

Spiritual Evolution in the Cultic Milieu

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“We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers”

— Carl Sagan

Introduction

If you consider yourself to be a spiritual seeker of any variety, then you have entered the environment that academics have termed the Cultic Milieu. The meaning of this expression is not directly related to cults, rather “Milieu” is a French word meaning “surroundings; environment”. It applies to the general environment of seekers with associated organisations and activities that make the Cultic Milieu function as a permanent ongoing feature of society.¹ The aim of this essay is to describe how it is impossible for people in this environment to be unaffected by the culture of the Cultic Milieu and how others within the milieu, act to impede real spiritual growth. In order to provide some clarity, this essay introduces a new term to describe the behaviour of people within the Cultic Milieu, who have been in and out of various cults and ideological groups. These are people who have been in this environment for so long, that they have become ‘conditioned,’ or ‘tainted’ by ‘cult tactics’. The routine use of cult tactics that most consider as normal practice is comprised of a battery of techniques used by manipulators and exploiters to gain control over the perception, thinking, emotions and belief systems of people whilst being drawn into cults or to keep people participating in cults. So, even if seekers drift around in the Cultic Milieu, as they can’t be drawn into cults, there seems

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to be an unacknowledged acceptance and compliance with a certain background level of detrimental conditioning within the Cultic Milieu that puts people into a mode that I have termed 'cult-o-matic'. This term has only been adopted because I do not believe there is an adequate modern word or phrase to convey sufficient meaning to the ingrained manner and behaviour of people steeped in the culture of the Cultic Milieu.

Enlightenment For Sale: Technologies of Experience

Historically, we can trace the development and widespread dispersion of mind-altering “Technologies of Experience,” that caused a consciousness “explosion” as huge numbers of people were exposed to radical therapeutic techniques. Briefly, we know that from about the 1970s onwards, experience techniques developed in the 1950s, found their way into the public arena. Social scientists had discovered that various methods can be used to push people into emotional highs, peak experiences, or supposed dramatic personal breakthroughs, whether via extreme acts of sensory deprivation or more subtle sensory manipulation. These methods could be used through words, gestures, images and intimate group dynamics and combined with Eastern practices (Zen, yoga and many forms of meditation) and psychedelics. Furthermore, the mass marketing of these techniques combined with aggressive sales techniques only served to legitimise the “quick-fix” search for enlightenment. Therefore, as these experience techniques became popular in the quickie search for enlightenment, there was real concern by some researchers that there was no real oversight, due to the largely subjective and intangible nature of the supposed benefits. Social

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scientists Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman in their groundbreaking book, *Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change* [1978, 1979, 1995, 2005], revealed that the ecstatic/illumination experience so often treasured by spiritual seekers may only be energy releases associated with the mind dealing with high stress, and when that sense of release occurs, people become wide-open to reprogramming.² Hence, in response to a certain technique or therapy, there could be 'enlightenment' or conversely, a mental breakdown. Basically, this amounts to a form of spiritual roulette and when things go wrong, the normal response is to blame the victim. Conway and Siegelman write:

“With the spread of the technology of experience into religion, therapy and wider everyday domains, millions no doubt had achieved impressive personal breakthroughs and spiritual awakenings, yet we saw little recognition of the perils inherent in the new technology and the intense experiences it evoked. These new practices that had proved beneficial in many contexts were not supernatural powers or pinpoint engineered tools but living information and communication processes that reached bedrock levels of the mind and body. When used manipulatively or covertly, they could be turned into paralysing instruments of human control. When practised recklessly or to excess, they spawned debilitating mental, emotional and physical effects.”

In a consumer society, it seems that the only real criteria for consideration, was how well these techniques brought in more recruits to cult enterprises and how well they could be used by salesmen to sell or be sold in workshops, seminars and trainings. In the hands of exploiters, it was quickly realised that experience techniques were tools that could be used against people to serve

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their own agenda. Simply, if you can change how people think and feel, whilst weakening their resistance to suggestion and command, then you can create new followers. This means that an unscrupulous guru can use ‘honed’ experience techniques, to recruit new followers who will give them all their money and/or work for next to nothing, as long as he can keep them under his spell. A salesman using psychological tricks, hypnosis, suggestion, persuasion and influence techniques, can create willing buyers who will keep buying whatever you have to offer, if they can keep buyers convinced that they will benefit somehow. The manipulative and covert use of these techniques is defined as ‘cult tactics’.

“In SALES, they find your PAIN, and then magnify your PAIN, and then sell you services that promise to take away the pain. If those “services” increase their pain while promising to reduce it, you have a Customer For Life.”

(Think about it, if their techniques worked, and you felt great, then they lose a customer. They are punished by success, and rewarded by failure.) The Anticult³

Various psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists and other academics and researchers have identified various levels of conditioning created by these technologies of experience. Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, use the term *Snapping* to indicate a sudden drastic alteration of personality.² (Literally, synaptic connections in the brain snapping off and new ones forming within seconds to create sudden change in the brain.) This altered state is the distinct aim of those seeking to gain complete control over new followers, but this is mostly disguised as being a real

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spiritual breakthrough. Conway and Siegelman describe the aftermath of *Snapping* as *Information Disease*, a term used to describe several distinct although interrelated states of mind. In the literature, there does not appear to be any other specific definition for the state of mind of those who are undergoing the hardcore process of brainwashing, alternatively called thought reform, indoctrination, mind control, etc or the more subtle means of creating changes of awareness with the specific intent of forcing life-changing spiritual experiences; breakthroughs, moments of rebirth, revelation, enlightenment, ecstasy or bliss, but where the subject's beliefs and perceptions, even fundamental values can be changed without the subjects consent. There is a wide variety of techniques to achieve this aim, but regular and ongoing changes of awareness could be considered as Pavlovian conditioning, named after experiments carried out by the Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov in the early 20th Century, where he described how we are "conditioned" into certain types of behaviour. This means that it does not matter whether mind-numbing techniques are used on a daily basis to generate altered states of mind or a weekend seminar causes the crisis of the mind called *Snapping*. Overall, the result is some people run the risk of altered personalities with minds that become more closed accompanied with a narrower range of emotions that are diminished in their intensity, at the same time that new beliefs can be more easily covertly inserted.

Conway and Siegelman received the Leo J. Ryan Award, from the national educational foundation named after the U.S. Congressman who gave his life in Jonestown, Guyana, for their "extraordinary courage, tenacity and perseverance in the battle against tyranny over the mind of man."⁴ For readers who may not

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be aware of this infamous historical event, on November 18, 1978, a US congressman and three journalists were shot and killed whilst on a fact-finding mission to investigate charges that American citizens were being held against their will, beaten, and subjected to other physical and emotional abuse.² This was taking place at the commune of an American religious sect called ‘The Peoples Temple’, in Jonestown, Guyana (they had not earned the title of cult at that time) run by self-styled ‘messiah’ the Reverend Jim Jones. It seems that Jones greatly feared that his church, first founded in 1956 as a socialist utopian community in the guise of fundamentalist Christianity, would be disbanded by the authorities and his power and livelihood taken away. Yet, in reality, his paradise had quickly disintegrated into a living hell for his followers who he subjected to extreme physical, mental and emotional duress in the hostile Guyana jungle. Therefore, the only reason the world knew anything about what was happening was because he could not stop some of his followers running away and reporting the horrors back home. Hence, the arrival of U.S. Congressman and reporters was the signal that the end was near and Jones ordered his followers to drink the ‘Kool-Aid’ from a washtub of strawberry flavoured drink laced with heavy doses of cyanide, tranquilisers and painkillers. It took five hours, but at the end 912 people were dead. As you can imagine, the world was shocked that a tragedy of this magnitude was possible and the debate raged as to whether this was a massacre or a mass suicide. A White House committee was instigated and a report recommendation for the government suggested the need to undertake “a concentrated program of research and training on cults.”

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Well, since this time, the Cultic Milieu and cults have continued to flourish in the United States. The voices warning about the dangers of cults and business enterprises that use cult tactics under the umbrella term Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs) have mostly been ignored. Today, we have some high profile tragedies where the use of cult tactics has been fatal. The New Age leader James Ray, who is often described as a motivational speaker, but who professed himself to be a “Practical Mystic”, has been convicted of three counts of negligent homicide when a sweat lodge held in October 2009, at his hugely expensive five-day “Spiritual Warrior” retreat outside Sedona, Arizona went horribly wrong.⁵ As it was reported in the Huffington Post, one juror stated: “It was a no-brainer there was heat,” Lepacek said. “These people were baked.” Curiously, when the emergency services arrived, one of the paramedics actually asked if this had been a mass suicide attempt because so many people were on the ground and were obviously really sick or already dead. Despite the fact that James Ray’s sweat lodge had gone horribly wrong, the paramedics were called against the wishes of James Ray.⁵ Fortunately, there were enough sane people in attendance who had not fallen under the James Ray spell and realising the severity of the situation, called for help. Unquestionably, from the evidence that was gathered and used by the Arizona State prosecutor Sheila Polk, the reason that James Ray had no concerns was that he had deliberately designed his sweat lodge to push people into an altered state by the use of extreme heat, in the hope that heat stroke would assure his followers of “an out of body experience”. Therefore, as far as James Ray was concerned, people turning blue and not breathing was nothing to worry about, his lack of medical knowledge was not a barrier to his all

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knowing wisdom. Thus, when James Ray was informed that two people had died, his subsequent behaviour conflicted with the characteristics of a true Spiritual Warrior. Firstly, when the police detective who had delivered the terrible news of the deaths asked about who had been in charge of the ceremony, James Ray just lied and claimed that the casual, hired-for-the-day fire tender Ted Mercer who had only acted under orders and provided hot rocks was actually in charge. This has now become the infamous refrain: *Ted did it!*⁶ Then in a panic, James Ray immediately ran away from the police so that he could not be questioned any further. Once James Ray realised he was supposed to take some responsibility for his actions, he attempted to do some damage limitation by hosting a telephone conference call with many of the surviving participants from his failed sweat lodge ceremony. Yet, this also turned into another PR disaster.⁷ The following anecdote was widely reported in the mainstream media:

A woman identified as Barb told the callers that a channeler at the retreat last Friday said the deceased had an out-of-body experience during the sweat lodge ceremony and “were having so much fun that they chose not to come back.”

The above statement is a perfect example of someone in cult-o-matic mode and has lost the ability to think and feel deeply. This means they had no empathy for the victims and were ready to stoutly defend cult tactics, without any sense of the need to be sensitive whilst family members were still suffering from shock and grief. However, the actions of James Ray cannot be defined as someone in the cult-o-matic mode because he knew exactly what he was doing. His psychological profile reveals that he is a sociopath and malignant narcissist, with a long trail of destruction

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as proof. Unfortunately, most of this background was not made available as evidence at his trial, despite the evidence collected by the prosecution and other researchers. Thus, at the jury verdict, it was widely acknowledged that James Ray had showed no remorse for the deaths of his victims at any time during his long trial.

Finally, I think it is worth mentioning that the Cultic Milieu covers many different groups that may not at first appear to be religious, spiritual or ideological. In September 2003, I once attended a Tai Chi Kineo introductory event that was being held near Stavanger, Norway, where I was living at the time. I distinctly remember that after some exercises, the leader Master Tek, settled down the group and then ‘mumbled’ for at least half an hour and also talked complete and utter rubbish. Now, I know he was putting his followers into a trance using an advanced hypnosis technique, presumably to maintain his control over his followers by reprogramming them, but at the time I thought it was just extremely weird. So, if I knew then what I know now, I would have just got up and walked out and not gone back. The same can now be said if I was attending any event where I felt that techniques were being used against me in a battle for my heart, mind and soul.

