

**Spirit Possession in a Contemporary British Religious Network:
A Critique of New Age Movement Studies Through the Sociology of Power**

by Matthew R. Wood, B.A.(Hons)

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ABSTRACT

Studies of phenomena classed as part of the New Age Movement have become increasingly common in recent years. This Thesis develops a new perspective on these through the use of anthropological and sociological analysis of structures of social power and the contextualisation of symbols and discourse. Research was based on a two and a half year ethnographic study of a network in Nottinghamshire, Britain, which included a meditation group and a spiritual fair. Spirit possession was seen as particularly important to these, in the forms of channelling and mediumship. The concept of nonformative spirituality was used to delineate the network as lacking enduring leadership and authority, such that participants' experiences varied within groups and practices. Thus, the network was not seen as part of a movement, but as a collection of informal groups linked through people's practices. Theory of bodily performance, with a critical analysis of the sociology of knowledge, was used to interpret the four sorts of practices in the network: channelling, meditation, holistic health therapies and divination. By paying attention to people's spiritual biographies, their careers of seekership were understood to develop through dissonant experiences. Nonformative spirituality was compared with those more formative groups which it drew upon, such as spiritualism, the Anthroposophical Society and occult study groups, thus providing a broader picture of its place in contemporary Britain.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Object of Study: the Nottinghamshire Network

This Thesis is a study of a religious network in the county of Nottinghamshire, Britain. This Network, comprised of separate groups, events and practices which were attended by many people in common, is one that would normally be described as part of the New Age Movement. Prominent phenomena were meditation, channelling, holistic health therapies and occult studies, set within contexts of regularly meeting groups and fairs. The Network was studied in two spells of participant observation, the first spread over two years during 1992-1994, the second covering six months in 1996. By analysing this Network, a second aspect of the Thesis is founded: critical engagement with some important topics within the sociology of religion. The key theoretical thrust here concerns the social powers of bodily performance. Through this debate, the religious phenomenon under study is sought a place within academic discipline. This Introduction briefly sketches some of the key concerns to be found in the Thesis, before considering the methods of analysis and presenting an overview of the chapters.

The sociology of religion has yet to produce a satisfying account of a mass of contemporary phenomena that is seen by all quarters of British society as a significant spiritual movement. The pervasiveness of what are collectively termed New Age may be seen in the commercial marketplaces of bookshops and music stores, in festivals and workshops, in travelling convoys, in healing rituals and in groups and societies. To list even a fraction of these phenomena is a bewildering task, which broadens as investigation deepens. The journalistic

media, Christian churches, other religions and government were ahead of academics in allocating to certain phenomena the appellative New Age. The adoption of this term by academics has been problematic in that not only have contradictory theories been used to assert similar conclusions, but that some confusion has also resulted in terms of method of analysis. This situation is reflected in the prominent use of lists in analysis of the phenomenon, the abandonment of which should be a feature that distinguishes academic enquiry from others.

This Thesis is therefore, in part, a challenge to New Age Movement studies. Approaches to the New Age are varied and throughout this Thesis concentration is directed upon four authors. Paul Heelas (1982; 1987; 1991; 1992; 1993; 1996) has written most extensively on the New Age Movement from a sociological perspective, locating them as self-religions within a theoretical tradition of modern capitalist society exemplified by the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1993; 1994). Michael York (1991; 1994) viewed the New Age Movement as a postmodern form of religion, formed of a multiplicity of networks. Both Heelas and York, working primarily within Britain, included paganism within the New Age and therefore see their analysis of the Movement as encompassing an entire direction of contemporary religiosity. The American historian, J. Gordon Melton (1988; 1992; Melton, Clark and Kelly, 1990), was more concerned with the roots of the movement, which he saw as transformed by events in the United States in the nineteen-sixties. Lastly, Wouter Hanegraaff (1995; 1996), a Dutch scholar, based his conclusions, that the New Age Movement is a western esoteric response to secularisation, on analysis of New Age literature.

Each of these authors addressed problems behind the representation of the New Age as

a movement, but the very term 'New Age' is not adequately questioned. Despite the different schematic approaches of Heelas, York, Melton and Hanegraaff - capitalist, postmodern, historical and literary, respectively - their analyses do not escape the basic sociological assumption of the existence of a New Age Movement, something that can only be derived from evidence of what is occurring in practical terms amongst people and the groups to which they belong. This Thesis is driven by the attempt to socially describe and analyse on a new footing many phenomena that are classified as New Age.

Some explanatory points concerning the text may be made. Pseudonyms are used throughout for field subjects, except for people leading talks or workshops at the London Festivals for Mind-Body-Spirit. Groups studied by fieldwork are referred to as, for examples, the Network, the Meditation and the Fair. References are included in the text; when several occur concurrently in the same paragraph regarding the same work, only the first includes the date, the following references include page numbers only. On first referencing a work whose original date of publication is of interest, that date is given in square brackets after the publication date. Finally, any inclusion of text in "quotes" that is not referenced, refers to field subjects' speeches, and does not indicate a dubious concept. When a concept or term is to be distinguished in discussion, it is marked like 'this'.

2. Method of Study: Fieldwork and Theory

The social contextualisation of power lies at the heart of this Thesis. By concentrating on this aspect, it is hoped that a corrective to both New Age studies and some theoretical debates may be achieved. Religious studies has so far largely failed to theoretically flesh out

its use of the notion of power. This has advantages in that the discipline has allowed itself to develop without the self-obsession that can follow analysis of a necessary, but ambiguous, concept. But its disadvantages have become increasingly obvious as it has turned from examination of established religions to those that maintain weaker social structures. The common experience of groups and practices looked at in this study is that they exercise no formal control over their members or participants. This means that participants are able to criticise and interpret their experiences by a variety of spiritual authorities and therefore to seek out new experiences without undue interference by others. However, this religious phenomenon is not as easily interpreted as may appear at first glance, for it is clear that seekers are embedded within social relations of power with others. That which was encountered through fieldwork did not easily lend itself to interpretation.

Social facts need explaining, as Marvin Harris pointed out (1977:11-13), and models are necessary for this, but unless both aspects are accorded an independence that prohibits the subsumption of one under the other, analysis merely repeats what it assumes and understanding does not progress. A dialectic therefore needs to be fostered between fieldwork and theory, such that the influence of one upon the other leads to a development of each. In terms of this Thesis, two problems may be discerned in this regard. On the one hand, the body of evidence that constitutes fieldwork is restricted by the relatively small time-scale and numbers of persons encountered. Whilst fieldwork took place over a five year period, groups were attended for at most eighteen months. And although up to twenty people regularly attended meetings, only a handful were selected for interview or became close personal contacts such that discussions with them were habitual. The validity of the basis of conclusions regarding the religious phenomenon of which the Nottinghamshire Network is understood to be a part may therefore be questioned, to which two responses

are made. First, research has to start somewhere, so fieldwork, no matter how limited, is always useful and can be used in dialogue with theory. Second, conclusions of a localised nature can be expanded if there is evidence of similar structures and functions in other contexts. Thus, it would be naive to assume that an analysis of this phenomenon in one British county could not be used to investigate the situation in another, since many aspects of society will be alike.

A second problem with the dialectic in this Thesis concerns the latter aspect, theory. The development of this through dialogue with the fieldwork means that it is being built up on the basis of only a small sector of religion in Britain. It could reasonably be purported that if other religions were looked at, different developments would occur. Specifically, the fact that the practices in this religious network are often so concerned with the private body, may be said to skew theory towards too much emphasis on the body in performance. To this, the retort may be made that theories are formed through dialogues with particular contexts, as in this Thesis, and not meant to be regurgitated without critical reflection on them in new situations. However, this is not to deny that some general theoretical conclusions are presented.

Ethnography, the analytic presentation of fieldwork, has been criticised in recent years as the epistemological concerns of critical theory have been applied to anthropology. Pratt summed up this dilemma: "Fieldwork produces a kind of authority that is anchored to a large extent in subjective sensuous experience [...] But the professional text to result from such an encounter is supposed to conform to the norms of a scientific discourse whose authority resides in the absolute effacement of the speaking and experiencing subject" (1986:32). The subjectivity of participant observation has come under increasing concern

in anthropology, for example by Lindquist (1995). The position of fieldworkers in social relation to their subjects can certainly lead to problems, but it is not the case that ethnographic results are scientific in the sense of the natural sciences. Pratt, like other contributors to Clifford and Marcus' volume (1986), was preoccupied with ethnographies as presenting a total picture of the societies they study; for this reason, Evans-Pritchard comes under particular scrutiny (Pratt, 1986:41; R. Rosaldo, 1986). But the explicit selection of parts of a society, by ethnographies, for particular purposes, counters epistemological instability by delineating the different stages of analysis. This implicit self-awareness of ethnographic texts, risks instability by the greater concern of the project at hand. The critical issues are then not so much the epistemological basis of analysis, rather than what analysis is accurate or not, given its limitations and goals. Ethnography has no pretence to be an ideal representation of the world, but is an engagement with it.

Critical theory of ethnography is important in highlighting the role that fieldworkers perform alongside their subjects. Eileen Barker described three stages in the role of "professional stranger" that fieldworkers play: passive, in which there is limited involvement with the group under study, interactive, where they act as one of the group, and active, in which they can explore, test and provoke their subjects (1987:144-146). This progression comes with increasing competence with, and understanding of, subjects' worldviews (146). So it is not the case that there is a simple relation of authority between fieldworkers and those they study, with the former dominating the latter; it is doubtful if this was the case even in colonial contexts such as Evans-Pritchard's African studies. Since fieldworkers are reliant upon the aid and recognition of others, they cannot fully control the research situation. For this reason, it is worth describing the role of fieldworker taken for this Thesis.

Fieldwork was always undertaken conspicuously, that is, with subjects knowing that attendance was for academic purposes. But the nature of the groups meant that this was interpreted as an interest in spirituality akin to theirs. People were not only very welcoming, but interested in the research and would discuss it as they would others' spiritual activities. Michael, a crystal healer, expressed the opinion that the research might be carried out for a reason other than for academic purposes, whether that was consciously recognised or not. Subjects were always glad to have a chance to talk about their experiences and life histories, even if this meant interviews went on for several hours. Michelle, who like Michael thought the research could have other personal motivations, wrote down notes on her spiritual history before she was interviewed, so that she did not leave anything out. She said she found this a very useful exercise, especially as she was in the process of making decisions about her religious involvement at that time.

These experiences resonate with those of other fieldworkers working in related areas of religion. Researching Welsh spiritualism, Skultans found that her attendance at meetings was not a hindrance, since all spiritualists consider themselves to be researchers in some measure (1974:1-2). McGuire and Kantor's research into suburban American healing rituals, "was interpreted as having some special significance" by their subjects (McGuire, 1988:270-271), although this could lead to their attempted conversion (274). Likewise, Festinger, Riecken and Schachter's involvement with an American prophetic group was taken as some sort of sign (1956:190), although they explicitly started attendance inconspicuously, as the group's prophesied date drew near. Reactions to fieldworkers is therefore often positive, although the reasons why this is so may lead to complications later on. However, it is clear that conspicuous fieldworkers need to work hard at their chosen areas of enquiry in order to reap the benefits of participant observation.

The active role that Barker delineated for fieldwork needs to be tempered by the recognition that it is possible for researchers to invent their own material. Milton contended that, "knowledge is always linked, through purpose, to the action of its invocation" (1981:138). In other words, some methods of acquiring knowledge from subjects may involve a new context for them and thus not be a part of what they would do or think were the researcher not present. This is a particular difficulty in interviews, where questions will elicit answers whether or not they are related to subjects' lives. As Milton said, "questions which encourage informants to consider new possibilities are of limited value" (139). Furthermore, the purpose behind answers may not be related to how they understand their lives, but to other goals, such as getting rid of the researcher as quickly as possible (140). These considerations are even more pertinent as regards questionnaires, since they are impersonal and therefore prone to increased misinterpretation. Milton's resolution of this problem is to, "base our [anthropologists'] inferences of people's knowledge solely on what they, in the course of their everyday life, make available to us" (155), by an impressionistic method in which fieldworkers' performances among their subjects are explicit and replicable (141, 156), rather than being a search for knowledge not normally revealed in everyday life (138). In this sense, she believed, folk models, or subjects' own understandings of reality, become anthropologists' models (155).

Milton's points need to be taken seriously and it was with this intention that research for this Thesis focused on participant observation in deference to texts and question-and-answer sessions with subjects. The interviews that were conducted tended to allow subjects space in which to address issues that were important to them, rather than leading them by eliciting answers on a series of already formulated concerns. However, the use that is then made of this knowledge, or folk model, is another matter; it may end up in an analytic

scheme with which subjects might not recognise or agree. Such is possibly the case with the interpretation this thesis gives of many practices, in terms of spirit possession. The veracity of these cannot be decided by folk models, but their accuracy as regards social reality.

The form this Thesis takes is to integrate fieldwork and its concomitant folk models with theoretical concerns, as it progresses through studies of different parts of the Network. Models, definitions and typologies are utilised in this not as the end result of analysis, but as transitional aids to study. Roy Wallis' study of new religious movements (1984) may be seen as a good example of this, exercising a critical awareness of what he calls externalist and internalist categories of writing. The former positivistically applies an external measuring device to the subject under study and the latter appreciates the world of these subjects as they experience it (1984:132). The latter, he said, provides better analysis (132), the former usually expressing hostility or justification for the religion studied and resulting in, "categories of endless models and typologies which are 'extended' and 'applied' with no apparent regard for whether anything is thereby illuminated" (136-138). A brief overview of the chapters of this Thesis should help to place these points in perspective.

3. Overview of the Thesis

The fieldwork and theory with which this Thesis engages are to be found, in the main, in different chapters. In order to set the scene for how the former is to be looked at, the first chapter is concerned with building up theories of power and performance. It is the next three chapters that apply this, enabling a social contextualisation of the material from

participant observation and interviews. The Network is therefore the primary focus of these chapters, although debates on the New Age Movement and self-religions are used to identify it within the larger context of similar phenomena in contemporary Britain. The last chapter seeks a wider contextualisation, in other religious traditions present in British society. The Conclusion extends that to suggest how the Network is to be understood in terms of contemporary Britain in general. The following gives a summary of the concerns of each chapter in turn.

Chapter One: The Sociology of Power and Performance, looks at the key theoretical debates that are used to interpret the material. Focus is first placed on the notions of social power and performance, by considering their use in anthropological and sociological debates. The relationship between these two disciplines is also considered. This leads onto a debate on the merits and weaknesses of the sociology of knowledge school, which, it is claimed, failed adequately to interpret social phenomena by neglecting a serious consideration of social power in favour of meaning. Having analysed these key terms, use is made of them to look at the relationship between individuals and society, an issue central to sociological debates. By viewing the idea of selves in this way, groundwork is laid for an appreciation of the Nottinghamshire Network.

Chapter Two: Nonformative Spirituality, considers the Network as a whole. By providing a narrative of the fieldwork, the different groups and individuals are introduced. From this, the four main practices of channelling, meditation, holistic health therapies and divination are focused upon and a model presented for use throughout the Thesis. The idea of a New Age Movement is then analysed, by drawing primarily upon the four authors mentioned in the first section of the current chapter. The theories underlying their interpretations of

phenomena are expounded and criticised, resulting in the acknowledgement of the need to formulate a new means by which to grasp them. Fieldwork from the Network is used to drive this debate, and in the last part the idea of it as a nonformative spirituality is raised. An extended case study of a life history is used to exemplify and analyse this term.

Chapter Three: The Essene Meditation and Channelling, is the first of two chapters that focus much more closely on fieldwork with the network, through two of its largest and most enduring groups. The first, an Essene Meditation, was attended for eighteen months and description of it is coupled with the role it played in attenders' practices and discourses. Its changes over this time and its development since its inception several years earlier is also looked at. Attention is then turned to channelling workshops which were organised and attended by many of the meditators. Channelling in general, and the influence it had on several group members, is looked at by establishing a model of the channeller's career. From this, the central role that spirit possession plays in the network is purported, and looked at in terms of meditation and divination. Finally, focus is turned to the life histories of two prominent couples at the meditation. The idea of nonformative spirituality is raised again and reconsidered through a closer examination of how social power is effected in performance.

