict, ebbs and flows as history unfolds. Boulding and Wartofsky have argued that science and rationality are getting into ecological and evolutionary ‘ruts’ and so parallelism can be seen as one of the attempts to re-establish the potency of reason in human affairs. Another way to view this is that a decline in the power of science/ scientists is a ‘stimulus to groups interested in taking over science’s niche in society’.

Bourguignon has suggested that all societies must regulate the relations between the rational and irrational so that at times where control of technological, economic and social factors appears to be waning we might expect a resurgence of interest in the irrational. This is especially potent in the contemporary climate of ‘technics-out-of-control’ and can perhaps be placed in the context of Weiman’s conception of intellectual history as a pendulum swinging between mysticism and scientific method.<sup>38</sup>

Restivo concludes with the assertion that parallelism is ‘a recurring phenomenon in struggles for power *within* intellectual communities and *between* intellectual and other communities’.

Its *ideology* can be said to be rooted in three basic strategies: 1.) Forman’s hypothesis that scientists will take measures to counter a decline in prestige aimed at altering the public image of science to make it consonant with altered public values and this, in turn, will alter scientific values, ideologies and doctrinal foundations. 2.) The prevailing, or prestige, modes of knowledge in a society will be exploited by advocates of other modes in order to legitimate and add prestige to their own, usually by adopting the methods and rhetoric of the prevailing modes. 3.) To somehow subordinate the prevailing mode.

Restivo notes that these strategies are not necessarily impediments to scientific growth and change and thus parallelism can also be viewed as ‘an attempt to work out new modes of thinking and behaviour in response to problems of sustenance and growth in human communities’.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.4 THE POSTMODERN DEBATE

This section defines the genre of the philosophical popularization of science, identifying its social and historical origins, and discussing the manner in which it has influenced the debate on postmodern physics. The links between the new science and postmodern theory are outlined next, with special reference to quantum mechanics and chaos theory.

2.4.1 The specific literary genre of 'philosophical popularization' of physics has a distinct lineage. Eger notes that the category of work is restricted to those which strive to increase the popular knowledge of physics principally on the grounds of its quasi-philosophical consequences rather than, for example a concern with the citizen's responsibility to be informed about science.

In its modern form, this distinct genre emerged in late nineteenth century central Europe (especially Germany) in the work of Helmholtz, Hertz and Boltzmann. McCormach asserts that their non-specialist writings were sustained by the Germanic ideal of scientist as *Kulturträger* (bearer of culture) which allowed physicists a certain amount of 'cultural space' for meditating publicly on the implications of their theories.<sup>40</sup>

Carson notes that until the 1970s the tradition of such meditations continued to be cultivated primarily by older, established scholars 'in the somewhat staid settings of central European academia' and were not always 'well suited to the needs of the rising counterculture'. The new generation of philosophical popularizers such as Capra and Zukav were marked by the concerns of the counterculture, including a hostility toward science, and found themselves in the new rhetorical situation of having to use the implications that could be drawn from physics to argue on its behalf, no longer able to rely on its authority to make the case for its implication,

In particular this resulted in a heavy stress on the revolutionary nature of the new physics and the new paradigm it introduced, the break it represented with a science of the past which was implication the mechanization and domination of nature.<sup>41</sup>

The difference in tone between these and the earlier works in the genre is marked and can be explained by the wider and less specialized audience at which they were aimed – this new public, Carson notes would not simply buy physics; 'it had to be sold to them, made attractive and exciting, and if possible, slightly subversive'. That Heisenberg had, of all the authors from the older school, most success with post 1960s audiences can perhaps be attributed to this factor – he assigned the English editions of three of his work to *World Perspectives*, a

publishing series with a manifesto that read like 'the counterculture *avant la lettre*' and which offered large, low-priced editions for student sales. The Kuhnian language of revolutions and paradigms has two functions, to explain why most scientists have not yet been converted and to mark the work as particularly appropriate to the new era of thought, an era that both enables and builds on the work. Carson summarizes as follows:

Revolution-talk thus functions finally as a mode of contention on behalf of a theory, as an attempt to define a new domain of argumentation where its merits can be set forth, outside the arena of specialists, who, despite their own unawareness of postmodernism, have defined the fields up for consideration, the manner of argumentation, and the terms circumscribing the discussion.<sup>42</sup>

2.4.2 In her analysis of the literature proposing a 'postmodern' physics Catherine Carson argues that the 'common presuppositions' underlying the discussion point back to a 'genre of literature written by physicists and undertaken for their own purposes', a genre which she refers to as 'philosophical popularization'.

She points out that the initiators of the genre were not themselves advocates of postmodern physics, but proposes that 'their general orientation has strongly influenced, even determined, the shape of the present-day literature on that subject'. She believes that these facts should, in using the notion of a postmodern physics:

Attune us to the hazards of taking over preexisting argumentative strategies, to the difficulties of tracing 'cultural influences' in science, and to the problems of fixing a science with a label that presumes to identify its essential import, as opposed to its historical origin.<sup>43</sup>

Of the authors Carson identifies as involved in discussions of a postmodern physics (Toulmin, Froula, Lyotard, Hayles) none is actually a practicing physicist, but all have heard about branches of physics like quantum mechanics and chaos theory, in a form, moreover, that makes them 'look suitable for drawing parallels to postmodernism'. In addition therefore, to their involvement with postmodernism in a literary or generally cultural context their literature on a 'postmodern physics' is distinctly influenced by a particular genre in the popularization of physics which, despite covering a variety of approaches and subject matter are, she argues, all 'characterized by a common program': 'they all announce to nonspecialist readers the advent of a new scientific paradigm, a paradigm that, overcoming restrictive and outdated ways of thinking, opens up fresh new prospects for or understanding of the cosmos'.<sup>44</sup>

She argues that the dominance of those 'quasi-philosophical, quasi-popular' books in the writing on postmodern physics has had a number of important consequences.

The first is that the options considered for a postmodern physics tend to stay within the framework laid out by the scientific authors, limiting the discussion she believes, to those fields with particularly vocal promoters – namely quantum mechanics and chaos theory. She notes the absence from the postmodernizing discussion of the example of the path-integral formulation of quantum mechanics which she suggests can be explained by the fact that ‘no physicist has yet ventured to proclaim it popularly as a revolution in physics’.<sup>45</sup>

A further result of the arguments staying largely within the bounds defined by the popularizing authors is that they have tended to reproduce the stance of that literature. A primary contention of the popularizing genre, for example, is the ‘unambiguity of the implications of scientific theories’, and while she acknowledges that most of the postmodernizing authors are ‘too sophisticated’ to accord science the power of dictating truth she suggests that even as they contest the connection between theory and reality,, they preserve that between theory and implications; ‘this, they still argue, is what the new paradigm *means*’.

She regards claims to lay out ‘the’ implications of a theory as problematic since they represent alliances between different realms – biology and social theory, physics and metaphysics, and the different alliances that get constructed are themselves contingent creations ‘reflecting as much about their creators as about the domains under discussion’. She offers the example of the present interpreters of quantum mechanics, all of whom seem to concur on the agreeable implications of that theory, and contrasts them with Paul Jordan, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, who built up alliances between his theory, via positivism in philosophy, ultimately to National Socialism in politics. Implications then, like parallels, are constructed, but their creators regard them, and so present them, as unconstructed, noncontingent, inevitable, and, she believes this stance has also been carried over into the literature on postmodern physics, reflecting a desire not just to identify the historical origins of a brand of physics, but to ‘fix its import’.<sup>46</sup>

A final way in which the popularizing genre has shaped the postmodernizing discussion is in its adoption of the idea of a revolution or paradigm shift in physics. Carson notes, and indeed it has been fully explored in the previous chapter, that it is one of the defining characteristics of literature on the popular implications of modern physics or chaos theory that it is pervaded with references to revolutions in physics and their consequences for our world view.

If physics is generally understood as a quintessentially modern endeavor, the emergence of a postmodern physics would necessarily have at its core the idea of a revolutionary change in worldview. Carson notes that many postmodernizing authors find the notion of such a revolution in physics a very appealing one, since, in its strongest version it ‘speaks to a non-

rational transition between incommensurable paradigms, a shift of view that historicizes and relativizes the forms of scientific reason on either side of the divide', and so by divesting science of the authority of universal, objective criteria it becomes just one among a multitude of cultural activities, 'with no claim to excel over the others in accessing a truth beyond human interests'.<sup>47</sup>

2.4.3 The following section will summarize some of the proposed links/parallels between the 'new physics' and postmodernity. The two disciplines which have been most extensively examined in the search for postmodern tendencies in physics are 'modern' physics (a catch-all term to describe special and general relativity, quantum mechanics and particle physics) and chaos theory.