Understanding the Cultic Milieu

In 1972, C. Campbell wrote a seminal article entitled: *The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization*.⁸ It was the first scholarly publication to conceptualise the Cultic Milieu as variety of alternative forms of religious/spiritual interests that emerged out of the 1960s as a phenomenon in its own right. This was

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opposed to focussing on individual New Religious Movements or simply giving a summary characterisation of such movements. Interestingly, it was proposed before the emergence of ‘New Age’ as an analytical concept and so makes no reference to the New Age movement or milieu. This is something that many sociologists today believe serves as a much more useful concept in describing the variety of beliefs, activities and groups that have their own distinct characteristics. Campbell, like so many academics living in fear of losing their livelihoods due to any hint that they might have unorthodox beliefs, choose to characterise the Cultic Milieu as “the cultural underground of society”. He suggested that the Cultic Milieu explicitly includes areas such as “deviant science and technology”, in fact he writes: “Scientific heresies abound in the cultic fringe. [...] Fully fledged scientific theories may also abound, notably concerning “ethers,” “emanations,” “fifth senses,” and astral planes, together with the many and varied interpretations of the nature of space and time.” He writes that underground technology is the result of “deviant science.” We have discussion of the institutions of “deviant medicine” and the practice of “faith healing, chiropractic, naturopathy, or mediumship” (yes, I know this is a strange grouping). Of course, he writes about “deviant religion” and “...the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure”. Obviously, depending on who you are, the descriptions provided by Campbell could be considered as insulting, but after 35 years or more, sociologists have not needed to apply much in the way of theoretical revision of this original hypothesis, because it is accepted that Campbell was able to plausibly conceptualise

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the unifying dynamics of the Cultic Milieu without sacrificing an appreciation of the diversity of the New Age movement which has become a dominant section of the Cultic Milieu. This is examined by Jochen Scherer in the thesis entitled: *“Truth is what’s true for me”? Reassessing the Knowledge Claims of New Age Spirituality.*⁹ Scherer writes:

The strength of the concept of the ‘Cultic Milieu’, at least for present purposes, lies in the fact that it draws attention to a continual dynamic process that is at the heart of the phenomenon under study. This dynamic incorporates ideological, behavioural and organisational aspects, describing how, as a result of the beliefs they hold, the religious lives of those involved unfold along particular behaviour patterns which in turn account for the fluidity and unusual organisational structure of the field.

Rather surprisingly, academics insist that the Cultic Milieu is not a product of the 1960s. Rather, it is a permanent feature of society — not just this society, but of every society for which we have historical records.¹ Campbell put it best:

Given that cultic groups have a tendency to be ephemeral and highly unstable, it is a fact that new ones are born just as fast as the old ones die. There is a continual process of cult formation and collapse which parallels the high turnover of membership at the individual level. Clearly, cults must exist within a milieu, which if not conducive to the spawning of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general. Such a generally supportive cultic milieu is continually giving birth to new cults, absorbing the debris of the dead ones and **creating new generations of cult-prone individuals** to maintain the high end level of member ship turnover. Thus, whereas cults are by

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definition a transitory phenomenon, the cultic milieu is, by contrast, a permanent feature of society. [Bold added for emphasis]

I would like to take the opportunity here to remind readers that in the past, academics were forced to support the status quo, especially when it came to science and religion because their employment depended on it. Hence, the use of a strong tone and the choice of the word “deviant” to describe those who chose to stray from mainstream accepted beliefs. Paradigm shifts that benefit the whole of mankind do not come from ideologues that refuse to consider new information and new ways of understanding our reality. If society is to benefit from the evolution of the most advanced citizens i.e. those are able to integrate more and more complex information, then the Cultic Milieu has to be healthy, a stagnant Cultic Milieu defeats the purpose of why it should exist in the first place. It seems from reading the literature that academics once desperately tried to phrase their beliefs in such a way as to make readers believe that conforming to societal norms (being a sheep) is totally acceptable and not conforming to societal norms (not being a sheep) is somehow unacceptable. The question is: how can there be healthy societies if everything stayed the same and there was no change? Something that is blatantly against the laws of nature and I would suggest against universal law. As an aside, let us consider that something strange happened and the laws of physics changed virtually overnight due to an evolutionary change driven by cosmic forces. If humans had been forced to consider that nothing ever changes and humans were not allowed to think differently and therefore there were no alternative ideas, then it is conceivable that the human race would not be able to adapt and a

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scenario could arise where humanity would rapidly die out. Of course, humans do have the ability to think differently and come up with new unique solutions. As they say, necessity is the mother of invention. In a crisis, previously rogue scientific ideas floating around in the Cultic Milieu would get some serious scrutiny instead of being treated as “deviant science” especially if they were crucial to the survival of mankind. Do you get the picture? Ideas and behaviours are only deemed “deviant” when they are not convenient for those who control society.

There is now plenty of evidence that nearly four decades after Campbell wrote his seminal article, academic opinions have most certainly changed. As Hammer writes: “Reactions from mainstream society would seem to have increasingly gone from the ridicule and hostility that Campbell wrote of, to a kind of mild indifference and low-key exclusion from ‘elite’ circles.” A reflection of how academic opinions have changed can be found in the book, *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (2002) by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööv; where they provide some positive, almost idealistic thinking about the dynamics of the Cultic Milieu.¹ Thus, from the introduction of this book we read:

The Cultic Milieu is a zone in which proscribed and/or forbidden knowledge is the coin of the realm, a place in which ideas, theories and speculations are to be found, exchanged, modified and eventually, adopted or rejected by adherents of countless, primarily ephemeral groups whose leaders come and go and whose membership constitute a permanent class of seekers whose adherence to any particular or organization tends to be fleeting at best. The ideas generated within the cultic milieu may eventually go mainstream, but long before they come to the attention of the

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dominant culture, they will have been thoroughly vetted, debated, reformulated and ultimately, adopted or rejected within the cultic milieu itself. The sole thread that unites the denizens of the cultic milieu – true seekers all – is a shared rejection of the paradigms, the orthodoxies, of their societies. Beyond this element of seekership, the cultic milieu is a strikingly diverse and remarkably tolerant ethos. Ideas unacceptable to the social, cultural and political mainstream flourish. This is not to say they find acceptance. Most, indeed are heard and rejected, many are criticized, most are ignored. But they are heard and exchanged and passed on from belief system to belief system, from leader to leader and from seeker to seeker.

Despite Campbell's need to emphasise his opinions on the "deviant" nature of the Cultic Milieu, he totally recognises that the appearances of cults is a temporary aberration and not typical feature of the milieu.⁸ Hence, he writes:

[I]t would appear as if the organizational form most typical of the cultic milieu is not the cult but the "society of seekers". Indeed the cult, in the form of a group offering a particularized and detailed revealed truth, represents something of an aberration from the basic principle of tolerance and eclecticism which is prevalent in the cultic milieu in general and this could possibly be one reason why it tends to have such a short lifespan. [...]

In line with the distinction between the cult proper and the society of seekers there is an associated difference between the adherent to a particular brand of cultic culture and a seeker actively committed to a quest within the culture but uncommitted to a specific version of "the truth". It is the former whose particularized loyalty helps to bring the cult into being

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out of the general milieu but it is the latter who supports the milieu itself by attending lectures and demonstrations and answering advertisements. There is a third category of person whose support helps to maintain the cultic milieu in existence, and this is the passive consumer of the “products” of the culture. Unlike the seeker, such a person does not possess the intensity of the commitment to the quest to actively invest a considerable amount of time, emotion and money in exploring the milieu. Instead his interest in the mysterious and the bizarre is merely a general one which he satisfies through subscriptions to magazines which are principally commercial rather than ideological in orientation. [...] Or his involvement is that of the ad hoc concern typical of a client seeking the services of a professional practitioner. [...] It is one of the principal reasons why the cultic milieu continues to survive.

Maybe this passage is not a fair representation of the types of seekers within the Cultic Milieu initially defined by Campbell as representing the home of “deviant science”, “deviant technology” and “deviant medicine” or basically anything ‘alternative’ from accepted mainstream beliefs. Should we ask: What type of ‘seekers’ are those in the Cultic Milieu who only consider it as a safe haven for certain ideas and knowledge? What about those who believe that at a certain point, the mainstream would ‘evolve’ enough to accept certain ideas and knowledge that would benefit the whole of humanity? Maybe within the Cultic Milieu, certain individuals and organisations should be considered as repositories of knowledge or a safe haven for “deviant knowledge” until the mainstream has matured enough or circumstances have changed to force the mainstream to accept certain truths? Maybe, there should be another category of seeker, those seeking safety from ignorant and intolerant mainstream thinkers.

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There are already some noteworthy precedents like traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture and chiropractic medicine. These are modalities that have been found to be effective and have already become part of mainstream culture, therefore benefiting the whole of humanity. So, even though these modalities were considered fringe and offbeat fifty years ago, we now know that in the 1960s, even the U.S. Military were quietly conducting their own investigations into acupuncture and today they openly gush about its effectiveness. However, I think the most interesting example that some might think does not fit the Cultic Milieu motif, is the work of neurologists Larry Marks and Richard Cytowic.¹⁰ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Marks and Cytowic were inspired to initiate a new wave of research into Synaesthesia that continues in countless learning institutions and labs around the world today.¹¹ However, this was not an easy decision as they faced tremendous skepticism and sometimes outright censure from their peers. Cytowic has said that “colleagues for years refused to accept synaesthesia as real and warned that pursuing it would ‘ruin’ my career because it was ‘too weird’ and ‘New Age.’” Cytowic experienced the typical reaction of orthodoxy when it came to subject that was not easy to understand. First deny it, and then discredit it and call it New Age. Interestingly enough, Synaesthesia is now one of the most interesting areas of psychology and there is enough evidence to suggest that this just might be part of the next step in human evolution. Synaesthesia was first recognised about 130 years ago by Sir Francis Galton who then went on to be an early pioneer of behaviourism and the subject of Synaesthesia quickly became a largely forgotten curiosity. Therefore, it seems the knowledge of this neurologically-based condition was barely kept alive by a few

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“deviant” scientists, until the winds of change turned a little spark of interest into a roaring inferno. Here, we can clearly see the dynamics of the Cultic Milieu operating when there is a sudden paradigm shift, knowledge held within the Cultic Milieu can quickly ‘transcend’ the belief barrier into the mainstream.

The Spiritual Milieu

Most academics agree that the Cultic Milieu is not the same as the New Age Milieu and since the first scholarly publications in the 1980s, scholars have addressed the difficulties involved in defining ‘New Age’. Most importantly, it is generally agreed that New Age spirituality is highly resistant to organisations that want to operate as a cult. Scholars recognise that this is based on fundamental beliefs about the importance of the self and personal experience. However, those who study cults and cult behaviour do not believe that typical New Agers are immune from those who are prepared to use extremely subtle methods of control. Wouter Hanegraaff is a noted authority on esoteric traditions and new religions as a professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and related currents at the University of Amsterdam. Hanegraaff believes the structure of New Age can be said to reflect its key beliefs:

New Age spirituality is strictly focused on the individual and his/ her personal development. In fact, this individualism functions as an in-built defence mechanism against social organization and institutionalization: as soon as any group of people involved with New Age ideas begin to take up “cultic” characteristics, this very fact already distances them from the basic individualism of New Age spirituality. The stronger they

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begin to function as a “cult” or even as a “sect”, the more will other New Agers suspect that they are becoming a “church” (i.e. that they are relapsing into what are considered old-fashioned patterns of dogmatism, intolerance and exclusivism), the less acceptable they will be to the general cultic milieu of New Age spirituality. Such a group then takes up a life of its own as a “new religious movement”, which may share many basic beliefs with the New Age movement but should no longer be considered a typical representation of it. Within the present social context of a democratic free market of ideas and practices, the New Age’s strict emphasis on the self and on individual experience as the only reliable source of spiritual truth, the authority of which can never be overruled by any religious dogma or consideration of solidarity with communal values, thus functions as an effective mechanism against institutionalization of New Age religion into a religion.¹²

In the paper by the Dutch authors Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, *Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality*, we are provided with the academic perspective of the potpourri nature of the New Age.¹³ This eclecticism has been termed here as Spiritual Milieu, but this terminology refers to the specific New Age field within the Cultic Milieu.

In most of the social-scientific literature, New Age – or ‘spirituality,’ as increasingly seems the preferred term – is used to refer to an apparently incoherent collection of spiritual ideas and practices. Most participants in the spiritual milieu, it is generally argued, draw upon multiple traditions, styles and ideas simultaneously, combining them into idiosyncratic packages. New Age is thus referred to as “do-it-yourself-

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religion” (Baerveldt), “pick-and-mix religion” (Hamilton), “religious consumption à la carte” (Possamai) or a “spiritual supermarket” (Lyon). In their book *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Sutcliffe and Bowman even go so far as to argue that “New Age turns out to be merely a particular code word in a larger field of modern religious experimentation” (1), while Possamai states that we are dealing with an “eclectic – if not kleptomaniac – process (...) with no clear reference to an external or ‘deeper’ reality”.

I was quite amused to read this and it reminded me of an expression in New Age circles of those flitting around looking for the next “spiritual buffet”. I used to think this was a bad thing, but now I have changed my mind. This will be explained later. Whatever, the authors revealed a deeper aspect to what appears as superficial spiritual shopping and we read:

The emergence of a pluralistic spiritual supermarket confirms Luckmann’s classical prediction, in short, but has simultaneously blinded many observers to the commonly held doctrine of self-spirituality – the belief that the self itself is sacred. It is this doctrine that paradoxically accounts for the staggering diversity at the surface of the spiritual milieu – an inevitable outcome when people feel that they need to follow their personal paths and explore what works for them personally – and simultaneously provides it with ideological unity and coherence at a deeper level. The common characterisation of New Age as ‘pick-and-mix-religion’ or ‘diffuse religion’ is not plainly wrong, then, but rather superficial. If it is believed that the sacred resides in the deeper layers of the self, after all, what else to expect than people following their personal paths, experimenting freely with a range of traditions in a highly heterogeneous spiritual milieu?