Chapter Four: Fairs and Healing, focuses on the second key group studied in the Network, the Nottinghamshire Spiritual Fair. The origins and development of the Fair and its organiser is considered, then the sorts of authority established between attenders and those who held stalls, gave lectures, or led workshops. It is also compared to other fairs, in Derbyshire and London. The importance of holistic health therapies at these fairs, leads attention towards their comparative analysis. The manner in which health is socially

constructed in groups is considered, then the role of the imagination and symbolism in nonformative spiritualities. The place of healing in the lives of practitioners is analysed in some depth, through a comparison of Reiki with other therapies. Consideration is given to how these relate to possession.

The fifth and final chapter, Nonformative Spirituality and Other Religious Traditions, draws from fieldwork with three other groups in the network, each of which is related to different forms of spirituality: spiritualist healing and spiritualism, the Anthroposophical Society, and an Occult Study Group and paganism. The social organisation of each of these, particularly spiritualism, is considered and compared to the Nottinghamshire Network. Then, through discussions of the institutionalisation of religion and the cultic milieu, the relationship between formative and nonformative social organisation is analysed. This helps differentiate the Network from related spiritualities and considers once more the structure of practices in that.

The Conclusion attempts to go beyond the confines of ethnography of the Network in order to place it within wider British society. Concepts of class and kinship identities are looked at, as the practices of nonformative spirituality are seen to have a direction and significance that can be tied to social conditions in contemporary Britain. With this, it is hoped, a more complete understanding of the phenomenon has been achieved.

This Introduction has spread out the cards that are to be played throughout the Thesis. The game that follows is played out in the linking and cross-linking of notions of power and performance within the expanding encounters of fieldwork. At various stages these cards fall into well-defined patterns, before breaking up again to assemble once more in

ambiguous arrangements. The nebulous subject matter of this Thesis means that such temporary conclusions are a sign that it is being dealt with seriously. Only when the last card has been played can the changing fortunes of the hands be seen in true perspective. For neither any one single card nor hand can be understood by itself, having significance only in its location in the entire game. The aim, then, is not to win by producing trumps or flushes, rather than to elucidate by the presentation of spreads. In this way the social world is brought to bear meaning to those players at the table.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SOCIOLOGY OF POWER AND PERFORMANCE

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss and evaluate anthropological and sociological debates concerning the body, performance and power. This is done to establish the theoretical manner in which the Nottinghamshire Network is to be analysed. These three elements are viewed as interconnected, such that social authority is created out of people's personal relations in which the way the body is used plays a part. This approach is seen as corrective to the emphasis on discourse and meaning employed by many sociologists, so setting the scene for the conceptualisation of nonformative spirituality in contrast to that of New Age Movement, in the next chapter.

PART I. POWER AND PERFORMANCE

1. The Relationship Between Anthropology and Sociology

In drawing upon both anthropology and sociology, this Thesis engages with a relationship that is still under construction. Especially since the rise of multidisciplinary subjects, such as cultural studies, these two have been juxtaposed in an attempt to cover a broader ground than each could achieve alone. However, it must be remembered that the development of both anthropology and sociology has sometimes led to differing, sometimes mutually exclusive, uses of concepts and theories. The anthropologist Abner Cohen reminded his readers of the pitfalls of each. Anthropology, he wrote, often tends to neglect power in favour of symbols, since it has traditionally been concerned with "primitive societies" which are homogenous and unchanging (1974:11-12). This has led, for example, to Claude Lévi-Strauss' explanation of symbolic behaviour in terms of a "logical structure" (4-5), which poses problems for an anthropology of "complex societies", where an understanding of "the dialectics of socio-cultural change" is needed (11-12). By contrast, sociology is concerned with variables of precise measurement and so does not usually take symbols into account (6-7).

A related difference between these disciplines is provided by Ulf Hannerz, through his anthropological studies of urban environments. He wrote that whereas sociology focuses on "units of population" and thus emphasises statistics, anthropology deals with "systems of relations" which views individuals as, "entities constructed from the roles through which they participate in these varied situations", in distinction from the decontextualised

populations of sociology (1980:10). Hence, whereas sociology confines itself to the study of social structure, anthropology extends into the minds of people by studying the cognitions - ideas, knowledge, beliefs and values - that constitute culture (11). Certainly both approaches are vital for understanding social phenomena and the relation between the two may be aided by the use of other religious studies approaches, such as literary criticism, psychology and philosophy. This engenders the creative dialogues for which Cohen and Hannerz called, allowing points of view to develop that grasp issues such as study of the literature read and written by fieldwork subjects and the thought processes that occur in private practices. In concordance with this approach, this Thesis will use the term 'sociological' generically, in reference to all forms of social analysis.

What lies at the heart of this Thesis is the social contextualisation of power. To do this, anthropological and sociological concepts are employed, such as power relations, performance, the body and networks. These core theoretical concepts, however, have ambiguous meanings in the two disciplines and therefore need to be used with care. By attempting to fuse anthropology and sociology together, as envisaged by Cohen and Hannerz, it is hoped that a more realistic understanding of this issue is afforded, which neither reduces people to functional units of contexts, nor exalts them to idiosyncratic demiurges. This is why in the next two sections, the two key concepts of power relations and performance are considered.

2. Power Relations

The concept of social power is diffuse throughout social studies of religions. It may appear

within treatments of charismatic leaders or hierarchies of authority, as predominates in Max Weber's *The Sociology of Religion* (1966 [1922]). More recently it has been explored in connection to individual creative expression, as in Paul Heelas' study *The New Age Movement* (1996). What such analyses point to is that power does not exist in itself, but only in relation to a lack of power. Charismatic leaders exercise power by virtue of being individuals who act in ways others do not. A structure of hierarchy has power because it organises people in a way that would otherwise be different. When individuals create their own power, a distinction is made by them between times of empowerment and times of disempowerment.

It is not proper to engage in social analysis and talk of power as opposed to a lack of power without referring to people who make the distinctions between the two. Power therefore always exists in social context and cannot be treated by analysts as a naturally occurring attribute or entity which some possess but of which others are bereft. Individuals have power because people treat them as powerful and others in relation to them as not powerful. This means that it is inadequate to talk of the charismatic authority of leaders if it is not made clear who accords them that power. Likewise, to point to individuals' feelings of empowerment if these are not put into the wider context of their lives. In any analysis of it, power must be socially contextualised.

Steven Lukes (1977) discussed three different views of power that he found in sociological literature, placing them in dimensional relation to one another. The one-dimensional view builds up a picture of power from analysis of decision-making, but ignores more subtle forms of influence and coercion. These subtle forms may be placed into two categories: first there are the cases where one group does not allow another to make decisions or only

to make them within a limited choice, second are the times when one group's choices are conditioned by another group who has the means to indoctrinate or shape experiences. The two-dimensional view takes into account the former cases but not the latter and thereby reproduces the error of commitment to behaviourism, the study of overt, actual behaviour alone (1977:21-24). However the theoretical gains of the three-dimensional view, by focusing on who controls the political agenda to determine the difference between actual and potential issues and conflicts (25), makes its implementation in social analysis particularly difficult.

As Lukes recognised, the three-dimensional view raises the problem of needing to study that which does not occur (1977:39). Whilst he provided some escape routes from this dilemma, such as studying how people behave during abnormal times when power is lessened and how they react to the few opportunities for dissension that do arise (47-50), Lukes' analysis is curtailed by his sociological approach which does not allow for a more ground-level analytic description of behaviour. If attention is given to symbols and performance, coupled with an understanding of how performers perceive their experiences, then a more trustworthy appreciation of power is possible. Such an approach effectively dove-tails sociology with anthropology in the sort of scheme envisaged by Cohen. Lukes himself, as would be expected from his insightful analysis of power, did not believe sociological research leads eventually either to study of the motivations of actors or of social structures that determine how people behave, what he called "objective co-ordinates", but rather to the relations between the two (54). People thus exercise power and have it exercised upon them (52), as is suggested by the very use of the concept of power: "within a system characterised by total structural determinism, there would be no place for power" (54-55). This calls for consideration of how people perform together in groups.

3. Social Performance

The importance of discussing performance requires an outline of how to handle it, so that its description becomes immediately relevant and does not remain unstructured. What follows is an attempt to place the concept of social power in a framework useful for this. Cohen viewed humans as two dimensional, being both symbolic and political, the latter term referring to power as it is exercised in social organisations (1974:xi). Through an analysis of "interest groups" (66), political organisations which have mechanisms for the co-ordination of action, Cohen sought to show how symbols are manipulated for political purposes and so remain present even in the most rational, bureaucratic organisations (xi). Issue may be taken with his Weberian notion of rationality, which he saw as formulated through a view of societies in terms of progression to effective action, and which rests on the assumption that organisations are more or less rationally bureaucratic in comparison with each other. Nevertheless, what Cohen called for, and attempted, was a political anthropology that takes issues of power, including those generated by the nation state, into account (129). This leads, he said, to "three major dialectical issues": symbols and power relations, symbols and selfhood, and symbols and change (138). Central to each of these is what he called the "structure of the drama", ritual performances in which the political and symbolic orders interpenetrate and influence each other (131-132):

"Each drama tries to effect a transformation in the psyches of the participants, conditioning their attitudes and sentiments, repetitively renewing beliefs, values and norms and thereby creating and recreating the basic categorical imperatives on which the group depends for its existence.

At the same time, some or many of the participants may attempt to

manipulate, modify or change the symbols of the drama to articulate minor or major changes in the 'message' of the drama" (132).

This depiction is notable for its treatment of the relationship that exists between individuals and societies, which is of especial concern to this Thesis' consideration of individual life histories. This differs from their dichotomous relationship in the sociology of knowledge and structural-functionalist approaches, where individuals or societies are viewed as the primary constitutors of social reality, respectively. The way out of such dichotomies is to be found in understanding the importance of performance, significant acts that individuals undertake in social context. Victor Turner was aware of this and it is his term "social drama" (Turner, 1974:23) that Cohen adopted to describe those situations in which politics and symbols coincide (Cohen, 1974:131-132).

In considering performance, Sam Gill criticised religious studies for focusing on literate religious traditions and being led thereby to study texts but not acts (1987:138). He proposed an extended realm of study for the discipline which adds acts as data alongside texts, but which must be accompanied by an expanded interpretation which adds performative analysis to analysis of information (139-142). At the present time, he said, religious studies is enclosed in informative analysis of texts and so ignores the three other areas of study: informative analysis of acts, and performative analyses of texts and of acts (142). For example, the Christian Bible may be studied as a textual object in itself, but a fuller understanding of it requires its role in performance to be considered, such as how it is used in gesture (144). What Gill presented was a methodology by which to appreciate what is occurring in the social world. The coupling of this with Cohen's insights leads to an approach that avoids the dichotomous dilemmas that so plague studies of religion.

Performance therefore refers to all visible aspects of a social drama: acts and gestures, as well as discourse, texts and symbols. The physical, gestural relations between people must be taken into account as much as words spoken or texts utilised, for whilst it is possible in analysis to separate these two aspects, in actual performance they form a whole and depend upon each other. It is through this whole that power relations can be discerned and which answers the difficulties of Lukes' third dimension of power. For just as it is possible to see which individuals and agendas become dominant over others in performance, so can those which fail to dominate be perceived. However, such close attention to performances through the method of participant observation can only be one part of a full sociological understanding of a phenomenon. The other part lies in both the history of that phenomenon as well as the histories of those individuals which constitute it. A second method used to investigate the Nottinghamshire Network is therefore interviews in order to glean life histories. Both these methods have faults in that there may be elements of performances and reported histories which are hidden from the researcher, but it is possible to attempt to minimise these by cross checking what different people say about the groups and each other.

What is of particular interest in these methods are conflicts whereby different social powers deal with each other. Such conflicts, or dramas as Cohen called them, may be viewed as ways in which mutual actions and understandings are engendered between people within groups. However, the fieldwork carried out in the network suggests that, for this social phenomenon at least, even such mutuality comes at the cost of experience of dissonance. For example, learning how to be possessed by the Ascended Masters is a shocking experience which seriously affects all aspects of the lives of the possessed. The same is true for what would appear to be much less disturbing incidents, such as the practice of

meditation, holistic health therapies or divination. The next two parts to this chapter consider how a neglect of conflict poses a problem for sociological studies and therefore reinforces the attitude that dissonance must be seen as a key to understanding performance.

One of the ways in which a religious study expanded in the manner outlined above proves its worth is being able to take into account performers' understanding of themselves in relation to the spiritual powers they claim to experience, whilst not naively ignoring the social context through which this is established. Unlike phenomenological analysis, the above approach allows a critical analysis of the subjects' relations with God, gods and other spiritual powers, rather than a bare acceptance of them. Such is the difference between, for example, Mircea Eliade's analysis of shamanism (1970 [1951]) and that of Ioan Lewis (1989a [first edition, 1971]). For the latter, shamans' relations to the spirits that possess them is of central sociological concern and needs to be placed in context with their relations to other social performers. No sphere of experience is above investigation for this approach, for all aspects of personal life are contextualised together. Because performers experience spiritual powers, this Thesis will employ the style of writing as if they exist. It would, in any case, be cumbersome to write as if their existence were accepted only by such performers. Social study is not concerned with the ontological status of experiences, but their significance in social context.

With these issues in mind, attention may be turned towards an important school of thought which has sought to provide a way by which to contextualise people in their societies and which is therefore important for the concerns of this Thesis. As well as drawing from an understanding of society based on Weber, the sociology of knowledge school emerged from the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, and is thus perhaps one of the most

rigorous of sociological attempts to deal with a general theory of human social life. However, by considering it in view of the above debates on power relations and performance, serious doubts may be cast on its theoretical procedures. Despite this, it is extremely useful for helping forge a way to deal with the difficult problem of contextualisation.

PART II. THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

1. The Sociology of Knowledge I: Alfred Schutz

The importance of looking at people's life histories suggests that it is not enough to build a social theory of power and performance if this is not combined with a theory of individuals' understandings of themselves in their world. As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann stated in their "treatise in the sociology of knowledge", *The Social Construction of Reality*, "reality is socially constructed and... the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs" (1967:13). Reality is here understood to refer to phenomena recognised by a subject as having existence independent of their own being (13). Knowledge is the concomitant certainty that subjects hold of this independence (13). A sociology of knowledge is thus an examination of the ways in which humans relate to their environments, but it is based upon the special consideration that such environments exist for humans only insofar as they are engaged by social groups. Any environment is thus a social environment which has been, and continually is being, constructed. The German title to one of Alfred Schutz's key works thus translates as, "The Meaningful Construction of the Social World" (Walsh, 1972:xii; Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, 1972 [1959]).

The special consideration of the sociologists of knowledge, that humans construct that with which they come into contact, in other words they create their reality, is philosophically based upon phenomenology. This led these sociologists onto the difficult issue of how individual and group constructions are to be related. As human, an individual is born into a social world in which environments have already been constructed. In encountering these

environments, individuals also help to construct them. But there is surely a difference between these two constructions. One is a group moulding of something into reality, the other is an individual engagement with that reality. The problem with the phenomenological starting point of the sociology of knowledge is that individuals' constructions of their realities is seen as the fundamental building block of groups' constructions of realities (Natanson, 1973:xxviii-xxx, xlv). Schutz, Luckmann, his pupil and colleague, and Berger each addressed the issue of the individual's own stream of consciousness in apprehending reality, before moving onto discussions of intersubjective or group dynamics. This philosophical bias - explicitly taken from the work of Husserl, amongst others (Schutz, 1972:42; and see Berger and Luckmann, 1967:34) - resulted in the confusion of a number of separate issues of social dynamics in the terms construction and reality. The intention in this part is to explicate these, through a critical reading of the sociologists of knowledge, beginning with Schutz's above text and the first volume of his *Collected Papers* (1973).