#### QUANTUM PHYSICS AS POSTMODERN

A more optimistic vision of postmodernity, described for example by David Ray Griffin in his 1988 *The Reenchantment of Science: postmodern proposals*, hold the hope of recovering a lost sense of wholeness to contrast with, among others, Capra's and Ferguson's assessment of modern science alienating humanity from a mechanized nature described more fully earlier in the thesis. Stephen Toulmin recognized the new attitude in, for example, the Uncertainty Principle, whereby the scientist's act of observing a quantum mechanical particle unavoidably influences the result of the measurement asserts a connection between observer and observed, subject and object, and can be seen as an 'instantiation of a new, postmodern form of science' which he perceives to be on the horizon.<sup>48</sup>

However quantum mechanics is also called upon to exemplify the less romantic vision of postmodernity, one which denies wholeness and magnifies fragmentation, discontinuity and uncertainty. Christine Froula, for example has noted the relationship between quantum mechanics and Derridean deconstruction – 'the links between the radically challenging representation of nature discovered by quantum physicists and Derrida's critique of the dualistic structure of Western metaphysics since Plato are strong and specific ones'. She argues that the Uncertainty Principle nullifies the notion of an independently existing reality and suggests Derrida's notion of the trace, which dissolves simple temporality, undermining the linear progression of language by tying signification to everything that is absent as well as present, can be seen as a correlate of the four-dimensional space-time of relativity theory.<sup>49</sup>

N. Katherine Hayles provides further examples in her analysis of the literary concerns of authors such as Vladimir Nabokov, D.H. Lawrence and Robert Pirsig whose work she suggests plays with the notion of the world as a dynamic web, a network in which all of the nodes interact, a field whose state is affected by its interaction with the observer – she ties the emergence of this concern in literature with the development of a ‘field concept’ in physics – though without unidirectional causality. Carson notes that while Hayles has stopped short of calling the phenomenon postmodern, the post-structuralist analogies are unmistakable.<sup>50</sup>

## CHAOS THEORY AS POSTMODERN

In *The Postmodern Condition* Jean-François Lyotard proposes that chaos theory, in studying systems characterized by instability and irregularity, in fact exemplifies a rising class of sciences that contradict the modernist demand for predictability, performativity and universality. He suggests that areas like chaos theory, replacing performativity with instability, constitute a new, postmodern form of science, summarizing that ‘postmodern knowledge is no simple a tool of the authorities’ it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.<sup>51</sup>

Hayles rejects this approach suggesting that the *program* of chaos theory is in searching out the order hidden within disorder thus reinforcing with its theory of universality the totalizing character of knowledge that Lyotard seeks to undermine – she nonetheless provides a number of parallels between chaos and postmodernist (especially Derridean) literary theory, which are summarized below:

The new scientific paradigms challenge the primacy of traditionally accorded to offered systems; deconstructive theories expose the interrelation between traditional ideas of order and oppressive ideologies. The scientific theories show how deterministic physical systems become chaotic because initial conditions cannot be specified with infinite accuracy; deconstructive readings operate upon texts to reveal the indeterminacy that re-marks an absent origin. The scientific paradigms embody a shift of perspective away from the individual unit to recursive symmetries; deconstruction writes about the death of the subject and the replicating, self-similar processes that constitute individuals. The science of chaos reveals a territory that cannot be assimilated to either order or disorder; deconstruction detects a trace that cannot be assimilate to the binary oppositions it deconstructs.<sup>52</sup>

Carson notes that these parallels are ‘to be seen as indicative of a common reaction, evident in fields as disparate as physics and literary criticism, to a crisis in the modernist cultural project of univocal representation’, insofar then as chaos theory can be considered part of this transformation it can, Hayles argues, be considered a postmodern form of physics.

2.4.4 Scott F. Gilbert wrote that Modernism, 'whether considered as a Renaissance idea, an Enlightenment program, or a capitalist project, embodies within it the notion that a physical reality exists outside the human cranium and that this reality can be apprehended and understood by the human mind'. Modernism has allowed the possibility of science and encouraged its ascendancy, but postmodernism on the other hand, has many components that deny the possibility of modern science.

Examples include the validity of pluralistic knowledge claims, the 'lack of a centre and a periphery within a field of knowledge', the ability to textualize material, and the blurring of the distinction between the 'knowing' subject and the 'known' object – Gilbert asks if science can even continue to exist under such conditions. Gary Zukav has similarly suggested that we may be approaching 'the end of science', and Marilyn Ferguson summed up the new age position, saying 'the end of conventional science may mean the coming of Western civilization, in its own time and in its own way, into the higher dimensions of human experience'.<sup>53</sup>

In the 'strong form' of postmodernism, science can be seen as a set of value claims 'situated in the hegemonic attempt to proscribe a particular view of the world', and so the scientists who write of a postmodern quantum mechanics or chaos theory have already relinquished the traditional truth claims of their discipline.<sup>54</sup> As most scientists admit that social factors play a role in directing scientific research, and some would agree that the interpretation of data is influenced by social norms so the new age understanding of developments must be understood in light of their positioning within the broader dynamic of culture.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will investigate the cultural significance of the new age, examining its position with regard to modernity, and latterly, postmodernity. Suggested trajectories of modernisation such as secularisation and detraditionalisation are assessed and the sociological theories offered in their analysis will be discussed. The opening section will outline a brief sociological description of aspects of the new age to help clarify its position with regard to the following discussion.

### 3.2 THE NEW AGE AS A RELIGION

In social theory, a fully functioning religion requires a creed, code, cultus and community. Although it is obvious that the new age is not a religion in any traditional sense (it was described in Chapter one, for example, as a *quasi*-religion), even an ethical (code-oriented) religion will show the presence of these elements since it will ‘predicate its cultus on a common belief system and encourage certain forms of everyday behaviour’. This section will provide an understanding of the new age based on these precepts (Appendices A to C further illustrate its position with regard to broader contemporary religious developments).

#### 3.2.1 Albanese provides a ‘working definition’ of religion as:

a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings and values.<sup>1</sup>

By orientation we establish where the boundaries are and place ourselves in relation to them, not necessarily within, and from this perspective she notes that many people live without god, but none without religion. We may absorb seemingly contradictory elements from more than one religious system and even self-consciously reject the term *religion* to speak instead of spirituality. The benefit of this definition is that it gives priority in understanding religion to concrete human experience and expression, it does not ‘tell us about religious functions (to deal with boundaries), and it tells us what forms (creed, code, cultus, community) it takes’.<sup>2</sup>

In order to better understand the new age it is helpful to note the distinction between its philosophical and phenomenal aspects, as well as distinctions between ordinary and extraordinary religions.

Within the new age, on the one hand are those 'thinkers' with environmental, transformation and holistic health agendas who stress a way of life shaped by theoretical reflection, and, on the other, the 'actors' who immerse themselves in such practices as channeling and work with crystals, and who bring an implicit theology to their religion while emphasizing cultus and symbolic behaviour.

Ordinary religion is made foremost by philosophical new agers by selling a reconstitution of society so that it will become what they regard as integrative and supportive, 'level(ing) transcendence and elevating ordinariness'. Meanwhile, phenomenal new agers are spiritual seekers who want direct evidence of and contact with the extraordinary. Although this extraordinary world is not usually supernatural in the traditional sense it brings 'transcendence into everyday life and, as much as possible transform(s) the ordinary'.<sup>3</sup>

## CREED

The main features of a new age *creed* have been dealt with more fully in section 1.4. Albanese notes that new age teaching about the nature of the work and human life can be viewed as a modern day version of the theory of correspondence, where, using a mystical translation of the language of quantum physics, a cosmology and anthropology are posited in which matter and energy are different manifestations of one encompassing reality and therefore interchangeable making transformation from one to the other conceptually simple.

As in other versions of correspondence, if everything is everything else then everything can also act on everything else, thus giving rise in a view of the universe and the planet as places of magic and miracle, and wherein transformation can often be sudden, dramatic and strongly perceptible. Transformation in the new age is understood as a work of healing, the human condition is in some ways deficient and the perfection that is possible is not yet present. In the following way Albanese links these aspects of the new age creed to its code:

Thus, New Age creed tends to graft to the idea of perfection now, as taught by the theory of correspondence, ideas of *imperfection* and future completion suggesting

the influence of Christianity. In this logic, what needs to be healed in the future cannot be an exact reflection of the ordered pattern of the universe. What is sick has somehow gone awry and needs to be made right. In this context, the New Age description of reality transforming itself swiftly becomes a New Age prescription for everyday living and for ritual work.<sup>4</sup>

## CODE

As this suggests, new age *code* is derived from its *creed*, and new agers seek to live according to a perceived ethic of harmony. But the ethic of harmony is also an ethic of change since it is linked with personal transformation and the cultivation of self, in common with both the American cultural legacy which champions progress and the Christian legacy of imperfection/future perfection. This 'ethic of change' offers a view of life as a kind of 'pilgrims progress' where individual responsibility for one's life and choices is emphasized and life is viewed as a series of lessons to be learned.