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The diversity of the spiritual milieu results from rather than contradicts the existence of a coherent doctrine of being and wellbeing.

Finally, in this short overview of the New Age, Hans Sebald (February 22, 1929 – February 2, 2002), who was Professor of Sociology at Arizona State University, claimed that “the New-Age movement’s benchmark is a nouveau romanticism” which is “a peculiar way of looking at the world and at oneself, an attitude that transforms the entire character of thought and sensibility [...] it substitutes fantasy and imagination for the facts of life and for an objective assessment of one’s own personality. It thrives on the childlike, hedonistic, picturesque, bizarre, unknown, and mystical.”¹⁴ This childishness does characterise New Age thinking, to the point where I have personally got so fed up with the fairy tales, that I specifically tell people that I am only interested in “Metaphysics for grown-ups”. Do you want an example? Well, I was shocked to my core when someone felt that I would benefit from their advice of ‘guidance’ and that I should “follow the crumbs”. Yes, that’s straight out of the German fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel. Briefly, the storyline goes that due to circumstances beyond their control, the children Hansel and Gretel end up lost, alone and hungry in the woods. The bread crumbs they had tried to use as markers to help them return home, had been eaten by birds, but they happen to stumble upon a house made up of confectionary goods and sweets. Of course they are enticed, as the house was specifically designed by a witch to help capture children. Consequently, Hansel gets locked up in an iron cage and Gretel is forced into becoming a slave and they only escape due to their ability to use their wits. So what do you think? Is this true wisdom or what? After being initially stunned,

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(actually, you never know, this might have been a clever cult tactic to induce some confusion). At the time, I had recently had my own escape story, so I could clearly see some comparisons that would reinforce my belief that I should not be trying to follow any crumbs that would lead me to the next witch... Whatever, the fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel might prove to be even more stunning as an analogy when we start to compare the use of bait combined with cult tactics to entice the innocent by the seducers that haunt the Cultic Milieu and the New Age movement in general.

Anyway, back to the academic literature. Scherer's view was to denounce Sebald and in his comments state: "Incidentally, the manner in which nuanced observation opinionated judgement inter-mix in this statement is typical of the way New Age provokes scorn, and thinly veiled rage in some commentators." However, in my opinion, Scherer could not have possibly mixed with many New Agers, because if he had, he would not have quibbled with the analysis. Sebald obviously realised that a significant amount of New Age works are specifically aimed at people with a childish mentality, sugar coated teachings abound to tempt those with a serious lack of interest in grown-up sensibilities.

Milieu Control

"You are a flaw in the pattern, Winston. You are a stain that must be wiped out. Did I not tell you just now that we are different from the persecutors of the past? We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with

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the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us; so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him. It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be. Even in the instance of death we cannot permit any deviation. In the old days a heretic walked to the stake still a heretic, proclaiming his heresy, exulting in it. Even the victim of the Russian purges could carry rebellion locked up in his skull as he walked down the passage waiting for the bullet. But we make the brain perfect before we blow it out. The command of the old despotisms was 'Thou shalt not.' The command of the totalitarians was 'Thou shalt.' Our command is 'Thou art.' No one whom we bring to this place ever stands out against us. Everyone is washed clean . . ." George Orwell, 1984¹⁵

The Chinese term brainwashing (literally “washing the brain”) was originally used to describe methodologies of coercive persuasion used under the Maoist regime in China, which aimed to transform individuals with a reactionary imperialist mindset into “right-thinking” members of the new Chinese social system. This was achieved by the development of techniques that would break down the psychic integrity of an individual with regard to information processing, information retained in the mind and

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individual values. Chosen techniques included dehumanizing of individuals by keeping them in filth, sleep deprivation, partial sensory deprivation, psychological harassment, inducing guilt and group social pressure. Brainwashing is a term that academics don't really like and the less emotive term thought reform was introduced into the psychiatric literature by Lifton and the term coercive persuasion by Schein.¹⁶ John Hochman MD writes:

Lifton's Study of Thought Reform

Robert Lifton published extensive research findings on Maoist "brainwashing" following the Chinese Civil War. The Communist government interned "counterrevolutionary" citizens and non-Chinese residents in "reeducation centers." Inmates were forced to write and rewrite autobiographies to document "crimes" of which they may or may not have yet been accused; they underwent prolonged interrogations, scrutiny by peers, work details, compulsory ideologic discussion groups, and exercise. Their conditions improved if ideologic mentors decided they sincerely adopted the "correct" viewpoints; physical discomfort and subjection to peer criticism increased if they clung to "reactionary" views. Doctrine was presented as a "sacred science" through "mystical manipulation" in a controlled, pseudo-spontaneous environment.

After emerging, many adopted the world view of their captors. They affirmed Communism with newfound shame for their prior "exploitation of the people." However, on leaving China, most lost their enthusiasm for Communism, decided they were innocent of crimes which they had learned to feel guilty, and returned to beliefs they held prior to "reeducation."

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Heller's Study of Thought Reform

Mikhael Heller, a Soviet émigré historian, views Communism as a mass psychology. He cites Lifton as the sole psychiatrist to have contributed in this area:

Lifton draws attention to a fact of exceptional importance: **The effect of “brainwashing” and its methods is felt even by those who he calls “apparent resisters,” those who seem not to succumb to the intoxication...** [Bold added for emphasis]

Robert Jay Lifton, M.D. is Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at John Jay College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Here we find that Lifton acknowledges that even people who have the ability to resist brainwashing are still affected by it and this is a very important part of understanding the osmosis that takes place when people are steeped in the culture of the Cultic Milieu.

Lifton interviewed 25 Western civilians who had stayed in China after the Communists took over, spent years in prison, confessed to “spying” against the Chinese people, and finally been deported from China. Lifton put his interviewees into three groups: 2 who seemed 100% converted to “the people’s viewpoint,” 8 apparent resisters, and 15 “confused and searching.” Every prisoner had been persuaded to some degree, however. Even the resisters expressed grudging admiration for the intensity and consistency of their captors, felt that they had learned something about themselves from the experience, and thought that the West needed to learn from the Communists in order to succeed against Communism.¹⁷

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The concept of brainwashing came back into the news when it was used by lawyers who were pleading a defence of insanity for a young sniper, Lee Boyd Malvo who they believed had been brainwashed by his mentor to carry out various heinous acts. From a 2003 article in the Washington Post entitled: *Stressed To Kill: The Defense of Brainwashing, Sniper Suspect's Claim Triggers More Debate*, we learn the following:

Is brainwashing hogwash or not?

Newspaper journalist Edward Hunter coined the term during the Korean War to describe mind control used on American POWs who defected to Korea and China. In his 1956 book "Brain-Washing," Hunter, later revealed to be a CIA propagandist, described "a system of befogging the brain so a person can be seduced into acceptance of what otherwise would be abhorrent to him."

Psychiatrist Robert Lifton, one of a team of U.S. researchers who were the first to interview POWs in China, soon after concluded that the Chinese used a systematic process of "coercive persuasion" that involves specific elements: complete control over information and environment, manipulation to erode self-expression, criticism and degradation, confession, discipline, peer pressure, renunciation of values, and coercion by physical force and threat.

"What I studied in Chinese thought reform is very real and brought about real changes in human beings," says Lifton, now a visiting professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. His 1961 book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* is considered the bible of brainwashing science.¹⁸

Interestingly, the term "brainwashing" punned on the Taoist custom of "cleansing/washing the heart" prior to conducting

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certain ceremonies or entering certain holy places. Today things have only become more subtle, as we have New Age ‘gurus’ offering meditations to their followers with the encouragement to ‘Mind Cleanse’. Seriously, could they not be any more blatant? From Chapter 22, *Ideological Totalism* of Robert Jay Lifton’s book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of ‘Brainwashing’ in China*, Lifton states under the heading of Milieu Control that:

“The most basic feature of the thought reform environment, the psychological current upon which all else depends, is the control of human communication. Through this milieu control the totalist environment seeks to establish domain over not only the individual’s communication with the outside (all that he sees and hears, reads or writes, experiences, and expresses) but also - in its **penetration of his inner life** - over what we may speak of as his communication with himself. It creates an atmosphere uncomfortably reminiscent of George Orwell’s 1984.

Such milieu control never succeeds in becoming absolute, and its own human apparatus can - when permeated by outside information - become subject to discordant “noise” beyond that of any mechanical apparatus. To totalist administrators, however, such occurrences are no more than evidences of “incorrect” use of the apparatus. **For they look upon milieu control as a just and necessary policy, one which need not be kept secret:** thought reform participants may be in doubt as to who is telling what to whom, but the fact that extensive information about everyone is being conveyed to the authorities is always known. At the center of this self-justification is their assumption of omniscience, their conviction that reality is their exclusive possession. Having experienced the impact of what they consider to be an ultimate truth (and having the need to dispel any possible inner doubts of

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their own), they consider it their duty to create an environment containing no more and no less than this “truth. In order to be the engineers of the human soul, they must first bring it under full observational control.”¹⁹ [Bold added for emphasis]

In essence, Lifton’s expertise is based on studying prisoners of war. His book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (1961) is considered a Bible for those serious about understanding the subject of how peoples are transformed into cult members. Yet, on close examination, it seems that those same principles can be applied on a much more subtle level and used within groups by unscrupulous ‘gurus’ within the Cultic Milieu operating in a manner that they are not considered by the less knowledgeable to be operating as conventional cults.

The late psychologist Margaret Singer is an expert on brainwashing and cults and was the author of the classic, *Cults in our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* (1995). The second edition in 2003 was revised to include some analysis on the connection between cults and terrorism.²⁰ Singer began studying brainwashing in the 1950s at Walter Reed Institute of Research in Washington, D. C., where she interviewed U.S. soldiers taken prisoner during the Korean War. Singer states that a thought reform program is the application of behavioural change technology to cause the learning and adoption of an ideology or set of behaviours under certain conditions. It is distinguished from other forms of social learning by the conditions under which it is conducted and by the techniques of environmental and interpersonal manipulation employed to suppress particular behaviour and to train others. From chapter 3 of *Cults in Our Midst*, we get a breakdown of how social learning can be distinguished from thought reform, which is reproduced

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below for review.²¹ Since this article is about the Cultic Milieu and not about cults, the argument is that people who have been in and out of cults will without hesitation, resort to cult tactics to achieve their aims, because the belief is instilled that they must use any means to achieve a desired end. There are many examples to prove that those with a predatory nature will be ruthless, but others who can only be considered as manipulative will also employ malfeasance to suit their objectives. This means people in cult-o-matic mode will: attempt to change people without their consent, using hypnosis, persuasion techniques, suggestion etc; limit the amount of communication to be as one sided as possible, especially outside of an organisation; work hard to gain control; take a rigid, authoritarian & hierarchical stance; be deceptive; operate with agendas; be intolerant; and be unethical.

The history of research into the study of brainwashing, thought reform, cults and the Cultic Milieu are beyond the scope of this essay. However, to quote from an excellent article, *When spirituality goes awry: students in cults*, we must note that cults come in two flavours.²² Hence, we read:

According to Merriam Webster (1996), the broadest definition a cult is a religion regarded by the majority culture as spurious or unorthodox. It is also defined as a system that gives great devotion to a work, an object, or a person (Merriam-Webster). There are two kinds of cults (Singer & Lalich, 1995). One type recruits members and exposes them to psychological and social processes that cause major shifts in perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs. The intention of this kind of cult, commonly called destructive, is long-term control of the cult member (Geszy, 1993). **The second type of cult is less lethal. It is designed to sell a product, a course, or a self-improvement program.** Some mind altering techniques may

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be used, but long-term membership and long-term effect is not intended (Singer & Lalich). It is estimated that as many as 20 million Americans are cult members (Geszy; Singer & Lalich).

Prisoners of war who have been brainwashed can be released from captivity but still remained brainwashed for a long time and therefore still need to be deprogrammed. Just because someone is not currently in a cult, does not mean they are free from the conditioning. Furthermore, seekers in the Cultic Milieu are encouraged to control themselves but they are given or taught tools that work against them in order to complete the “penetration” of the “inner life”. If a follower permits this inner penetration, then they have been compromised. Whether seekers have been in and out of cults or somehow their sacred self has been compromised, they should be considered the same as prisoners of a spiritual war.