In his analysis of reality construction, Schutz focused on the actions of the subject. He viewed these as being "mapped out" in the person's mind as a project, which he called the "in-order-to-motive" (1972:63, 86-90). But there is a second "motivational context" which Schutz named the "genuine because-motive", which explains the act not as a project, but in terms of the actor's past experiences (91). This second motive operates, he wrote, in the pluperfect tense, rather than the future perfect tense of the first motive (93). The reason for Schutz's careful explication lies in his preoccupation with Weber's sociological methodology: "Weber failed to distinguish the projected act from the completed act, leading him to confuse the meaning of an action with its motives" (216). Weber was led to this confusion because the way most people view their acts as meaningful is by the "in-order-to

motive", whereas the genuine motive, the "because-motive", is not recognised by them (86-88). Schutz gave the example of opening up an umbrella when it starts to rain: this is done, it is commonly said, in order not to get wet, whereas really it is because it is raining (93).

This discussion takes place within the limited realm of "the stream of consciousness of the solitary Ego" (Schutz, 1972:217). Significantly, it is articulated in response to the issue of attaching meaning to an act. Weber had confused meanings with motives: the reason or motive for carrying out an act was seen by him as the meaning of an act, because he did not distinguish between the project of the act and its actual completion. Since this completion takes time, which actors experience through their consciousness of themselves, a motive cannot be equivalent to a meaning. Schutz viewed meaning as, "*a certain way of directing one's gaze at an item of one's own experience*" (41). This is more forcefully stated in his *Collected Papers*:

"Meaning [...] is not a quality inherent in certain experiences emerging within our stream of consciousness but the result of an interpretation of a past experience looked at from the present Now with a reflective attitude.

As long as I live *in* my acts, directed toward the objects of these acts, the acts do not have any meaning" (1973:210).

Meaning is not, then, a secondary experience to actors' experiences of their acts, but rather the way those acts are experienced in retrospect. Motives operate as "contexts of meaning", linking motivators with the motivated - in other words, they delineate experiences which are to be regarded as meaningful (1972:216). Giddens pointed out that this complements Weber's conception of social action, "by a study of the natural attitude, or what Schutz also calls variously the 'common-sense world', or the 'everyday world'" (1977:27).

By the time he came to consider intersubjective understanding in the social world, Schutz

had already established what are meanings, motives and actions. He needed only to apply these formulations in the context of encountering others. Schutz was absolutely clear in viewing these considerations as strictly phenomenological (1973:117) - a method that he then left behind in talking about social relations (1972:97). But there are clear difficulties if the sociologists of knowledge consider meanings, motives and actions to be understandable apart from consideration of the social world. For what one person sees as meaningful can determine meaning for someone else. The genuine motive for an action may not lie within people's fields of experience, because the act may be forced upon them for reasons they know nothing, or can do nothing, about. The simplistic manner in which Schutz undertook to tackle the problem of meaningful construction can be seen by his misunderstanding of an "a priori" structure of the mind which needs to be explicated by phenomenological method before the relations between different minds are considered (44). He called this, "a science of essence (*Wesenswissenschaft*)", a reductionist analysis made necessary by the fact that the social world is composed of many such "living minds" (44). Such essentialist analysis is unacceptable in light of the lived experiences of humans. Analysis cannot begin from the notion of the solitary ego and expand out to intersubjectivity, for social relations permeate and form the bedrock of every aspect of life for egos; indeed they constitute just what is an ego.

In viewing the individual's self consciousness as the fundamental building block of human and social existence, Schutz neglected the nonegalitarian form that intersubjectivity takes. Although it may be true that, "*everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experiences*" (Schutz, 1972:106), this does not mean that someone cannot do things to others which they cannot understand or would not consciously choose. One consequence of this for Schutz is that he seriously misinterpreted the significance and

extent that the "behaviour of predecessors" has on their successors (Giddens, 1977:31). People do not only interact through their consciousnesses and sociologists should not write of people as if they do. To do so is to overlook crucial issues of bodily experiences of dissonance and creativity which this Thesis views as crucial to religious life. Schutz seemed to assume that experiences not involving others' consciousnesses - as in "non-consociates", those whom are not met face-to-face - are benign, and that experiences of meeting others' consciousnesses are done so on an equal footing (1972:108-111). Schutz certainly advanced from Weber's sociology by highlighting individuals' different perspectives on the same social realities - and thus the arising of multiple meanings (9, 20-24, 33-34; 1973:207-233), as well as the differences between objective meanings and the changing meanings over time for an individual (1972:123-125, 128) - but he did not develop these issues as being exploitable by one party over another. Thus, although he acknowledged the shock that results from moving between different realities (Giddens, 1977:18), Schutz did not view the wider social context of conflict within which this lies, for his scheme was concerned with meaning, not power. Schutz's social world is a safe one where there would be merely misunderstandings, such as making Mormon friends cups of tea when they say they are thirsty. But the reality of the social world is that everyone experiences it as otherwise: controllers of meanings often pose as dangerous threats to those who are not in control or who have a smaller share of control.

An important element of Schutz's system is the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. The former refers to established social facts which exist independently of any one person; the latter to occasional social facts which depend on their continual usage. In relation to sign usage, Schutz considered these to be the kernel and the fringe or aura, respectively (1972:126). Objective signs are, "abstracted from the living Acts and actions

in which these signs [are] used" (217). For Berger and Luckmann, objectivation was an important process of reality construction, by which institutions are made external to the people who produce them (1967:76-79). What the sociologists of knowledge left unclear was the moment at which a sign or institution or other social product may be considered an object, to have been objectivated. It seems as if their philosophical predicates of object and subject - based on their starting point for analysis on the solitary ego, the subject who encounters others as objects - determined their later, sociological, analysis. Berger and Luckmann projected the phenomenological units of object and subject as social realities. A more realistic view would be to consider the influence of intersubjective realities: how widespread and how powerful they become over time.

Schutz's pervading sense of the benign nature of social relationships continued through his theoretical discussions of the "social world". He characterised the "we-relationship" as a "face-to-face relationship in which the partners are aware of each other and sympathetically participate in each other's lives for however short a time" (1972:164). Whilst it could be argued that Schutz was not attempting to deal with issues of power - a master and a slave may be said to have a "we-relationship" of the kind above, despite the discrepancy that exists between the two - his essentialism cannot bear the weight of continually ignoring these. For him to claim that the "essential characteristics" of others and people's relations with them, mean that there is subjectively no difference between indirect and direct experiences of these others, because those characteristics are kept in the memory (178), is clearly false. Significantly, he remarked that marriage is perceived like this (179). People's experiences, and thus their opinions, of even those closest to them are constantly open to change. The stability with which Schutz imparted the social world acts as a tool to side-step power relations, so that the phenomenological method may be upheld.

This discussion directly relates to criticisms of the emphasis on language and the mind which studies of religion habitually display, that will arise in later chapters in this Thesis. Schutz's phenomenology is just that: humans are seen as meaning-seeking animals concerned in apprehending the social world as it is given to them as egos. He remarked that to reflect on "we-relationships", people need to withdraw from them (1972:167). Yet social encounters are influential during the time in which they are experienced. Reflection afterwards may be viewed as a recognition of what has already changed in an individual's life. For example, Gell's anthropological analysis, *Reflections on a Cut Finger* (1979), located periods of solitude within the world of social relations, to which they are inextricably linked. A person can never properly be considered a solitary ego, as Schutz did; the New Guinean Umeda's times of contemplation are themselves times of taboo, and so are directly concerned with power structures which the individual has little control over (Gell, 1979:133-137). This is not to say that they are not meaningful or actively participated in, and therefore constituted, by the individual, but that this is done within the social reality of authority structures. Schutz developed this former clause, only to neglect the latter. It may be concluded that alongside the mind and language, meaning - and humans as meaning-seeking animals - is another tool of social studies often used to simplify social reality and thus bracket out the structures of power within that.

2. The Sociology of Knowledge II: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann

If Schutz may be seen as a phenomenologist who attempted to appreciate sociology in his analysis, then Berger and Luckmann were sociologists trying to integrate phenomenology (1967:34). Their starting point was the "everyday life-world" of the individual, rather than

the solitary ego as such. They called the reality of this world "reality par excellence", above the multiple spheres of reality which otherwise exist and which entail shock (35). The everyday world is an intersubjective one, where meanings are shared with others (37). The main task of their book was to show how this world is constructed, and in doing so they developed three key stages: objectivation, roles, and internalisation.

Objectivation is the process whereby things, such as institutions, acquire reality objective to individuals (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:77). "Institutionalization [their term for a process that may be viewed as equivalent to objectivation] is incipient in every social situation continuing in time" (73). "Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors" (72). That Berger and Luckmann were primarily sociologists, rather than phenomenologists, may be seen by the fact that early on in their analysis the issue of power was introduced: historicity and control are, they wrote, the two characteristics of institutions (72). What they failed to develop, however, was the theme of control within the process of institutionalisation or objectivation.

As objects, institutions are experienced as possessing their own reality, external to, and coercive upon, individuals (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:76). The authors here referred to Durkheim's notion of social facts, elements he viewed as confronting individuals by their brute existence beyond that of their own realities. These social facts are mirrored in "collective representations", ideas to which the social group give birth (Durkheim, 1968:15-16). Since a group acts together in the realm of the world, collective representations stand for external reality in the minds of all individuals in the group. The specific case of collective representations with which Durkheim was concerned in *The Elementary Forms of*

the Religious Life were the categories of thought, such as space and time (9-20). Traditionally, philosophical treatments placed the origins of these either as immanent in the mind - and therefore not derived from experience, or *a priori* - or as constructed by the mind of the individual (13).

Durkheim's radical new view overcame this philosophical impasse by considering the categories to be collective representations, learnt through the experience of social facts. Put simply, the idea of space to indigenous Australians was, he said, circular because of their circular camps (1968:11-12). Individuals thus transcend themselves by belonging to society (16-17). But Durkheim needed to posit a new relationship in his argument in order to avoid the accusation that, since categories translate social states, they are only metaphors for the real world of nature. He claimed that society, "is a part of nature, and indeed its highest representation" and believed that this closes the philosophical gap between mind and nature (18-19). Durkheim held that the religious life of "primitive" societies would disclose this relationship in the clearest form available and this therefore became the subject of his study (8).

That Durkheim's attempt was not entirely successful is shown by the continuing treatment the problem receives, not least because of its ambiguity as to whether categories of thought are universal or relative with regard to different societies (Collins, 1985:46-53). Hill wrote that Durkheim's dilemma was that he, "tends to treat religious patterns as a symbolic manifestation of 'society', but at the same time to define the most fundamental aspect of society as a set of patterns of moral and religious sentiment" (1973:39). The seeming circularity of this dilemma, that society is both treated as real and ideal (39-40), need not arise if the two elements are posited in dialectical relationship. This overcomes Hill's

difficulty, portrayed in terms of cause and effect, allowing both religion and wider society to stand as material conditions in the world. Issue may then be taken with Durkheim's notion that the social world is a part of nature, rather than with the relationship between ideas and society.

The legacy of Durkheim's views has meant that the social world is now taken to be the source of the mind's thoughts in many social studies. But there remains the problem of innovation of new social facts and the decline of old ones. One response to this is that the rise and fall of social facts is the outcome of conflict between social facts; in other words, they have a life of their own. Another response is that exceptional circumstances, such as charismatic leaders or influential colonists, initiate such changes. The difficulty with the first is that in Durkheim's own terms, social facts only exist because they are held as collective representations in the minds of many individuals. Whilst the second response accords leaders or colonisers a higher ontological status to the led or colonised: although colonisers may be understood to be so in terms of power, in particular military power, this would merely translate the argument into the first response. Again, the solution to this may lie in a reconceptualisation of the problem. If social facts are postulated as objective, over the subjectivity of individuals, then there is a methodological presupposition of two different ontological statuses: subject and object. But if this terminology is abandoned and replaced by the notion of processes which link individuals to each other, rather than processes which result in end products, then social reality can be understood not as the establishment of facts, but of relationships comprised of individuals.

Berger and Luckmann's second stage of explanation concerned individuals' roles in society. Despite their inclination to emphasise the mindedness of the process of objectivation, they

did recognise the importance of the body in this (1967:51). "Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles" (91). But because they viewed institutions, or social facts, as objects which, though external, bear down as realities upon individuals, the roles which arise from experience of them are discrete. This separateness of one role from another, because one institution is separate to others by virtue of each being a different object, is expressed in the idiom of types. The different actions an individual performs in experiencing institutions are typified in this context of a "stock of knowledge" which is shared by a "collectivity of actors" (90-91). These roles are the basis of identities held by people, such as "Frenchman" or "executive" (195). This theory of types was built on Schutz's analysis, which itself drew on Weber.

Contemporaries, which Schutz defined as people who coexist in someone's own time, but whom are not directly experienced face-to-face, are "ideal types" (Schutz, 1972:181-184). The flaw in this discussion is highlighted when Schutz claimed, "*The typical and only the typical is homogeneous*, and it is always so", and that the "objective meaning context" can be used to define subjective experiences of an ideal type (186). Schutz may be interpreted here as meaning that types are objects, which can be acted towards in only one behavioural manner. This may be extended to say that types breed typical responses, thus structuring experience outwards from the institutions to which they belong. Schutz's ideal-typical formulation, lying at the heart of his "scientific model of the social world", created a universe of "pure rational acts" made on the basis of "perfectly clear and distinct knowledge" (1973:40-45). Whilst he recognised that this does not concur with "actions within the common-sense experience of everyday life in the social world" (42) - although he did apply it to economic action (136) - its very presentation as part of social analysis portrays it as a standard to which that world is compared. This suggests similarities with Plato's world of Ideas as in

his simile of the cave (Melling, 1988:99-103). Popper described this as "methodological essentialism", "the theory that it is the aim of science [including social science] to reveal essences and to describe them by means of definitions" (1966 [1945]:32), which he believed remained to haunt western analytical thought.

The sociologists' of knowledge view of types proffered a far too simplistic view of the world. It is tempting to write that this view is childish, for games children play are often role plays in which types such as policeman, nurse and farmer figure. This temptation should, however, be resisted, for it is suggestive to remember that these are governed by adults, being learning games which teach children a certain representation of the social world. This programme of socialisation suggested by Schutz's analysis (and see Berger and Luckmann, 1967:150) will never be morally neutral. As Durkheim recognised, conformity in categories and collective representations is a "moral conformity" (1968:17). Social learning is a moral programme, designed to uphold certain interpretations of reality. For children, role playing helps teach respect of, and the recognition of powers in, particular roles. It was to the detriment of sociology that the sociologists of knowledge came to represent the social world in a similar manner.

Although types of contemporaries may be conceived homogeneously, it is more important to recognise and discuss the ways in which this perception can vary over time and vary between different individuals and groups. Further, contemporaries are never just faceless images of types: they are represented through real people, as well as in reports about them, and in the fictional media such as books, magazines, television and cinema. The pictures held of them is therefore more likely to be heterogeneous, complicated and confused; various aspects will come to the fore depending on context. It may be that one source of

power which groups can develop is in constructing and maintaining a homogeneous representation of types amongst its members, which is common in prejudiced organisations such as racist and nationalist groups, as suggested by Ignatieff's paper on Balkan nationalism (1994). The strength of such constructions lies in keeping these other people out of contact so that they cannot be seen to be varied and thus to bring into question any heterogeneous view held of them. If sociologists are to seriously take notions of the incompleteness of socialisation and of multiple perceptions of reality, then they must not seek to rigidly categorise and typify reality themselves. An important point in this will be to view language less as an ideal construct and more as a tool containing variable significations.

The third stage of Berger and Luckmann's analysis may be seen as the third moment in the social construction of reality. This is internalisation, whereby objective events come to have meaning for the individual. The first two moments are externalisation and objectivation of reality - although each moment is simultaneous with the others, not sequentially processed - but it is only with the third that an individual can be said to have become a member of society (1967:149). The internalisation of objective reality is a process of socialisation, in which language is used to stabilise people's senses of subjectivity by integrating their different zones of everyday life into meaningful whole (53-55). Language is thus seen as central to reality-construction, as Schutz had proposed in his sociology (1973:264, 349). The use of language as an activity has also been recognised in anthropological studies, for example by Malinowski (1948:246).

