

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE NEW AGE

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Introduction of chapter eleven, I argued that ‘New Age thinking is essentially a reaction to the ideas and values which are perceived as having dominated western culture during the last two thousand years’. In this sense, New Age religion is a manifestation of popular culture criticism, defining itself primarily by its opposition to the values of the “old” culture. Accordingly, the “New Age” under the sign of Aquarius will presumably exemplify everything which has been neglected or missing during the Piscean Age. The New Age emerges as the positive mirror image of the Old Age. This is exemplified by the phenomenon of “diagrams of opposition”, which may be found in a number of New Age sources. An occasional criticism of such diagrams, as voiced by David Spangler, indirectly testifies to their importance in New Age religion. Spangler points to the ‘danger ... of applying the new paradigm in a non-holistic way’:

Often it is contrasted with the older, mechanistic paradigm, which appears to emphasize values of competition, exploitation, profit, centralization, and unlimited material growth at the expense of the environment. We should remember that industrial civilization has brought us many benefits, and that the mechanistic paradigm that supports it is not unrelievedly ugly. Both cultural views share values in common. Nor is the new paradigm absolutely pure and right. It will have its shadows, too. One can already see them in the form of groups that in the name of wholeness trample on individual rights, or individuals who, in the name of self-realization and growth, conveniently forget their accountability to others¹.

These remarks are characteristic of the later, “moderate” Spangler. Few other New Age authors are prepared to say something positive on behalf of the mechanistic paradigm. In *Original Blessing*, Matthew Fox includes a four-page appendix entitled “Fall/Redemption and Creation-Centered Spiritualities compared at a Glance”², a briefer version of which appears in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*:

from anthropocentrism
from Newton
from parts-mentality

to a living cosmology
to Einstein
to wholeness

¹ RS 105.

² OB 316-319.

from rationalism	to mysticism
from obedience as a prime moral virtue	to creativity as a prime moral virtue
from personal salvation	to communal healing, i.e., compassion as salvation
from theism (God outside us)	to panentheism (God in us and us in God)
from fall-redemption religion	to creation-centered spirituality
from the ascetic	to the aesthetic ³

Some of these oppositions reflect Fox's personal "creation-centered" emphases, and many New Agers would replace Einstein by the proponents of quantum mechanics. In most respects, however, the list exemplifies common New Age beliefs about the kind of shift that will (or should) take place. Very elaborate opposition diagrams are to be found in several chapters of Marilyn Ferguson's *Aquarian Conspiracy*⁴. A particularly clear opposition is given by Stanislav Grof, who relates the two paradigms to his "hylotropic" and "holotropic" mode of consciousness respectively⁵. His oppositions are discussed one after the other, but may be schematically compared as follows:

In the hylotropic mode of consciousness, an individual experiences himself or herself as a solid physical entity with definite boundaries and with a limited sensory range. The world appears to be made of separate material objects and has distinctly Newtonian characteristics: time is linear, space is three-dimensional, and all events seem to be governed by chains of cause and effect. Experience in this mode supports systematically a number of basic assumptions about the world, such as: matter is solid; two objects cannot occupy the same space; past events are irretrievably lost; future events are not experientially available; one cannot be in more than one place at a time; one can exist in only one temporal framework at a time; a whole is larger than a part; or something cannot be true and untrue at the same time.

In contrast to the narrow and restricted hylotropic mode, the holotropic variety involves the experience of oneself as a potentially unlimited field of consciousness that has access to all aspects of reality without the mediation of senses. ... Experiences in this state of mind offer many interesting alternatives to the Newtonian world of matter with linear time and three-dimensional space. They support systematically a set of assumptions which are diametrically different from those characterizing the hylotropic mode: the solidity and discontinuity of matter is an illusion generated by a particular orchestration of events in consciousness; time and space are ultimately arbitrary; the same space can be simultaneously occupied by many objects; the past and the future are always available and can be brought experientially into the present moment;

³ CCC 134-135. It is significant that Fox, as a Catholic Priest, does not say "from religion—to spirituality".

⁴ AC 229-231 ("Power and Politics"), 270-271 ("Medicine and Health"), 317-319 ("Education and Learning"), 360-362 ("Economics").

⁵ AS 239-240.

one can experience oneself in several places at the same time; it is possible to experience simultaneously more than one temporal framework; being a part is not incompatible with being the whole; something can be true and untrue at the same time; form and emptiness or existence and nonexistence are interchangeable; and others.

Although Grof's discussion reflects his own transpersonalist perspective, and concerns the opposition between two states of consciousness, it amounts to an overview of the old and the new paradigm as envisioned by him. Apparently, he hopes for a world in which the validity of the holotropic mode will be generally accepted, so that reality will be perceived from a radically new "spiritual" perspective. Grof can therefore be regarded as a typical example of the overlap between the concern with a new *scientific* paradigm and the hope for a new age of *spirituality*.

2. THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

The Timing of the New Age

Like holism, the coming "New Age" is a vision rather than a theory. Talk about the "Age of Aquarius" reflects the hope that the dominant culture of the present will change for the better. Beyond that shared wish for cultural and spiritual improvement, however, opinions are very diverse. This already begins with the question of dates. It is not uncommon to encounter the statement that, although we may not realize it, we have already entered the New Age⁶. In the foundational work of the early David Spangler, which is devoted entirely to the New Age theme, this is explained in anthroposophical terms (cf. chapter seven, section 2B). The "Christ energy" has been impregnating the earth for about two thousand years, and this process was recently completed. Accordingly, the whole earth has now been fully transmuted on the "etheric level":

It was as if an explosion of light ripped through the old etheric body, altering its characteristics and raising it into a new level and form already prepared for it, leaving behind only a memory, an etheric "shell", a corpse, a thought-form of what it had been. Yet it was a thought-form with a residue of power, much of

⁶ W 16: 'We have now entered the Age of Aquarius ...'; GW 189: 'We are now in the Aquarian Age, ...'; RBNA 51 (Limitless Love and Truth speaks): '...behold! I have placed my seal upon this planet. ... I have transformed the planet'.

which came from the consciousness of mankind. Thus, there became two worlds, one of the old, one of the new⁷.

The old world is the manifest one; the new one is as yet largely nonmanifest. In the manifest world, however, the Christ presence (Christ life, Christ energy, etc.) has now become fully available, and this is what is meant by the term “the second coming”: ‘he walks amongst us again, though clothed in etheric energy, and his presence quickens the etheric and spiritual life of all who can open in love and peace and, responding, arise to his level. More and more are becoming aware of his life with us’⁸. This reasonably clear picture is complicated by the fact that ‘Limitless Love and Truth’ (the channeled entity that dictated large parts of *Revelation*) seems to be the very same being as this Christ energy, but that the latter must not be confused with another, yet greater Being: the second coming of “The Christ”/Limitless Love and Truth is merely a preparation for the coming of the *Cosmic* (or Aquarian⁹) Christ. As stated by Limitless Love and Truth, with an obvious allusion to John the Baptist: ‘I prepare the way for One greater than myself’¹⁰. Even this coming of the Cosmic Christ (cf. Matthew Fox’s book of that title) has *already* occurred on the inner planes: ‘This embrace has occurred. With the creation and activation of the new etheric body of Earth ... the Cosmic Christ has entered the auric field of the planet, bringing with him revelations without precedence, truly inaugurating a New Age of consciousness for Earth and all upon it’¹¹. The crucial implication is that, although the old world is momentarily still dominated by a superseded level of human consciousness, its values are doomed. The old culture may be compared to ‘a clock winding down’¹²; although it still exists, the life has gone out of it:

Individuals who attune to the old will find themselves unable to be truly creative; what they build will not last. On the other hand, New Age individuals are attuned to the highly creative and magnetic energies which characterize this Aquarian cycle. What they put their hands to will prosper; what they build will last; what they create will grow. Thus, the objective world will increasingly take on New Age aspects and forms because only these forms will have the life and power and attunement to survive and prosper and develop¹³.

In this way, the New Age has already arrived but will inevitably manifest itself more and more clearly over the years. The description of the process in *Revelation* is backed up with some precise dates¹⁴. In 1961 ‘a series of phenome-

⁷ RBNA 119.

⁸ RBNA 121.

⁹ RBNA 161.