The general ethic of harmony, change, healing and learning has been specified in the new age in numerous ways – the New Age teacher, favoured text and community lineage become especially significant - and the multiplicity of 'action pathways' for applying the general ethic has given rise to a strong tradition of religious combinationism.

In keeping with correspondence theory, new agers have long linked their personal well-being with planetary well-being, thus emphasizing a social ethic alongside the individual code. This social ethic has prompted reforming action ranging from ritual means to political organization with the aim of promoting environmental healing, as well as feminism and a concern for world peace.<sup>5</sup>

## CULTUS

The fluid and informally structured nature of the new age means that links between code and cultus are especially close – in the absence of 'churches' in which ritual religious action conventionally takes place, new agers instead perform everyday actions in deliberate and self-consciously symbolic ways, or, conversely, stage ritual events as methods of affecting public and political opinion. This closeness (between code and cultus) underscores the seriousness with which many of the phenomenal rituals of the new age (for example, crystals and channeling) are practiced. Rituals which may seem faddish are thus, for many, purposeful actions.<sup>6</sup>

Cultus, therefore, can be seen as providing a series of ritual vehicles for expressing new age creed and code. The two main methods of such rituals, both of which are both symbolic and practical, seek to alter the human condition, to heal, 'even as they act out symbolically the creed and code of the New Age'.

The first method, (Reiki, the Japanese method of palm-healing is an example), stresses the material world and seeks to 'harmonize the energies of the body so that they resonate with larger natural forces and laws'. Reiki aims to heal by using energy to transform bodily organs and functions, the ritual thereby acquires practicality and, for believers, provides 'material proof of the metaphysical system on which it is based'.

Other rituals 'seek to facilitate mental journeying into nonmaterial worlds' with a goal of stimulating 'forces of mind and imagination so that they assume control over matter'. In an example such as shamanism, mind becomes the ritual focus in ways which are not only symbolic but also practical, by, 'illuminating a problem situation in everyday life, offering directions for a healing, aiming to effect the healing, or giving advice for spiritual growth'.<sup>7</sup>

Additional examples of seemingly non-ritualistic activities which have acquired 'quasi-ritual' status could include the wearing of crystals and other gemstones thought to possess powers in order to aid or protect individuals or develop aspects of their character, and even the use of flower/mineral essences to assist healing or otherwise help change one's life situation by altering the mind state in subtle ways.

Even when such ritual work is practiced alone it is based on beliefs and lifeways that are shared thus associating the cultus of the new age with the new age community.<sup>8</sup>

## COMMUNITY

There is a general characterization of the new ager, suggested in part by the popularity of high-priced and fashionable weekend workshops and conferences, as often middle-aged, sometimes young, usually urban and middle-class, possibly more often female than male, better educated than average and not particularly alienated from society. However, little is known in the strict demographic sense since, owing to the vague and disparate nature of the 'movement', the criteria for 'membership' would prove difficult to define. Paul Heelas suggests over 10 million have had 'some contact' with new age practices and Albanese notes 'serious sociological estimates' from 20,000 to 60 million in the United States alone, the real figure probably lies somewhere in between.<sup>9</sup>

Insofar as it is viewed as a response to the social situation of the counterculture it is not surprising that new age religion has a 'special relationship' with the generation born and reared in this era, the specific religiosity of the baby-boomers has been the study of several in-depth analyses. On the nature of the community of the new age Albanese writes that the loose networking has been 'generally effective' in bringing people together, their 'language community' finding itself voiced in common concerns, she suggests it works towards a sense of empowerment in a world that, 'for many, has grown too impersonal, too corporate and bureaucratic, and too resistant to personal leverage'. She summaries as follows:

In short, New Age community has been as expansive as the New Age itself. It provides a summary statement of the patterns of expansion that form one side of American culture. Indeed, in a society in which boundaries have historically been everywhere, the New Age provides a dissolution of boundaries. Its members testify to a pluralism and combinationism become omnipresent, become, in fact the very substance of religion.<sup>10</sup>

The manner in which the position of the new age reflects the changing status of the religious in our society, in which its treatment, and manifestation of its particular ideology, can be seen to reflect the values our culture will be the subject of the following exploration.

### 3.3 TRAJECTORIES WITHIN MODERNITY

In a special issue of the journal *Religion* in 1993 Paul Heelas introduced a 'relatively ill-explored, albeit culturally well-established topic' – the cultural context of the New Age. Sociological analyses of the movement have had as a recurring theme the response to modernism, calling on theoretical frameworks ranging from Durkheim's 'cult of man' to Berger's theory of secularisation, the perceived cultural significance of the movement has been contingent on its alignment, in whole or in part, with various anti-modernist, modernist and postmodernist tendencies in our societies. In Heelas' words, the New Age:

would appear to have a great deal to do with the premodern, drawing much of its practices and wisdom from the great and minor religious traditions. Yet it has recently been argued that it is, par excellence, the religion of postmodernity. To complicate things further, it has also been claimed that the New Age is part and parcel of dynamics constitutive of modernity.<sup>11</sup>

He notes that 'the 'movement' (as it is commonly designated) somehow collapses the conventional periodization of change'.<sup>12</sup>

This section will attempt to place the new age in the debate over the status of the religious in modernity. An overview of the theories of secularisation is provided, and the conventional view of religion in modernity is outlined. The process of dedifferentiation in modernity is assessed and the final sections introduce the concept of detraditionalisation, looking also at its relationship to secularisation.

3.3.1 Lorne L. Dawson describes the dilemma raised for sociologists by the general 'unexpected resurgence of religious life in the late twentieth century' in the form of both New Religious Movements (of which by this definition, the new age is one), and the various kinds of fundamentalism or revivals of orthodoxy, as causing a 'growing doubt about the veracity of the theory of secularization'.

Linda Woodhead puts it more succinctly: 'as the twentieth century draws to its close those who spoke of the inexorable march of secularisation in modern cultures are exposed as false prophets'. While she acknowledges the steady decline of the major churches in Western Europe she argues this should not be allowed to obscure Christianity's continuing influence, its robust state in non-European countries and the continued growth of non-Christian religions in the West.

But most damaging of all to the secularisation thesis she asserts has been 'the rapid rise in both Europe and America of non-traditional forms of religiosity other than the Christian', such 'post-Christian spiritualities' are, she argues all variants of what she terms a 'New Spirituality', itself 'intimately connected with the New Age'.<sup>13</sup>

3.3.2 Outlining the main characteristics of the stronger (disappearance) version of the secularisation thesis Philip Hammond drew attention to its unilinear, 'one-dimensional' character, and to some of the factors that have been evoked to explain the process. He states that the linear image which dominates Western thought about society helps maintain the notion that 'social life is systematically coming from somewhere and going elsewhere'. Social science was imbued with this perspective, born as it was in nineteenth century evolution, and it gave us the forms we use to describe social change: *industrialisation*, *modernisation*, *rationalisation* and *urbanisation* – all of which imply one-directional processes. He argues that in the scientific social study of religion,

this dominant linear image is expressed chiefly in the term *secularisation*, the idea that society moves from some sacred condition to successively secular conditions in which the sacred evermore recedes. In fact, so much has the secularisation thesis dominated the social scientific study of religious change that it is now conventional wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

In line with Enlightenment philosophy, but grounded in social and cultural analysis, Weber contested that the exercise of reason (empirical science), intellectualisation and rationalisation has meant that 'there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation'.

The consequence for religion is that 'with the progress of science and technology, man has stopped believing in magic powers, in spirits and demons; he has lost his sense of prophecy and, above all, his sense of the sacred'. Bryan Wilson extends this saying that 'all the evidence is toward the decline of belief in the supernatural'. He rejects the idea that the supernatural any longer has a significant influence in the everyday life of modern man, and, as a result:

religion has come to be associated much more as one among a number of leisure activities, it exists in the area of free choice of the use of time, energy, and wealth in which the end products of the economy are marketed for consumers.<sup>15</sup>

3.3.3 For Wilson therefore, secularisation is the process whereby 'religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system', but this leaves open the possibility that

people may nevertheless remain interested in religion for personal reasons, allowing it to continue to exist in a privatised fashion. The process of 'structural differentiation' involving the development of 'autonomous spheres of procedure and value' meant that religion 'lost its presidency over other institutions', in particular the political (the secular state), legal and economic. However, Heelas notes that religion also became more internally differentiated, in that considerable contrasts can now be identified between:

Traditional, authoritative religions of the text, liberal teachings with a strong dose of humanism, prosperity teachings stamped with the mark of utilitarian individualism, and all those alternative spiritualities or New Age teachings with their emphasis on the expressive.<sup>16</sup>