According to Berger and Luckmann, there are two sorts of socialisation, primary and secondary. Primary socialisation makes people members of society and is emotional as well as cognitive (1967:150-151). The world internalised here is represented as "necessary", for

the individual plays no part in its choice (154-155). This world, also that of "first order" objectifications, is one legitimised by a "symbolic universe" which places signifiers of meaning beyond the reality of the everyday life-world (110-113). Whilst Berger and Luckmann recognised that, "*All* social reality is precarious. *All* societies are constructions in the face of chaos" (121), they did not treat social reality as involving dissonant elements in its very existence, yet that is something which must be so if, as they said, socialisation is never complete (166). Secondary socialisation is a result of the division of labour, being "role-specific knowledge", and may itself lead to problems of consistency with primary socialisation (158-160). It is, however, more susceptible to dissonance, being less "deeply rooted" in consciousness - for example, the emotions are not necessarily involved (161, 167).

Although Berger and Luckmann's conceptualisation of this secondary process is a more helpful way to probe social reality in general, they could formulate it only in a lifeless, weak manner. To view some arenas of social life, such as paid work, as secondary socialisations and therefore as devoid of emotional significance for individuals, is to misunderstand the lasting effect such activities have on people. Like Marcuse (1968), they confused social criticism of employment with social analysis of it. That Berger and Luckmann relegated many socialisations as secondary goes to show that they were partisan in their approach: they represented an ideal world of all-encompassing significance, because this was seen by them as the most objective element in comparison to the most subjective element, that of individual existence, or Schutz's solitary ego. For each of these authors the social world was collaboratively constructed by the mutual representations of numbers of individuals. By contrast, an approach that focused on the relations between people would view a symbolic universe as constituted through those various socialisations in which people are involved.

3. *The Sociology of Knowledge and the Sociology of Religion*

It was to the study of religion that Berger and Luckmann turned, as had Weber before them, to extend and exemplify their analysis. There were two reasons for this. First, they viewed religion as the most important sphere of social life entered into by humans. Second, secularisation, as loss of traditional church power, was seen by them as the most important social issue of the contemporary world. Through tackling the phenomenon of religion, the sociologists of knowledge laid their more abstract arguments open to concrete criticism.

Berger and Luckmann believed that religion plays a central role in the construction and maintenance of universes, that being one of its main functions (1963:422). The sociology of knowledge's focus is on "legitimizing processes" (423) of the social world to the individual, where, "Using Alfred Schutz's expression, the individual's world-taken-for-granted must be legitimated over and over again" (422). In their paper *The Sociology of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*, Berger and Luckmann were unequivocal in chastising sociology for failing to appreciate the importance of religion in society, despite this being of central concern to the founders of the discipline, such as Durkheim and Weber (419-420). They attempted to remove the sub-discipline of the sociology of religion from its "somewhat eccentric preserve" (420), and found that the crisis of religion in present society was an ideal opportunity to do so. In "a modern pluralistic society in which different legitimating systems compete for the patronage of potential consumers of *Weltanschauungen* [worldviews]", the sociology of religion needs to be broadened from specific church-based projects, as well as "any scientific ideology that may exist within the field of sociology itself" (424). In conformity with their methodological bias towards the benign relations that

exist between individuals and their social worlds, Berger and Luckmann interpreted pluralism to possess a "market character" where the individual has "the relative freedom of the consumer" (424). In future individual writings, these authors put forward their own developments on these views; it is instructive to compare their themes to demonstrate flaws in their commonly held sociological presuppositions.

Luckmann attempted to articulate a series of related concepts in explaining how functions "to integrate the routines of everyday life and to legitimate its crises" have an "essentially religious" nature (1967:27). Since this role of religion is a fundamental, all-pervading social function, it need not only be carried out by traditional church religion, but also by other phenomena, which Luckmann called invisible religion. To explain this he developed the concepts of symbolic universe, world view, and sacred cosmos. "Symbolic universes are socially objectivated systems of meaning that refer, on the one hand, to the world of everyday life and point, on the other hand, to a world that is experienced as transcending everyday life" (1967:43). Such a universe makes the subjective experiences of the individual meaningful, allowing a process of "individuation of consciousness" into social "Self" (44-46). The world view is the configuration of meaning which underlies a historical social order, acting as a "reservoir of significance" for the individual. Recalling Durkheim, he called it an "*elementary social form of religion*", which is universal in human society (53). Lastly, the sacred cosmos acts as the symbolic representation of hierarchy of significance underlying the world view (70-71). As the sacred cosmos is to the world view, so the "religious layer of individual consciousness" is to personal identity. Luckmann believed that this three-fold scheme provided plausibility for the individual to be able to function completely in the everyday life world, although this always remains precarious (65, 74-76).

In developing such a systematic theory to account for the importance of religion in society, Luckmann seems not only to have confused the sociology of knowledge approach, but to have embroiled himself in logical ambiguities. It is not clear how each of his three key concepts relate to each other. It appears as if the objective symbolic universe is a particular religious tradition's concrete representation of beliefs and actions, with which individuals engage: it teaches them that there is another sphere of reality which is more important to their own lives. The world view, which Luckmann said is a nonspecific "unitary matrix of meaning" (1967:54), is a broader conception of meaning which lies beneath a variety of symbolic universes or religious traditions. Further, beneath this lies the sacred cosmos, an even deeper level of meaning which articulates the matrix of the world view. This interpretation of Luckmann's awkward and unclear scheme leads to the charge that he is guilty of always seeking to explain by further explanation. Each new element requires more theoretical work to integrate it into the system, leaving an unsatisfactory regression of understanding. In needing to take up issues of symbolism, world view, and sacrality, which indeed cannot be ignored, into the sociology of knowledge, which is a totalising methodology, Luckmann was forced to develop one level of meaning after another.

The pitfalls inherent in Luckmann's schema especially arose when he attempted to discover how secular society has affected those elements. The sacred cosmos is forced out of influence by economic and political institutions, when social conditions change (1967:82-85). But if the above interpretation is accurate, then symbolic universes and the world view must lose their force if the sacred cosmos loses its own. And if that happens, they have changed in order to objectivate those social institutions which Luckmann understood to be simultaneously undermining them. This is similar to the theological position held by Cox, who argued that in the western world Christianity laid the foundations for its own demise

through secularisation (1968:31-46). Luckmann, on the one hand, was trying to argue for the fundamental role of religion or religiosity through all social processes - and thus of the continued importance of symbolism, world view, and the sacred - whilst, on the other hand, he considered these obsolete and impotent in the modern world. This confusion remained even in his much later essay, *Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?* (1990), in which he argued that in secular society, subjective experience of transcendence has become a private affair.

Luckmann was forced into this predicament because of the methodology of phenomenology itself, which starts from the point of view of the individual confronted by an objective other, in this case an objective society. Then, when the sociological development of this view does not fit the facts of social reality, it is seen to be that reality which has altered, rather than the legitimacy of the method in the first place. The problem would never have arisen if meaning was not taken to link the discrete entities of subject and object, but to help account for the performances between people. Unfortunately, in not recognising this fault in his methodology, Luckmann continued to propagate its consequences by positing the plurality of institutions as the fundamental condition of modern society (1967:95). Notions of the facticity of institutions, and the individual's construction and maintenance of them, lie as a heavy burden on the plausibility of the theories of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann.

In his writings dealing with the application of the sociology of knowledge to the sociology of religion, Berger (1970 [1969] and 1973 [1967], published in the United States as *The Sacred Canopy*) developed the concept of plausibility structure to account for how the social world is legitimised for and by the individual. In particular, plausibility structures deal with the

issue of theodicy, answering the existential crises which problems of evil, such as suffering and death, pose to people (1970:40-41; 1973:68-75). Theodicy was a central concern of Weber (1966:138-150), who analysed religious responses of salvation to it in terms of ideology, theology and institutions of social movements. According to Berger, the sociology of knowledge leads to the conclusion that what people find credible will depend upon the social support these claims receive, and so the plausibility structure is in fact a social base for religious theodicies (1970:50-64; 1973:54). Like Luckmann, Berger found that secularisation has meant a diminishment of the power of institutional church religion, whilst the processes which these provided for are still prevalent but established through new media. There are, in contemporary society, a plurality of plausibility structures (1973:57-58). But Berger, unlike Luckmann, withheld the right to call these religions, since they do not worship the transcendence that results from the construction of society (1970:108).

In an appendix to *The Social Reality of Religion*, Berger criticised Luckmann's definition of religion, which he viewed as far too encompassing (1973:179-180). In an earlier article, Berger had equated the sociology of religion with "an ecology of the sacred", in which, "the social groupings that are religiously based can be understood as forming themselves *around* the location of the sacred" (1954:475). In contrast to Luckmann, this scheme maintained the institutional basis of religious experience, locating churches and sects either as further or nearer to "spirit" (474-477). The strong point of agreement between Berger and Luckmann, however, remained their "anthropological" starting point, by which is meant basic notions of what it means to be human, and which therefore lie as the foundations of phenomenology (Berger, 1973:177-178). It is this base which, Berger said, distinguishes both his and Luckmann's "conception of functionality" - in which religion is defined in

terms of the dynamic or dialectic of humans with their environment, an approach utilised by Durkheim - from both substantive definitions, such as by Weber, and "contemporary structural functionalism" (1973:176-177). This functionality, however, places phenomenology dangerously close to theological positions, since the transcendence of the social environment to the individual may be interpreted in terms of spiritual transcendence, such as represented by the concept of sacredness. The relationship between phenomenological social studies and theology was an issue of which Berger was aware but, as seen above as regards Eliade, the two are easily confused (see Davies, 1984a:25-26).

4. A Critique of Meaning in the Sociology of Knowledge

The crux of the issue which the sociologists of knowledge raised is whether a focus on meaning is a plausible method for social analysis. This debate is an important one, for Davies wrote that the concept of meaning has become a unifying paradigm for social studies since the nineteen-sixties (1984:2-5). According to Davies, "man is a meaning maker and utilizes religious processes for the construction of ultimately secure spheres of certainty" (15; and see Greeley, 1973:55-83). So, "The mode of meaning places mundane and supernatural concerns on a continuum of significance as far as the student of religion is concerned" (Davies, 1984:2), although with this viewpoint, it is necessary to ask at just what point an order of meaning attains the significance of an order of salvation (6). It is, however, the ambiguous nature of the concept of meaning which allowed Davies to assume that salvation processes are universal as the drive for meaning (1), and so not just another order of meaning as he also believed, and which have allowed the concept to become paradigmatic. In Schutz's analysis, meaning is a way or manner of apprehending the world.

Meaning is not a motive for acting, as Weber had misunderstood it to be, but a way of linking motives to actions, in what Schutz called a meaning-context.

This concept of meaning is different to the drives for meaning which Berger and Luckmann articulated in the notion of plausibility structure, defined by Davies as a "social base for particular suspension of doubt without which the definition of reality in question cannot be maintained in consciousness" (1984:29). Plausibility structure appears more as a motive than a meaning, which is why it could act, in Berger's terminology, as functional analysis. A plausibility structure, or world view, or sacred cosmos, or salvational process, is not a manner of appreciating the world, but a motive for other results. Yet if these other results are understood to be meanings or meaningful relationships to the world, then Schutz's position, and really the whole phenomenological base of their analyses, is undermined. People are not driven to view the world in a meaningful manner by establishing meaningful constructions in the first place. Either meaning is an established manner of perception, making people's actions understandable, or it is not. The double-sided use of the concept of meaning by the sociologists of knowledge, as a manner in Schutz's sense and as a motive in Weber's, leads them never to be content with single levels of explanation, but always to be regressing to new levels.

In a paper attempting to redress the balance in the sociology of religion towards concepts of power, Beckford (1983) showed how power has been treated under the rubric of meaning, and thus devalued. "It is highly significant", wrote Beckford, "that the experience and perception of power in human relationships is not selected by Berger as one of the signals of transcendence [in the modern secular world - see Berger, 1970]. The reason for this surprising omission may be that he subsumes "power" under his concept of "order"

which, in turn, is subsumed under the concept of "meaning"" (1983:13). This secondary consideration of power - as "the background "noise" of the social system" - means Berger's analysis is disembodied and abstract (13). Beckford similarly criticised Luckmann and phenomenologists such as Hans Mol (1976). These writers, "each encourage us to think of religion as primarily a matter of knowledge susceptible to understanding in the same way as other cognitive products - in particular, language" (Beckford, 1983:12). By contrast, Beckford insisted that religious people respond to sources of power, not meaning (29), and characterised the sorts of powers that exist in religious social contexts (18-29). As he pointed out, "Meaning systems are certainly objectivated, but it is an empirical question whether men actually succeed in making sense of their lives in terms of them" (14). This repeats Giddens' criticism in *New Rules of Sociological Method* that Schutz "deals with action as meaning rather than with action as *Praxis* - the involvement of actors with the practical realization of interests, including the material transformation of nature through human activity", as a consequence of which, "the centrality of power in social life" is left unrecognised (1977:53). As noted above, the social world is not a benign one, where people freely choose between systems of meaning; rather, many actions are coerced or issue from long established behavioural patterns.

The cognitive anthropological tradition, that has exerted such influence in the United States, may be seen in the same light as the sociology of knowledge. D'Andrade wrote, "Meanings represent the world, create cultural entities, direct one to do certain things, and evoke certain feelings" (1986:96). Although he recognised that culture consists of more than knowledge, his view that "social agreement" creates the constituents of culture (90-91), parallels the sociologist of knowledge reliance on mutual representation. Geertz's paper, *Religion as a Cultural System* (1966), likewise rests upon an understanding of symbols as

embodied meanings. His claim that these act "to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men" (1966:8-12), again diverts attention from the power structures in the social world, replacing them with ideas to which individuals must relate by using their minds, rather than social relations using their bodies. This concern also dominates Batson and Ventis' social-psychological study of religious experience (1982). Defining religion in terms of coping with "existential questions" of life and death (1982:7), they relegated the social context of this experience to "publicly observable "tracks"", which are symptoms of religiousness (18). Subsuming social power under cognition, this tradition in fact limits its own analysis of the role of the mind and the significance of meaning, for by ignoring the complexities of the social world, these can only be viewed in a weak, static manner that predetermines its own argument and evidence. The application of this to contemporary spirituality, for example, is shown by Bellah's analysis of new religions as the response to a crisis of meaning in modernity (1976). Claiming that, "out of the shattered hopes of the sixties there has emerged a cynical privatism, a narrowing of sympathy and concern to the smallest possible circle, that is truly frightening" (1976:342), Bellah effectively ruled out detailed analysis of individuals' lives in their full social contexts; the world of social power is typified as it is dismissed.

Some concluding points may be made about this topic by considering some of the assumptions of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty, who continued Husserl's philosophical enterprise, wrote that the phenomenological method describes rather than explains (1969:14). Moreover, what it describes are essences, by which Merleau-Ponty meant the general terms, genres, or types that lie behind the reality of things in the world (22-25). But this is not what Weber meant by a type: in his scheme, ideal types were a sociological construction of various positions or resources of social phenomena, which did not act alone

in any single social situation, but mixed together in the real world (Hill, 1973:150). Types could be institutions, such as church and sect, or cultural forms, such as charismatic and legal authorities. Schutz confused this sociological pragmatic undertaking with the methodological essentialism of the phenomenologists. Although types are not concrete things for either of these positions, Weber's work employed types as tools to understand the social world, rather than as prescriptive models which condition that world.