¹⁰ RBNA 122.

¹¹ RBNA 123.

¹² RBNA 81.

¹³ RBNA 145.

¹⁴ RBNA 125.

na around the world, but centred in Britain, began to manifest'. One of them was the revelation of Limitless Love and Truth, who announced that he would reveal himself 'through the medium of nuclear evolution' on Christmas Day, 1967. Because 'again, man's consciousness tended to interpret this matter in physical objective terms', many expected a cataclysmic event to take place and were disappointed when nothing spectacular happened. However, the reason they did not notice the event was that they were too 'physically oriented':

Thousands of other individuals around the world ... did experience a remarkable release of energy upon the Earth from higher dimensions. On 31st December, 1967, Limitless Love and Truth announced, 'My universal revelation, through the medium of nuclear evolution is complete ... The whole of nuclear energy is me and my whole power completely under my control ... The universal love flow is increasing. All is well'¹⁵.

From this perspective, Spangler proclaimed the arrival of the New Age; and together with other representatives of what I have called the New Age *sensu stricto*, he endeavoured to hasten its outward manifestation. The later Spangler, as we saw, was to adapt his idea of the New Age to changing circumstances. He even appears to have changed his mind about its inevitability¹⁶.

Spangler's identification of Christmas 1967 as the birth of the New Age is countered by alternative dates mentioned in other sources. Particularly well-known is the so-called "Harmonic Convergence" believed to have taken place on August 16-17, 1987¹⁷. In spite of such precise examples, we may safely conclude that most New Agers believe that the coming of the New Age roughly parallels the coming of the new millennium, without focusing too strongly on one particular date. Jean Houston, for instance, notes that 'we are clearly at the end of one age and not quite at the beginning of the new one'¹⁸, but gives no dates. This seems to suggest, at least, that the New Age is not very far away. However, it is remarkable that several sources mention dates which are scarcely useful to inspire millennial enthusiasm because they are still hundreds of years in the future. Z Budapest includes an astrological calculation by Anna Kria, which times the beginning of the Aquarian Age in 2376¹⁹. This is consistent with Marian Green who, although most of her books have the word "Aquarian" in their titles, believes that the New Age will begin some-

¹⁵ RBNA 125.

¹⁶ RS 76: 'The new age is not guaranteed; an optimism based on a feeling of inevitability may only lessen our ability to enter into the work necessary to bring a different culture into being. The new age is, instead, an image that can motivate us to act and work for a transformed future ...'. To my knowledge, Spangler has not addressed the manifest incompatibility of this statement with his earlier vision.

¹⁷ Cf. Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 145-146. The belief that 'a particularly powerful cosmic force peaked' at this date derives from the Mexican Jose Arguelles.

¹⁸ PH 213.

¹⁹ HBWM 193.

where ‘in the next couple of hundred years’²⁰. Murry Hope seems to think that a few hundred years more or less make little difference: ‘The approximate date given by astrologers for the commencement of the Aquarian Age is around the year 2000, although by astronomical computation a more precise figure of 2740 is given’²¹. Seth, finally, links the coming of the New Age to a threefold incarnation of the Christ soul, whose mission will be completed by 2075²².

The “Pathos of Change”

If there is no agreement between the authors about the precise timing of the New Age, neither do they describe its nature in the same way. What we find is a spectrum of opinions: at one extreme there are authors who merely predict a moderate change for the better, while on the other extreme some prophesy an Age of Light characterized by unimaginable splendor and bliss. Both will be discussed below. In addition, we may distinguish a category of New Age conceptions which are neither the one nor the other. They exemplify what I propose to call (with reference to Lovejoy’s concept of metaphysical pathos) the “pathos of change”. This concerns an essentially vague enthusiasm about the breaking down of traditional patterns and the opening up of new horizons. If anything, this important category of New Age statements gives expression to the sheer thrill of living in exciting times, marked by unprecedented changes and unheard-of opportunities. The character of this pathos of change is best conveyed by direct quotations. Jean Houston puts it like this:

I see a change. It is vested in the greatest rise in expectations the world has ever seen. It is so far-reaching in its implications that one might call it evolution consciously entering into time, the evolutionary potential asserting itself. It needed a certain critical mass, a certain merging of complexity, crisis, and consciousness, to awaken. Now it is happening. ... And what is happening constellates around the idea of human freedom and human possibilities. The idea of freedom is expanding because the idea of what it is to be human is expanding²³.

Marian Green, also, speaks in very general terms of ‘the way things are dying out and great changes taking place’:

A lot is happening, even in the political world ... This is only the start of the many changes the next couple of hundred years will bring. We could be on the verge of a true Golden Age, for the Water Bearer is the Grail Carrier who has found the vessel of rebirth and brought it into the world that its redeeming waters may be poured out for all in need. Also, the magical and supernatural arts will surely be allowed to take their place among the technologies of the future ... If we are strong

²⁰ GAAM 135.

²¹ PR 193.

²² SS 371.

²³ PH 212.

enough to be able to accept change and therefore the magic it brings, and to act with that change, in harmony with the Old Gods and Goddesses, whose being has always been immanent in some form, a wonderful future lies ahead for us²⁴.

A similar enthusiastic trust in the future expansion of human potential is expressed by Eva Pierrakos's channeled source:

I am happy to say that quite a number of you are already part of this strong cosmic movement for which you have made yourself available. You experience hitherto undreamed-of expansion and joy, resolutions of problems that you never thought possible. And it continues. There are no limitations to your fulfillment, to the peace, to the productivity, to the creativity of living, to joy, love, and happiness, and to the meaning your life has acquired as you serve a greater cause. ... You are creating a new life for yourself and your environment, of a kind that humanity has not yet known. You are preparing for it, others are preparing for it, here and there, all over the world, quietly. These are the golden nuclei that spring up out of the gray, dark matter of untruthful thinking and living. ... Enter this new phase, my dearest friends, with courage and affirmation. Rise up and become who you truly are, and experience life at its best²⁵.

Finally, even David Spangler's work may be plausibly interpreted as primarily motivated by the pathos of change:

The New Age is a concept that proclaims a new opportunity, a new level of growth attained, a new power released and at work in human affairs, a new manifestation of that evolutionary tide of events which, taken at the flood, does indeed lead on to greater things, in this case to a new heaven, a new earth and a new humanity²⁶.

The "Moderate" New Age

Not all New Agers believe in the advent of "a new heaven, a new earth and a new humanity". Seth, for instance, says that 'A new era will indeed begin—not, now, a heaven on earth, but a far more sane and just world, in which man is far more aware of his relationship with his planet and of his freedom with-in time'²⁷. Matthew Fox hopes for a planetary "mystical awakening" which will stimulate peace, justice and wisdom in our treatment of the planet's resources²⁸. The later, "moderate" David Spangler gives a rather detailed 'pre-view' of the emerging planetary culture. Some likely characteristics will be: an integration of planetary culture with regional cultures; some kind of political world agency, but not at the expense of local and regional bodies; more emphasis on communication, both in technological terms and in terms of inter-

²⁴ GAAM 211-212.

²⁵ PST 236-237.

²⁶ RBNA 91. For some further examples, cf. AC 30-31; SOU 307-311.

²⁷ SS 375. More information about the New Age is given on pp. 377-379.

²⁸ CCC 34.

cultural and interpersonal understanding; an emphasis on education as a life-long process; an economy based on the individual's creativity and production; larger economic entities with an accountability to society which transcends the economic sphere *per se*, and more participatory and democratic in character; a planetary spirituality that coexists side by side with separate religions and spiritual disciplines; existence of healing practices which combine techniques of medical intervention with stimulation of self-healing; a new interest in androgyny; and a deeper integration between science and mysticism, technology and ecology: 'In addition to traditional instrumentation and methods of experimentation, there will be added the intuitive capacities of the human mind and soul and its ability to gain information in altered states of consciousness through attunement to the "implicate order"'²⁹.