3.3.4 Berger proposes that with the emergence of the modern world religions were compelled to adapt to two new 'realities'. First, since religion has become a matter of choice, religious orientations no longer reflect the legitimating requirements of society so much as the preferences of individuals, a process known as 'privatisation'. Second, the demise of the religious monopolies of the past, unlikely to return under the highly differentiated conditions of advanced capitalism, has led to a new situation of 'pluralism'. Berger argues that the implication of privatisation and pluralism for religious traditions 'which previously could be authoritatively imposed' is that they now have to be 'marketed, ...must be 'sold' to a clientele that is no longer constrained to 'buy''. In Dawson's words 'religious institutions have become marketing agencies and the religious traditions consumer commodities'. Religious organisations therefore underwent changes to both structure and ideologies with the result that they became, like other institutions of modernity, increasingly bureaucratic and business-like and ever more similar in form and function. The result of pluralistic competition according to Berger is that the plausibility of each religion is undermined as its content is relativized, 'deprived of their status as taken-for-granted, objective reality', and their veracity claims became a matter of subjective consciousness and conviction alone.<sup>17</sup> There are, he proposes, two strategies open to religions in these conditions:

They can either accommodate themselves to the situation, play the pluralistic game of religious free enterprise, and come to terms as best they can with the plausibility problem by modifying their product in accordance with consumer demands. Or they can refuse to accommodate themselves, entrench themselves behind whatever socio-religious structures they can maintain or construct, and continue to profess the old objectivities as much as possible as if nothing had happened.<sup>18</sup>

3.3.5 Paul Heelas argues that despite the importance of differentiating processes, the powerful countervailing tendencies witnessed by modernity are now in favour of dedifferentiation. With regard to religion he argues that modernity has witnessed the 'development of the spirituality of the perennial', that religious exclusivism has given way to inclusivism and as people move from denomination to denomination they are inclined to find 'much the same spirituality at the heart of all religious traditions'.<sup>19</sup>

This can also be said to be the case with regard to the secular-sacred boundary as the religious becomes less obviously religious and the secular less obviously secular:

This can be considered, for example, in connection with expressive individualism. An estimated ten per cent or more of Western populations now speak the language of 'authenticity', of 'being true to oneself': and this is to operate in some sort of indeterminate zone, the language being humanistic, the ontology smacking of the Immanent. Rain forests are treated *as if* they were sacred; the boundary between the sacred and the secular loses its hold in many alternative therapies and healing provisions.<sup>20</sup>

3.3.6 New age religiosity is clearly inspired by the premodern. Marion Bowman has written extensively on the influence of the Celtic and Druidic beliefs, and the numerous way in which ancient Eastern mysticism and the pagan traditions have been resourced are documented in the first Chapter. Heelas contends that in this manner 'the new relies on the old, for 'wisdom', practice, and - (one) might add - legitimization'.

Further to the distinctions drawn in section 3.2 it becomes obvious however that new age discourse, if not practice, is largely de-traditionalised. In 1991 Robert Bellah wrote that 'one aspect of the great modern transformation involves *the internalisation of authority*... and this has profound consequences for religion'. The process of de-traditionalisation takes place in the move from an external authority to the internal authority of the 'utilitarian individual', or to the authority of the 'first-hand spiritually informed experience of the self'.<sup>21</sup>

In *strongly traditionalised* religion a transcendent and authoritative past transmits the knowledge and wisdom which informs the present and future. The pathway to salvation is provided by the traditional and transcendent which are necessarily seen as being superior to life as it currently is, and the self (to varying degrees) is thus seen as fallen, in need of salvation. *Strongly detraditionalised* religion on the other hand, rejects the merely 'external' and what the past has to say, and places faith in the knowledge and wisdom attainable by the individual in the here-and-now, in 'direct experience' rather than 'second-hand' reception. The divine is to be found within the individual or in the natural order, and 'only thus can one be liberated from the anti-spiritual (capitalistic, consumeristic) tendencies of the modern world'. Heelas contends that the new age is detraditionalised in that it transcends voices from

the past, as well as, for that matter 'voices belonging to the established order of contemporary society and culture'.

In detraditionalised religion Stephen Tipton argues, the 'expressive ethic' replaces the 'authoritative ethic' of tradition, the extent to which the authority ascribed to one's own 'true' experience is bound up with the fact the 'Self' itself is sacred, in contrast with strongly traditionalised religion where the self is relatively devalued.<sup>22</sup>

Strongly traditionalised religion is characterised by its 'institutional forms, beliefs and rituals', and this element of the traditional, Albanese notes, is present in new age practice. However features of the detraditionalised are also present, in, for example, the informality of institutional arrangements, as the church, chapel or mosque which serve to organise worship from 'without', are replaced by 'ad hoc encounters', and religious leaders are replaced by 'non-directive facilitators'. In this manner, the authority within, rather than belonging to a particular religious organisation or following a prescribed form of worship, leaves one free to choose which rituals or myths to follow in order to make contact with the spiritual.

A further point of contrast between traditionalised and detraditionalised religions can be identified in the fact that the former will assume that it and it alone provides the best path to the truth and other traditions will be judged accordingly, while the latter by definition, rejects the differences and associated evaluations made by the traditionalised order and instead assumes an interconnected or interfusing spirituality 'running through all religions as well as the self and the natural order as a whole'.<sup>23</sup>

Heelas and Woodhead insists that in order to understand detraditionalised religions it is necessary to think in terms of interlocking forces and transformation, these include:

a wider cultural turn from transcendence to immanence; from an external locus of authority to an internal one; from fate to choice; from ethical principles to ethical experiences; from test by way of text to test by way of experience; from negative evaluations of human nature to positive; from living in terms of what the established religious order announces (or imposes) to living out one's own spirituality; from differentiated religion to de-differentiated; from happiness by way of sacrifice to happiness by way of realisation; from salvation by following tradition to enlightenment through self-chosen rituals (including those informed by technology); and, very importantly, from looking to the future in terms of the past to experiencing life in the here-and-now.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible to isolate five main *varieties* of detraditionalisation. The first can be described as the 'weakening' of tradition, the second involves the sacralisation of the self and the third, 'individualisation of religion', describes the shift from commitment to particular religions to

the exercise of one's own authority in constructing personal spiritualities. The fourth variety describes the consumerisation and instrumentalisation of religion, where consumerisation involves detraditionalisation or secularisation 'insofar as religion serves largely to satisfy and pleasure the self', and instrumentalisation involves the reduction of religion 'to serve largely as a means to the end of obtaining prosperity'. The fifth is the universalisation of religion that emphasises what is held in common by religions rather than the traditions and externals that serve to differentiate them.<sup>25</sup>

Heelas and Woodhead suggest that each of the five varieties or *processes* of detraditionalisation can be explained in different ways, it may be useful to provide a summary at this point.

The first, they argue, involves such factors as the application of critical reason to 'traditional' truths formerly held sacred. The key explanatory factor in the second is the wider cultural 'turn to the self' characteristic of modernity, in this argument detraditionalisation leads not to secularisation and atheism but, instead a form of religiosity is (sometimes) regenerated. The third type critically involves the development in modern times of a 'culture of choice', since, because of the emergence of consumer culture, people have come to believe they have the right to choose and devise their own religions. In the fourth type of detraditionalisation this aspect of consumer culture can also be seen to play a role, as the self in its 'utilitarian' rather than 'expressive' guise, seeking to gratify itself in terms of what is offered by capitalistic modernity, detraditionalises (or secularises) by accommodating religion to its own desires. Finally, the fifth type of detraditionalisation may be explained as a response to the potentially divisive pluralism characteristic of modern times by moving beyond differences in order to find what is held in common.<sup>26</sup>

3.3.7 Detraditionalisation and secularisation are not the same. Secularisation necessarily involves the disappearance of religion from public or private life, or at least a loss of its significance, while detraditionalisation, essentially, has to do with its *transformation*. As a result detraditionalisation leads (ultimately) not to atheism but to '(the rise of) spiritualities of life'. While sometimes admittedly, this process will involve the de-intensification of religion and the spread of a precarious privatised religiosity this need not necessarily be the case: Heelas and Woodhead point out that there are plenty of 'publicly and politically potent spiritualities of life around, both in the West and in India'.<sup>27</sup>

These points notwithstanding there are a number of significant overlaps between the theories of detraditionalisation and secularisation - they can both involve similar (if not identical)

processes, such as, for example the application of reason to reject traditional beliefs - and factors crucial in fuelling detraditionalisation, such as the turn to self, are also bound up in secularisation.