Because phenomenology attempts to describe individuals' apprehensions of their worlds, rather than explaining these as Weber's sociology sought, it claims to be value free (Sharpe, 1975:220). Further, phenomenology claims to "bracket out" the question of existence, by the attitude of "*epoché*", in order to relate the observer's essence to that which is observed (Sharpe, 1975:223-224; Turner, 1984:54). The resulting "eidetic reduction" is supposed to imply, "an intuitive grasp of the essentials of a situation in its wholeness" (Sharpe, 1975:224; and see Merleau-Ponty, 1969:24). That this essentialism in fact lays the basis of determinism, may be seen in the notion of "*entelecheia*", the course of events in which the essence is realised by its manifestations (Sharpe, 1975:237). The subjectivity which always exists in individuals' relations of the world, however, cannot be bracketted out, not least because they analyse the world by utilising their bodies, not just their minds (see Sharpe, 1975:248). The whole phenomenological enterprise, then, is called into question: when considering phenomenologies of religion, such as by Eliade, van der Leeuw, Mol and Otto, it must be asked what values these writers hold in their analyses.

Bryan Turner held that phenomenology is unsociological, because it ignores governments of the body which social structures hold over the individual, and thus cannot appreciate the social construction of the self (1984:54, 57). This is a damning indictment of the

sociologists of knowledge, since knowledge of social constructions of the world is what they base their entire project upon. Turner showed how, for example, Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment did not in fact overcome an emphasis on cognition, for here it is used to mean that the body is an embodiment of consciousness (52-53). Meaning, rather than existence, comes to be the only question of importance in phenomenology (54). Merleau-Ponty's insistence that there is no dualism between subject and object, may be understood in the same light (1969:28-30; and see Warnock, 1976:146-150 and Sharpe, 1975:231). This abandonment of dualism is not an attempt to discuss those things which involve both subject and object - such as individuals and their worlds - in the form of power structures, but to be able to subsume objects into subjects so that such issues are no longer relevant. In conclusion, a phenomenology or sociology of knowledge which tries to analyse the social world as the establishment of mutual representations is a false attempt to cover, with philosophical concepts and models, that with which it cannot come to terms.

The intention in this part has been to show that individuals' performances are ones, as Giddens said, of praxis (1977:53): knowledge of the world comes about in its utilisation. Practices take place within the material conditions that govern individuals' realities, but is also linked with them in a dialectical manner: the world may be altered through the praxis of one reality against another. It is important, then, to understand that religion itself acts as a material condition, providing a social base by which to act in the world which can make a difference to individuals' lives. So meanings should be viewed as part of the structures of power with which individuals engage in performance. The fieldwork presented in this Thesis will show how knowledge, far from being the primary actor in social life, is open to continual reinterpretation as power relations shift in a differentiated world. The third part in this chapter continues to build upon ideas of how people and groups are related, in order

that the fieldwork may be placed within a theoretical understanding that is consistent and helpful.

PART III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELVES AND SOCIETY

1. Confrontations with Power

As has been seen, the sociologists of knowledge unduly disregarded power when considering people's relation to society and to events which act as shocks that alter individuals' lives. Basso pointed out how important such times are for individuals' biographies: they force a reorientation in practical engagement and a reconstruction of ideology (1989:2). Such changes are, she wrote, processes of figuring out rather than of legitimising or justifying what is happening. Her characterisation of this as a dialogic, not monologic, process may be seen as equivalent to this 'Thesis' dialectical interpretation of social life. These changes do not involve the individual alone, even if they are dominated by lone practices, for interpretations of experience are shared with others, which draw new moral boundaries and personal allegiances (Basso, 1989:18). The groups in the Nottinghamshire Network gave much time for the recounting of personal biography, in what Basso called "speech-centred action" which is so important for the formation of self-identity (19-21).

To individuals, new experiences may come quickly and dramatically, giving rise to the illusion of spontaneity and individual creativeness, represented by new self-identities and worldviews. They react to these new realities by engaging with them through activity. According to van der Leeuw, a religious worldview, or "*Weltanschauung*", is never just a point of view, but primarily a participation; there are indeed, then, as many worlds as there are human beings (1938:543). This is an important phenomenological position: to represent

the world as it appears to individuals, not just how they are perceived by social observers. But this stance must be tempered by a recognition of the role of the latter. For in trying to understand the worldviews of others, social observers necessarily place them alongside their understandings of those of many others and alongside their own understandings of reality. It is this that presents problems for phenomenological analysis. There may be a world for each individual, but these various worlds are linked together through social structures. And it is these structures, not worldviews in themselves, which orientate individuals to reality.

Van der Leeuw documented a number of ways to the world which can be found amongst religious phenomena. One of these was creative domination, characterised by the twin attitudes of magic and myth. This way appears to be intended as the basic orientation of humans to their world, since van der Leeuw likened magic and myth to the two rails of the one track on which people are always travelling (1938:553). Magic is confrontation with the world: "So man too assumes the offensive against the powers: he overcomes them by the main force of his will: he creates them as it were" (546). When this struggle has a temporary respite then the mythical attitude arises, which confers form on the brute powers which have been encountered. Through this process, individuals exercise "Power", "Will", and "Form", which are basic to any participation in the world (545). By describing attitudes that may be taken towards the world, van der Leeuw initiated an important discussion that has consequences beyond his limiting analysis of sacred power. It is useful to explicate in more detail both his and Durkheim's views of the relationship between social reality and individuals.

Power, for van der Leeuw, was extraneous to individuals, who find themselves confronted

by it throughout life, particularly in their religious lives (1938:23-24), an issue explored ethnographically by Lienhardt (1970). Powers, even those exercised by individuals, are manifestations of Power, the universal and impersonal subject which permeates the world (van der Leeuw, 1938:29-30). As experienced by humans, things and contexts either have power or lack it - this is linked by van der Leeuw to the classic dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Sacredness is a mystery, and thus taboos arise around it, acting as a "categorical imperative" concerning them (47-49). The other side to van der Leeuw's characterisation of humans as being acted upon by Power is his view that they give forms to the different powers which touch them. This process is a social one, such that, in effect, sacredness is only experienced by individuals in "intimate community" (83). The dialectical nature of this process means that van der Leeuw's argument is not sequential: individuals are not first apprehended by Power, causing them to congregate together in order to give form to it. Rather, individuals' experiences of power are within social contexts and although Power is objectified as beyond people and form, it is only felt within these two. As such, the first two parts to *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* - "The Object of Religion" and "The Subject of Religion" - are abstractions of the religious life of people, where object, as Power and powers, and subject, as individuals and their communities, are fundamentally linked.

Van der Leeuw's approach has many similarities to Durkheim's analysis of power as society acting impersonally upon its members, formulated through his critique of theories of totemism (1968:167-239). For Durkheim, totems and gods were personifications of clan groupings, to which respect and obedience is due. This personification is needed because society is not a concrete object and so cannot act as a tie for "abstract emotions" (220). Respect is therefore transferred from society to the object of the clan totem: "social action follows ways that are too circuitous and obscure, and employs psychical mechanisms that

are too complex to allow the ordinary observer to see whence it comes" (209). Durkheim called the group and its individual members "moral beings" (223), because they are the constituents of society, from which these imperatives extend. The obedience that follows from such respect to the totem results from its governing "moral powers". Morality, for Durkheim, was therefore no abstract set of rules, but grounded in the material of social life. As the authority of such morality, religion is present in both material and spiritual forms, acting, "like the womb from which come all the leading germs of human civilization" (223).

Like van der Leeuw, then, Durkheim articulated his theory through a subject-object dichotomy, where the seat of power resides in something external to the individual. This thing is posited as sacred, although Durkheim recognised that as a force, sacrality may be present to different degrees in objects (1968:188). But the weakness in his argument arises from reliance on psychological states to explain how groups are bound together through rituals, a theory he built on Robertson Smith's analysis of sacrifice (Beidelman, 1974:56-61). For Durkheim, society acts as an object that demands a psychological response towards its personification as a totem or god. At the same time, by participation in this joint enterprise, individuals feel themselves to be powerful and are inspired even to the extent that they will sacrifice themselves for the sake of this object or ideal:

"the powers which are thus conferred, though purely ideal, act as though they were real; they determine the conduct of men with the same degree of necessity as physical forces. The Arunta [a central Australian tribe and its members] who has been rubbed with his churinga [an Aruntan sacred ritual instrument] feels himself stronger; he is stronger. If he has eaten the flesh of an animal which, though perfectly healthy, is forbidden to him, he will feel himself sick, and may die of it. Surely the soldier who falls while

defending his flag does not believe that he sacrifices himself for a bit of cloth. This is all because social thought, owing to the imperative authority that is in it, has an efficacy that individual thought could never have; by the power which it has over our minds, it can make us see things in whatever light it pleases; it adds to reality or deducts from it according to the circumstances" (1968:228).

By making psychological responses an integral part of his sociology, what Giddens called, "the reduction of human agency to the 'internalization of values'" (1977:21), Durkheim not only flouted one of his own basic principles of sociological method (1968:231), but needed to introduce a metaphysical element, the notion of collective representations. This is the name he gave to the objects that as images are shared by all members of the group, demanding their respect. They therefore act as conduits for society, which, as the totality of individuals, figures psychologically as a "collective mind" for its members (433-434). Society is therefore greater than the sum of its parts. Although Durkheim's emphasis on society as an active force drove his social analysis beyond that of his predecessors in religious studies, it cannot act as a dynamic model for it posits too great a gap between human agency and social forces. His theory is unable to account for the establishment, maintenance and change of societies, drawing instead a mechanistic model for the interrelation between mind and society. Whilst this bridged the gap between these two - as intended by his Introduction to *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, as discussed above - it did not do so in an adequately sociological way and the classic dichotomy that he tried to resolve was duplicated in terms of that which exercises power and that on which it is exercised. Like the future sociologists of knowledge, Durkheim did not properly conceive of society as a partial construction that was mutable. His theory therefore does

not allow for individuals working within various realities to make and break career paths. Yet a theory to account for such work is needed if understanding of the people in this religious network is to be reached.

The interruption of one social reality by another, and the resulting shock to the individuals concerned, although couched in terms of meaning, is a theme within Schutz' sociology that is of great relevance to this debate (Schutz, 1973:231; see Giddens, 1977:18). These interruptions can be taken account of in a number of ways, but may not be ignored. Assimilation, toleration or diminishment may take place, but each of these requires an appreciation of new realities through work and therefore an openness that may lead to the establishment of new realities and career paths. The issues of self-identity that are raised by this may be usefully considered through the more recent writings of Anthony Giddens.

2. Reflexivity

Modernity and Self-Identity (Giddens, 1994 [1991]) was intended by Giddens to be a corrective to his previous emphasis on the structures of society. The result was an application of his key concept of risk to how individuals live in the late modern age. In *The Consequences of Modernity* (1993 [1990]), Giddens continued the Parsonian tradition of focusing upon the institutions of society as interrelated to the motives of actors. He sought to show how, in the late twentieth century, societies are developing into a form to which the structures of modernity have led. This form is new in the history of humankind and cannot be adequately grasped either by "uni-dimensional analysis" - such as by Durkheim, who concentrated on industrial order, or Weber, who considered the rationalised control of

information - or by Parsons' conception of society as bounded and with a high degree of coherency in which it is sociology's place to resolve the order of that entity (1993:12-14).

The modernist form of society must instead, wrote Giddens, be understood as radically discontinuous from traditional society and order (1993:3), with a dynamism derived from three elements. These are, firstly, the separation of time and space, with their recombination in forms allowing precise calculation and reference with respect to each other (16-21). This process of delocalisation allows the next two. Secondly, then, is the disembedding of social systems, the ""lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (21). This especially applies to symbolic tokens, such as money and political legitimacy, and expert or technical systems (22). Thirdly, these social relations are reflexively ordered and reordered through the continual input of new knowledge. This means that in modernity, traditions receive justification and identity only insofar as they are subject to being potentially revised by new knowledge (38-39). As such, sociology in fact plays a "pivotal position" through its concepts, theories, and empirical information on the social world (41): *"Modernity is itself deeply and intrinsically sociological"* (43).

Giddens' explanation of modernity as it has been created through its very own consequences, leads to the exposition that, "Modernity is inherently globalising" (1993:63). Trust is an essential part of living in such a society, for it is the only workable attitude to adopt towards the disembedded and delocalised social contexts which are everywhere prevalent (29). The faith that is thus placed in others and systems, means that individuals are oriented towards "human moral imperatives" rather than "religious cosmologies" and as such, in modernity, risk has replaced fate (34). Related to trust is the "ontological

security" that individuals build up through consistently being able to deal as actors with their surrounding social and material environments (92). Giddens isolated three environments of trust in modernity: personal relationships, abstract systems, and future-oriented, counter-factual thought as a mode of connecting the past with the present. Likewise, there are three environments of risk: the threat emanating from modernity's reflexivity, that of human violence from the industrialisation of war, and the threat of personal meaninglessness, this being the first threat applied to the self (102).

Giddens' rendition of life in the contemporary western world is one-sided in that he concentrated upon the need to trust, to the detriment of considering contexts in which trust is accorded. An individual need not exercise much social power in order to be trusted: the division of labour means that whatever job is being carried out, other parts of the productive system become dependent upon it. Further, Giddens over-emphasised both the amount and influence of situations involving trust and risk; for many people involvement in society, in terms of capital wielded, can be small. A consequence of this is that neither trust nor risk is necessarily a strong determinant of self-identity, even if they are prevalent in an individual's social contexts. But Giddens' description of contemporary life in his later volume needs a strong conception of risk in order to base a notion of human agency as one of informed, free choices. Here, individuals are represented as beings who, confronted with overwhelming situations of risk (1994:114-126), empower themselves through knowledge to utilise social contexts for their own purposes: "The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible [...] We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves" (75). This leads to the choice of a lifestyle:

"Lifestyle is not a term which has much applicability to traditional cultures, because it implies choice within a plurality of possible options, and is

'adopted' rather than 'handed down'. Lifestyles are routinised practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favoured milieux for encountering others; but the routines followed are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self-identity" (81).

Instead of addressing the experience of living, Giddens' later volume merely pasted the concepts of his previous work onto conceptions of the self. In this sense, he did not drive his theory beyond the confines of analysis of institutions, which remain monoliths within individuals' lives, and therefore did not apply the insightful criticisms of Durkheim and Parsons which he made in *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1977:93-98). For it is not these institutions that are shown to be mutable rather than the selves with which they come into contact. Thus, although Giddens appeared to move beyond the Parsonian preoccupation with institutions, this theory of institutions was left largely unchanged. But the value of the sociologists of knowledge was in showing that institutions and society can only be understood with reference to the human agencies that produce and maintain them. Unfortunately Giddens did not seem able to apply his own critique of Parsons' concept of power, as being held through overt consensus, ignoring conflicts and covert influences (1974 [1968]). By viewing power in terms of self empowerment (1994:138-141, 191-196), Giddens tended to recourse to psychoanalytic and existential theory in order to explain the state of social life (55, 227).

For Giddens, the interconnection between personal relations and the impersonality of abstract systems entailed that trust must be worked upon, involving, "a mutual process of self-disclosure" (1993:121). Rather than being an individualism resulting from the

breakdown of old communal orders, Giddens viewed this process as a concern for "self-fulfilment" which can be related to a "spiritual quest" (122-124). This analysis is very close to New Age studies, as in Luckmann (1990:135-137), but especially that of Heelas, who viewed the reflexivity of the self as its enduring characteristic (1996:135-177). Heelas' extended use of Louise L. Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life* (Hay, 1987 [1984]), a best-selling book that teaches self-love and self-acceptance for resolution of life's problems, parallels Giddens' emphasis on the themes to be found within a book by Janette Rainwater, *Self-Therapy* (1989; Giddens, 1994:70-80). The fact that the manner in which these books may be used by their readerships is not addressed, did not concern either Heelas or Giddens. One way to advance analysis of the relation between individuals and societies is to focus on reactions to conflict and discern what resources are utilised in this and thus to see how both individuals and institutions exercise agency. One way into this debate is to look at the process of socialisation and the social selves that are thereby created.