It is perhaps a telling fact that, seen within our corpus as a whole, this vision comes across as relatively "moderate" and down-to-earth. Yet, as soon as one attempts to imagine a world in which a planetary spirituality peacefully coexists with separate religions, and multinational corporations are prepared to sacrifice economic interest to the common good, it becomes evident that even this perspective looks like a dream. Spangler himself would probably not disagree but, rather, point out the importance of pursuing one's dreams. He ends RS with calling the New Age "a wild dream":

I have a dream ... that one day we shall all walk this earth as if it were a new world—and in that time it will be new, for we will see it and ourselves with new eyes and touch each other with a new and gentle spirit. We will know the delight of the sacred within us and around us and the joy of being partners, cocreators, with the earth and with God. Whether my grandchild will witness the fulfillment of this dream is up to all of us³⁰.

Indeed, many speculations about the advent of the New Age are primarily expressions of the need for faith and optimism in the face of present crisis. Peter Russell draws a picture of what he calls the "high synergy society"³¹. It would be characterized by minimal conflict between the elements of the system and between the elements and the system as a whole; there would be a considerable reduction in crime, violence, international hostility and terrorism; once we would begin to realize that we are 'all of the same spirit, all human beings would become universally sacred'³² so that war, murder or rape would become anathema; there would be real concern for the environment; we would cease to identify only with our narrow "skin-encapsulated ego", and spiritual values would be a universally accepted part of life; although we would live in

²⁹ RS 107-114.

³⁰ RS 163.

³¹ AE 181-200. The chapter begins with a quotation from Buckminster Fuller: 'The world is now too dangerous for anything less than Utopia'.

³² AE 182.

harmony, the values of diversity would be increased rather than diminished: 'Social synergy would not therefore imply any form of totalitarian world government'; the present preoccupation with economic growth would be rechanneled in the direction of inner rather than outer growth; attitudes to work and unemployment would change, as would attitudes to illness and health; the brain hemispheres would be more balanced, and in the relations between the sexes there would be a trend towards the ideal of androgyny; the principle of synchronicity would generally be accepted; finally, there would be an increase of ESP and other paranormal phenomena: '... a society of enlightened people could be a society in which we all had such faculties. Unbelievable? Impossible? Or are they an indication of just how profound the transformation could be ... ?³³'. Like Spangler, Russell explicitly acknowledges the Utopian character of such future perspectives: 'Throughout this book I have been taking a very optimistic view of humanity and its future—and deliberately so. Why? ... because I believe that the image we hold of the future plays a role in helping that future to emerge'³⁴. Unrealistic though it may seem, positive thinking about the future is necessary in order to create a more positive reality³⁵. However, Russell is not oblivious to the risk of failure. The present world crisis is an "evolutionary test": if we pass the test we will move on to a higher level, but 'if we fail, we will probably be discarded as an evolutionary blind alley'³⁶. In remarks like these it becomes obvious that New Age optimism is sometimes the mirror image of an acutely-felt sense of crisis, even despair.

Willis Harman, finally, discusses the New Age as follows:

Surely it is not too idealistic to imagine a future global commonwealth in which each of Earth's citizens has a reasonable chance to create through his or her own efforts a decent life for self and family; in which men and women live in harmony with the Earth and its creatures, cooperating to create and maintain a wholesome environment for all; in which there is an ecology of different cultures, the diversity of which is appreciated and supported; in which war and flagrant violation of human rights in the name of the state has no legitimacy anywhere, and there is universal support of the rule of law throughout the world; in which throughout the entire human family there is a deep and shared sense of meaning in life itself³⁷.

We may conclude that "moderate" visions of a New Age combine specific New Age concerns (such as social acceptance of the transpersonal and of alternative healing approaches; convergence of science and mysticism; harmony of opposites such as the brain hemispheres or the sexes, etc.) with quite general

³³ AE 200.

³⁴ AE 201.

³⁵ Cf. the concept of affirmations discussed in chapter eight, section 3B (par. "The Mechanics of Changing Reality").

³⁶ AE 207.

³⁷ GMC 152.

ingredients of a “better world” (harmony and cooperation; reduction or abolition of war, violence and crime; a healthy environment, etc.). Of particular importance is the oft-recurring emphasis on wholeness which *includes* diversity and individuality³⁸. Humanity must become one large family, *but* one which honours diversity among its members; global wholeness implies some kind of world economy, *but* one which protects smaller regional economies; a global spirituality is needed, *but* one which is compatible with a diversity of traditional religions; and some kind of world government may be needed, *but* not a totalitarian world order which can overrule regional governments and individual freedom. It is only predictable that critics will accuse New Age authors of wishing to have their cake and eat it too. Actually, this emphasis on unity-which-includes-diversity is highly characteristic for New Age culture criticism. Put in abstract terms, New Age authors, firstly, reject patterns of atomistic “fragmentation”: whenever and wherever parts become alienated from the whole and forget the “higher good”, a destructive war of all against all results. This happens at all levels, whether the “parts” are individuals, economies, religious traditions, or countries. But, secondly, New Age authors also attach supreme value to individualism at all levels, and reject authoritarianism and the rule of external “power-over” (Starhawk). Whenever and wherever the supreme value of “self-responsibility” is sacrificed, violence and oppression results. Again, this happens on all levels: examples are suppression of individual freedom by church or state; suppression of small “green economies” by powerful multinationals; or the totalitarian specter of Orwell’s *1984*. Wholeness *and* diversity must, therefore, somehow be combined in the New Age. In putting forward this ideal, New Age authors consistently follow the rule that the *vision* must come first, and difficult questions of how to implement the vision come second in line. This fits well with the further assumption that outer change, at all levels, must in principle be preceded by inner change. Critical objections to the effect that New Age authors do not prescribe concrete measures or take a political stance will therefore fail to convince: New Agers will regard that very question as reflecting the wrong premises. They are convinced that, in the end, the world will only change when people change first; failing that, all discussions of practical policy are useless. Accordingly, the goal of New Age authors is to encourage readers to change their perspective on reality and thus to change reality itself.

Given the underlying belief-system analyzed in previous chapters, it is perhaps understandable that even the apparent dilemma of wholeness versus diversity outlined above is usually ignored on the *emic* level. The dominant assumption

³⁸ Cf. the primacy of “generative source” holism over the emphasis on a “self-sufficient absolute” (chapter six, section 2A). This cosmological vision is perfectly in line with the social vision.

is that the practice of “inner development” will resolve the problem. Having re-established contact with one’s own higher self, one regains a proper perspective on how one’s “separate” individuality is related to the greater whole within the larger perspective of evolution. The relationship of the incarnated and alienated personality to its universal soul, analyzed in chapter eight (section 2B), may be taken as paradigmatic of how the New Age movement looks at relationships between “parts and wholes” generally. Accordingly, only spiritual ignorance creates attitudes of “fragmentation” as well as attitudes of “power-over”; and only spiritual insight can heal dualism and fragmentation on all levels. Therefore the social and political dilemma of wholeness and diversity will only be solved—and the New Age will only be able to arrive—when the basics of New Age spirituality gain acceptance on a global scale.

The Age of Light

Alongside “moderate” visions of the New Age, we find those which describe an unprecedented revolution that will literally transform earth into heaven. The general vision of this “Age of Light” originated in the theosophically-inspired New Age *sensu stricto*, but has obviously influenced the New Age *sensu lato*. Shakti Gawain, for instance, is confident that ‘Even the happiest of lives in the old world cannot compare to the depth of fullness and bliss that will be possible at the higher levels of consciousness available in the new world’³⁹. Ramtha is similarly optimistic. The ‘Age of Flesh’ is ending, and we are at the beginning of ‘the Age of Light, the Age of Pure Spirit, the *Age of God*’, in which humanity regains an ‘unlimited’ consciousness⁴⁰. Ramtha announces a ‘utopia called Superconsciousness, a collective whose social order will differ drastically from what you know it to be now’⁴¹:

All of you have been promised for e’er so long that you would see God in your lifetime. Yet lifetime after lifetime you never allowed yourself to see it. In this lifetime, most of you will indeed. You will live to see a magnificent kingdom emerge here, and civilizations will come forth that you had not even the slightest notion existed. And a new wind will blow. And love, peace, and joy in being will grace this blessed place, the emerald of your universe and the home of God⁴².

The Ramala masters, too, assert that ‘all things will be possible in the New Age’⁴³. The changes will be so momentous that human beings will be able to survive them only if they themselves undergo radical change:

You will not be able to survive the changes that are to come simply by adapting

³⁹ LL 4.

⁴⁰ R 150.