The extent to which the 'consumerisation and instrumentalisation of religion' involves either, or indeed both, trends is ill-explored and remains unclear. For example, while aspects of Christianity may be 'tailored' to suit consumers it clearly remains 'religious', although it may lose aspects of its tradition. But when religion is treated as a means of pleasuring or empowering the self and is 'fully accommodated to the desires of the person', consumerisation and instrumentalisation would appear to lead to secularisation.<sup>28</sup>

To summarise then, with regard to the new age, basic themes such as the rejection of externalities to do with 'beliefs' (which simply nurture the ego) in favour of spiritually-sourced expressivism', ensure that the traditional doctrines of religion are:

viewed in negative light... (however), such religiosity can still be drawn upon to provide practices. And indeed this is what has happened. New agers are adept at drawing on traditions, often transforming activities (say shamanism as originally envisaged) to put them to use in terms of the search within.<sup>29</sup>

This section will assess the arguments surrounding the manner in which the new age relates to modernity. This first part deals with the conventional view of anti-modernity while the latter parts suggest ways in which the movement displays more compatible, or even pro-capitalist, tendencies.

3.4.1 Many commentators on the new religious consciousness of the latter half of the twentieth century have sought its significance in terms of its appeal. Typical of such analyses, Hunter has built on Berger's basic understanding of the human condition and the social construction of reality to propose that the answer lies in the 'alienation and anomie' that are 'structurally endemic to advanced industrial society', and more specifically, on the crisis of meaning and personal security stemming from the 'de-institutionalisation' of the modern world.<sup>30</sup>

According to Berger, humans, as a species, have sought to create a stable cultural order to compensate for our lack of instinctual programming, an order which will come to be taken for granted and hold the threat of anomie at bay.

The aspects of life which become sufficiently routinized and habitual to be beyond ready questioning are said to be 'institutionalised'. Hunter propose that while much of life in traditional societies is organised in this way, modernity is instead 'characterised by an unprecedented degree of de-institutionalisation'. This problem, exacerbated by the uneven nature of the distribution of deinstitutionalisation is, he argues, the cause of 'the turn East' of so many 'middle class youths'.<sup>31</sup>

The deinstitutionalised aspects of 'private' life such as courtship patterns, marriage, child-rearing, sexuality, gender relations, consumption, vocation and spirituality result in their conversion from the realm of taken-for-granted experience to that of choice.

Institutionalisation continues unabated however in the public spheres, dominated by massive bureaucracies which organise and operate government, the law, business, communication and even religion.

The 'formal rationality' which guides the institutions is geared toward the functional requirements of the social system with no regard for the desires or needs of the individual. Hunter argues that the consequences is a public sphere, wherein everything is seemingly a matter of choice but where many individuals may yearn for more guidance, at odds with a

public sphere where 'guidance is manifest' but in ways which 'belie the meaningfulness of participation for the individual. He summarises thus:

The dilemma of modernity, in which all individuals are variously caught, is an oppressively formidable public sphere, which is structurally incapable of providing individuals with concrete and meaningful social confirmation of their sense of reality (including their understanding of social processes, subjective meaning and personal identity), and an enfeebled private sphere, which is distressingly under-institutionalised, and which is structurally unable to provide reliable social parameters for the more mundane activity of everyday life and a plausible, well-integrated system of meaning which gives location and purpose to the individual's total life experience.<sup>32</sup>

For Hunter and others therefore, the new spiritual consciousness which emerged in the sixties is a sociocultural protest against these conditions, representing a 'demodernising impulse' and an attempt to socially reconstruct the world by 'reimposing institutionally reliable meaning upon existence'.

3.4.2 Also examining the new age as a 'response' to modernity, Paul Heelas aligns aspects of the counterculture with a rejection of 'the contaminations of modernity' in particular those involving commitment to the materialistic life. For serious 'self-religionists' enlightenment was believed to be incompatible with ego-derived temptations and attachments and they accordingly sought liberation from the institutions of modernity by 'dropping out' to live in squats or communes, or to make the journey to the pre-modern enclaves of the East. Heelas notes that after a period of some stagnation evidence of a revival of this wing can be seen in the increasing number of people joining the bands of travellers who roam from festival to festival in a 'largely summertime New Ageism'.

Characteristics of this attitude can also be seen in those who attempt to offer alternatives to what the mainstream has to offer in, increasing, almost every aspect of the service, cosmetic and agriculture industries and also in how new age principles have been brought to bear on such domains as education, social work and big business.<sup>33</sup>

3.4.3 The analyses of Stone, Westley and Campbell are compatible with Hunter's conventional views in many ways, yet none choose to frame the adaptive response of religion, as manifested in the new spirituality of the late twentieth century, in the negative terms of reference implied by the 'anti-modernist' label.

In their readings of the situation the changes recorded are not treated as reactionary, but rather as 'being symptomatic of the continued and healthy evolution of the forms of religious life'. The discussions provided in these papers are obviously different but in his extensive analysis of their contributions Lorne L. Dawson has identified the common, interrelated characteristics which indicate a common perception of what he calls the 'new religious consciousness' of the time.

From a summary of these six points, included in Appendix C, it is clear that for these purposes the new age movement can be understood to be a part of, if not interchangeable with, this 'consciousness'. In assessing the significance of the 'consciousness', Stone notes that it is 'emblematic of trends that have been developing in American religion for decades' but that their incidence '(have) never been documented to be as strong or as widespread' before. He also remarks, in common with both Westley and Campbell, that it is markedly more compatible with science and the social sciences than with conventional religions, and likewise with the 'new social order emerging around us, whether it is called advanced capitalism, late or high modernism, post-industrialism, or post-modernism'.<sup>34</sup>

While perhaps not of sufficient scale or permanency to form the basis of a new religious culture he counters that it may nevertheless 'serve as midwife for new sensibilities', concluding that:

the significance of current religiosities may be less as social movements than as part of a cultural drift toward an 'innerworldly mysticism' that is compatible with (non-reductionist) scientific orientations.<sup>35</sup>

He further suggests that such an 'innerworldly mysticism' could have a 'cultural survival value' since it is 'complementary to bureaucratic post-industrial society', and, seeing Berger and Hunter's diagnoses of modernity in a more positive light comments:

Finding satisfaction in religious experience may help accommodate late capitalism's characteristic separation of private life from vocational life, of finding meaning in consumption rather than production... A mystical orientation is applied to the private sphere of life as individuals supply their own solutions to religious problems, are assured of a sense of self (or sequence of selves), and gain respite from the workaday world to return refreshed to support bureaucratic asceticism in their work-role...<sup>36</sup>

Westley likewise acknowledges the inaccuracy of continuing to characterise the attitude of the movement to science as 'one of rejection, substitution and escape', since he argues, they are 'actively seizing on both the new cultural relativism promoted by the spread of social scientific knowledge and some of the means and data of the natural sciences to facilitate and legitimate their existence'. Dawson supplements his arguments (written in 1978) pointing to the wide array of more specific and important theoretical developments in the sciences that have since:

Become foundational to the model of reality emerging from the 'new religious consciousness' (i.e., ideas like the holographic paradigm of David Bohm and Karl Pribram, the paradigm of self-organisation associated with Ilya Prigogine, the formative causation of Rupert Sheldrake, and the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock).<sup>37</sup>

Campbell adds that while the 'rationalism, materialism and ... self-concerned this-worldliness' of modern man may be 'the focus of mystical opposition and scorn', there is no 'opposition to abstract, secular systems of thought in general... (and this) leaves many areas in the arts, philosophy and the sciences, where mysticism can draw on material syncretisation', concluding with his assertion that 'the monism, relativism, tolerance, syncretism, and above, all, (the) individualism' of the new religious consciousness 'is clearly highly congenial to the ethos of contemporary society'.<sup>38</sup>

Westley and Campbell use, respectively, Durkheim's 'cult of man' and Troeltsch's 'spiritual and mystical religion' to explain the emergence of the new spiritual consciousness as resulting from the advancement of social differentiation, with regard to institutions, the division of labour, and what Weber calls 'spheres of action' in general, but, assessing the 'incomplete causal explanations' of each, Dawson identifies the resulting dilemma thus:

Is the new religious consciousness a mere epiphenomenal reflection of social structural changes? Or is it both one of the mediums and the sources of the cultural changes we are experiencing? ... just reaction to modernity or ...represent(ing) some intrinsic adaptation of religious forms to the modern social world?<sup>39</sup>

Parsons believes the correlations can be viewed in a more optimistic light, arguing that (such as new age) sensibilities 'above all strive to rationalise culture in the name of the expressive values and emotional practices that are highly legitimate in contemporary society', in other words he finds that there is a marked element of cultural continuity between these supposedly deviant religions and the dominant culture.