3. The Body and Socialisation

The following sections attempt to integrate theory of performance to that of power relations, in further discussion of the relationship between individuals and society, in other words the issue of social contextualisation. In such a way, the "peculiarly disembodied" conception of people found in many social studies, to which McGuire drew attention (1990:283), is addressed. To do this, a "social anthropology of affect" is used to show the importance of emotions in the social and intellectual dimensions of life that together constitute self-identity (Epstein, 1978:xv). The relevance of this is to be found in the fact that expressions of self-identity lie at the heart of what it means to be human. This issue

is explored through a series of theoretical building blocks, beginning with a look at Marcel Mauss' essay on socialisation, *Body Techniques* (1979, from a lecture given in 1934).

Mauss attempted to present a theory of action as a means to delineate the realm of the social world from those of psychology and biology. Socialisation, by which the individual becomes part of this world, occurs through learnt actions which direct psychological and biological needs:

"It is precisely this notion of the prestige of the person who performs the ordered, authorized, tested action vis-a-vis the imitating individual that contains all the social element. The imitative action which follows contains the psychological and biological element. But the whole, the ensemble, is conditioned by the three elements indissolubly mixed together" (1979:102).

Mauss applied this to social habits that he called "body techniques", classifying them according to sex, age, efficiency and transmission, as well as biographically in terms of what individuals experience from birth to death (104-110). Thus, how an individual walks, swims and runs, are techniques resulting from "collective and individual practical reason" (101). Mauss here raised issues of socialisation and social competence, by which individuals learn to perform appropriately in different contexts. But this cannot be viewed simply as the tailoring of psychological and biological traits to social models of performance, as Erving Goffman demonstrated in his study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1971).

In his exhaustive sociological critique of the "theatrical performances" of "institutional social life", Goffman (1971:ix-x) explored his view that socialisation into an acting role is not carried out by a social teacher on a non-social pupil. Instead, the person being taught already exists in a social reality, and holds a large repertoire of social knowledge, such as

body techniques, which will be needed in the new role (63-65). Goffman stated, "In short, we all act better than we know how" (64). In other words, the physical body is a social body, which performs only with socially learnt actions, an issue which Mary Douglas explored (1973:93-112). This means that the human body is an informed body, in the sense that it holds knowledge. The role of socialisation is to place actors in contexts where such knowledge is displayed, rather than teaching them how to act in the first place.

Socialisation thus refers to the transformation from one social reality to another. In an analysis of Zen meditation, Preston pointed out how many studies of conversion focus on situational factors of, for example, social marginality, thus neglecting the "physiological impact and symptoms of meditation and thus miss an important aspect of learning to become a member" (1988:55-57). This learning is based in people's experiences of their bodies (63-64), which cannot be fully understood through rules established by the social groups in which this takes place (82-91). A social learning of the body, then, is not a prelude to performance; it is a performance. This is further explored in the work of Richard Schechner.

The transformative nature of performance lies at the core of Schechner's book, *Performance Theory* (1988). Although he trained within the western theatrical tradition, the thesis which Schechner put forward is, as the title suggests, very broad, encompassing a general theory of socio-political action (1988:190). It must be remembered that Schechner's main concern was with ritual performances in a formal setting, even though he also referred to sports, games, and play, and as such he operated with a narrower sense of performance than does this Thesis, despite his closing remarks (282-283). For if performance is the context in which bodily actions occur, then all actions, not just those in ritual, are performances, with

consequences for the social world. Explicitly drawing on Victor Turner's work, Schechner stated that performances are experimental and liminal, yet bounded by conventions which contain their danger (xiv). The form of performance, he wrote, is to stand as a critique of existence by drawing on fantasy to set up an idealised alternative (10-11). But Schechner pointed out that this idealised critique is performed in an actual way: it exists as a social reality for the performers, in the way that, for example, shamanic healings are real for those involved (36-43). Unlike Turner, who viewed some rituals in terms of anti-structure, Schechner emphasised the structure set up for such liminal time: it is a process with consequences, being a context through initiation using re-ordered space (51-61), and is thereby established through rules that accord time and the objects within it a special status (6-10). He later drew on the notion of play to suggest where the energy for such "performative transformations" comes from (98-101).

Schechner's analysis shows that times of liminality are structured. As such, it seems to be incorrect to view the notion of anti-structure as non-structure, for groups exhibiting *communitas* are structured at least by their boundaries with society, as regards who can enter and leave, and when. Further, those involved in rites of passage maintain contact with certain elements of structured society, such as those who teach initiates what is expected of them in their new role. Liminal statuses must therefore be regarded as structures within wider society (see Turner, 1995:125-130), in which *communitas* is a performance that socialises participants to new forms of behaviour (185). This may be linked to Lewis' argument that spirit-possession may function either on the periphery or in the centrality of a society, depending on the prevailing cultural morality (Lewis, 1989a:114-159). The fact that groups structured in an alternative way, such as some spirit-possession cults, may alter in their relation to central society, leads to the suggestion of a more fluid role for Turner's

liminal groups. If *communitas* is not just an insipid feeling of fellowship, it must be an acted affect, maintained in performance in social context, with social consequences. Indeed, Turner increasingly began to turn to performance and drama theory to develop his ideas, as discussed below.

Schechner tried to show how performance, such as in some sorts of theatre, may have profound consequences for wider society (1988:109-110, 120-121); in that respect his work also functions as polemic. He pointed out that a transformation may be effected on three levels: story, performers and audience. Schechner recognised that in performance, roles are internalised, such that theatre training "goes into the body" and "An illumination of sorts occurs: what is being written in the bodies of the dancers is read *from the inside*" (273). At certain times of performance, such as in trance, this results in a "maximum arousal" where the ego, or "I", of the actor loses control of knowing and feeling states (274-278). Such a state may be compared to flow experiences.

4. Flow Experience

A useful investigation into social performance was founded on a psychological study, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, which may be introduced through Turner's work. The articulation of the experience of *communitas*, wrote Turner, comes through symbols which represent its twin poles of ideological and emotional meaning, a conception he explored in an analysis of African Ndembu ritual, *The Forest of Symbols* (1967:19-47). "Dominant symbols", those which maintain their meaning through different rituals (20), coalesce during times of *communitas* so that strongly-held values are equated with intense

affects; from this arises a distinctive period for the individual, who is now in the "flow" of the ritual process (Turner and Turner, 1978:135-136). This argument by Turner, with his co-author Edith Turner, was developed through analysis of Roman Catholic pilgrimage. Pilgrimage was understood by them to be related to liminal periods, in that they channel an experience of *communitas* by erecting a structure of sacred space, time and objects, which are encountered in a group setting (1978:8-9, 23, 102). But the whole context is liminoid, rather than liminal, because it remains a voluntary undertaking, unlike tribal initiations which are a closed structure in a religious routine (35, 231-232). The desire to be a pilgrim arises from individuals' free choices, the Turners wrote, at a time in their lives when a cure from affliction is sought. In Christian pilgrimage, this affliction is seen as a personal distance from God, conquered through approaching a personal initiation towards him (11-14): "Pilgrimage provides a carefully structured, highly valued route to a liminal world where the ideal is felt to be real, where the tainted social persona may be cleansed and renewed" (30).

By this analysis, the Turners developed anthropologies of the body and of affect into a theory of flow. "Pilgrimage systems", they wrote, are examples of "normative *communitas*", where the initial experience of *communitas* as spontaneous or "existential" is organised and socially controlled in order for it to be maintained (1978:135; and see Turner, 1995:134-140). It is this control of the symbols through which *communitas* is "channeled" (1978:102), which allows a repetitive structure to be set up such that the experience of it coalesces certain values, by the "normative pole" of symbols, with certain emotions, by their "orectic pole" (135-136). The Turners detailed, for example, how the Irish Lough Derg pilgrimage attempts this using images with decreasing sacred space and the slowing of time. The value of religious and political loyalty to the Pope and Roman Catholicism is increased by this, as is the feeling of "Irishness" by representations of the experiences of Irish Saints (135-138).

The limiting field of stimulus at the end of the pilgrimage by the domination of the station crosses, coupled with a loss of individual identity by group chanting (138), encourages the socialisation of a particular experience, which the Turners designated "flow": "that union of action and awareness, which is one of the most fulfilling of human experiences" (102-103). Flow would seem to be the fulfilment of *communitas*, and therefore a fundamentally important human experience and endeavour, with profound wider consequences. A recognition of flow would therefore appear to be crucial to social studies since, "Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority" (Turner, 1995:128).

The concept of flow utilised by the Turners was taken from the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, although its origin is attributed to John MacAloon (Turner and Turner, 1978:102-103). Csikszentmihalyi's investigation into "optimal experiences", in which he claimed flow is achieved, clearly demonstrates the social structure necessary for the experience, and allows analysis of the process of socialisation by which it is facilitated (1992a, 1992b). It is important to emphasise this latter aspect, given the intensely personal nature of the experience; there is a tendency to view the individual as the main generator of flow, especially since Csikszentmihalyi's original work concentrated on artists (1992a:3). As a psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi in part developed the idea of flow through consideration of what constitutes the self, referring to the social psychologist George H. Mead's theory of the "me" and the "I" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992b:33; and Mitchell, 1992:55).

Csikszentmihalyi defined the social conditions of optimal experience as lying between two sorts of social reality: challenges which cannot be met by the performer's skill and those which are too easy to perform; the former result in anxiety, the latter in boredom

(1992b:30). In optimal experience, which rarely occurs in everyday life, challenges and skills are balanced. Such a situation occurs in "structured activities" where these two variables can be controlled. The structure needed includes clear goals, quick and unambiguous feedback, and some degree of personal control (30-33). So although the performance is socially constructed and maintained, it allows the subjective experience of excitement with "self-harmony" (29-34). It may be said that the performer comes to revel in the strictures of performance; Csikszentmihalyi wrote of the coherent and purposeful logic which results from this (34). This point is of importance: the performer feels at full purpose with the logic of the performance. This logic must be one, therefore, which allows for a large degree of self-expression and self-development within it. For example, although football is a social game with many rules about how it is to be played, the individual player is able to grow in skill and develop idiosyncratic forms of expression within these. In this sense the game can be both intrinsically motivating and intrinsically rewarding (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1992a:6-8).

A sociological study of the flow experience by Mitchell (1992) placed it within a framework of how the body may be acted upon in modern industrial society. Mitchell located flow in the "existential middle ground" between alienation, where individuals' skills are greater than their challenges, and anomie, in which the challenges are too much for their skills (1992:36-37). As Mitchell acknowledged, these are classic sociological terms taken from Marx and Durkheim, concerning the experience of work in Europe (38-39). Although this has obvious parallels with Csikszentmihalyi's analysis, it is an improvement by grounding the concept of flow in social reality. However, like Csikszentmihalyi, despite Mitchell's understanding of the social conditions of flow, he was more interested in the subjective experience of the self by the performer in flow, rather than of the rules of the performance. Hence he wrote: "Actors neither apprehend their deeds nor reflect upon them; they lack

both fear of the future and guilt for the past" (55). However, this position is naive in that it ignores the social context of the self-identity which flow may engender, which includes discourse used by people to describe such experiences. Many of the flow experiences they consider take place with other performers, and are thus social activities with concomitant social apprehension during, before, and after the experience. To isolate an activity as flow in the way that Csikszentmihalyi and Mitchell did, is to abstract it from the wider social reality in which it is contextualised.

Csikszentmihalyi could answer that flow can be so abstracted, since it is intrinsically motivated. His thesis is indeed greatly indebted to Abraham Maslow's work into "peak experiences", or self-actualising behaviour, except that he wished to probe the feeling or "quality of subjective experience", rather than the behaviour of this (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992a:5-7; see Maslow, 1964:21-22, 59-68). But Maslow separated peak experiences from the institutions in which they take place, categorising them as individualistic and claiming that, for example, religious organisations are secondary to the peaker, for peak experiences are the basis of religious experience (1964:21-28). As such, the sociology of the experience is treated secondarily to the psychology, and flow comes to be seen as merely a block by which to fill a gap in the performer's otherwise alienated or anoemic life (Mitchell, 1992:45-47). This represents a regressive sociological step from Mead's (1972 [1934]:135-138) and Schutz's analyses; whilst they erred in focusing on the individual's confrontation with society, they still located social life as a central component of their theories.

By building on Maslow's work, however, Csikszentmihalyi and Mitchell relegated social contexts merely to supportive factors, preferring instead to focus on individuals' engagement with themselves. Hence in studying mountaineering, Mitchell drew a

distinction between rational play, which needs self-conscious participation so that, for example, the performer tries to win, and the play of flow where the self-conscious is eliminated (1992:45, 53-55), as if mountaineers do not care if they achieve their goals or not. The naivety of this approach is highlighted by one group in Csikszentmihalyi's original study: chess masters (1992a:7). In criticism of this, it may be stated that the struggle to achieve goals will have different meanings to different groups of people, but competition plays an essential part in this. An experience of flow cannot be disembedded from the social context in which it is constituted. This context includes the performers' past and future experiences of the activity, such that they know what they want to do and how, and thus their self-identities. Flow may be an unusual and heightened sense of awareness, but it is not non-social because of that; it is important to understand the social nature of flow, not just in its boundaries, but as it is performed. Thus, it may be misleading to differentiate experiences of flow from other experiences. Rather, flow analysis points to the need to consider the role of self-identities during performances in general.

J. Personhood and Selfhood

In evaluating recent innovations in anthropology Marcus and Fischer noted a lapse in confidence in understanding social life as it is represented through ethnography (1986). They claimed this had resulted in a change of focus from collective structures with which anthropologists were traditionally concerned, to orientations centred on the individual:

"If anthropologists can no longer depend as certainly on their traditional media, such as public rituals, codified belief systems, and sanctioned familial or communal structures, for capturing the distinctiveness of a culture, then

they must resort to cultural accounts of less superficial systems of meaning.

The focus on personhood is an attempt to do just this" (1986:45).

Against the "methodological individualism" prevalent earlier in the twentieth century, that sought to explain action in terms of the behaviour and choices of individual actors, Marcus and Fischer posed the problem that other cultures may hold different "conceptions of the individual" (45). That being so, anthropology's "traditional media" may not be appropriate routes of investigation of another culture, for a change in the conception of the individual must be reflected in a new conception of action. What this amounts to are new ways of relating people to their social contexts.

Marcus and Fischer described three recent attempts at this. The first, "psychodynamic ethnography", demonstrates the "self-reflective commentaries on experience, emotion, and self" that comes with individuals' engagements with such psychological phenomena as dreams, associations, and transferences, which "public cultural forms" obscure (54). Obeyesekere's *Medusa's Hair* (1981) is cited as an example of this. Realist ethnographies, their second category, draw their "initial frames of analysis" from the common world shared by individuals, but seeks the individual significance of this (1986:55-56). Thus, whilst Arnold van Gennep and Turner focused on ritual as the transition from one status to another, realist ethnography sees this transition as something that must be worked out by the individual over time, such that, "Emotional structure and a sense of self are thus a dynamic becoming, not something created at a point in time by a ritual" (61-62). As a third category of post-methodological individualist ethnography, modernist texts highlight the discourse between ethnographers and their field subjects, by concentrating on the "immediacy of discourse and the dialogic experience of fieldwork" (67).

Whilst they held criticisms of each of these, Marcus and Fischer appreciated their value of innovating beyond traditional anthropology. But the concentration on personhood is a troubled area that involves implicit notions of selfhood. The three innovations they highlight are united by a psychoanalytic understanding of the self, as a core of the individual that is constituted through reflection on social structures. Whilst it is essential to investigate how individuals relate to such structures, as this Thesis attempts to do, it is not enough to view these as shadows that exert a constant presence but are usually in the background. To make the psychological life of individuals more real than their contexts of power skews analysis away from sociological to psychological understanding. Obeyesekere's study does not shroud these contexts, indeed, material conditions of existence dominate his analysis. It is therefore wrong to over-emphasise the place accorded to psychoanalysis, as Marcus and Fischer do in their quest to find a secure footing for anthropology in the face of postmodernist epistemological critiques (1986:8-12, 36-42, 123, 161). Further, this endeavour fails to appreciate the epistemological base of anti-paradigmatic and relativist positions, which are themselves grounded in philosophical premises, specifically of textual meaning, as Gellner pointed out (1992:23-29). Their key base for such meaning is found in a psychoanalytic model, which utilises notions, however variable, of personhood and selfhood. But these are useful constructs only if appreciated in terms of social power, a point the following discussion seeks to consolidate.