⁴¹ RIC 145.

⁴² RI 6-7.

⁴³ WR 117.

physically, for the physical body that you are seeking to protect will not exist in the New Age. The physical structure of the human beings that will dwell in the New Age will have changed radically. Whereas, now, a large percentage of your body is water, in the New Age it will be air. ... The human form will be different and will vibrate to a different note. The physical nature of the Earth will be very different. The angels and the great Masters will actually be present on Earth, in physical appearance, and will walk and talk with you. The whole structure of matter, the frequency range in which you live, vibrate and have your being will have been altered. Therefore only one thing, only one factor, can guarantee your survival, if that is indeed your concern, in the natural cycle of this change and that is consciousness, your soul consciousness. For it is your soul that will build the body that you require, that will change the atomic structure of your being and so prepare you for the life of the millennium which is to come—the Golden Age of Aquarius⁴⁴.

Sanaya Roman's description is apparently indebted to a vision similar to Spangler's coming of the "Cosmic Christ". She speaks of the advent of a cosmic 'wave of energy passing through your galaxy that is altering the course of all life it touches. This wave affects the very nature of energy and matter, bringing all matter into a higher vibration'⁴⁵. Initially, this energy-wave seems to have surprised even Roman's channeled source Orin: he describes how he and his fellow-entities "investigated" the wave and discovered that 'it is light and it is conscious'⁴⁶, and that it assists evolution and growth. As a result of its influence, humanity is 'rapidly evolving into a new race of beings ... a telepathic race'⁴⁷. The new human will have a 'body of light that is able to vibrate at a higher frequency and radiate light'⁴⁸. As a result:

What you struggle so intently with now—to be more loving, to believe in yourself, to forgive, to have compassion, and to release pain and negativity, will be easier in future times as human energy systems become more evolved. Humanity will have a more fully formed body of light and will become a radiating source of light⁴⁹.

As the New Age comes, many "high guides" make themselves available for channeled advice. Even the very nature of time is changing: we move from linear time to 'a more intuitive time'⁵⁰. Earth gravity will be altered slightly, and changes will occur in the electromagnetic frequencies of the earth. The influence of the wave of light will be particularly strong at so-called 'power spots'⁵¹: energy centers on the earth surface comparable to acupuncture points

⁴⁴ VR 63.

⁴⁵ SG 1.

⁴⁶ SG 1.

⁴⁷ SG 2-3.

⁴⁸ SG 155.

⁴⁹ SG 155.

⁵⁰ OtC 218.

⁵¹ See OtC 165, 167; SG 5.

on the human body. Between these points all over the earth, a network of light will spread which encompasses the earth.

Probably the single best source for descriptions of the "Age of Light" is the work of George Trevelyan. The cover of *Operation Redemption* shows an angelic being, complete with large wings, standing over the earth. Its arms are outstretched to a source of white light above it, the light of which enters its head from above, and is apparently received in its heart. From its feet extend a kind of tentacles which encompass the earth globe. The angelic being apparently acts as a mediating figure, "channeling" the light from above to the earth below, thus assisting "Operation Redemption" which brings in the New Age. Trevelyan speaks of a 'Second Coming' which brings in 'a New Birth on a planetary and cosmic scale'⁵². Humanity will evolve to 'fourth and fifth dimensional awareness'⁵³. The release of 'powerfully creative and uplifting energies' will result in 'a new civilization based upon enduring values of love, truth, joy, peace and the ideal of service ...'⁵⁴. The people and the governments of the world can choose either to resist or to recognize the 'higher wisdom and intelligence which is being made available to us'⁵⁵. Only the last option will prove effective in the end, and will result in 'a universal civilization—a true brotherhood of Man upon Earth'⁵⁶. In this new civilization, people will no longer be able to kill; cruelty to animals will be intolerable; war will cease and non-violence will be the rule: 'The basic values of tolerance, honesty, respect for truth, cooperation and compassion will become ever more manifest, while the very capacity to deceive another, to bear false witness, steal or murder will be eradicated from the patterns of human behaviour'⁵⁷. Long descriptions of the blessings of the Age of Light may be found throughout Trevelyan's oeuvre. They all amount to the same thing: a momentous "cleansing of the planet" will result in radically positive change, unlimited "light and love", bliss, happiness, peace and plenty. Before his mind's eye, Trevelyan sees how 'an etheric mantle of light is gathering around the earth'⁵⁸; this 'redemptive flow' will lift the consciousness of humanity towards a higher dimension, and then all will be well.

Trevelyan assures his readers that 'we are not talking about naive optimism, pious hopes or airy idealism', but adds that 'The New Age is not a social plan based on intellectual concepts'⁵⁹. It should certainly be clear from the above that radical visions of the "Age of Light" are qualitatively different from the more moderate visions of an improved society. Only the former can be regard-

⁵² VAA 22.

⁵³ VAA 77.

⁵⁴ VAA 63.

⁵⁵ VAA 64.

⁵⁶ VAA 64.

⁵⁷ VAA 69.

⁵⁸ VAA 114.

⁵⁹ VAA 69.

ed as an unambiguous case of New Age millenarianism. The coming of the Aquarian Age conceived as a religio-spiritual rather than a socio-political event is heavily indebted to the theosophically-inspired New Age *sensu stricto*. If the vision of an improved future dominated by a new paradigm/vision of reality constitutes one extreme on a scale of New Age visions, then the vision of the millenarian “Age of Light” constitutes its logical opposite. The middle range between both extremes provides room for a variety of more ambiguous visions, in which elements of both may be combined in various ways.

3. THE SHIFT FROM OLD TO NEW

It can roughly be said that “moderate” approaches to the New Age mostly call on human beings to accomplish a spiritual reorientation, while visions of the “Age of Light” mostly emphasize some kind of outside intervention. Accordingly, the first vision takes the possibility of failure more seriously than the second. Within these parameters, various ideas are in circulation about how the shift from the old to the new culture will or should take place. In all cases, the background to New Age visions is an acute sense of crisis, and of humanity having arrived at a crucial “turning point” situation. This is most often explained in the context of a larger process of evolution. Believing that we have arrived at a turning point in evolutionary history, some New Age authors call on humanity to take the right steps in order to fulfil the evolutionary purpose. A distinct minority believes that, whatever steps we take, the great reversal will come in any case.

The Potentials of Crisis

The starting point of the hoped-for transformation lies in an acutely-felt sense of crisis. New Age literature is pervaded with assertions to the effect that the development of western culture has now brought us to a point of extreme danger to humanity and the planet as a whole. Fritjof Capra begins *The Turning Point* as follows:

At the beginning of the last two decades of our century, we find ourselves in a state of profound, world-wide crisis. It is a complex, multidimensional crisis whose facets touch every aspect of our lives—our health and livelihood, the quality of our environment and our social relationships, our economy, technology, and politics. It is a crisis of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions; a crisis of a scale and urgency unprecedented in recorded human history. For the first time we have to face the very real threat of extinction of the human race and of all life on this planet⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ TP 21.

Capra goes on to discuss some examples: nuclear catastrophe, mass starvation in many parts of the world, the environmental crisis, a corresponding crisis in health care, widespread social and psychological disintegration, and a malfunctioning economy. He argues that the root of all these problems is a crisis of *perception* due to an outdated mechanistic worldview, and proceeds to outline the characteristics of the “rising culture” which will be based on an alternative paradigm and a corresponding view of reality. Similarly, Willis Harman describes the various aspects of the crisis as ‘interconnected components of what we might call the one world macroproblem’, and argues that ‘they are consequences of a mind-set and the behaviors and institutions associated with it ... which brought great benefits in the past but now creates problems faster than it solves them. The world macroproblem will be satisfactorily resolved only through fundamental change of that mind-set’⁶¹.