Heelas in attempting to isolate some ostensibly *pro-capitalist* tendencies in the new age movements specifies a 'wing' of the movement which, he argues, developed 'in tandem with the triumphalist capitalism... of the 1980s'. He notes that in Britain alone there are thousands of training organisations promising to enlighten workers, most often management, and argues that the rhetoric of enabling the 'self to be put to work' resonates strongly with 'the language of individualistic enterprise culture'. Many of these 'relatively secularised 'new age' organisations' he argues, are little interested in nurturing spirituality, promising instead to tap into the powers of the Self in order to 'pursue success defined in psychological or materialistic fashion'.<sup>40</sup>

The idea that success in the marketplace is perfectly compatible with spiritual progress is exemplified by (author of the best-selling *Money is my Friend*) Phil Laut's criticism of the idea that 'money and spirituality don't mix':

Having a prosperity consciousness enables you to function easily and effortlessly in the material world. The material world is God's world, and you are God being you. If you are experiencing pleasure and freedom and abundance in you life, then you are expressing your true spiritual nature. And the more spiritual you are, the more you deserve prosperity.<sup>41</sup>

In her book *How to be Chic, Fabulous and Live Forever* Sondra Ray insists in a chapter entitled 'That Art of Enlightened Shopping' that the 'exterior' can be enjoyed by way of the inner quest, declaring 'God is unlimited. Shopping can be unlimited'. Similar 'best of both worlds' teachings have been noted in Chapter one, Werner Erhart's est training seminars for example have long emphasised the value of obtaining 'results' while questing within.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.5 THE NEW AGE AND POSTMODERNITY

Postmodernism is the very loose term used to describe the new aesthetic cultural and intellectual forms and practices which are perceived to have emerged in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

The degree to which *postmodernism* represents a break with, reaction against or accommodation to modernism varies between theorist and from one field of inquiry to the next. In his book *Against Post-modernism* Callinicos presented the arguments of many against the thesis that there has been a decisive shift from a modern to a postmodern era, suggesting that the concept is unnecessary to explain what are merely the inevitable developments of the phase of late capitalism.<sup>43</sup>

In each individual field the same dilemma must be addressed and most of the theorists whose views are discussed below identify features of both condition in the practice and beliefs of the new age.

Summarising the debate as it stands in the various disciplines, Thompson has written that in religious thought,

there have been attempts to develop a post-modern theology which reaffirms spiritual and moral bases of action neglected by secular modernism, whilst not abandoning the powers of reason. Sometimes this takes the form of a pastiche of religious ideas and selected elements of science and secular reason, as in New Age religion.<sup>44</sup>

So whether or not it can claim to be 'par excellence, the religion of postmodernity', it is certainly at the centre of any discussion of postmodern religion, and at least similarly involved in those on postmodern science.

In light of suggestions in a previous section that much of new age discourse is 'counter' or 'anti' modern and considering its agenda for a new future, it makes sense to think of it in a manner as post-modern. But self-religiosity itself cannot be considered postmodern for chronological reasons so the argument, presumably, must centre on the way it is used.

Heelas summarises the proposal as follows: 'the cultural logic of late capitalism, to quote Jameson, has generated a postmodern consumer culture; and those involved can treat New Age provisions as 'consuming delights' of an appropriate postmodern variety'.<sup>45</sup>

James Beckford offers a characterisation of what is most often understood by the term, suggesting the following 'hallmarks of the postmodern sensibility':

1. A refusal to regard positivistic, rationalistic, instrumental criteria as the sole or exclusive standard of worthwhile knowledge.
2. A willingness to combine symbols from disparate codes or frame works of meaning, even at the cost of disjunctions and eclecticism.
3. A celebration of spontaneity, fragmentation, superficiality, irony and playfulness.
4. A willingness to abandon the search for over-arching or triumphalist myths, narratives or frameworks of knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

The distinctive expression of this sensibility which Beckford expects in religion would:

be that putatively post-modern forms of religion would embrace diversity of discourse and the abandonment of unitary meaning systems; cross-references between, and pastiches of, different religious traditions; collapse of the boundary between high and popular forms of religion; and a accent on playfulness or cynicism.<sup>47</sup>

While he acknowledges that these themes call to mind 'a few new age groups', mentioning the followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and some other syncretistic Buddhist groups in particular, he insists that these are only 'the glittering baubles on the exotic fringe of religion', and concludes:

My assessment of the new spiritualities... is the same... their very holism locates them much more firmly in the traditions of modernity than of post-modernity. The stress on the inter-connectedness of all living things, the heightened awareness of 'the global circumstance'... the strong sense of evolutionary equilibrium and change, the belief in the possibility of personal and social transformation, and the affirmation of noninstrumental rationalities are all redolent of a revised 'Enlightenment project' with the emphasis more firmly placed on the human scale and spiritual implications of science implications of science, politics, and state administration.<sup>48</sup>

He observes the fragmentation in the 'sacred canopy of the past' and the 'juxtaposition of formerly separate religions may have created the impression ... of a patchwork quilt', but insists that the new religious consciousness and the shift in sensibility it reflects is still concerned with 'the pursuit of truth' and have turned more to science (now of a non-reductionist kind) than away from it.<sup>49</sup>

It seems customary in the discussion of the manner in which a subject exhibits postmodern tendencies to suggest 'schematic differences' between modernism and postmodernism, Grace Davie provides the following version for religion, based on Harvey's which is also included in Appendix D:

*Religion and Modernity: a Schematic Representation*

Modernity	Postmodernity
Industrialization Urbanization Production	Information Technology De-urbanization Consumption
Both modernity and post-modernity are problematic for religion but in different ways	
Modernism	Post-modernism
The grand narrative: religious Or anti-religious	Fragmentation/ decentring of the religious narrative but also of the secular; i.e. of the scientific, rational or anti- religious narrative e.g. rationalism/ communism
Secularisation	A space for the sacred but often in forms different from those which have gone before
God the Son The institutional churches Medical science Agribusiness	The Holy Spirit Varied forms of the sacred Healing Ecology <sup>50</sup>

Postmodern thinking is often considered in two distinct strands. The aspect usually referred to as *postmodernism* is associated with theorists such as Lyotard, Baudrillard, Heidegger and Derrida and is characterised by 'fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universalising or 'totalling' discourses'. It has been described as the pessimistic face of the postmodern, arising from a perceived crisis in modernity it 'issues in relativism, even nihilism'.<sup>51</sup>

*Postmodernity* can be said to describe the cultural context which has experienced a 'noticeable shift in sensibility, practices, and discourse formations' distinguishing it from the preceding period, while remaining within the modernist paradigm. Gallagher summarises the distinction as follows:

Both share a questioning of the achievements of modernity but whereas *postmodernism* seems to remain largely in a mode of refutation, cultural postmodernity,... goes beyond negative critique and, in some instances, represents a search for liveable languages beyond the narrowness of modernity.<sup>52</sup>

Various scholars from different disciplines have taken the more positive approach to post-modernism, discerning trends that constitute a challenge to the 'negative' aspects of modernism, such as its materialism, secularism, individualism, patriarchy, scientism, anthropocentrism and ecological vandalism, Thompson proposes that this constitutes a new 'constructive post-modernism' which he defines as follows:

Constructive post-modern thought seeks new connections and syntheses that might offer alternatives to the negative aspects of modernism. The kinds of phenomena studied include some that modernist thought would have regarded as marginal or antithetical to modern life; the sacred, charisma, passion, spirituality, cosmic meaning and unity, enchantment, community and so-called feminine qualities such as 'love' and 'romance'.<sup>53</sup>

While some of these qualities were emphasised in the Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century in a reaction against assumed negative aspects of Enlightenment thought and modernity, the difference with constructive post modernism is that it does not have a 'romanticised view of the pre-modern, but seeks to combine the benefits of modernity with the values and qualities that it believes were devalued by modernism as an ideology'. He suggests 'New Age religions' are an example of constructive post-modernism that combine 'elements of religion, science, psychology and business'.<sup>54</sup>

David Ray Griffin similarly contrasts *deconstructive* or *eliminative* postmodernism with *constructive* or *revisionary* thought, characterised by the aim of overcoming the modern worldview not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews as such, but rather by constructing a new one through a 'revision of modern premises and traditional concepts'.