Turning to another of Mauss' essays, in *A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self*, he provided a cross-cultural account of personhood in law and morality (1985 [1938]:3). Whilst native Americans operated with a notion of role in terms of the life of the clan, and individuals in Indian and Chinese cultures were treated only in composite with one another, Mauss wrote that Roman culture led to a conception of individuals as

persons lying behind their various masks, reflecting the philosophical Stoic tradition that understood things as having true characters (1985:4-18). With Christianity, this Latin *persona* became a self, an individual with a unique, sacred consciousness, in other words, a "psychological being" (19-22). Although the extent to which Mauss' argument is evolutionist, as Allen held (1985), is debatable, his importance lies in showing that modern European conceptions of the individual, especially those in psychological terms, are contingent and to be understood in relation to social contexts, as Shweder and Bourne (1986) attempted to demonstrate in a comparative study between Indian and North American ways of talking about the world.

Whether conceived in terms of a mask, a role, a function, a person, or a self, the relation between individuals and their societies is couched conceptually within contexts of social power. Carrithers articulated this by tracing two historical strands, those of "personne" and "moi": the former addresses the "social and legal history of the conception of the individual in respect of society as a whole", whilst the latter conception is concerned with individuals' interactions as moral agents in the cosmos (1985:235-236). Both are, he wrote, related, but this relation alters according to cultural context (249-250). This may be seen as a sociologically more sophisticated elaboration of Mauss' concerns, for it allows private experiences, such as the spirit world, to be included within social life. The notion of self-identity may, then, be used in sociological analysis to explain the self-consciousness of individuals across cultures, if self is seen in terms of social power rather than as an abstracted essence.

Gell's *Reflections on a Cut Finger* in New Guinean Umeda life (1979), emphasised the social nature of internalisation which is needed for self-identity. Of the self, Gell wrote: "It is

nowhere except in what it accomplishes" (1979:136). Accomplishments are the intentional acts of social relationships, and Gell focused his study around those acts of taboo-observance which are prevalent in Umedan society. In fact, he said that taboo does more than express the self - it constitutes the self (137). For the Umeda, taboo is a cessation of "*tadv* relations", or actions in which people eat, kill and fornicate. By removing themselves from these relations at certain times of contemplation, Umedans seek to re-establish a sense of self, which Gell called a "transcendental ego" (133, 147). As transcendent, individuals feel they are, "detached bystander[s], classifying out an already constituted world", but Gell showed that such *tadv-maivem*, or not-*tadv*, relations exist only because they are, "immanent in a network of relations, defending an at best vicarious transcendence, not always successfully" (133). Corollary with *tadv* relations are those of *yahaitav*: passive suffering to which the individual is subject. *Tadv-maivem* acts to stop the active-passive sequence of ego-constitution of *tadv/yahaitav* relations, at least for a while (146-147). Here, individuals feel ascetic, frequently experienced through an appreciation of dreams (146).

Gell's study is useful in showing that a sense of self is fully embedded within performance: for the Umeda, this is in the sense of active-passive performances. Times of contemplation, where transcendence from the social world is sought, are only possible given this active-passive cycle, arising from it and having consequence upon it (1979:147). This, then, is a process in which individuals are both socialised, by partaking of the stages, and yet able to innovate, by the dissonances created through times of *tadv-maivem*. How such dissonance is utilised by the Umeda in their social life, if at all, is not enquired into by Gell, yet it seems that a time of taboo may be one of assessing already finished projects, and formulating the next (133). If this is so, Umedan spirituality lies at the heart of their social creativity, represented by access to divinity through dreams (146).

Therefore, the innovation of contemplation is explicitly founded on the social world by the use of symbols and discourse. Cohen claimed that selfhood is maintained through symbolic action, by the integration of fragments of personality that contractual relationships create (1977:117-118, 122). He wrote, "The self is not a natural inborn feature of man, but is achieved through social interaction with other men" (122), placing such action in the context of "interest groups" that are directed toward political ends (117-118). The artistic creativity that may result from this parallels the use of language as establishing a banner to proclaim the speaker's social location, for expressions of relation to divinity or spiritual power are reflections of social relationships.

Whilst Cohen abstracted human existence in terms of two dimensions, political and symbolist, the former being utilitarian, shrewd and calculating, the latter being idealist, altruistic and non-rational (1977:117), he convincingly showed that symbolic action can give rise to self-consciousness. Importantly, however, he did not place limits on the way the self is conceptualised, indeed, he criticised anthropologists for assuming selfhood to be a constant rather than a "significant variable" in social processes (1974:57), a point also raised by Geertz' comparison between Javanese, Balinese and Moroccan perceptions of self (1986). Further, although Cohen treated selfhood as an "autonomous entity" which is not a reflection of power relations, this is not because it is a thing-in-itself, but a system in its own right that is interdependent with them (1974:58). As a system, Cohen wrote that, "The totality of the self is thus subject to a most intensive competition between the various types of power groups" (60). He therefore conceived of selfhood as both total and autonomous only because he had shown its creation and maintenance in the symbolic actions of power relations. Social determinism is thus avoided, whilst a rigorously sociological method is upheld.

This chapter has worked its way through a variety of anthropological and sociological theories dealing with the way individuals and societies are related. People's experiences and discourses cannot be understood without an appreciation of the contexts of power in which they occur, for their own physical bodies are repositories of socially learnt performances. But nor can experiences of embodiment be fully understood through the immediate power relations in which people exist, for private experiences have a subjective meaning relating to self-identity that is not exhausted by simple social factors. This chapter has attempted to link these two, intimately related, perspectives by evaluating different sociological traditions. In this way, the body and the self are viewed as social and as subjectively experienced.

As pointed out in the Introduction, it is very important to hold a consistent method by which to look at the sorts of religious activities in the Nottinghamshire Network, which are commonly classed as self-religions and therefore usually interpreted in terms of individuals' private behaviour. As the following chapters purport, the fallacy of theories of self-religions lies in assuming that practices are investigations into private lives, without taking account of the contexts of power from which privacy is built. The articulation of selfhood that is so prevalent a feature in such practices is not a discovered private arena, but results from the power relations with which individuals are engaged. The fact that this selfhood now acts autonomously within the social context is shown by the sometime exercise of seekership, but remains interdependent with power relations. The next chapter considers the network as a whole and compares it to theories of the New Age Movement and self-religions. It uses the theory of this chapter to suggest a different way to conceptualise the phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO: NONFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY

Introduction

The last chapter theorised social power, by pointing to the need to contextualise people's experiences and not limit analysis to cognition in the forms of beliefs and language. The present chapter applies that theory to the Nottinghamshire Network by focusing on its social organisation and people's agency within that. An overview of the Network as a whole draws attention to the four main sorts of religious practice found there: channelling, meditation, holistic health therapies and divination. Attention is then turned towards what lies behind the idea of the New Age Movement in a wide range of sources and shows how academic analyses are related to various folk models, with particular attention paid to Paul Heelas' work. The notion of the Network as nonformative is developed through that discussion. Two aspects of agency are discussed in relation to this issue: seekership and dissonance, whereby new experiences challenge self-identities and effect transformations. However, cognitive explanations of seekership and religious creativity are countered by the need to consider performance and social power in wider contexts. A case study is used to illustrate these points.

PART I: STRUCTURE AND PRACTICES OF THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE NETWORK

1. An Overview of the Network

The religious phenomena that were studied for this Thesis may be viewed in two ways. First, focus may be placed on various groups and events. In this way, these may be seen as discrete entities with their own histories, social organisations, beliefs and practices. The longest period of fieldwork with such an entity was conducted with the Essene Meditation group. Shorter periods were spent with a Spiritual Fair, a spiritualist healing group, an Anthroposophical Society group and an Occult Study Group. There were also a number of day events: two channelling workshops, two London Festivals for Mind-Body-Spirit, a Derbyshire spiritual fair, a crystal healing workshop and a visit to a holistic health centre. These will be explained in the next two chapters, although some indication of the practices that occurred in each will be presented in the present one to provide an overall picture. Figure One, at the end of this chapter, portrays this view, by showing the timescale of fieldwork with groups. However, there was a large degree of cross-over between these groups, necessitating a second way of viewing them. Here, focus was placed on the interconnections within a view of the groups as a whole. For example, the channelling workshops were organised and attended by Essene meditators, and people from the various groups held stalls or attended the Spiritual Fair. The separate interviews which were conducted with a dozen people involved in the groups consolidated this focus. These aspects are illustrated in Figure Two, which shows the network of inter-relations between groups and those individuals with whom significant personal contact was established during

fieldwork. Individuals named in bold refer to people who were interviewed separately from group meetings. An understanding of this cross-over required a perspective that moved beyond a consideration of each group or event as it was in itself. These together, as a whole, needed to be understood, and this was achieved through the concept of network.

As this chapter will seek to show, the sort of religiosity of participants in the Network meant that none were tied to particular religious traditions to the exclusion of others. This attitude required a multiplicity of resources with which individuals could engage, but which also needed to be readily available. It comes as no surprise then, to find that such people, living in a geographical area containing many tens of thousands of people as in Nottinghamshire, related to each other through criss-crossing patterns of groups and events. Socialising and gossiping functioned to maintain this structure, which depended upon the movement of people within it. Thus the authority that existed within groups was related to this wider clientele and the network from which participants came. So, the concept of network needs to be developed analytically, not simply understood as the cross-over of a mass of people within an environment of related groups. Anthropologists have usefully developed network theory, to which attention is now turned.

The dialectic of groups and practices with their potential participants has been usefully explored by the network theorist Ulf Hannerz. "The general consequence of gossip", wrote Hannerz, "is that the individual gets a map of his social environment including details which are inaccessible to him in his own everyday life" (1967:57). Gossip is thus particularly important in a network, elements of which exist in relative peripherality to each other. The urban setting of these networks means that there is a "pool of potential alters, accessible to be drawn into relationships at some later point" (Hannerz, 1980:244), providing resources

which enrich what is on offer. This results, he noted, in the fluidity of urban life, allowing frequent changes in careers through creation as well as selection (270-279). So, "a sense of network forms can help us delineate characteristic cultural processes of the global ecumene", especially as regards individual agency in the social organisation of meaning (Hannerz, 1992:40). Referring to Karl Marx, Hannerz wrote that the meanings of roles and careers is sustained by power (1980:286). The contents of religions are, then, best viewed as a function of interpersonal relations and not, as is often assumed, a function of ideology, such as of the self, or of individual charisma, both of which place emphasis upon individuals rather than relations between individuals.

The sort of agency by which the Nottinghamshire Network was built up, therefore needs to be related to the sort of social power in the groups. This is understood in terms of the concept of nonformativeness which is explained in the third part to this chapter. Until then, this term may be taken to refer to the sort of social organisation of groups and practices found in the Network. For the present discussion, the Network may be understood as comprised of people involved with one or two groups, but who practised a variety of rituals, often alone, which drew them to other groups at various times. The Network was thus structured, but in a state of slow flux as individuals' spiritual careers developed.

Boissevain (1973) and Noble (1973) explained how the study of social networks arose out of dissatisfaction of structural-functionalist analyses in anthropology. This approach - which also characterises Talcott Parsons' and, to some extent, Giddens' sociologies - treated societies as static and members as bound by roles, and was inadequate in explaining social change (Boissevain, 1973:vii; Noble, 1973:4). By viewing people as, "interacting social

being[s] capable of manipulating others as well as being manipulated by them" (Boissevain, 1973:viii), network analysis sought a more satisfactory account of social life, but must be tempered against an over-optimistic view of individual social flexibility (xii; and see Cohen, 1974:40-42). In drawing on the concepts of "effective" and "extended" networks, Noble (1973:5) showed that analysis is still bounded, despite the social links that extend across the world. This is a useful distinction for the Nottinghamshire Network: it would be easy to encompass any aspects of similar religious phenomena in Britain as relevant to study of this network, but this would remove the contextual grounding of the study and therefore repeat the analyses of beliefs and language of New Age Movement studies which are considered in the next part. To legitimate such a move, these New Age analysts resort to the conception of a movement, without properly considering what constitutes such a social organisation; Heelas, for example, wrote that the New Age is not an "organized movement" but a "collection of paths" (1993:105), although his later work categorically named it the New Age movement (1996).

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To shed light on this issue, Mitchell's six-fold description of the criteria for the notion of a corporate group may be employed. He identified six features of such a group: recognition of criterion of membership, acceptance of norms and rules, capability of joint action, common aims and interests, division of labour in terms of these, and persistence of such labour relations (1973:31-32). Although a movement may be said to be a much looser sort of group - the various meanings of movement are considered further on - the notion becomes meaningless unless each of these criteria is present to some significant degree. In terms of the Nottinghamshire Network, this was not the case. However, this does not mean that the Network should be seen as an isolated phenomenon, unrelated to similar other networks in Britain. The Nottinghamshire Network may be properly regarded as a

distinguishable entity, since the Essene Meditation and the Spiritual Fair were central in bringing together people from other groups and those who were practising on their own. However, it may not be seen as a bounded entity, for groups on the fringes of this centre were themselves involved with other networks. For examples, some at the Occult Study Group were involved with paganism in the form of Wicca, and others maintained participation in spiritualist groups. Also, people from groups outside Nottinghamshire became involved, such as Charles, a Londoner who attended one of the channelling workshops, and the opposite was also true, such as Alvin, a spiritualist healer, who attended a Derbyshire Spiritual Fair. This poses two problems for study of the Network: first, in what sense it is distinguishable and yet part of a wider British phenomenon; second, in what sense its core groups are to be distinguished from other phenomena such as paganism and spiritualism. This topic is considered in more detail in Chapter Five; the present chapter seeks to understand the Network on its own terms.

The answer to these problems is provided by paying attention to the power relations within and between the Network's groups and to the attitude by which participants treated them. This is articulated, as stated above, by the concept of nonformativeness. However, it is clear that if anything meaningful is to be said about the Network and its differentiation from other religious phenomena, something must be said about its structure, both in terms of what was practised and the issues of power in such practice. That is the aim of the next section.

2. The Four Key Practices and their Relationship

The groups in the Nottinghamshire Network were quite different to one another, as may be seen by the two main groups studied. The Essene Meditation was a fortnightly evening meditation comprised of around two dozen people, many of whom knew each other. The Spiritual Fair, by contrast, was a monthly event which people paid to attend, with up to one hundred participants and a large number of stalls, lectures and workshops. Yet this disparity was accompanied by a strong similarity in what was practised, which was only fully revealed when the biographies of individual participants were uncovered through discussions and interviews. Whilst the fieldwork presented in the next two chapters, and in the case study at the end of this one, considers these practices in much more detail, a broad sketch may be made to portray what went on in these groups and in people's lives, so that the structure of the Network may be comprehended.

The central practice at the Meditation was, obviously, meditation, but the discussions which occurred after the meditation time showed that this was only one amongst a number of sorts of practices of importance in participants' lives and of significance to their meditative practice. The Lovells, who led the meditation, were practising therapists in Bach flower essences, astrology and counselling and the Spencers, in whose home it was held, were healers through biorhythms. Most other attenders also practised or received at least one form of holistic health therapy, such as Reiki, Rogerian counselling, hypnotherapy, massage and aromatherapy. This aspect was prevalent at the Spiritual Fair, where stalls and talks were held on a number of therapies: spiritualist healing, Reiki, aromatherapy, reflexology, flower essences, crystal healing and shiatsu, to name the most prominent.