A sense of crisis and potential doom is evident in the work of many other authors. Marilyn Ferguson refers to the literary device of the “Black Moment” (the point at which all seems lost just before the final rescue) and its counterpart in tragedy known as the “White Moment” (a sudden rush of hope for salvation just before the final inevitable disaster): ‘Some might speculate that the Aquarian Conspiracy, with its hope of a last-minute turnabout, is only a White Moment in Earth’s story; a brave, desperate try that will be eclipsed by tragedy—ecological, totalitarian, nuclear. *Exeunt* humankind. Curtain’⁶². Such examples suggest how seriously the crisis is experienced. Expressions of deeply-felt concern, sometimes of evident despair, about the world situation may be found in the works of very different authors. Matthew Fox has nightmares about the dying of the earth and of all human and spiritual values⁶³; Shirley MacLaine describes a rapidly deteriorating culture⁶⁴; Starhawk is haunted by visions of a nuclear holocaust, ecological disaster and general decline of human values⁶⁵; Peter Russell compares humanity to a sort of ‘plan-

⁶¹ GMC 111-112.

⁶² AC 45.

⁶³ OB 12-15; CCC 11-34 is based on a dream of despair. Fox describes the crisis under these headings: ‘Mother Earth Is Dying; The Mystical Brain is Dying; Creativity is Dying; Wisdom is Dying; The Youth are Dying; Native Peoples, Their Religions, and Cultures Are Dying; Mother Church is Dying; Mother Love (Compassion) is Dying’. Fox ends, however, with a reminder to his reader that ‘Our Mother is Dying, but Not Dead’.

⁶⁴ OL 7; DWYC 12. MacLaine’s entity “John” speaks of ‘progressive insanity, depression, confusion of purpose, and total human inequality and despair’ (OL 198). MacLaine feels that the world is heading for disaster: ‘time is running out’ (OL 327).

⁶⁵ DD was written as an attempt to exorcize fears of nuclear holocaust: ‘For me, the journey began in a place of despair. During the writing of the early versions of this book’s first chapter, I was haunted by visions of annihilation. Images of the city destroyed, of curling flesh, of the sudden flash in the sky—then nothing. I could not look at a friend, at my family, at children, without picturing them gone. Or worse, the long, slow deterioration of everything we love. ...

etary cancer' constituting a deadly threat to Gaia's survival⁶⁶; and even such a convinced believer in the Age of Light as George Trevelyan does not always succeed in concealing his moments of despair: 'It is likely that we have gone so far in our evil and ignorant ways that repentance ... cannot in itself repair the damage. We need ... the aid of higher power. That power *does* exist and is alert to the crisis. In this fact lies our hope. ... The Creative Intelligence perhaps revels in games of brinkmanship. But there is still time, if only just enough ...'⁶⁷.

Trevelyan is one prominent example among several New Age authors who speculate that the outbreak of nuclear war might actually be the signal for the Age of Light to begin. In a highly characteristic passage (which also exemplifies the British chauvinism of many New Agers *sensu stricto*) Trevelyan announces that if only the "Folk-Soul" of Britain would allow itself to be impregnated with the Christ power, it would be protected from nuclear attack: 'Then (O science fiction!) the Russian rockets fired at our unresisting land, would, when they reached the protective barrier, simply disappear! The situation would be so dramatic, so totally contrary to rational and logical thinking, that the Divine Power could no longer be ignored and would have to be admitted'⁶⁸. Some pages later, Trevelyan asserts that full-scale nuclear war will not be allowed by the powers of Light: 'Is it not more probable that the pressing of the button will be the signal for a controlled and vast demonstration of light filling the heavens?'⁶⁹. The same idea appears in the work of the early Spangler: if 'a human press-button device would be used ... simultaneously with the pressing of the button, instead of disaster, the universal Revelation would occur'⁷⁰. And a similar line of reasoning is found in the work of Chris Griscom, who suggest that our evolution into "light beings" will render nuclear radiation harmless: 'Radiation is light. We are in the evolutionary process of becoming light bodies. ... One word describes our choice: *adapt*'⁷¹. Actually, Griscom is saying that the spiritual evolution of humans into "light beings" has become a necessity of survival⁷².

Despair pushed me into an obsession with history, in particular, the crucial sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I had to know how we got into our present predicament'.

⁶⁶ AE 19-20.

⁶⁷ VAA 108. Latent feelings of despair may also be suspected behind an occasional almost suicidal remark: 'Let us admit that a great tidal wave would be the quickest way to the New Jerusalem!' (OR 181).

⁶⁸ OR 189.

⁶⁹ OR 194.

⁷⁰ RBNA 63. Cf RBNA 64: ("Limitless Love and Truth" speaking) 'Should nuclear devices be used, the energies will be the revelation of me. All that will remain is what I am and all that is not of me shall disappear ...'.

⁷¹ ENF 78.

⁷² ENF 128: 'We just did something we can't fix, like Chernobyl. What are we going to do

Many more examples of the sense of crisis, impending doom and the consequent necessity of radical change may easily be found⁷³. The examples just given already suggest that the occurrence of a "crisis" need not be evaluated negatively in all cases. Often, it is conceptualized as a necessary and therefore healthy aspect of *evolution*. Thus, Shakti Gawain seems to welcome the crisis as a decisive step towards "world healing":

People frequently talk about what terrible shape the world is in. In many ways, things seem to be going from bad to worse, and this can be very frightening. It has helped me considerably to recognize that the world is currently going through a major healing crisis, very similar in form to what individuals are experiencing. When we as individuals begin to wake up to the light, we also begin to become aware of the darkness in which we have been living. ... Fears and distortions which have been denied and ignored because they were too painful to look at begin to come into our consciousness in order to be released. Problems that were "swept under the rug" come forth to be solved.

This is what I see happening on a worldwide level today. If we recognize the seeming chaos and pain in the world as a giant manifestation of our individual healing process, we can see that it's a very positive step⁷⁴.

According to another frequent belief, the current crisis constitutes a major "bifurcation point" in evolution. This idea is an application of Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures: if the condition of such a system is "far from equilibrium", small fluctuations are sufficient to suddenly drive the whole system over a critical threshold and to an entirely new and higher level of complexity. Thus, Marilyn Ferguson suggests that the current "disequilibrium" of society provides the appropriate conditions of heightened stress in which a 'dissident minority like the Aquarian Conspiracy'⁷⁵ may effect a complete social transformation⁷⁶. The main attraction of Prigogine's theory seems to have been that it allowed Ferguson to entertain hope rather than feel passively powerless in the face of overwhelming global problems. Ferguson conveniently chose not to emphasize the fact, noted above, that Prigogine actually depicts a 'dangerous and uncertain world'⁷⁷, in which no happy ending is guaranteed because tiny random events may have unpredictable consequences. Peter Rus-

now? Dematerialize it, because that's the only choice we have. The threshold between the manifest and the unmanifest worlds allows matter to pass both ways. We are now in a place where if we do not use the higher mind that we have, we will not survive. We all know that'.

⁷³ For some further relevant statements, including extensive listings of the vices of modern society, see WW 159; WR 193; SOC 207; LL 183-184; BB 429; PH xiv-xv; SOU 73-74;

⁷⁴ LL 183; cf. RG 23-24.

⁷⁵ AC 180.

⁷⁶ For Ferguson's complete argument, see AC 170-181. Cf. Prigogine's statement in OC 176: 'Under certain circumstances ... the role played by individual behavior can be decisive. ... We expect that near a bifurcation, fluctuations or random elements would play an important role, while between bifurcations the deterministic aspects would become dominant'.

⁷⁷ OC 313.

sell, in contrast, openly includes the possibility of failure in his Prigoginean account of the world crisis:

...extreme fluctuations within dissipative structures can lead to the emergence of new levels of organization. In evolutionary terms the fluctuations appear at periods of instability, or crises, in which organisms are forced either to adapt to the changed environment—perhaps moving on to higher levels of organization—or be extinguished ...

In the present day it is readily apparent that society is also going through some major crises. Looking at humanity from the perspective of dissipative systems, we can see that the two principal characteristics of a major fluctuation are present: increasing throughflow of energy and matter, combined with high entropy. ... This is apparent as increasing disorder both within society (e.g. rising social unrest, increased crime and growing economic chaos), and in the surroundings (e.g. increasing despoliation of the environment and rising pollution).

We would seem to be rapidly approaching the breaking point. And there are two possible outcomes—breakdown or breakthrough⁷⁸.