Table: The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion, and Thought Reform

(from Chapter 3: Cults in Our Midst)

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	<i>Education</i>	<i>Advertising</i>	<i>Propaganda</i>	<i>Indoctrination</i>	<i>Thought Reform</i>
<i>Focus of body of knowledge</i>	Many bodies of knowledge, based on scientific findings in various fields.	Body of knowledge concerns product, competitors, how to sell and influence via legal persuasion.	Body of knowledge centers on political persuasion of masses of people.	Body of knowledge is explicitly designed to inculcate organizational values.	Body of knowledge centers on changing people without their knowledge.
<i>Direction & degree of exchange</i>	Two way pupil-teacher exchange encouraged.	Exchange can occur, but communication generally one-sided.	Some exchange occurs, but communication generally one-sided.	Limited exchange occurs; communication is one-sided.	No exchange occurs, communication is one-sided.
<i>Ability to change</i>	Change occurs as science advances; as students & other scholars offer criticism; as students & citizens evaluate programs.	Change made by those who pay for it, based upon the success of ad programs; by consumer law; & in response to consumer complaints.	Change based on changing tides in world politics and on political need to promote the group, nation, or international organization.	Change made through formal channels, via written suggestions to higher-ups.	Change occurs rarely; organization remains fairly rigid; change occurs primarily to improve thought reform effectiveness.
<i>Structure of persuasion</i>	Uses teacher-pupil structure; logical thinking encouraged.	Uses an instructional mode to persuade consumer/buyer.	Takes authoritarian stance to persuade masses.	Takes authoritarian & hierarchical stance.	Takes authoritarian & hierarchical stance; no full awareness on part of learner.
<i>Type of relationship</i>	Instruction is time-limited; consensual.	Consumer/buyer can accept or ignore communication.	Learner support & engrossment expected.	Instruction is contractual; consensual.	Group attempts to retain people forever.
<i>Deceptiveness</i>	Is not deceptive.	Can be deceptive, selecting only positive views.	Can be deceptive; often exaggerated.	Is not deceptive.	Is deceptive.
<i>Breadth of learning</i>	Focuses on learning to learn & learning about reality; broad goal is rounded knowledge for development of the individual.	Has a narrow goal of swaying opinion to promote and sell an idea, object, or program; another goal is to enhance seller & possibly buyer.	Targets large political masses to make them believe a specific view or circumstance is good.	Stress narrow learning for a specific goal; to become something or to train for performance of duties.	Individualized target; hidden agenda (you will be changed one step at a time to become deployable to serve leaders).
<i>Tolerance</i>	Respects differences.	Puts down competition.	Wants to lessen opposition.	Aware of Differences.	No respect for differences.
<i>Methods</i>	Instructional techniques.	Mild to heavy persuasion.	Overt persuasion; sometimes unethical.	Disciplinary techniques.	Improper and unethical techniques.

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Is there anything off-limits? Intruding into the Workplace

The term Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs) was coined by the late psychologist and cult expert Dr. Margaret Singer, where it can be found in the first version of her book *Cults in Our Midst*. From the chapter called *Intruding into the Workplace*, we get the following description:

I have included LGATs in this book because they represent forms of coordinated programs of intense persuasion and group pressure. I am not discussing here the many excellent skill-training, educational, and motivational programs that are used in business and industry for practical results. But apart from those programs, there are many training schemes that employ thought-reform processes [cult tactics] that can harm employees and engender lawsuits for employers. They are a modern-day, corporate version of social and psychological influence techniques that make people deployable without their knowledge or consent—precisely my objection to cults.²³

Despite Singer's well known stance of being anti-cult, she realised the difference between people benefiting from the activities that sprang from the Cultic Milieu and the dark side when some became trapped in cults. Thus, she writes:

Clarification of New Age

Since I refer on occasion to New Age programs or groups, I feel that a clarification of my use of the term is necessary to avoid misunderstandings. This is not a book critiquing New Age philosophy. But I do call attention to what I think of as the dark

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side of New Age thinking, to show how some so-called New Age techniques and ideas are in some instances used to exploit people and include them to join cults. Countless theories, activities, practices, and events are included in the broadest definitions of New Age. For example, discussions of New Age thinking can range from interests in acupuncture, crystals, tarot cards, channeling, meditation, alternative health care, special diets, wavy music, health-food restaurants, and a variety of self-actualization books and programs to specific theological critiques of the reasoning underlying certain New Age beliefs—such as the central theme that “all is one”—and to thoughtful philosophical critiques of what such thinking is bringing into the educational, medical, and religious arenas.

Many persons today dabble in such New Age ventures as going to holistic health practitioners, engaging in supposed native practices, attending inspirational lectures, going on wilderness treks, and collecting crystals. Many aspects of the New Age can be entertaining, beneficial, and informative, as long as people don't get caught up with someone using these ventures to entrap them into a thought-reform group or a cult or to psychologically coerce them into turning over their lives to a leader who is exploiting them personally or financially.²³

Singer summarizes her opinion on LGATS as follows:

Buyer Beware, Thought-Reform Processes at Work

Because of my involvement in psychological and medical research over the past fifty years, I have worked in a variety of hospitals, clinics, and universities. For more than fifteen years, I have served on the Kaiser Permanente Medical Institutional Review Board, evaluating and reviewing informed-consent procedures for all

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research involving humans that is performed under the auspices of the Kaiser Permanente system. I sat on the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine Committee to survey the effects of mustard gas and lewisite after a government testing program was revealed in which sixty thousand World War II military personnel were exposed to those gases without their consent. Data from this testing had not been made public until 1991. So I have been sensitized to fighting for and sustaining the laws that protect human rights in biomedical and behavioral research.

The combination of these review responsibilities and my professional work with cult survivors has given me an avid appreciation for the need to protect and uphold the practice of informed consent. I am dedicated to individuals' having informed consent over their lives, their choices, and their beliefs, and I believe that employees have the right to know what they are being made to attend. **This perhaps has made me particularly aware of how deceptive many training programs are. [...]**

Religious issues aside, the pronounced psychological nature of many of the exercises within many of these programs is of concern. We cannot deny the fact that they grew out of the highly confrontational group therapy techniques introduced by the encounter, sensitivity, and large group awareness training movements. And in many ways, these psychological techniques are little different from the influence processes used in today's cults to achieve attitudinal change. This is apparent in the psychological and behavioral effects produced, and in the appearance of a certain number of psychological casualties during and after participation in some of these training programs. [...]

In short, lack of informed consent, use of hidden agendas, and use of various forms of coercion characterize the criticisms of both

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cults and certain modern-day training programs among those who have experienced them. Buyer, beware.²³

It must be noted here that due to the threat of a lawsuit, Singer was forced to remove the entire chapter *Intruding into the Workplace* from her book, *Cults in Our Midst*. Today, the missing chapter can be found in its entirety on the internet and is required reading for those who may wish to be advised of the harsh treatment used on people.²³ The section *Intruding into the Workplace* lists the techniques used in work based trainings that included: meditation, neurolinguistic programming, biofeedback, self-hypnosis, bizarre relaxation techniques, mind control, body touching, yoga, trance inductions, visualization, and in some cases, intense confrontational sessions akin to the “attack” therapy methods that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Singer, using these intense psychological techniques causes some of these programs to “induce ordinary people to suspend their judgment, surrender themselves to their instructors, and even adopt new fundamental beliefs.” Trainers using confrontational techniques created a sense of powerlessness in the seminar attendees. Once this sense is achieved, it becomes a lot easier to erase old patterns of thinking and behaviour. Whilst many people would not consider most of the above activities to be “harsh”, due to the intensity and duration of these events, it is like comparing a pleasant breeze on a summer’s day with a force 5 hurricane, some people just cannot cope with the emotional and mental onslaught. Therefore, based on her own investigations and research, Singer claimed that people were opened up psychologically and the result was some people committed suicide and others had mental breakdowns where they had to be hospitalised, taking as long as a decade to recover.

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At this point, I would like to take the opportunity and question why authorities permit untrained and unqualified people to practise amateur psychology, despite the risks it poses to people who if damaged, can take many years to recover. This might suggest some evidence of a greater plan to permit amateur Big Brother mind control because the use of crude methods can still cause sufficient damage with the result that there are less enquiring minds capable of awakening to the manipulation and control of humanity. Either way, it is now standard practise in the use of cult tactics to encourage people to open up their deepest wounds, so that the emotion of painful memories of past trauma floods the mind, forcing people into overwhelming emotional and mental stress that can precipitate serious breakdowns. Unfortunately, these cult tactics are routine in LGATs, New Age and some religious circles. This explains why LGAT business enterprises require course participants to sign disclaimers for all liability or waivers against any form of responsibility or compensation, absolving them from any guilt when breakdowns and injuries occur. Suicides that occur are generally ignored because they mostly happen after course events are completed. Simply, LGAT enterprises merely consider the fate of these people as “collateral damage”. The refrain that is sung over and over again is: people are responsible for whatever happens. It does not matter that some of the most damaging and sadistic techniques invented by man are being used, the victim is to be blamed for anything that happens. The notion of blaming the victim is a convenient way for predators using a plethora of cult tactics like hypnosis, suggestion and persuasion techniques etc, to dodge any responsibility for their actions.

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What's more, techniques honed by LGATs are being applied in what is considered to be more traditional cult settings. Unscrupulous gurus are 'inserting' themselves into their followers core beliefs, self and mind, the sacred 'You' inside is taken over. In order to explain this concept, imagine that your Sacred Self is a computer program that is being continually being updated by experiences from life. We all change in small ways, but essentially we still have a unique identity. The aim of unscrupulous 'gurus' is to go deep into the psyche of a follower and overwrite the software program of the 'Sacred Self' with the aim of dominating the consciousness of their followers. Do you want an example? Well, it was revealed in the trial of James Ray, that whilst baking his followers in the endurance test that he called a sweat lodge with the intent of generating heat stroke that would assure his followers of an out of body or ecstatic experience, he was also barking out commands like: "I am the Alpha and the Omega. I am God."²⁴ So whilst his followers were in a state of extreme discomfort and less able to mentally cope with the psychological attack, James Ray was busy attempting to overwrite the software of the Sacred Self of his followers.

Being Badly Bitten

As I have already stated, this essay is not about cults or even about the New Age movement, rather it's being aware of the fact that the Cultic Milieu is filled with people who have been influenced in some way by the general culture of the Cultic Milieu. Those who are most affected are those who have been in and out of cults or ideological groups where cult tactics are routinely used. One of the characteristics of the most cult-o-matic

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people is sociopathic tendencies induced by the belief that 'the end justifies the means'. Simply, many are often taught that deception can be used to bring enlightenment to the unenlightened. Yes, that's really strange isn't it? So, if you get involved within certain parts of the Cultic Milieu, it is highly likely you are going to get heavily bitten. Therefore, I was initially quite amused to find the following B.I.T.E. model, but not so amused after carefully considering the details.²⁵

The BITE Model was developed by Steven Alan Hassan, who is a former member of the Unification Church. He is now employed as an exit counsellor (deprogrammer) and mental health counsellor. He developed the BITE model, to determine how destructive mind control can be understood in terms of four basic components, which form the acronym BITE:

1. **B**ehaviour Control
2. **I**nformation Control
3. **T**hought Control
4. **E**motional Control

On his website, Steven Hassan writes:

It is important to understand that destructive mind control can be determined when the overall effect of these four components promotes dependency and obedience to some leader or cause. It is not necessary for every single item on the list to be present. Mind controlled cult members can live in their own apartments, have nine-to-five jobs, be married with children, and still be unable to think for themselves and act independently.²⁵

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At this point, it is worth highlighting how this model can be considered in terms of those in the cult-o-matic mode. On some reflection, I think that people within the Cultic Milieu can willingly “adopt” certain behaviours, only consider certain sources of information, only allow certain types of thoughts and willingly tone down their emotions because they think this makes them more “spiritual”. Thus, I have used my own experiences to pick out the most definitive details, but on review, readers might think other traits might be more appropriate. So, in summary we have:

Behaviour Control: Where, how and with whom the cult-o-matic person lives and associates with; What clothes, colours, hairstyles the person wears; What food the person eats, drinks, adopts, and rejects; Individualism discouraged; group think prevails; Rigid rules and regulations.

Information Control: The use of deception that includes; Deliberately holding back information. Distorting information to make it acceptable. Outright lying. Misquotations, statements taken out of context from independent sources. Preference to only certain sources of information or people can be believed, through books, articles, newspapers, magazines, TV, radio. Indoctrination through workshops, retreats, seminars, individual studies, group activities. Within organisations, spying on other fellow members is encouraged.

Thought Control: Black and White thinking, us vs. them (inside vs. outside). The use of “special” words used to constrict rather than expand understanding, in order to reduce complexities of

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experience into trite, platitudinous “buzz words”. Rejection of rational analysis, critical thinking, constructive criticism.