Again, resonances with new age ideals and optimism are immediately apparent, in his 1997 introduction to the State University of New York Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, Griffin writes:

going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanisation, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Constructive postmodern thought provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from modernity itself. The term postmodern, however, by contrast with *premodern*, emphasises that the modern world has produced unparalleled advances that must not be lost in a general revulsion against its negative features.<sup>55</sup>

Griffin acknowledges that to the 'deconstructive' postmodernists, this view is 'still wedded to hopelessly outdated concepts' in its attempt to salvage positive meaning for notions of the self, historical meaning and truth as correspondence, ideas which were central to modernity, as well as the premodern notions of a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature. However he argues that this revisionary postmodernism is 'more genuinely postmodern' since it 'does not simply carry the premises of modernity through to their logical conclusions, but criticises and revises those premises' through its return to organicism and its acceptance of nonsensory perception, thereby opening itself up to the recovery of truths and values from various forms of premodern thought and practice 'that had been dogmatically rejected by modernity'.<sup>56</sup>

In her analysis of the relation between the New Spirituality/New Age and postmodernism, Linda Woodhead makes a distinction between two uses of the term, where the first describes a 'movement within philosophy' and the second the most recent phase of Western culture. She denies any connection between the postmodernism in the first sense and the New Age on the grounds that 'its experience based epistemology assumes a non-linguistic, ideologically untainted experience', the rejection of which is the grounds of postmodern linguistic theory. Furthermore she suggests that the New Age belief in the deep reality of the Self contradicts the postmodern stress on 'loss of self' which has 'grown out of its literary theory and deconstruction of Freud'.<sup>57</sup>

Finally she proposes that the New Age itself is a prime example of the 'grand narrative', clearly therefore owing far more to Modern thought than to Postmodern. For Woodhead, it is only when the term is used in the second sense, to describe our late-capitalist culture that similarities become apparent:

For the New Spirituality/New Age is a sort of consumer religion – consumers may 'buy' whichever sorts of religious goods give them pleasure. It seems to get satisfaction from a constant interplay of different images and different experiences. There is no grasping after these images, no clinging to them. People are aware that they are 'merely' images, and generally see them to have no particular attachment to specific ones. And perhaps the New Spirituality knows some of that playfulness and lack of seriousness supposed to be displayed by the postmodern condition.<sup>58</sup>

On the whole however, she insists that these postmodern features are far less substantial than the modern ones, and concludes with a summary of the fundamental incompatibility of the concepts:

Underlying the whole project (of the New Age) is a deep seriousness about the quest for 'authentic life, 'the true path', connection with 'deep reality', as well as a dissatisfaction with postmodern consumerist culture. Few people can live in a world where 'deep' meaning and value have been radically eliminated and, and the search to find them, a search still deeply conditioned by modernity, is surely at the heart of the New Spirituality.<sup>59</sup>

Postmodernism, for Lyotard, is neither a style nor a historical period, but rather 'an unrepresentable deferment of conceptualisation and totality'. His major contribution toward a definition of the term is his theory of *metanarratives* (*grand recits*). While modernity privileged such all-encompassing narratives as fascism, Marxism and capitalism, Lyotard's postmodernism encourages little narratives (*petits recits*) that claim to avoid totalization and preserve heterogeneity. Affinities with this attitude can be seen in the 'eclecticism' of the new age movement, its acknowledgement of the validity of other belief systems and in its embracing of 'otherness'.

David Lyon acknowledges that the debate over postmodernity is 'open to 'religious' possibilities' and believes that the new age 'like postmodernity, may be viewed as a response to a perceived crisis in modernity'. Arguing that postmodernity finally makes space for the religious he links Simmel's prediction that post-Christian religiosity would be a 'formless mysticism' in which the soul would be 'its own inmost metaphysical life not moulded by any forms of faith whatsoever' with Harvey's suggestion that 'even religion and myth can be of the greatest significance' to the new class of cultural producers.<sup>60</sup>

The pagan revival with its regeneration of the symbols of 'mother earth' and 'gaia' also 'fit nicely with 'postmodern currents which denigrate logocentrism in favour of image and sign'. He notes however, that while the new age seems to mirror some postmodern concerns about modernity crisis there are also ambiguities - 'most important, perhaps' is:

the way that New Age both expresses postmodern moods and simultaneously offers antidotes to modernity. The expression of modernity crisis can be seen in the laid-back, fluid and undogmatic pastiche of nostalgia and kitsch - the 'circus' of New Age. The cures for modernity crisis, on the other hand are visible in the new techniques for overcoming materialism and resignation, the new spiritual disciplines of meditation or channeling.<sup>61</sup>

In conclusion Lyon offers seven 'mutual echoes' which he feels 'indicate that sufficient evidence exists for hypothesising that New Age is a religious expression of post-modernity, Simmel's post-Christian religiosity'.

Briefly summarised, the first is that both 'are all about a new era', while debate continues as to whether or not the postmodern condition is actually with us, so new agers are divided as to when we will pass or have passed into the 'new paradigm' or Age of Aquarius. The passing of the old necessitates the abandonment of old verities, for postmodernism these are the metanarratives of the Enlightenment with the quest for 'correct' epistemology giving way to a new concern with ontology, an outlook certainly compatible with the new age equation of the Cartesian/Newtonian worldview with oppression and destruction. The common centrality of self is the third resonance, which in turn leads to the fourth - the postmodern shift into consumer capitalism is echoed in the characterisation of the new age as a 'pot pourri of 'spiritual' ideas offered in the religious supermarket'. The fifth is a shared doubt about 'the efficacy of politics', and the sixth is globalisation, accelerating in the postmodern age with the development of new information and communication technologies while also characteristic of the transnational networking which 'epitomises New Age organisation'. Lastly he asserts that both connect with the fin de siècle if not millennialism, asking if 'perhaps both postmodernity and New Age constitute the seduction of a millenarian spirit of which Raymond Williams warned?'.<sup>62</sup>

The debate on postmodernity is still open and few discussions of its implications or influence can offer concise verdict or resolution. The new age cannot be regarded as *purely* or completely postmodern, no cultural trend can, it would at any rate be contrary to the stated characteristics of the term. But more fundamentally, the postmodern is never proposed as unrelated to the modern and neither can the new age be regarded as such. Probably the most revealing characterisation of the position of new age religiosity or the new spiritual consciousness in our contemporary society is that which suggests it be considered as a 'cultural resource'. As a direct descendent of the 'expressive revolution' of the 1960s the pervasion of 'self-religiosity' has entered popular culture in our pursuits, practices, vocabulary and, consciously as well as unconsciously, in our beliefs and worldviews. The following section will take one aspect of this worldview and examine its current manifestation as both an underlying belief and a leisure option.

## CLOSING DISCUSSION

In his book *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement* Elliot Miller proposes that the New Age 'can only be adequately understood by reference to mystical experience'. Sections within the movement employ 'psychotechnologies' such as meditation, 'creative visualisation', chanting etc., in order to temporarily suspend normal patterns of thought without extinguishing or diminishing consciousness itself. The resulting altered states of consciousness (ASCs) can produce a profound mystical sense of 'transcendence' of individuality and identification with everything, thus illuminating via first-hand experience the underlying new age worldview of ultimate reality as undifferentiated: 'everything is one, and the nature of the One must be consciousness since at the peak of the mystical state consciousness is virtually all that is experienced'. Miller argues that those who actively pursue or passively submit themselves to ASCs set themselves up for 'nothing short of a religious conversion', and he or she will experience things once considered impossible, 'ecstatic feelings, psychic power... all create hope for a more purposeful, satisfying life. A new world view... to replace the shattered old one'.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the new age emphasis on experience, the centrality of notions of evolution and transformative union, and its ethos of monism or pantheism, the interest in such pursuits and their perceived desirability for the serious new ager is not surprising. Eastern religions have long employed meditational and yogic exercises to induce such states, and to similar ends. In the Western occult tradition too the pursuit has been central to gnostic philosophies. But until now it has always been a resolutely minority practice in the West, just as the occult metaphysical knowledge in which it is steeped has always been a 'secret knowledge', open only to an educated elite and persisting in a subculture outside the mainstream of religious and social practice.

As we have seen through the course of this thesis, new agers have blamed the project of modernity for the marginal position in Western society of many elements and qualities they consider vital.

One propagator of the mechanistic worldview was Freud's reductionist approach to psychoanalysis. As an explanation of the unitive experiences that occur as symptoms of schizophrenia, Freud proposed in 1905 that consciousness of a differentiated, external world is a *secondary* acquisition (which, in schizophrenia is apparently reversed). In 1920 Cavendish Moxon took this theory of infantile solipsism to explain the mystical union as 'nothing less than a return to the intra-uterine condition', the God/universe with whom the mystic unites is 'a projected image of the narcissistic libido... a regression to the mother'.<sup>2</sup>

If this can be taken as a reflection of the mainstream attitude of marginalisation or rejection to the mystical union in *modernity*, has there been a perceptible change in the 'new paradigm' of *postmodernity*? In psychoanalytic theory at least Merkur writes that infantile solipsism has given way to a new consensus in direct infant observation, which, when applied by Irving B. Harrison in 1986 to the phenomena of unitive experiences suggests that they should be regarded instead as fantasies:

The mystical immersion rides on a grandiose fantasy of union with an omnipotent and infinite love object... mystical experiences universally have the quality of wish-fulfilments – like dream experiences that satisfy unconscious desires'.<sup>3</sup>

The attraction of such qualities in a late-capitalist society where the consumer will *pay* for wish-fulfilment, where sensation and pleasure are so highly prized, would seem to be very great indeed. The status of the pursuit of mystical or unitive experiences in postmodernity could be very revealing, not only with regard to the persisting influence of new age or gnostic interests, but also with regard to the organisation of our culture and the experience of the individual within it. Such an investigation is beyond the scope of this study, but by providing a comprehensive background to the factors involved it has attempted to form a theoretical framework which might serve as an introduction to the topic. In conclusion, the following suggestions are offered as a starting point for any such investigation.