Evolution of Consciousness

Whether or not they regard a crisis to be necessary, New Agers generally believe that we are living at a crucial “turning point” in the evolution of consciousness. Critics might comment on an apparent discrepancy between belief in an Aquarian Age of limited duration, on the one hand, and belief in a decisive evolutionary advance, on the other. The first option suggests a vision of recurring cycles; the second one suggests a scheme of linear progression. Although it would probably not be impossible to integrate both options within one macro-historical model, New Agers typically do not address this problem at all⁷⁹. This marked absence of interest once more confirms the interpretation of the New Age movement as based primarily on a popular criticism of modern western culture. Accordingly, the all-important point for New Agers is to emphasize the urgent necessity of *change*. The precise function of the hoped-for New Age in the larger scheme of things is felt to be a merely theoretical problem of minor interest. For this reason, it is pointless to require too much precision about the evolutionary significance of the “new consciousness” that New Agers associate with the coming of the New Age. Whether it will be a temporary phenomenon (ending together with the Age of Aquarius, i.e., in circa 2000 years) or a permanent acquisition; whether in this last case it represents a stage which will be followed by yet higher developments, or the final consummation of all evolution (as seems to be suggested by the perfect bliss of the “Age of Light”); and how this latter vision of earthly perfection relates to the vision

⁷⁸ AE 52-53.

⁷⁹ I noted something similar at the beginning of chapter eleven, section 1.

of unlimited cosmic expansion in ever “higher dimensions”: all these questions remain wide open. New Agers simply focus their attention on one aspect or another, but seldom on the relatedness of the aspects.

The all-important point, as was noted, is the need for *change*. Since the world situation is moving from bad to worse, and since reality is created by consciousness, it is human consciousness that must change radically in order to reverse the tide. This is the simple foundation of the New Age belief in an imminent “evolution of consciousness”. Many descriptions of the new consciousness follow directly from their function as an expression of culture criticism and a sense of crisis. David Bohm and F. David Peat argue that humanity is caught up in a ‘destructive generative order’ which may well produce a ‘cataclysmic failure of the human race’; they therefore call for a ‘new creative surge’ (and even ‘a *new order* of creative surge’) which should produce a new way of doing science, a new society and a new kind of consciousness⁸⁰. The Farrars likewise assert that ‘homo sapiens is on the threshold of an evolutionary leap in his psychic functioning’, immediately after a discussion of the world crisis⁸¹. Jean Houston reminds her readers that ‘we find ourselves in a time in which extremely limited consciousness has the powers once accorded to the gods’, and infers from this that now must be the time for a decisive evolutionary breakthrough to multidimensional consciousness⁸². David Spangler prophesies the ‘emergence of a new kind of consciousness, an intuitive-mental awareness, attuned to a level of knowing and power unlimited by space and time’, opposing it to the old consciousness which is bounded by concepts of separation, space and time⁸³. George Trevelyan, in the same context, speaks of a ‘new type or species of humanity’, called ‘Homo sapiens noeticus’⁸⁴ and elsewhere referred to as ‘a superior race’⁸⁵. This selection could easily be expanded further. Although there is general agreement that humanity has now arrived at an evolutionary crisis or turning point, and can progress towards a new and higher consciousness, opinions differ with regard to the role human beings play in this process.

⁸⁰ SOC 207-209.

⁸¹ WW 279.

⁸² PH 213.

⁸³ RBNA 99-100.

⁸⁴ OR 69-70; EiG 21. Vgl. EiG 31, 146.

⁸⁵ EiG 21. In speaking of a new man, a superior race etcetera, readers will inevitably be reminded of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* including its fascist associations. Trevelyan seems to share in a certain naivety with which many adherents of modern theosophy still speak of human “races” but, like the large majority of theosophists, he does not use the term in a fascist sense (about the oft-recurring idea that the New Age movement is (quasi-)fascist, see Hanegraaff, ‘Verschijnsel New Age’, 94-96).

The Human Contribution: Creating Critical Mass

Many New Age authors are decidedly ambivalent about the role played by human action in the coming of the New Age. Visions of 2000-year cycles, a progressive evolution of consciousness, or the coming of the Cosmic Christ all suggest that the New Age is inevitable; many New Agers, however, apparently realize that this view may easily breed passivity, and therefore emphasize the importance of the human contribution. We have already seen that David Spangler moved from his early “interventionist” perspective to the conviction that the New Age will have to be created by human action. However, although a figure such as Starhawk may strongly promote social and political action, the overwhelming majority of authors emphasize “inner work”. Shakti Gawain is a typical example:

Some ... become angry because they believe I am endorsing a narcissistic self-absorption that denies the problems of the world and negates the necessity of social and political action. Upon further discussion I am usually (though not always!) able to make them understand that this is not the case. Being willing to deal internally and individually with the original source of the problem is simply the most practical and powerful way to effect real change. ... The underlying cause of world problems is the pain, fear, and ignorance we experience from being disconnected from the power of the universe. If we continue to project our problems outside of ourselves and fail to recognize the inner power we actually have, I believe we will support the very evils we are fighting. On the other hand, if we are willing to take responsibility for our fears and deal with them, we will clear the way for being able to hear the voice of the universe within us. If it tells us to take action, we can be sure the action will be powerful and truly effective⁸⁶.

On the basis of such a perspective, many authors do emphasize that, although the opportunities may be particularly favourable at the present historical moment, the decisive shift to the New Age must still be accomplished by human beings⁸⁷.

The most typical and widespread expression of the belief that a transformed minority may effect world-wide change is known as the theory of *critical mass*. This theory can be traced to the story of the so-called “Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon” told in Lyall Watson’s book *Lifetide* (1979)⁸⁸. According to Watson, primatologists studying the behaviour of wild macaques on the islands off the coast of Japan noticed a baffling phenomenon in the fall of 1958. The researchers observed how a female monkey washed a potato in order to remove sand and grit from it. She taught the trick to other members of the group, and

⁸⁶ LL 184.

⁸⁷ For instance MAA 11; GMC 157; OL 364; WR 193.

⁸⁸ Watson, *Lifetide*. For the dissemination of the story to a wide New Age audience, see Clark, ‘Hundredth Monkey’. For a critical review, see O’Hara, ‘Of Myths and Monkeys’, 61-78.

soon all the monkeys were cleaning potatoes in the same way. At that point, something extraordinary happened:

Let us say, for argument's sake, that the number (of potato washers) was 99 and that at 11 o'clock on a Tuesday morning, one further convert was added to the fold in the usual way. But the addition of the hundredth monkey apparently carried the number across some sort of threshold, pushing it through a kind of critical mass, because by that evening almost everyone in the colony was doing it. Not only that, but the habit seems to have jumped natural barriers and to have appeared spontaneously, like glycerine crystals in sealed laboratory jars, in colonies on other islands and on the mainland in a troop at Takasakiyama⁸⁹.

Watson himself seems to have scarcely believed his eyes but, as noted by a historian of New Age religion, 'the story was quickly seized upon by those who thought they had found a way the human race might avert nuclear war'⁹⁰. Ken Keyes published a bestselling book *The Hundredth Monkey* in 1982⁹¹, and a movie about the subject was produced by Elda Hartley⁹². To Peter Russell, as to many other New Agers, the theory implies that once the number of people who have achieved "higher consciousness" will have reached a certain "critical mass", enlightenment will suddenly spread as a chain-reaction throughout society. Russell quotes several authorities (Teilhard de Chardin, G.I. Gurdjieff, and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi⁹³) as having suggested the same. Explicit or veiled references to the theory of critical mass, either with or without reference to the "hundredth monkey", may be found throughout our corpus⁹⁴. David Bohm believes that even a group of ten fully committed persons, having achieved a higher consciousness, could effect a decisive change: 'Even one man like Hitler who had a great passion, had a tremendous effect, though for destruction. If there had been ten people with Hitler's passion, all working together, nobody could have resisted them'⁹⁵. It seems somewhat bizarre that while the scientist Bohm believes a number of ten people to be sufficient, an "extreme" believer in the Age of Light such as George Trevelyan mentions a far "safer" number: 'We are told that if fifty million people will simultaneously think and pray Peace for an hour in meditative stillness, then it will suf-

⁸⁹ Watson as quoted by Clark, 'Hundredth Monkey', 226. The same quotation appears in AE 176, but Russell leaves out the reference to glycerine crystals.

⁹⁰ Clark, 'Hundredth Monkey', 226.