Emotional Control: Manipulate and narrow the range of a person’s feelings. 2. Make the person feel like if there are ever any problems it is always their fault, nothing to do with the leader or the group. Excessive use of guilt and fear.

The BITE model is very useful in providing us with generalisations and external symptoms to look for in those who are operating in cult-o-matic, but it does not provide much detail about their altered state of awareness. In order to achieve this, we must compare and contrast with normal brain function. In the course of cult research, psychologists have documented a variety of impaired states of mind exhibited by those who have been pushed or have pushed themselves into peak experiences by the use of various experience techniques. For reference, the following definitions for Cognition provide some guidelines.²⁶

Cognition: Is defined as the psychological result of perception, learning and reasoning, or simply the scientific term for mental processes. These are enabled by various high level functions carried out by the human brain, producing and using language, comprehension and the use of speech, visual perception and construction, the ability to calculate, attention (information processing), memory, and executive functions such as planning, problem-solving, and self-monitoring.

Mild cognitive impairment: Is defined as a brain disorder in which thinking abilities are mildly impaired. Individuals with

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mild cognitive impairment are able to function in everyday activities but have difficulty with memory -- trouble remembering the names of people they met recently, remembering the flow of a conversation and a tendency to misplace things. The individual may be aware of these difficulties and compensate with increased reliance on notes and calendars.

Cognitively impaired: Is defined as having either a psychiatric or a developmental disorder that affects cognitive or emotional functions to the extent that capacity for judgment and reasoning is significantly diminished. Others, including persons under the influence or dependent on drugs or alcohol, those suffering from degenerative diseases affecting the brain, terminally ill patients, and persons with severely disabling physical handicaps, may also be compromised in their ability to make decisions in their best interests.

Cognitive Suicide: This term was first introduced by researcher Lynne Rudder Baker who used it rather provocatively in the titles of her papers entitled: *The threat of Cognitive Suicide* (1987) & *Cognitive Suicide* (1988).²⁷ Baker argued that giving up belief is to perform a kind of “cognitive suicide.” Since, this was part of a very intellectual discourse related to Eliminative Materialism, which is a materialist position in the philosophy of mind. Its primary claim is that people’s common-sense understanding of the mind (or folk psychology) is false and that certain classes of mental states that most people believe in do not exist. The original use of the term is well beyond the scope of this essay to flesh out, but it has since been adopted and used in a rather derogatory manner by commentators to depict those who volunteer to close

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down their mental capabilities in the pursuit of spiritual advancement. Therefore the term Cognitive Suicide is being used to describe the consequences of closing down the mind and the use of ‘cult tactics’ being advocated by many prominent persons within the Cultic Milieu and therefore needs to be explained in some detail in this essay.

In the book *Snapping: America’s Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change* by Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, chapter 12, *Varieties of Information Disease*, lists four varieties of information disease that they identify as mental states that occur when people have *Snapped*.²⁸ I believe that information disease is a technical description for the general mental state that I have defined as cult-o-matic. The following excerpts are included to provide the scientific opinion of cult experts that have thoroughly researched the consequences of people dabbling in various techniques of experience that do not provide any enlightenment but instead, destroy people’s cognitive abilities and the result is explained away as “enlightenment”. Conway and Siegelman write:

We define information disease as an alteration through experience of a person’s everyday information-processing capacities — his everyday powers of thinking, feeling, perception, memory, imagination and conscious choice. When these vital capacities become altered or impaired, the resulting change is not simply one of behavior. When snapping turns to information disease, it marks a lasting change of awareness at the most fundamental level of personality. The disease is not physiological in origin; in most instances, it does not appear to damage or destroy the basic biological machinery of the brain. Nevertheless, as we have come to understand it, information

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disease represents an organic alteration of the brain's complex organization.

Information disease, the step beyond momentary episodes of snapping and information stress to *ongoing* impairments of mind may lead to physical breakdown of a person's entire ability to make sense of his experiences. It may come about suddenly, from overwhelming mental or emotional experience or other intensely stressful or traumatic event, or gradually from some cumulative information stress, overload, or any other sustained assault on the mind's everyday thinking and feeling capacities. Either way, the impact appears to be the same: a marked alteration of awareness, diminished conscious control and persisting impairments of an individual's everyday powers of mind.

The new cults, sects and self-help therapies offer an abundance of examples of information disease, individuals plagued by severe mental emotional disturbances, states of altered and reduced awareness, delusions, hallucinations, detachment, withdrawal and, in the most extreme instances, violent and self-destructive states. Undoubtedly, throughout history, similar afflictions of mind have occurred from natural stresses, physical pressures or at random. Now however, they are becoming increasingly common consequences of modern culture's burgeoning information technologies and expanding human technology experience. [...]

Today information disease may result from a wide variety of experiences. Some may be strictly physical: as Wiener noted, fundamental changes in human information-processing capacities may result from injury to the brain or nervous system. Poor diet and prolonged lack of sleep, as well, may impair the brain's ability to perform vital information-processing functions. But information disease may also result

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from information alone, especially from intense experiences that abuse an individual's natural capacities for thought and feeling. The most dramatic examples of this type of information disorder, we believe, are resulting from the heedless experiments in thought, feeling, memory and imagination practiced by many modern cults, sects, self-help therapies and related enterprises, and from the abuse of popular techniques of mental and emotional control, group encounter, guided fantasy, meditation and other practices in widespread use today. These ritualized communication practices are as powerful as any physical force in their potential to disrupt and impair the brain's information-processing activities. By tampering with basic distinctions between reality and fantasy, right and wrong, past, present and future, or simply by stilling the workings of the mind over time, these intense communication practices may break down vital faculties of mind. There is also growing evidence that they may organically impair crucial working connections in the brain' underlying synaptic networks and neurochemical channels and, in their extremes, physically destroy long standing information-processing pathways in the brain.

We can identify four distinct varieties of information disease, each of which may follow from a snapping moment or other intensely stressful experience, although none necessarily depends on the occurrence of a single drastic change.

The most prevalent is the ongoing altered state of awareness. This altered state is not one of enlightenment or mind expansion. On the contrary, it is a state of narrowed or reduced awareness that people may experience both during and after their involvement in some cult or group, as it is often perceived as an unnerving uncontrollable sensation of "floating".

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A more extreme variety of information disease is marked by the lasting impairment of a vital capacity of mind. This is the *delusional phase*. It may result in vivid delusions, hallucinations, and lead in its extremes to irrational, violent and self-destructive behaviour. This variety in our view has been the cause of some of America's most shocking new events in recent years.

Two other varieties of information disease take the forms of *not thinking*: literally shutting off the mind and *not feeling*, a parallel strain caused by actively suppressing one's emotional responses and which may ultimately numb a person's capacity for feeling altogether. These advanced forms of information disease are reported frequently by practitioners of popular self-help therapies, members of cults, extreme fundamentalist sects and controlling ideological groups. In our view, they may be the most damaging forms of all and lead to the complete dissolution of personality. [...]

Floating — The Ongoing Altered State. In the wake of a snapping experience, after an individual surrenders or lets go, whether in a sudden moment or gradually, he may slip into a level of reduced awareness in which the disorientation and confusion of the snapping moment becomes part of his everyday experience of the world. This trancelike floating state, in our view, marks the first stage in the change and reorganization of personality. [Comment: In the New Age world this is commonly known as being "ungrounded". Some people will actually boast about how hard they find it to ground, implying that they are too spiritual to deal with everyday life. However, it is much more likely to mean that those having difficulty grounding may have experienced some kind of major traumatic event that has left them having difficulty functioning and they are cognitively impaired and

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others who have sabotaged themselves by overdoing certain techniques of experience.] [...]

An ex-Rajneeshee described the floating state he fell into in the sect that crippled his ability to function in the everyday world.

“I was in a complete state of complete disorientation,” he told us. “I was so blurry, my mind was so narrowed, it was like being in a fog. There was physical things, I felt cold and clammy, in kind of a limbo state. Everything was dull. I couldn’t hear sounds with any intensity or see sights or taste food. Mentally, I was in a state of total confusion. I couldn’t talk in complete sentences or do any critical thinking of my own. I didn’t know how I felt about anything.” [...]

The Delusional Phase. This second, more advanced form of information disease concerns reality and illusion and an individuals ability to distinguish between the two. For, all along with the basic processes of perception that brings information to the brain, the human mind possesses the remarkable capacity to create information of its own. this capacity is generally referred to as *imagination*. [...]

For most people the ability to distinguish between reality and imagination, between fact and fancy, is so basic that it can be taken for granted. At times, a person may be so awestruck by the sharpness or novelty of an experience he may question whether he is awake or dreaming, but on those rare occasions a quick pinch is usually enough to set matters straight. In fact, this elementary form of verification is the best example of all possible arbiters, for the ability to distinguish between perception and imagination is inseparably connected to our ability to feel. [...]

Yet, powerful and primary as our capacity for feeling may be, it is a surprisingly simple and straightforward matter to

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weaken or destroy it. A direct attack on human feeling may leave a person stunned and numb, momentarily incapable of any emotion. A more concentrated, prolonged assault may bring about a lasting alteration of this capacity and, in doing so, break down the individual's fundamental ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. This is the delusional phase of information disease and, from the evidence we have seen, it is a direct consequence of the impairment or destruction of human feeling. [...]

Looking back, Davenport recognized some of the practical value of these initial Scientology techniques. They gave him peaceful, relaxed feelings, he said, and they actually did improve his ability to communicate and assert himself socially. But he went on to explain what he considered the danger of the process.

“This is the thing,” he stressed. “If people just took the communication course and left Scientology for life, it would not be such a bad thing, because the beginning course does help you out. But then the technique itself sucks you into further and further courses. The counselling never ends.” [...]

In our opinion, Scientology has refined the most reliable methods for bringing about the delusional phase of information disease. But the same condition can be found across the spectrum of new spiritual and personal growth practices. Similar techniques are employed in fundamentalist and charismatic Christian sects, new age therapies, group training enterprises and clinical psychology. The method called guided fantasy is a recognised therapeutic technique that uses the power of imagination to bring about changes in consciousness and personality. Another method, called psychodrama, is one of the most potent tools of modern psychiatry. Psychodrama takes the imagination one step further than fantasy, engaging the individual in a physical dramatization of his past traumas and

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psychological problems, and in the active role-playing of desired outcomes. Its power lies in the converging patterns of information—mental, emotional and physical—the method may give rise to in the context of an intense group interaction.

We spoke with many people who reported experiencing overwhelming discomfort, anxiety and even intense snapping moments during guided fantasy, psychodrama and role-playing sessions. The experience left some in states of disorientation that lasted for months, during which they found themselves constantly struggling to test the reality of their perceptions. Only with the passage of time and the support of people close to them were they able to once again discern the boundaries between what was genuine and certain and what was not.

Not Thinking — Mind Control But a far more frightening threat to personality posed by the new technology of experience is the impairment of a more fundamental capacity of mind: quite simply, an individuals ability to think, not just for himself, but to think at all.

Almost every major cult and cult-like group we came upon teaches some form of not thinking or “mind control” as part of its regular program of activity. The process may take the form of repetitive prayer, chanting, speaking in tongues, self-hypnosis or diverse methods of meditation. As countless studies have shown, such techniques, when practiced in moderation, may yield real physical and mental health benefits, feeling of peace, relaxation and a calming of nervous tension. Extended practice may bring on euphoric transcendent states: emotional highs, feelings of bliss, and a pleasing lightness of mind and body. In such states a person may have sensations of being in intangible realms or alternate realities. He may see divine visions, receive spiritual communications, or experience breakthrough moments of revelation or enlightenment.

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Prolonged stilling of the mind, however, may wear on the brain physically until it readjusts, suddenly and sharply, to its new condition of not thinking. When that happens, we have found, the brain's information-processing capacities may be disrupted or enter a state of complete suspension producing states of mind that incorporate many other symptoms of information disease: disorientation, detachment, ongoing altered states, hallucinations, delusions and, in extreme instances, total withdrawal.[...]

What they don't realize is the brain responds organically to the experience of not thinking: as we have seen, positively at first, but over time those benefits may vanish as the brain readjusts in a catastrophic manner. When that happens, not thinking becomes the norm, and with it a dramatic reduction of awareness. Moreover, once a person's brain enters this state, the individual may be plausibly incapable of coming out of it on his own. [...]

To gain a close-up view of meditation's well-known benefits and lesser known dangers, we turn to a veteran—and an insider. A man we call Barry Robertson practiced Transcendental Meditation for four and a half years. For nearly half that time he earned his living as a beginning instructor in the technique. [...]

“In TM you *empty* your mind,” he stressed. “TM is switching your mind into neutral. You have no control over it; you try not to have control over it. You try to let your mind just go flat, with no thoughts whatsoever. When you concentrate on something, you have at least one thought. TM attempts to go beyond that.”