1. With his multi-million selling *The Road Less Travelled* M. Scott Peck launched into the mainstream of popular culture genre of 'pop' psychology with its particular hybrid of psychoanalytical and new age themes. In it he describes the experience of 'falling in love' as a 'dissolution of ego boundaries' allowing the experience of a 'mystical unification of the self with the non-self', the non-self being the 'other' of both partner, and by extension, the universe.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that it is the pursuit of this 'ecstatic' sensation, enjoyed only in the initial stages of the relationship, which causes not only our cultural obsession with romantic love, but also our disinclination to sustain relationships that have ceased to provide it.

In her 1997 book *Consuming the Romantic Utopia* Eva Illouz provides an extensive analysis of the social construction of romantic love as a product, placing it in the context of postmodern marketplace of 'thrill-seeking, exoticism and the search for intense authentic experiences'.<sup>5</sup>

2. Rachel Storm suggests that the lineage of the pursuit of altered states of conscious through 'artificial means' can be traced back to the mythologies of ancient Greece, through Gnosticism and the occult mystical tradition, to its resurgence in the LSD experimentation of the counterculture.<sup>6</sup>

'Rave culture' is possibly the pre-eminent youth movement of the past two decades. At its heart is the drug 'ecstasy', designed specifically to induce unitive states, for around five pounds and for about four hours at a time, millions of young people purchase the experience every weekend. Filtering on to the dance scene since the early 1980s from its use in new age psychotherapies, the 'e' business was, by 1993 estimated to be worth £2 billion a year in Britain alone, and has undoubtedly grown since then.<sup>7</sup>

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Linda Woodhead on the New Spirituality and the New Age:

In her discussion of Post-Christian Spiritualities Linda Woodhead identifies a series of shared characteristics between the 'New Spirituality' and 'New Age' movements.

At the deepest and most general level I think that the New Spirituality/ New Age is fed by what may be called radical egalitarianism. The New Spirituality loathes any form of hierarchy and is suspicious of all power except 'spiritual power'. It attacks all forms of dualism (male/ female, us/ them, spirit/ body etc.), regarding them as disguised hierarchies.

Its ideal is 'connectedness' or 'wholeness', a state where everything is on a level, nothing and no-one is higher than any other, and where ideally all real differences have been abolished. There can be no God above us, nor a tradition which has authority over us. This radical egalitarianism must be linked to social and economic changes in modern society (greater distribution of wealth and power), as well as to ideological currents like Marxism...

Closely linked to this radical egalitarianism and reinforcing it is the experience-based epistemology that is so central to the forms of spirituality I have surveyed. This feeds in from the Romantic revision of the empiricist tradition. It is linked to radical egalitarianism because if my experience is thought to be the basis of all knowledge then I never have to accept the authority of anyone or anything outside me. My 'Self' is the master of all it surveys.

Radical egalitarianism and the privileging of experience both encourage the turn of the self documented by many observers of the modern condition, and very apparent in the writers I have been looking at. The rise of psychology has undoubtedly reinforced this turn, and many of the writers I have considered are deeply influenced by Freudian and Jungian notions...

The New Spirituality and the New Age also share a suspicion of rationality and the 'rational self' which flows from the privileging of experiencing and the suspicions of radical egalitarianism. Reason may be something one has to obey; it may create hierarchies by judging some things true others false; and it may reveal some people as cleverer than others). This characteristic is reinforced by a tendency within much feminist thought to view women as more in touch with their emotions and 'deep experience' than men.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Woodhead, 1993: 8-9

## APPENDIX B

Linda Woodhead on the New Spirituality/ New Age and fundamentalism:

In light of this 'intimate relationship' between the 'New Spirituality' and the 'New Age' Woodhead concludes that the two can, for the purposes of study, be understood as referring to the same phenomenon. However she also contests that they share a significant amount with another conspicuous feature of contemporary religiosity: fundamentalism.

...though surface differences tend to obscure this, I believe that the New Spirituality/ New Age actually manifest a number of the defining characteristics of a fundamentalism. This struck me most forcefully when reading Matthew Fox, and I will illustrate the point with reference to his work, though I believe it could be illustrated by several of the other works I considered. First, it has a clear sense of 'us and them' – those who experience things aright (creation-centred spirituality) and those who do not (fall-redemption spirituality) with a clear implication in the writings that the latter are not just deluded but malicious. And of course those who are enlightened do not just have God on their side, in an important way they are God.

Second, there are very clear 'fundamentals' to this spirituality. So clear are they that Fox can set them out point by point at the end of his book. Like all forms of the New Spirituality, his system is extremely easy to understand. Its simplicity and its total explanatory power (of God, the world and everything) no doubt contributes importantly to its influence.

Third, there is no awareness that this system is one historically-conditioned ideology amongst others. 'Experience' is regarded as authoritative, ahistorical and innocent rather than as an internalized ideology. There is the claim that the return to a creation-centred spirituality is the return to the pristine origins of the Christian tradition, to the spirituality of Jesus himself.

Fourth, there is a powerful mechanism for deflecting/emasculating criticism. Not only are those who oppose the creation-based spirituality said to be deluded and trapped in their ego-selves, they are said to be biologically defective, working only with the left half of their brains. Academics clearly fall into this category according to Fox.

Finally, there is a clear desire to spread the spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Woodhead, 1993: 8, 9

## APPENDIX C

Lorne L. Dawson on the New Age and Pentecostal and Charismatic movements:

Dawson summarizes Arthur Parsons' account of the points of convergence between the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements on the one hand, and the 'various New Age movements' on the others, arguing that his points also share much in common with the traits of the New Religious Movements identified by Stone, Westley, and Campbell.

First, both the Pentecostal-Charismatic and the New Age movements stress a rediscovery of the experience of sacred power in the daily lives of ordinary people. The experience in question is envisioned as intense, personal, ecstatic, and susceptible to being repeated. Both movements associate these experiences with the continuous presence of spiritual energy, whether prana, mana, orgone energy, or the Holy Spirit in human affairs... But historically, socially, and culturally, each movement contributes to a new and marked democratization of numinous experience in society.

Second, both movements represent attempts to fashion new structures of social cohesion, under the guise of 'sacred communities'. In doing so however, both are distinguished by their world-wide vision. In true globalistic manner they have consciously sought to transcend 'conventional denominational, national, and ethnic boundaries. As internationalist movements they have adapted to 'current geopolitical realities and trends' and taken full advantage of the new means of mass communication and travel, as well as mechanisms and forums for cultural exchange.

Third, at the heart of each movement is a strong focus on the task and means of spiritual healing, both of the mind and of the body. Underlying this preoccupation with the well-being of the individual is a common holistic belief in the interconnectedness of spirit and matter, the mind and the body, the individual and the community, and the sacred and the profane.

Fourth, both groups are geared to the arrival of a new age. Their beliefs and practices are all premised on elaborate eschatologies, though New Agers usually promote a kind of 'soft' apocalypticism whereby the world will be suddenly changed for the better as a result of some collective spiritual effort, while the Pentecostal-Charismatic revival adheres to Biblical prophecy and thus 'is far less sanguine about the prospects of the modern world'.

Fifth and lastly, both movements display an 'anti-institutional and decentralized character. Loose organizational structures, resembling networks far more than traditional bureaucracies, are typical of both movements and the primary locus of authority tends to be the individual and his or her interior experience, judged in the light of its pragmatic fruits for the individual and humanity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dawson, 1998: 146, 147

In common with Stone, Westley and Campbell, Lucas later noted how these features link both these movements to some long-standing themes of American religious life: a messianic view of the nation, and ethos of individualism and egalitarianism, a tradition of revivalism, and a preference for pragmatism that entails belief in the reconciliation of the religious and the scientific worldviews.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lucas, 1995: 207, 208

# APPENDIX D:

Schematic differences between modernism and postmodernism proposed by Hassan (1975, 1985):

Modernism	postmodernism
Romanticism/Symbolism	Paraphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Anti-form (disjunctive, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/logos	Exhaustion/silence
Art object/finished work	Process/performance/happening
Distance	Participation
Creation/totalization/synthesis	Decreation/detotalization/antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centring	Dispersal
Genre/boundary	Text/intertext
Semantics	Rhetoric
Paradigm	syntagm
Hypotaxis	Parataxis
Metaphor	Metonymy
Selection	Combination
Root/depth	Rhizome/surface
Interpretation/reading	Against interpretation/misreading
Signified	Signifier
Lisible (readerly)	Scriptible (writerly)
Narrative/ <i>grande histoire</i>	Anti-narrative/ <i>petite histoire</i>
Master code	Idiolect
Symptom	Desire
Type	Mutant
Genital/phallic	Polymorphous/androgynous
Paranoia	Schizophrenia
Origin/cause	Difference-difference/trace
God the Father	The Holy Ghost
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Transcendence	Immanence <sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Hassan, 1985 in Harvey, 1989: 43.

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