⁹¹ Keyes, *Hundredth Monkey*. 300,000 copies were distributed during the first year. It was translated into nine languages and reached a sale of more than a million copies within a few years (Clark, 'Hundredth Monkey', 226).

⁹² Clark, 'Hundredth Monkey', 226.

⁹³ Essentially the same theory is indeed strongly promoted by the Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation movement. As noted in chapter five, TM is a major influence on Russell's worldview.

⁹⁴ Apart from the sources quoted in the main text: TP 418-419; AC 26; LL 178-179; PH 212

⁹⁵ HP:euu 79. Cf. mf 86.

fice to start such a chain reaction, such ‘morphogenic resonance’⁹⁶. This last term refers to the obvious resemblance between the theory of critical mass and the theory of morphic resonance developed by Rupert Sheldrake. Since his theory looks as though it was devised especially in order to solve the Hundredth Monkey enigma, it has generally been assumed that Sheldrake is a defender of the hundredth-monkey theory⁹⁷. Actually, the story as told by Watson is conspicuously absent from Sheldrake’s work. Since it is hard to believe that he would not be aware of it, this is most likely a deliberate choice. Sheldrake probably realized that the scientific credibility of his already “heretical” theory could only be adversely affected by association with a doubtful popular legend. Particularly revealing is *The Rebirth of Nature*, in which Sheldrake explicitly discusses the hope for a ‘new millennium’ and asserts the real power of group prayers for world peace⁹⁸. One might expect morphic resonance to be mentioned here as a scientific explanation of the efficacy of prayer, but that connection, so obvious to Trevelyan and many other New Agers, is not made by Sheldrake himself. This leads to a remarkable conclusion. Sheldrake is admired by many New Agers because they believe him to have given scientific credibility to the theory of critical mass and thus to the idea of a sudden transformation of society. The connection made by his followers is, however, not shared by Sheldrake himself. With respect to popular New Age theories of critical mass, he seems to be a sceptic rather than a believer.

Images of Intervention

The theory of critical mass may be interpreted in several ways. Many New Agers will argue that, while the sheer enormity of the world crisis tends to paralyze people, the theory of critical mass is “empowering”. By suggesting that even individuals can make a real difference, it stimulates people to pursue inner transformation. David Spangler, on the other hand, suspects that the theory may breed passivity: ‘people are simply waiting for this quantum leap that will make the world right again’⁹⁹. Indeed, it seems that this latter attitude is as widespread as its opposite. A strong belief in the ultimate perfection of the cosmic process may easily be felt to imply that the coming of the New Age is an inevitable evolutionary event. Examples involving superhuman cosmic processes, such as waves of energy or an “acceleration of frequency”, as

⁹⁶ EiG 157.

⁹⁷ Clark, ‘Hundredth Monkey’, 226 incorrectly states that ‘The political and scientific implications of the phenomenon are examined in Rupert Sheldrake’s *A New Science of Life*’. Lyall Watson or the hundredth monkey appear neither in NSL nor in PP or RN.

⁹⁸ RN 221-223.

⁹⁹ RS 97.

described by the early Spangler or Sanaya Roman, have already been discussed above¹⁰⁰. In addition, it is not unusual to find the belief that the late 20th century is a time in which many souls are incarnating with the specific intention of helping to bring in the New Age¹⁰¹. The consistent theme is that the decisive shift towards a New Age is steered not primarily by human action, but by the higher powers of Light which operate from invisible levels of reality. This belief does not necessarily imply that a happy ending is guaranteed, for humanity may still frustrate the process by stubbornly refusing to cooperate. However, the interventionist perspective does strongly suggest that if only we let "operation redemption" run its course, the world will be saved.

In chapter five I noted that, with few exceptions¹⁰², only the New Age *sensu stricto* can properly be called millenarian or apocalyptic. It seems that strong interventionist beliefs are based almost entirely on the theosophical frameworks which are characteristic for this group. Accordingly, the clearest examples of apocalypticism are found in the work of the early Spangler, Trevelyan and the Ramala masters; and to these must be added the Cayce material, which is also strongly influenced by modern theosophy. The only New Age apocalypticist without an overt theosophical background is Ramtha¹⁰³.

Edgar Cayce predicted that momentous "earth changes" would take place in the period between 1958 and 1998¹⁰⁴. He mentioned a shifting of the earth's gravity poles accompanied by great upheavals such as earthquakes and floods. These cataclysms would be accompanied by the reappearance of Atlantis¹⁰⁵, which would rise from the sea in a period which would see the simultaneous rediscovery of Atlantic historical records hidden in the vicinity of the great pyramids.

A very similar picture is presented by the Ramala masters. Due to the ongoing process of evolution, the "vibration" of the other planets of our "Solar Body" is gradually quickening. Our earth, however, is falling behind: at the moment, it is 'toppling, or swaying, almost like a spinning top which is about to stop'. In order to prevent that, the Great Beings are now artificially quickening the earth's vibration. This process is accompanied by 'great confusion

¹⁰⁰ Cf. also Capra's belief in the inevitable decline of the old cycle and rise of the new, in TP 418-419; or Gawain's emphasis on the evolutionary necessity of the current crisis: RG 23-24.

¹⁰¹ TI 200-201; PR 193.

¹⁰² One might think of Erich Jantsch, although his case is somewhat ambiguous. He seems to welcome the possibility of a worldwide catastrophe from an evolutionary perspective which reminds one of Hegel's "cunning of reason". See the quotation in chapter ten, section 2 (par. "Non-Dual Ethics and the Problem of Relativism").

¹⁰³ Which does not necessarily mean, of course, that this source was not influenced by theosophical thinking at all.

¹⁰⁴ The best source is SP, which is presented as an overview of "The life, the prophecies and readings of America's most famous psychic" but concentrates very strongly of the prophecies.

¹⁰⁵ Actually, Atlantis should have appeared already in 1968 or 1969 (SP 229).

and disruption'¹⁰⁶. According to *The Revelation of Ramala* (published in 1978), the last years of the twentieth century will be characterized by earthquakes, heavy rains and floods, droughts, famines and plagues. Among other things, the 'Insect Kingdom' will cover the earth¹⁰⁷. There will be seven great plagues, the first of which is AIDS: an epidemic that is due to humanity's abuse of sexuality¹⁰⁸. A much worse disease is in the making¹⁰⁹. In the course of events, old structures will be wiped out and the world will be totally transformed. The Ramala masters, also, say that Atlantis will reappear, and they add that space beings will contact humanity¹¹⁰.

Ramtha's apocalypticism surfaced strongly in a controversial channeled address on May 17-18, 1986¹¹¹. His predictions for the near future included the appearance of sun spots resulting in great droughts on earth, followed by famine; an unprecedented increase in earthquakes, in connection with what Ramtha refers to as the "zippers" on the earth crust; pestilential diseases and widespread violence (but *no* nuclear war¹¹²). Although Ramtha was sometimes explicit about the years and dates of the events¹¹³, he also hinted that the events might happen at a later date or even not at all¹¹⁴.

Spangler's *Revelation* is a special case. Although it must certainly be regarded as an "interventionist" text, it is less specific about coming cataclysms and adds some elements not found elsewhere. Ideas of a "final judgment" are explicitly rejected by Limitless Love and Truth:

I have not come to sift the good from the bad. I am not the judge. I simply am what I am. If you are that I am, then you are of me. If you are not, then you come under a different law and must obey it before its cup can pass from your lips. ... None are saved. None are lost. There is always only what I am, but I have revealed myself in new life and new light and new truth. Those who attune to that will not

¹⁰⁶ RR 163.

¹⁰⁷ WR 129.

¹⁰⁸ WR 272. In WR 206, AIDS is called 'but a warning to Humanity to show it what lies ahead': it is the precursor of a far worse disease which will afflict the whole planet (repeated in VR 274). VR 93-94 and 274 tell the reader that AIDS can be healed by inner transformation and removing 'the psychological blockage that is causing the disease'. Only a few people will heal themselves in this way, however, 'because only a very few people have either the power or the will to do so' (VR 94).

¹⁰⁹ VR 274.

¹¹⁰ RR 231-236.

¹¹¹ It was a particularly clear example of the shift from the early to the later Ramtha to which I referred in the introduction to his messages in chapter one.