According to Robertson, to achieve this emptying of the mind, each TM student is given what is said to be his own custom-tailored mantra, a Sanskrit word which the Maharishi had defined as a meaningless sound with a “vibratory effect”

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that helps the mind reach a quiet state. According to the TM organization the various sound qualities have been known for over five thousand years. [...]

“You start the mantra off in your mind, saying it over and over again,” he explained. “Then all of a sudden it gets quieter. At first it’s a voice in your head, you’re subvocalizing it in your mind. Then your mind just kind of floats on this nice sensation.”

As Robertson describes it, the first effect of TM is soothing emotional high brought on by the brain’s response to repetition. Then slowly, as the mind adjusts to the revelation, the sound of the individuals “inner voice” diminishes. At this level, of relaxation, the technique can be beneficial, a kind of tranquiliser, relieving stress and providing the “restful alertness” TM claims to offer.

“A lot of people do experience these positive effects for a long time,” said Robertson. “A certain amount of relaxation and clarity of mind results when you reach this mental state.” [...]

According to Robertson, those who stay with this form of meditation for any length of time become vulnerable to its long term impacts. He described his impression of the cumulative effects of TM in startling terms. [...]

Robertson traced TM’s roots in Hinduism and Tantra Yoga. Then he explained why he believed that among Western meditators mantras may have a particularly destructive effect.

“Soon you mind gets to a place where your mind no longer associates meaning to anything,” he said. You just have this sound going on in your mind, and you get to the place where there’s no longer concrete meaning. You’re just abstractly experiencing nothing. You’d think a person would become afraid in this emptiness or vacuum, but this happens to your feelings, too. You reach state where you’re not feeling anything

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either. By the way, this is the state that the Maharishi calls *bliss*.”

As Robertson described it, the TM state of bliss was not a state of profound pleasure. It was a level of awareness devoid not only of all thought but of all feeling and, by default, of all pain.

At first you don't even know you're experiencing this transcendental consciousness,” he said. “You can't remember it, you can't grasp it. But as you do more meditating, you become aware that you are aware of nothing. You are able to experience that nothingness, that emptiness. You can peer down into it.” [...]

What are the long-term effects of this widespread process of not thinking? Toward the end of our cross country research tour, we interviewed a former Hare Krishna *brahmin*, a temple executive. He gave us his view of how, by the late seventies, the once peaceful ascetic International Society for Krishna Consciousness had turned into an aggressive full-time religious tract and book distribution operation while more spurious activities were going on behind the scenes. Experienced salesmen travelled to Krishna temples instructing devotees in the techniques of salesmanship. According to him, in their unthinking state, the devotees remained perfectly willing to solicit sales and donations up to twenty hours a day. But some, over time, were no longer able to do so.

As our contact described it:

“There were two vegetables at our temple, people who were really bad off from chanting. We'd have to spend about two hours a day chanting our rounds to Krishna, but they would take four or five hours to get through them. There's not a whole lot to do of work to be done around the temple, so we would just let them chant all day. Eventually these people deteriorated to

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the point where they couldn't get them to work or do anything. They were complete basket cases.”

Not Feeling — Emotional Control. Mind control was only half the story of the new covert control. As our inquiry expanded, we uncovered a second control pattern pervading the inner lives of millions of spiritual seekers of, a pattern of not of mind control but of *emotional* control. In contrast to identifiable techniques that stilled the mind's critical thinking and decision making capacities, these more subtle methods of emotional control targeted a deeper domain of human information processes: people's inner feelings of fear, guilt love hate anger and other universal emotions. [...]

Mind control. Emotional control. In practice, many cults, self-help therapies and fundamentalist sects alike used mixed methods of mind control and emotional control in their daily rituals and regimens. The babble of tongues was, for many Christians, a mantra that blocked their doubting thoughts and impious feelings. Scientology's auditing technique, according to dozens of Scientologists we interviewed, appeared to control their minds and emotions simultaneously. Across the board, the combined methods induced all manner of ecstatic highs, blissful states and mystical sensations. They also left members of many groups in ongoing states of floating, delusion, emotional numbing, and suffering other information disease symptoms.

A former Scientologist who spent nearly two decades in the sect recalled the cumulative impact of that group's practices on his emotions, and his intense reaction afterwards.

In Scientology you have what we call a 'somatic cutoff.' A somatic shutoff is basically where you stop feeling. Your emotions are being subverted but you think they're coming out. In fact, you think it's wonderful. It wasn't until I left the group that I realised what had happened, and then I began to tap into

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my emotions for real. I found myself like a small child. I would feel something and say ‘What is this emotion?’ and then I would just break down. It was like suddenly there were all these raw areas of my life, things that had been bandaged up, hidden away, renamed, and I didn’t know what to do with them. It was like opening a time capsule and all these emotions from twenty years came flooding to the surface.”

Steven Alan Hassan uses his B.I.T.E. model to outline the details of those who are mind controlled but he specifically states they don’t have to live in a commune to be subject to the various types of control. Research that started in the 1950s suggests that people don’t need to be in a cult at all to exhibit some of these traits because as Lifton has already stated, prisoners of war who have been brainwashed and then released still need deprogramming. The social scientists Conway and Siegelman have identified four mental states that occur after snapping that they have called Information Disease, which describes significant cognitive impairment. Today, cult experts watching the latest trends in society and the Cultic Milieu are warning about those advocating cognitive suicide. On examination of the research over the last forty years and also taking into account media reports, anecdotal stories and personal testimony, it is possible to state that within the Cultic Milieu, many seekers are conditioned by their own experiences or by osmosis by others into a certain way of thinking and under certain conditions will react in the mode that I believe can now be described as cult-o-matic.

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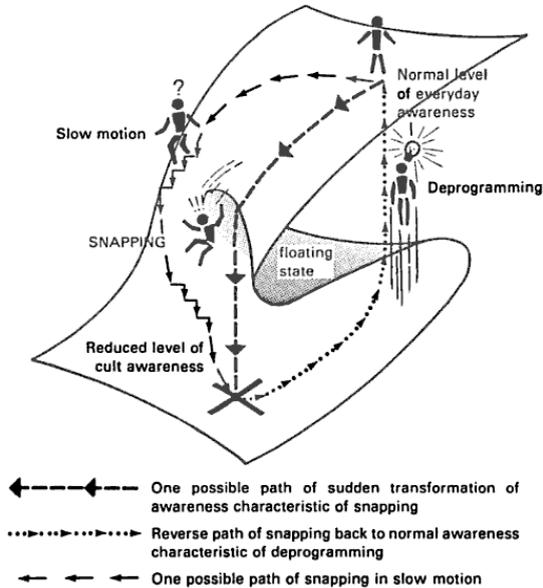


Figure 2: Snapping as plotted on a simplified model of Thom's catastrophe curve

From Chapter 11. The Snapping Moment

Positive Skepticism

In an online debate at the *eSkeptic* website between Deepak Chopra and Michael Shermer entitled: *The Value of Skepticism: Is Skepticism a Negative or a Positive for Science and Humanity?*²⁹ I was impressed with the following statements from the essay *The Power of Positive Skepticism: A Reply to Deepak Chopra* by Michael Shermer. As a caveat, I have always pointed out that the scientific community has a long history of ignoring good

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scientific discoveries and that means a good scientist can easily be 20, 30, 50+ years ahead of his peers before the scientific evidence is so overwhelming that a paradigm shift becomes inevitable. So, I would argue that using the scientific process of peer review as a model of how skepticism is used in practice, is in my view not completely appropriate, however, the skeptical stance that is part of the tradition of science does have some merit as long as it is not subverted by political or business interests as we have seen in recent years with the major controversies surrounding Climate Science. Whatever, there is some real value in positive skepticism when it comes to evaluating the risks and benefits of assessing what's on offer in the Cultic Milieu. In this respect, former college professor teaching psychology, evolution, and the history of science at Occidental College, California State University Los Angeles, and Glendale College, Shermer writes:

Positive skepticism...involves much more than the negative disposal of false claims. In fact, the word "skeptic" comes from the Greek skeptikos, for "thoughtful." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "skeptical" has also been used to mean "inquiring," "reflective," and, with variations in the ancient Greek, "watchman" or "mark to aim at."

...Positive skepticism is a way of thinking that leads to deeper understanding, and it is a vital tool in the science kits of practicing scientists...there is more than one way to be spiritual in this world...spirituality is the quest to know the place of our spirit within the deep time of evolution and the deep space of the cosmos... In skepticism we have two canonical sayings: "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" and "Keep an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out."

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The skeptical fences are there for a reason — to keep the borderlands of science from shading too far into pseudoscience, non-science, and nonsense. For every Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein, there were a thousand cons, cranks, and quacks with their revolutionary theories that turned out to be flummery and flabdoodle.²⁹

In researching for this essay, I came across the angst of a New Age author Karla McLaren who wrote about her conversion process from a New Age believer to a skeptic.³⁰ In the essay *Bridging the Chasm between Two Cultures*, the foreword explains McLaren as; “A former leader in the New Age culture—author of nine titles on auras, chakras, “energy,” and so on—chronicles her difficult and painful transition to skepticism. She thanks the skeptical community and agonizes over how the messages of scientific and critical thinking could be made more effective in communicating with her former New Age colleagues.” Here, I will state clearly that using intuition, discernment and critical thinking is not the same as taking on the persona of a skeptic, especially those skeptics who tend to react in a negative knee-jerk manner regardless of the subject matter. McLaren does not refer to positive skepticism and that is rather unfortunate because there is a need to highlight that there is a distinction, but some quotes from McLaren are provided because we are given some important insights from someone who had New Age beliefs deeply ingrained into her psyche from an early age. In the essay, McLaren informs us:

“The problem is this: In my culture, you can’t openly attack anyone or their character, and you can’t use truly focused skepticism. In my culture, personal attacks are considered an

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example of emotional imbalance (where your emotions control you), while deep skepticism is considered a form of mental imbalance (where your intellect controls you). Both behaviors are serious cultural no-nos, because **both the emotions and the intellect are considered troublesome areas of the psyche that do very little but keep one away from the (supposedly) true and meaningful realm of spirit.**”

[...]

“From a vantage point outside the New Age culture, **my culture’s disavowal of emotions and the intellect may seem very strange and nearly inexplicable.** Nevertheless, it is a very real cultural component that must be understood and considered if any useful communication is going to occur. If we want to successfully communicate with someone, we’ve got to understand not just their language, but the cultural context from which their language springs. From what I’ve seen in both the New Age and the skeptical cultures, this understanding is absent. I certainly didn’t understand the skeptical culture until I spent real time considering it as a culture—and I know from my reading that most people in the skeptical culture don’t understand the New Age culture at all.”

[...]

“If I were in this business for the money, I would have never seriously questioned what I was doing. I would have turned back as soon as my research challenged or threatened me. But I wasn’t in it for the money. **I was there to help people, often very disturbed people who were trammeling after this cure, that device, these gurus, or those miracle supplements.** I tried to help people in my culture make sense of all the ideas and gadgets that were coming at them with such rapidity, but I was unable to make even a dent. When I understood fully that, no matter how good my intentions, the mere mention of things like auras, chakras, and “energy” brought with them a host of

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truly unsafe and untested assumptions—and that **I was leading people into an arena where skepticism and critical thinking were forbidden**—I knew that it was time to stop, and stop completely. It was a wrenching, isolating, and despair-filled decision, but since my focus is to help others, it was the only ethical or moral shift for me to make.”

[...]

“One of the biggest falsehoods I’ve encountered is that skeptics can’t tolerate mystery, while New Age people can. This is completely wrong, because it is actually the people in *my* culture who can’t handle mystery—not even a tiny bit of it. Everything in my New Age culture comes complete with an answer, a reason, and a source. Every action, emotion, health symptom, dream, accident, birth, death, or idea here has a direct link to the influence of the stars, chi, past lives, ancestors, energy fields, interdimensional beings, enneagrams, devas, fairies, spirit guides, angels, aliens, karma, God, or the Goddess.

We love to say that we embrace mystery in the New Age culture, but that’s a cultural conceit and it’s utterly wrong. In actual fact, we have no tolerance whatsoever for mystery. Everything from the smallest individual action to the largest movements in the evolution of the planet has a specific metaphysical or mystical cause. **In my opinion, this incapacity to tolerate mystery is a direct result of my culture’s disavowal of the intellect. One of the most frightening things about attaining the capacity to think skeptically and critically is that so many things don’t have clear answers. Critical thinkers and skeptics don’t create answers just to manage their anxiety.**

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Maybe I'll find a way to capitalize on my culture's thirst for answers, and my people's capacity to work with conflicting information (**metaphysical ideas change every six months or so** and therefore people in my culture are very accustomed to switching mental gears). I have faith now that I didn't have before: faith in your culture's concern and integrity, and faith in my culture's curiosity and capacity to learn new things. I've also learned firsthand that bad training, though damaging, is not a life sentence.

The complete analysis provided by McLaren, helps us to see how some parts of the New Age milieu have adopted a culture where people are expected to accept new ideas without asking any critical questions. Somehow, there are influences within the New Age milieu that determine that if some belief or therapy is flavour of the month, it's OK to jump straight in, critical thinking and emotional qualms are untenable. At this time, I have not identified how it is determined what is hot and what is not, presumably, the strongest influences come from agencies with strong marketing abilities. This means that there is no provision for lying, cheating, stealing, manipulating, controlling, and predator types who see eager and enthusiastic seekers as sheep ready to be sheared. There is no defence against these people if you have no idea how they operate and any analysis of how they operate is frowned upon. Simply, it seems that for some, wolves in sheep's clothing don't exist and you must believe everything that you are told without question. On some reflection, this viewpoint is so incredible, we have to really consider: is this really what some people believe? After my own experiences with some hardcore New Agers, I believe that new ideas are only accepted if they are built on the foundations of existing and long cherished beliefs. There are

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people with strong integrity who refuse to get involved with beliefs that they don't agree with. These people are often loners who are happy to go looking for the latest cheese but they will process the information through their own belief system and then modify what they have learnt to be used for their own benefit. Maybe, these are the true seekers.

Bait, Cheese and Sales Pitch

At this point it might help to elucidate how the Cultic Milieu acts a fishing ground for those with nefarious intent. Once a guru becomes famous, it is a lot easier for him to find followers because the assumption is made that they are famous for delivering whatever they have on offer. What's more, being famous attracts others who want to be 'seen' and this creates 'Social Proof', as it is widely acknowledged that people want to be seen and photographed with the 'right' people and it does not seem to matter whether the guru actually delivers on his promises, as long as people believe that they are popular for the right reasons. In reality, getting famous is the hard part and it seems that this can only be achieved by having good bait, creating the right impression and knowing how to market your services. Spiders need a web to capture flies, a fishermen needs worms on a hook, cheese is used on a mousetrap to catch mice, whatever, good bait is absolutely essential.

Once the fox has got followers into the lair, then the process of reprogramming people is fairly standard and a well known business. Once people are attracted, they will get involved at a deeper level if the initial bait is good enough. Most people think that if the initial attraction is true or works then they can safely

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assume that everything else that comes along will be true or work to their benefit. The logic used is that if A-C is OK, then they assume that they can just switch off and relax because D-Z will be OK too. That's the false logic that most people use and it generally works in the favour of those gurus or cult masters who have managed to produce or find some good bait. The assumption is that someone's credibility can be proven based on a small amount of information and once that credibility hurdle has been reached, then all thought of querying the source is abandoned, this works as long as glaring inconsistencies and behavioural problems start to cause some doubt. Therefore, wannabe gurus and cult masters need to produce or find good bait and if they cannot create something themselves, then the next best thing is to steal from someone else.

There is plenty of evidence that unenlightened gurus generally have a hard time keeping up the pretence of enlightenment and in desperation, are forced to resort to stealing from others. It is not hard to imagine that stealing from a gullible follower is the preferred option, as it is usually less detectable to the outside world when trying to pretend that you are omnipotent and the font of all knowledge. Ironically, this is where the well known New Age 'Law of Attraction' excels, because if you have anything worth using as bait, you will attract thieves like flies around the honey pot. The evidence shows that the Law of Attraction works very well when it comes to other people's avarice.

Incidentally, I believe this must make for some serious frustration for aspiring gurus and cult masters if they have been previously indoctrinated into believing they are one of the chosen few. Cult experts tell us that due to the programming, if a

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follower gets the chance to become a leader, they will only try to perpetuate what they have already experienced and that means utilising cult tactics to get people to buy into their delusion. In the following section, we will refer to cheese instead of bait because there is need to emphasis the principal of a mousetrap.

There is nothing wrong with cheese and good cheese makes the best bait for mice. (Actually, that is not true, I had a dormouse in my home in Italy and it decided it was most happy living in the piano. Despite many attempts to catch this little critter, the cheese on a mousetrap failed. Luckily, I had a very wise but young Italian teacher who suggested chocolate. Well, since we were desperate, chocolate was deployed and the poor dormouse was snared in an extremely cheap mouse trap almost immediately. So despite the totally inefficacy of cheese, it is the tradition to refer to cheese on a mousetrap, but in reality, I would suggest it would be a waste of time being employed. These days, I wonder whether mice have actually become more sophisticated and they have actually updated the mouse morphogenetic field to warn their kind that cheese in strange places must be avoided at all costs. In fact, I wonder how long it will take for the chocolate to not work either, but I digress.) The Cultic Milieu is filled with many different types of ideological cheese. The difference between whether that cheese is used to attract mice into mousetraps depends on whether cult tactics are being used.

According to Conway and Siegelman, there is a direct relationship between the amount of time spent in mind altering ritual and therapeutic practices and the time needed to recover from the symptoms of information disease. Therefore, since many seekers are often in and out of so many different 'culty' groups with their various different practices, even if their conditioning

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can be considered to be fairly mild, there is still a need to deprogram from the typical background levels that exists in certain parts of the Cultic Milieu. For those who like testing lots of cheese, the main criteria must be avoiding the mousetraps and that is easy to do if you use intuition, discernment and critical thinking. These days it is a lot easier to check out old styled gurus and their cults due to information provided on the internet by ex-followers and their victims, but New Age gurus by their demeanour and behaviour are much harder to discern because the typical barrage of techniques of experience found in the Cultic Milieu have to be blended with cult tactics and it requires expertise to differentiate who is doing what. Yet, due to the serious nature of seekers being killed by someone who they trusted to aid them in the search for enlightenment, I have highlighted the recent sweat lodge tragedy in Sedona, Arizona where three healthy people lost their lives. Personally, I simply wanted to know how this could happen and after spending hundreds if not nearly a thousand hours researching, studying and learning about the use of cult tactics in a time frame of about five years, I now realise that these techniques have been used against me on quite a lot of different occasions during my life. Let's say I am now more aware of the true nature of the spiritual war that is being waged against seekers. The following discussion about the spiritual leader James Arthur Ray (JAR) is instructive because in so many ways, he typifies the sociopathic spiritual leader, a Pied Piper followed by hordes of completely duped people.

Cult watchers had already located JAR on their radars, well before the sweat lodge disaster, so a great deal of time had been spent analysing his methods. Therefore, before he was made famous by his television appearances, he had already been

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designated as ‘dangerous’. JAR used all the cult tactics in the book of manipulation and deception, but he has been remarkably candid in his approach at the same time. One of the first things to note about JAR is that he did not waste his effort on all the people who had heard about him but were not necessarily amenable to his teachings or his style. So, he actually required potential followers to read all of the books of the Peruvian-born American anthropologist and author Carlos Castaneda (1925 – 1998).³¹ This was to make sure that new recruits would be instilled with the notion of what to expect from a spiritual teacher and how they would be expected to be treated as followers. As the active cult watcher Corboy writes:

If you read the Castaneda books, where young Carlos is, so his tales go, being harshly treated by Don Juan Matus, this could lead a reader of Castaneda trash to expect a teacher to be ‘a bit abusive.’

Think about it, friends. One can use Castaneda literature as a recruitment and also as a sorting device.

1) The books would repel anyone who detects that they are fiction, or who already knows that Castaneda was a fraud and already knows that genuine tribal teachers never behave that way. An aspiring hustler is GLAD if the Castaneda books repulse this group of readers---for the hustler does not want persons like this in his or her audience. So, potential critical minded trouble makers who see the books are fantasy and insult the culture of tribal peoples, or who simply find the books childish stay away from the hustler, making his or her job easier.

2) Readers who accept the Castaneda story line as true but who are repulsed by Don Juan’s cruel behaviour and who don’t like the material for that reason and therefore refuse further

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involvement with any hustler (or potential date) who likes Castaneda books and recommends them--good. The hustler does not want to be burdened by people who are kind enough to be revolted by cruelty.

Who is left? Persons who accept the Castaneda fantasy material as true, and who ignore its cruelty because the stuff makes them feel excited and special and they don't know to fact check and cut off any of their friends who express skepticism or disgust in relation to Castaneda.

This, friends, is what Churchill called the soft white underbelly. This is the niche market of people that all hustlers want. And all that is needed is to recommend Castaneda's books and see who wolfs them down and shows up for your next event, eyes glowing with excitement.³²

After the sweat lodge disaster, JAR was also extremely helpful by providing details of the process that he expected new followers to follow. In March 2010, James Ray promised a series of talks in which he would share “seven fundamental principles that I have found to literally impact my life in so many ways, in fact probably change my life.”³³ According to cult watchers, the fundamental principles clearly list the LGAT business model. This list is so succinct that I have added Anticult's short comments to help explain how the model works.

7 Fundamental Principles	The Anticult Interpretation
A Purpose	As stated, the first two are the initial sales pitch, and they get into people's life “meanings”. That is the Big Claim, the set-up. Then it moves into
A Vision	

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	drawing people into the system.
A Mentor	Start focussing on the Guru as your Leader in your mind
A Practice	The start of the indoctrination process, with covert tech inserted inside the Practice (insert choice)
A Coach	Upselling to a system of more personal indoctrination and sales, costing \$100 hr of course.
A Group	Getting lured and Love-Bombed into the group/sect, using local meetings and conference calls, it's the start of Social Influence.
A Retreat	Getting even more deeply involved in a LGAT seminar environment for a weekend, then 9+ days at a hotel or in the wilderness.

Anticult is brutal in his analysis and writes;

The key to all of this of course, is to make sure the Practice does NOT work as advertised, as if it did work, then you would put yourself out of the Guru business. The Practice has to SOUND like it could work, with lots of Testimonials, but does NOT work, but makes the person blame themselves for not 'releasing' hard enough, and to buy more Coaching and Seminars. Repeat until dead broke.

There is no doubt that JAR used as many cult tactics as were available, but it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss this in detail as this has been analysed by experts elsewhere.³⁴ However, it must be stated that JAR was very successful because he had spent a considerable amount of effort learning how to use an array of tools to help him achieve his aims. His downfall appears to be that he overdid things, which was inevitable because one of his

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favourite mantras was “Balance is Bogus”. In a way, it might explain why he “attracted” so many followers who believed that James Ray would help deliver a quick-fix enlightenment experience. His followers at some level must have also believed that, “Balance is Bogus”. Incredibly, as it has been widely reported, some of his followers were happen enough to be roughly treated by JAR as they came back for more punishment at extremely high prices, so they were obviously satisfied with their experience. To be fair, as his defence lawyers pointed out, if people were not already unconscious, then they were at liberty to walk away from any of the activities being offered at his seminars and retreats. JAR emphasised to his followers the need to only care about their own experience and this means those in cult-omatic will leave you to die so you can have your experience, exactly as one witness confessed in the witness box at the James Ray trial. On reflection, it seems that the only safeguard that people have is the knowledge of how cult tactics can be used against them and the need for critical thinking to be maintained at all times. Simply, trusting someone to keep you safe when they are using a battery of techniques to re-engineer your beliefs, whilst providing you with quickie spiritual enlightenment, is not the way to stay safe.

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Conclusion: The Orwellian New Age

To summarise, the Cultic Milieu is not the same as the New Age movement and social scientists tell us that it has always existed as a permanent feature of society. In the 1970s, the Cultic Milieu was looked upon unfavourably by academics and deemed to the home of ‘deviants’ made up of those with alternative viewpoints that related to religion, spirituality, science and medicine. Today, the New Age part of the Cultic Milieu, also referred to as the Spiritual Milieu is considered in a much more positive light as the place where new ideas are thoroughly vetted, debated, reformulated and ultimately, adopted or rejected within the Cultic Milieu itself before even being propelled into the mainstream of society. Yet the Cultic Milieu was defined as an environment of seekership where it could act as a safe haven for those retaining the knowledge of traditional medicine, old and new scientific theories and technologies being ignored by world controllers.

Cult experts tell us that in the 1970s, Technologies of Experience were popularised in the mainstream and that many people accepted that quickie enlightenment was on offer for the masses. Despite the lack of efficacy due to the subjective nature of personal beliefs, these experience techniques were picked up and honed by salesman and gurus as tools that would help them achieve their aims of obtaining and manipulating as many followers as possible. The result is that within the Cultic Milieu, there is a rather sinister and routine use of cult tactics, where seekers are routinely damaged and considered collateral damage: people are immediately discarded if they become completely mentally ill; and suicides are completely ignored and not spoken

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about. In the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, not thinking and not feeling are considered traits to be acquired, but independents might consider this as indoctrination, the result of a spiritual war on the mind and the spiritual evolution of mankind. The truth is just sinister and levels of mind control that can be exerted are reminiscent of that described by George Orwell's in his classic novel '1984'.