¹¹² RIC 35, 54. Neither will there be a shift of the earth's axis. This explicit rejection of Cayce's prediction is found in RIC 35.

¹¹³ For instance RIC 22, 54.

¹¹⁴ RIC 22: 'The time of the drough *can* change. It can be at a later time. But it *is* coming'. On RIC 106 Ramtha reminds his audience that 'time is an illusion ... To predict an exact time frame is the greatest speculation there is...'. In RIC 141ff Ramtha even suggests that the cataclysms may not take place after all, and J Z Knight suggests that humanity may still prevent the apocalypse by taking control of their lives and changing their reality (RIC 7, 11).

be saved. They will only be attuned to what I am in my new revelation. And those who heed me not, but follow the downward course as human level consciousness unwinds itself and enters a new cycle, they are not lost¹¹⁵.

Somehow, the “two worlds” will come to be separated. Those who attune to Limitless Love and Truth will enter the New Age, and those who do not will be ‘shepherded’ to their own proper place or dimension of further evolution. *Revelation* is concerned to explain that the New Age is not to be associated with “destruction” but only with creativity and “uplifting” energies¹¹⁶. However, there is more than a hint that this may be so only for those with the right “attunement”, while those who remain locked in limited patterns of thought may well experience real cataclysms: ‘When the energies of atomic power are released, they will be of me and revelation will occur. But heed this: I am not prophesying war. ... Let no man think I have placed upon him through Truth the inevitability of destruction, disaster and death. These are all illusions save to those who are not of me. What the old invokes that it may disappear need not disturb the new’¹¹⁷. Apparently, this means that the “pushing of the button” may trigger world-wide revelation from the perspective of those with the right “attunement”, while *simultaneously* bringing real death and destruction to unenlightened souls. The very same event will be experienced in radically different ways depending on what “world” one belongs to. Spangler, in his commentary on the revelations, seems to be determined to play down this vision of real nuclear holocaust (for the unenlightened) by discussing it only in the vaguest of terms: ‘It is in the second world, the world of man’s consciousness, that the true cataclysms may be felt. ... Thus, the first impact of Aquarius was the introduction of interim energies designed to shatter the outdated thought-forms and creations ... Such energies may express destructively ...’¹¹⁸.

If *Revelation* is characterized by a certain ambiguity towards the “harder” aspects of apocalypse (an ambiguity shared by George Trevelyan¹¹⁹), no such ambiguity is evident in the Ramala materials. According to this source, ‘all the events that are prophesied in the Bible will come to pass’, including the appearance of an Antichrist¹²⁰ and a veritable day of judgment: ‘This is the time of Armageddon. This is the time of the sorting of the wheat from the chaff. If you are wheat, do not take heed for the chaff for the wind of evolution will blow it away. Only the wheat will remain, but that wheat must be pure, must be healthy, must be strong’¹²¹. Like *Revelation*, the Ramala masters assure their

¹¹⁵ RBNA 64-65.

¹¹⁶ RBNA 140.

¹¹⁷ RBNA 65.

¹¹⁸ RBNA 141.

¹¹⁹ Cf. for instance VAA 109-110; OR 27, 181, 187, 194.

¹²⁰ VR 69 & 331.

¹²¹ WR 261.

readers that the “chaff” will not be exterminated but will receive new chances to fulfil their evolutionary potential¹²². For the time being, however, the prospects are decidedly grim. As noted in *The Vision of Ramala* (the last and most apocalyptic of the Ramala books) the end of the Piscean age will mirror its beginning: ‘...the fact that Jesus died a violent death on the cross indicates a violent end to the Age’¹²³.

We may conclude that belief in an outside intervention is widespread in the theosophically-inspired sources, most of which belong to the New Age *sensu stricto*, and that apocalyptic visions of worldwide disaster are common. These visions stand side by side with images of a gradual and nonviolent shift to a better society. Roughly it may be said that there is a correlation between the nature of the shift, on the one hand, and the nature of the expected outcome, on the other. Whenever the New Age is regarded as a perfect Age of Light, it is coupled with (mostly apocalyptic) interventionism. For, evidently, only higher powers can effect such a change; mere human beings are not capable of doing so, although they *are* able (according to most sources) to frustrate “operation redemption”. Reversely, to the extent that the New Age is depicted as the product of a global change of mind or paradigm shift (i.e., as something accomplished by human beings), it is consistently described in more moderate—although still highly optimistic—terms.

4. EPILOGUE: CONTROVERSIES OVER THE NEW AGE *SENSU LATO*

Finally, one should note that not only the “New Age” in the sense of an imminent new era is a frequent subject for discussion, but the “New Age” in the sense of the movement of that name as well. New Agers often reflect on the nature of their own “movement”, and a few words must be said about what they say about it. Marilyn Ferguson, in her early “manifesto” of what would come to be known as the New Age movement, describes how she came to choose the name “Aquarian Conspiracy”: ‘I was drawn to the symbolic power of the pervasive dream in our popular culture: that after a dark, violent age, the Piscean, we are entering a millennium of love and light—in the words of the popular song, *The Age of Aquarius*, the time of “the mind’s true liberation”’¹²⁴. Ferguson described the emerging new movement in terms of “universal connectedness”, with reference to the concept of “Segmented Polycen-

¹²² WR 234. They will return to a ‘Group Energy’, and once they have ‘earned the right to individuality’ they will once more take the path of spiritual progress.

¹²³ VR 73.

¹²⁴ AC 19. Actually, the use of the term “Aquarian Age” does not necessarily include any dogmatic conviction about astrological inevitabilities. My research suggests strongly that, in spite of the term, astrology plays only a minor part in New Age expectations.

tric Integrated Networks”, or SPINs¹²⁵. Her description of a SPIN shows the concern, commented upon above, for a non-hierarchical holistic structure which does not threaten individual freedom: ‘Whereas a conventional organization chart would show neatly linked boxes, the organization chart of a SPIN would look like ‘a badly knotted fishnet with a multitude of nodes of varying sizes, each linked to all the others, directly or indirectly’¹²⁶. The similarity to Ferguson’s other favourite concept, the holographic paradigm, is evident. Applying the SPIN concept to the Aquarian Conspiracy, Ferguson suggested that the latter could be regarded as ‘in effect, a SPIN of SPINs, a network of many networks aimed at social transformation. The Aquarian Conspiracy is indeed loose, segmented, evolutionary, redundant. Its centre is everywhere’¹²⁷. Ferguson’s conceptualization of the Aquarian network has been adopted by many later authors¹²⁸. Capra describes essentially the same process of various “countercultural” networks linking and joining forces in order to form the vanguard of the “rising culture”¹²⁹. Harman sees the same countercultural movements coming together as ‘different drops in a single wave of transformative change’¹³⁰. At the very beginning of her first New Age book, Shirley MacLaine describes how she discovered Ferguson’s SPIN of SPINs. Having travelled all her life, she could not but notice a gradual but frightening deterioration of the world’s condition¹³¹. However, at a certain moment she noticed that a quiet change was taking place: ‘People I talked to began to speculate on what it was that was missing. The tone of our conversations shifted from dismay and confusion to a consideration that the answers might lie within ourselves ... I found myself in touch with a network of friends all over the world who were involved with their own spiritual search’¹³². This discovery, partly documented in *Out on a Limb*, was a source of hope. At the very end of the book, MacLaine repeats the theme of the emerging SPIN of SPINs: ‘...everywhere I went, I continually encountered a deep need for spirituality and expanded consciousness, a need for people to come together to share their energies in *something* that worked’¹³³.

Ferguson and MacLaine may perhaps be taken as representative for the vision and the reality respectively: as I noted in chapter five, ‘If the Aquarian Conspiracy is the manifesto of a hoped-for new culture, MacLaine’s bestselling

¹²⁵ The concept was proposed, according to Ferguson, by the anthropologists Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine, in order to account for the structure of social-protest networks since the 1960s.

¹²⁶ AC 235.

¹²⁷ AC 236.

¹²⁸ Apart from those discussed in the text, cf. also PH 214; WW1 12-14; AE 70-77 (in terms of the “Information Age”); RS 88.

¹²⁹ TP 46.

¹³⁰ GMC 117.

¹³¹ OL 7.

¹³² AC 7-8.

¹³³ OL 352. Cf. also DL 305; GW 8.