In an interview with Margaret Thaler Singer, Ph.D, conducted by Dr. Klaus Karbe May 21, 1978, Singer explains some of the causes of young people getting involved with cults.³⁵ If we remove the word parents and interject the word gurus/spiritual leaders/therapists and the word children is replaced with the word follower, then we can start to see how the New Age milieu can operate like a spiritual pin ball machine where victims will bounce from guru to guru and therapist to therapist. Hence we read:

For some years (since the post-war era, I believe), parents here in the United States have not wanted to tell their children anything about the evil in the world. After the war they only had the desire to make their children happy, to present them with a better world. The poor instruct their children not to accept money, clothes etc. from other people. The rich, in turn, tell their children to protect themselves from kidnappers who want to take their money or break into their houses. The middle class parents, in contrast, primarily those of the post-war era, have not told their children that there are evil things in the world because they only want to make their children happy and show them a better and happier world. Therefore they have not told their children enough. ...My own parents and those of former generations generally had very happy lives with their children even though they told their children that there are good

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and bad people on the earth, and that they should rely on their own good judgment and not be taken in or let something happen to them - like in the wonderful stories they have been told. **I completely believe that parents have failed in that they have not explained to their children and warned them about people who talk cleverly and beautifully and want to manipulate them.** That, however, is the only thing which I would blame the parents for.

The greatest criticism of New Age beliefs has to be that you are responsible for whatever happens, no matter what the circumstances. If you are targeted by predators, malignant narcissists, sociopaths and psychopaths, and you have not been made aware that evil despicable people are brilliant at appearing as angels of light, then that is your fault! If you are: conned out of your money; put into a mental institution; or even killed by accident by your guru in their attempt to provide quickie enlightenment, then that is YOUR fault! This attitude is very prevalent in the most indiscriminate parts of New Age Milieu and smacks of widespread sociopathic values. Why would leaders in the Cultic Milieu tell their followers about the bad people who “talk cleverly and beautifully and want to manipulate them”, when they can ignore the elephant in the room and then continue to sell more books, seminars, training and therapy to those same naive followers that have been badly hurt elsewhere? If the leaders stick together and say nothing, then the victims will simply float around the Cultic Milieu where they remain potential customers and some people will literally bounce from guru to guru and from therapist to therapist. Are you getting the picture? This means the only protection worth having against becoming a victim in the New Age Milieu that tolerates low levels of

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integrity, is the knowledge of how the manipulators work with a vast array of tools that have been created since the 1970s that are being routinely being used against the totally unsuspecting.

Maybe, intellectuals already realise that the New Age Milieu has been largely subverted by the forces of evil that George Orwell so cleverly described in his '1984' science fiction book. What if in the 1970s, the experience techniques were intentionally unleashed into the mainstream of the United States as a Big Brother exercise in controlling spiritual seekers? Techniques of Experience that people should have viewed as sinister were instead welcomed by a society of people that had already been sold on quick-fix solutions as being the norm. Well, let's look at the facts. The United States of America has leaders that want to perpetuate continuous war and insist on pervasive government surveillance to defeat "terrorists", but the incessant public mind control that Orwell warned about is not so obvious, but many researchers claim is part of modern day life. (Incidentally, many believe the first major step in the search for enlightenment is to turn the TV off and then they will not be subject to Tell-Lie-Vision.) Maybe, Orwell's imagined oligarchic dictatorship has chosen to control spiritual seekers by taking over the New Age part of the Cultic Milieu and making sure that the unaware individual is continuously subordinated by a system that has been designed to make sure there are plenty of victims. New Age beliefs supports predators, sociopaths, malignant narcissists and manipulators, who are never at fault, because it is taught that the victim must blame themselves for anything adverse that happens to them. If we see that New Age beliefs being perpetuated act like a virtual 'Ministry of Truth', then we can start to see how it is possible for seekers to be duped and sometimes seriously hurt by

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spiritual salesmen who use a “syntax” of cult tactics with the aim of pushing their followers into an ecstatic/illumination experience where they can be re-programmed in order to complete the “penetration” of the “inner life” thereby making them followers for life. As George Orwell wrote in the classic book ‘1984’, the meaning of which takes on a different hue when we analyse how experience techniques and cult tactics have been used against unaware seekers:

“We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. ... The command of the old despotisms was ‘Thou shalt not.’ The command of the totalitarians was ‘Thou shalt.’ Our command is ‘Thou art.’ No one whom we bring to this place ever stands out against us. Everyone is washed clean.”
George Orwell, ‘1984’

The most disturbing aspect about the New Age teachings about not thinking and the use of technologies of experience is that there is a possibility that adherents might be losing out on the widespread evolutionary changes that appear to be now taking place. According to neurologist Richard Cytovic, “Synaesthesia is actually a normal brain function in every one of us, but that its workings reach conscious awareness in only a handful.” This implies that those who have been identified as synaesthetes are just simply operating at a new and holistic level of consciousness. Personally, I would interpret this to mean that somehow, for increasing numbers of people, the threshold of conscious awareness has deepened. In the paper, *Of fragrant shapes and colourful sounds: The world of a synaesthete* (2001), Professor Anindya Sinha writes:

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Cytowic (1993) speculated synesthesia could be the conscious awareness of **a normally holistic process of perception** that is usually subconscious or unconscious in most of us but is prematurely displayed in synaesthetes. If it is truth, then each of us is unknowingly synaesthetic.³⁶

Professor Anindya Sinha's research is mostly based around the field of Cognition and Consciousness and so his opinions like many others who specialise in this field are important and might explain why a few scientists believe that this might be the next major evolutionary step forward for mankind. Neurologists tell us they don't understand consciousness and they can't explain why things become conscious because experiments reveal that even if an image is directly beamed into the corner of the eye, it does not mean that the brain will automatically process the incoming stimuli permitting the subject to see the image. In the article: *Synesthesia: Beyond The Five Senses* (2011) for Executive Intelligence Review, Oyang Teng writes:

Like synaesthesia itself, in which triggering stimuli are often products of learning and language, this suggests a dynamic interplay between culture and perception, in which our senses, rather than being "hard-wired," are instead somewhat conditional, subordinated to the continuing evolution of our cognitive powers.³⁷

Simply, I really like this quote and it *feels* right. This means that those who are serious about understanding evolutionary change should query why so many in the Cultic Milieu are advocating practices that should be considered anti-evolutionary and can be

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clearly demonstrated to enable leaders to control and manipulate their followers. The evidence is so overwhelming that those who are seriously interested in spiritual evolution but are unfamiliar with cult tactics must realise there is a dire need to protect yourself from those in the cult-o-matic mode and their leaders. In order to do this, it is essential that you:

- Learn about human development.
- Learn about cult tactics
- Learn about the traits of sociopaths, psychopaths, malignant narcissists and manipulators.
- Learn how to think critically
- Learn how to employ positive skepticism
- Refuse to be a sheep. Be awkward and most manipulators will give up because you are too much trouble.
- Don't be afraid to pay attention to your intuition. Value your own discernment.
- *Seek Safely!*³⁸

Dedication

*The highest sign of enlightenment should be
humility in the face of reality.*

The Anticult

I don't know who The Anticult is who regular posts at The Cult Education Forum, but I can only presume by the quality of the information that he is an academic and possibly a practising, psychologist, or sociologist. Whatever, I have greatly benefited from his wisdom. Despite spending a tremendous amount of time

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denouncing fake gurus and teaching people how to understand cult tactics, The Anticult has become a guru himself and I am very grateful for his wisdom.

Addendum

He had capitulated, that was agreed. In reality, as he saw now, he had been ready to capitulate long before he had taken the decision. From the moment when he was inside the Ministry of Love -- and yes, even during those minutes when he and Julia had stood helpless while the iron voice from the telescreen told them what to do -- he had grasped the frivolity, the shallowness of his attempt to set himself up against the power of the Party. He knew now that for seven years the Thought police had watched him like a beetle under a magnifying glass. There was no physical act, no word spoken aloud, that they had not noticed, no train of thought that they had not been able to infer. Even the speck of whitish dust on the cover of his diary they had carefully replaced. They had played sound-tracks to him, shown him photographs. Some of them were photographs of Julia and himself. Yes, even ... He could not fight against the Party any longer. Besides, the Party was in the right. It must be so; how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken? By what external standard could you check its judgements? Sanity was statistical. It was merely a question of learning to think as they thought. Only!

The pencil felt thick and awkward in his fingers. He began to write down the thoughts that came into his head. He wrote first in large clumsy capitals:

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FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

Then almost without a pause he wrote beneath it:

TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE

But then there came a sort of check. His mind, as though shying away from something, seemed unable to concentrate. He knew that he knew what came next, but for the moment he could not recall it. When he did recall it, it was only by consciously reasoning out what it must be: it did not come of its own accord. He wrote:

GOD IS POWER

He accepted everything. The past was alterable. [...] How easy it all was! Only surrender, and everything else followed. It was like swimming against a current that swept you backwards however hard you struggled, and then suddenly deciding to turn round and go with the current instead of opposing it. Nothing had changed except your own attitude: the predestined thing happened in any case. He hardly knew why he had ever rebelled. Everything was easy, except!

Anything could be true. The so-called laws of Nature were nonsense. The law of gravity was nonsense. 'If I wished,' O'Brien had said, 'I could float off this floor like a soap bubble.' Winston worked it out. 'If he thinks he floats off the floor, and if I simultaneously think I see him do it, then the thing happens.'

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Suddenly, like a lump of submerged wreckage breaking the surface of water, the thought burst into his mind: 'It doesn't really happen. We imagine it. It is hallucination.' He pushed the thought under instantly. The fallacy was obvious. It presupposed that somewhere or other, outside oneself, there was a 'real' world where 'real' things happened. But how could there be such a world? What knowledge have we of anything, save through our own minds? All happenings are in the mind. Whatever happens in all minds, truly happens.

He had no difficulty in disposing of the fallacy, and he was in no danger of succumbing to it. He realized, nevertheless, that it ought never to have occurred to him. The mind should develop a blind spot whenever a dangerous thought presented itself. The process should be automatic, instinctive. Crimestop, they called it in Newspeak.

He set to work to exercise himself in crimestop. He presented himself with propositions – 'the Party says the earth is flat', 'the party says that ice is heavier than water' -- and trained himself in not seeing or not understanding the arguments that contradicted them. It was not easy. It needed great powers of reasoning and improvisation. The arithmetical problems raised, for instance, by such a statement as 'two and two make five' were beyond his intellectual grasp. It needed also a sort of athleticism of mind, an ability at one moment to make the most delicate use of logic and at the next to be unconscious of the crudest logical errors. Stupidity was as necessary as intelligence, and as difficult to attain.

Source: Part 3, Chapter 4, 1984, George Orwell

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“George Orwell’s exposition of the Ministry of Truth, Ministry of Love, Newspeak, Thought Police, Crimestop, Doublethink etc, in his fictional totalitarian society of Oceania, now simply described as an Orwellian society, should be carefully considered as applying to the darkside of the New Age Milieu.”

Susan Joy Rennison

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- 38 SEEK Mission Statement: S.E.E.K. is a non-profit charity organization formed to educate the public about the self-help industry. Those who 'seek' to better their lives and improve the world around them through the assistance of a self-help organization should be able to do so in a safe environment. Seek Safely, Self-help Empowerment through Education and Knowledge, <http://seeksafely.org/Home.html>

“Here is the How: Kirby lost her life because she believed in a

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fraudulent leader. Her thirst for self-improvement and growth was exploited. She invested energy, money and trust, expecting a professionally-run and enlightening experience. Instead, her leader lied about his knowledge and credentials, and he ultimately had little concern for his students. His behavior during the retreat and following the events of October 8, 2009, which took the life of Kirby and two others, revealed a reckless, arrogant, irresponsible, careless, heartless, self-absorbed, and basically “harmonically bankrupt” person - a FRAUD, unable to live what he taught. While there is value in the self-help industry, there is also great potential for so-called leaders to abuse the platform they have assumed for their own gains. In seeking their own ends, they exploit their customers and even put these customers in danger, using psychological techniques they are not certified in, therapeutic treatments they are not trained in, and orchestrating dangerous physical challenges without proper safeguards in place.

As for the Why, perhaps there is no why. But our task now, to be able to live with this horrible loss, is to figure out what’s next. We have to create some meaning out of this otherwise meaningless tragedy.”

Kirby's Voice, Seek Safely, Self-help Empowerment through Education and Knowledge

http://seeksafely.org/Kirbys_Voice.html