Two other sorts of practices commonly encountered were meditation and divination. Many people meditated regularly, often alone, as in Michelle's case which is presented at the end of this chapter. Meditations took various forms: silent visualisations, visualisations led by a speaker, or a mixture of the two. A third category of practice, commonly neglected in New Age studies, is that of divination, ritual techniques used to gain guidance or information, which in anthropological studies are often classed as oracular usage, since oracles may be divined or consulted. The most popular divinatory techniques were astrology, Tarot cards, pendulum dowsing and Feng Shui. However, it must be pointed out that for each of the three sorts of practice - meditations, holistic health therapies and divination - more than one form could be habitually employed. For example, the Spencers divined by both astrology and pendulums. Also, the majority of people practised each of these three sorts of practice.

There was, however, one further sort of spiritual practice which, it became increasingly clear as fieldwork progressed, was central both to groups and to individuals' careers. This was spirit possession, primarily in the forms known as channelling and spiritualism. Although not as commonly experienced as the other sorts, spirit possession is interpreted in this Thesis, and often articulated as such by field subjects, as laying the ground for experience of these other practices. Crucially, it was fundamental to the origins and establishment of many of the groups, through either knowledge of possession or direct experience of it. The Lovells' interest in the Essenes, for example, grew by reading books claiming to be written by people possessed by spirits of Essene sect members. Their interest in healing therapies had grown from early attendance at Christian Science meetings, to registration as healers with White Eagle Lodge, a group based on teachings received through possession by White Eagle, claimed to be a deceased native American chief. Similarly, Michael, who established

and ran the Spiritual Fair, had much contact with spiritualist groups and had gone through a period of crisis in which he had heard voices in his head and written automatically. As with the other forms of practices mentioned above, these experiences and the contexts in which they occurred are considered in greater depth in later chapters. They are presented here in order to draw attention to the happenings in the Network and to establish a structure common throughout it.

If channelling is interpreted as the key performance which related meditation, holistic health therapies and divination, it may be seen as drawing together different aspects of the human. Holistic healing focuses primarily on the body, divination on the mind, whilst meditation was understood by practitioners as involving a higher aspect to their physical body, often characterised as soul or spirit. These three commonly practised performances therefore describe a full picture of the human as it was understood by the people involved. But the relation between them in terms of the human may be taken still further. Meditation, in dealing with moral dilemmas encountered through self-inspection, may be said to employ the emotions, which is why it focuses on controlling them. Holistic health, however, is tactile rather than emotional, since it focuses on dilemmas of the wellbeing or health. In contrast to these two, divination uses thought to resolve dilemmas of knowledge.

Channelling acted to structure these three triple elements. However, the channelling performance is not a simple unification of each triad. Rather, it establishes a different, overriding element as authoritative. Since channelling involves the possession of the whole human, the locus of channelling is the person, not just one aspect of what it means to be human. The active means of the channelling performance is neither emotional nor tactile nor thoughtful, but vocal. Through its discourses, which are particularly highlighted by the

two workshops organised and attended by Essene Meditation members, channelling replicates the importance of texts in society. The authority of channelling therefore provides an important shared discourse by which people can relate to each other, although the nonformative context in which this occurs means there are limits to such constructed reality. Finally, the aim of channelling is that of mission, the establishment of a mystical career which provides the context for the attainment of morality, health and knowledge. Described in such a way, the authoritative centrality of channelling is super-structural to these other performances, which may be seen as secondary to it. The relations between the four may be described in the following manner:

CHANNELLING:	PERSON	VOCAL	MISSION
<i>MEDITATION:</i>	<i>SOUL</i>	<i>EMOTIONAL</i>	<i>MORALITY</i>
<i>HOLISTIC HEALING:</i>	<i>BODY</i>	<i>TACTILE</i>	<i>HEALTH</i>
<i>DIVINATION:</i>	<i>MIND</i>	<i>THOUGHTFUL</i>	<i>KNOWLEDGE</i>

Figure Three at the end of this chapter is intended to illustrate this common structure to the Network. As a model it is not meant to be a final statement of them, but a means by which to aid their investigation. An example of this is given by the placement of Reikei between channelling and holistic healing. As will be seen later in the Thesis, Reikei may be interpreted as a superstructural healing technique, because its performance is similar to possession and it ritually subsumes other healings. By use of this model, then, it is possible to locate other practices in relation to each other and thereby suggest ways in which they may be analysed. It stands as a structure which unites the various groups and people of the Network, as well as other religious phenomena, and which needs to be understood in terms of the sort of social power relations present there. This Thesis contends that sociological

models should be treated in an aesthetic manner, as useful, and therefore pleasing, for other people. So the model is not presented as a solution, but as a tool. Its brief presentation in this chapter will be filled out as fieldwork is considered.

As a common structure, this quadratic model suggests that the Nottinghamshire Network functioned as some sort of entity, in that its various elements were not simply arbitrarily placed together. Rather, they acted together in a certain manner which gave rise to such a structure. What such a structure entails, cannot be understood without regard for the wider society in which the network is located. The elucidation of that is not central to this Thesis, although some exploratory remarks are made in the final chapter and Conclusion. However, as analysis of fieldwork progresses, this may be borne in mind, such that the relations existing between groups and individuals are seen as meaningful in a wider context. In particular, the seemingly unstable nature of both people's spiritual careers and groups in the Network is of significance and should be briefly theoretically considered, as a prelude to the concept of nonformativeness.

The first chapter showed that many strands in sociology have failed to recognise the frictions and conflicts of social power within a functioning social system and this is the main criticism that may be levelled against Parsons' functionalism. Parsons' claim that, "Every social system is a *functioning entity*. That is, it is a system of interdependent structures and processes such that it tends to maintain a relative stability and distinctiveness of pattern and behaviour" (1966:143), is not contestable by the fact that he assumed each society to be functional. Rather, what is contestable is his assumption that if structures function together, they must be stable as a result of shared values and collective goals (Haralambos and Holborn, 1991:123). This Thesis, in line with much anthropological theory, disagrees

with such an assumption: structures may in fact create great instability and yet continue to function, for they continue to maintain their power or react against each other, and need to be seen in context to their wider society, as shown, for example, by Ernest Gellner's study of changing spiritual authority amongst Berber tribes (1969).

The value of this notion of structure is that it counters claims that a functional analysis is unable to cope with social change (as in Gellner, 1970:47-48). Thus, the Nottinghamshire Network may be seen as instable in that people frequently changing their practices and spiritual career paths, whilst groups arise or disappear, grow larger or smaller, and change their beliefs and rituals. Yet the Network continued to exist within both its local and national wider society and may therefore be distinguished as a phenomenon to be studied. Just because a structure is instable in this way does not mean it will collapse, so sociology should be able to interpret it as a functioning entity. In order that the structure of the Nottinghamshire Network may be understood, it is necessary to consider debates on the New Age in which its elements would usually be placed. Only through this can a more adequate sociological interpretation arise.

PART II. NEW AGE MOVEMENT STUDIES

1. The Hegemonic Encapsulation of the New Age

The sorts of religious phenomena as found in the Nottinghamshire Network have, it is contended in this Thesis, been misrepresented on the one hand through classification as New Age and on the other hand as constituting a movement. Such New Age studies arise from various sources: academics, Christian churches, other religions, proponents of similar phenomena themselves, the journalistic media and state governments. A proper sociological analysis of what this Thesis calls nonformative spirituality cannot ignore New Age studies because not only are they the way in which similar phenomena have been analysed in the past, but their formulation of a New Age Movement has had an affect on the very phenomena which they seek to understand. Thus, a process of stereotyping of nonformative spiritualities has taken place, resulting in the need for practitioners themselves to question their own belonging to a New Age Movement. This questioning has not been strong enough to lead to the formation of a movement out of those that are stereotyped, simply because stable authority structures do not exist and have not arisen within them. There are few social bodies which exist to be so stereotyped, with the possible exception of some pagan groups classified as New Age and which had a sense of social identity in the first place. However, an awareness of being stereotyped as New Age is common amongst nonformative spiritualists, who question its meaning in terms of their spiritual, rather than social, solidarity with others. For those studied in the Nottinghamshire Network, this was usually coupled with a rejection of the term. When questioned about their sense of being New Agers, the Lovells, the Spencers, Michelle and Michael all said it was a hackneyed term

which pointed to superficial elements rather than what people were really doing. This referred not only to those authorities mentioned above, but also to corporative uses of the term New Age in products such as books, magazines, music and shops that sold paraphernalia such as crystals and incense sticks.

Whilst the term new age was sometimes used by field subjects, this was rarely as a noun in definition of themselves, rather than as an adjective to describe the effects of what they did. Neither was this a millenarian use of the term: the new age is not a time that is to come in which existence will be radically different than today, described by York as "imminent" (1991:13), but an altering of people's actions and attitudes that will take account of the mystical basis to reality that already existed. Hanegraaff went some way in recognising this, by distinguishing between New Age in restricted and wide senses (1995:85-99). The former refers to the millennial vision as especially realised in the Theosophical tradition, whilst the latter refers to, "the historically unique directions under the impact of an overarching New Age worldview" (1995:93). The confusion of such millennial groups, including the Church Universal and Triumphant (York, 1991:59-61), with nonformative spiritualities in New Age studies leads to analytical problems that can only be resolved through attention to power structures. Even though the very term New Age may have arisen within a context that is influential on such spiritualities, namely Alice Bailey's writings (York, 1991:46), this alone cannot be used to infer what it means in nineteen-nineties Britain. It appears that the term New Age Movement fits into a hegemony that says little about the social phenomena to which it is directed, but much about those who wield it. Before academic analyses are looked at in greater depth, this issue may be considered through three contexts: Christian churches, the journalistic media and miscellaneous others.

Christian critiques of the New Age are invariably heavily based on texts, not fieldwork. As such, they often focus on authors such as William Bloom (1991 and 1995) and David Spangler (1977 and 1984) who have at various times been proponents of a New Age Movement and have attempted to deal systematically with various aspects seen as important to their spirituality, such as healing, contemporary scientific theory and broad social issues. One of the main points of contention for Christian analysts are such authors' uses of the person of Jesus Christ, which is seen to be relativistic as regards other religious teachers and traditions, as described by Romarheim (1988). These critiques take either a liberal Christian or evangelical Christian stance, each setting up the movement in terms of a challenge to their own positions. Liberal approaches are favourable towards the intent of the New Age, which they see as a response to disagreeable social conditions, but criticise their means as irrational and ineffectual and therefore inferior to Christian responses. Such may be seen in the works of Lucas (1996) as regards contemporary science, Perry (1992), Seddon (1992) and the Dominican Woods (1993; 1994). The evangelical approach views the New Age as more of a direct threat than a parallel response, diverting attention from Christian responses. Here, it is seen as perverting and misrepresenting a number of key Christian themes which, in its most insidious form, may be interpreted as a conspiracy. Typical of this are Cole *et al* (1990), Gassmann (1991), Groothius (1986) and Miller (1990). The New Age Movement has become not only a scapegoat for declining church attendance and influence, but a foe that issues a clarion call for Christians to take on their moral responsibilities. This explains its use by all wings of Christianity, from those that are declining to those in revival, but it rests on the perpetuation of the concept in the journalistic media.

In Britain, it is in daily newspapers that the term New Age is most indiscriminately applied.

As such, the New Age Movement may be described as a conceptual product that helps sell copies, but the reasons for the choice of such a product cannot be explained by reference to consumer demand. Rather, they must be sought in the role that newspapers play in Britain. Pagan groups are typically concentrated upon, probably because they are more formative than other groups and therefore more accessible to investigative journalism. Apart from these, healing rituals are commonly explored since healers are also visible because they need to advertise to gain business and may welcome journalistic interest for its advertisement of them. These latter are often the focus of lifestyle sections of papers, reflecting the widespread use of holistic therapies in contemporary Britain. Pagan groups often are classed, along with occultists and travellers, as irrational (Pat Kane, *The Guardian* 2, 4 January 1995, pages 12-13; Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian Weekly*, 31 May 1998, page 22) and dangerous (Madeleine Bunting, *The Guardian*, 12 November 1996, page 9; Jo-Ann Goodwin, *The Guardian Weekend*, 7 May 1994, pages 32-33, 35, 39; Damian Thompson, *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1994, page 10). At best they are seen as involving boring "nerds" (Gary Trotter, *The Guardian*, 24 June 1995, page 25), and at the worst as ideologically fascist (Umberto Eco, *The Guardian*, 19 August 1995, page 27; Kalman and Murray, *New-age nazism*, 1995; Anthony Middleton on anti-Nazi protestors at a David Icke lecture tour, *The Big Issue* 145, page 6).

Whilst this is the response of the broadsheet newspapers and weekly news magazines, at least one daily tabloid, the *Daily Mail*, frequently includes articles on religious themes such as occult knowledge and ufology, as for example their serialisation of the story of the discovery of Central American Mayan fortune-telling crystal skulls, which was headlined on the front page (3 November 1997). Such approaches typically relate historical ideas, practices and people in an indiscriminate way, as if to show that their stories only shed light

on a tiny part of the phenomenon, as also in Storm's (1991) journalistic book, which may be compared to the volume by Lemesurier, who had lived at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland (1990). Again, then, the New Age may be seen as constructed for various purposes depending on the concerns of analysts. Broadsheets, in their concern over social issues and respectability, present a phenomenon which is irrational and fails to properly address contemporary issues, whilst tabloids may be seen as presenting the world as inscrutable to reflect the lack of control people have over their lives and outside forces, as portrayed by those papers' emphases on those considered as outsiders to their readership and who adversely and irresistibly affect the society of that readership.

Whilst these references have not been systematically collected, they give an indication of the systematic criticism of the New Age that is perpetrated in the British media. Such criticism is based on the scantiest of empirical evidence and make use of terms that serve to confuse the social phenomena they consider, by categorising people together in ways that depend upon assumptions of common meaning. Thus, although Kalman and Murray are to be commended for drawing attention to fascist ideology within David Icke's writings and links between him and the British far right, to claim that he has "influence over an alarmingly large swathe of the growing New Age and green movement" (1995:19), is simply erroneous unless the New Age is defined as comprised of those who read his books and adhere to his beliefs. But as this study will show, nonformative spiritualists do not read as much as is assumed, nor do they strongly adhere to that which they do read. More contextualised knowledge is needed before condemnation of people as fascist. Without such knowledge, accusations take the form of an ideological witch-hunt which merely makes it harder to identify real fascists and their influences.

The third category of stereotypers of the New Age Movement is a miscellaneous one, referring to less systematic denouncements that take place within contexts which do not benefit greatly from the construction of the concept and yet use it when there is a need. Of importance here are other religious groups, such as some pagans, like Monica Sjöö, who criticised it for its patriarchal bias (1992; 1994), and British Buddhists (see Cush, 1996). It is interesting that of the latter groups, most are quite favourable to the New Age, except for Soka Gakkai International (Cush, 1996:200). Whilst British Buddhists believe they have much in common with the New Age Movement, due to their common roots in the Theosophical Society (204-5), Soka Gakkai appears to maintain greater control over its membership boundaries, which are threatened by the young age of its practitioners and its adoption of a "set of values focusing on freedom of choice, search for personal fulfilment and the desire to enjoy life to the full" (Cresswell, 1995:99-100). This suggests that Soka Gakkai is a formative group whose clientele hold a nonformative attitude and that therefore, to preserve the group, nonformative spirituality has been constructed as an identifiable phenomenon which can be criticised in order to bolster allegiance to their own group.

New Age is thus a conceptual tool used for polemic. This is further shown in Kitzinger's feminist critique (1990), the British Prime Minister John Major's castigation of New Age travellers at the 1992 Conservative Party Conference: "Not in this age, not in any age" (cited in William Oddie, *The Sunday Times* Style and Travel, 3 April 1994, page 10), and critiques of the state of contemporary society, such as by Lasch (1987). Barker (1989b) showed how the British State and the Church of England seek to control and discriminate new religions through indirect means. Her analysis shows the importance of the journalistic media in this, which echoes this survey of New Age studies: the media is essential in maintaining a conceptual construction of social movements, reaction against these being reflected in State

and Church policies. The Hollywood film *The New Age*, directed by Michael Tolkin (Warner Brothers, 1994), also ridiculed the New Age, through a mocking account of a couple's business ventures in their search for self-fulfilment. They set up a shop named Hipocracy before the wife, Kathryn, places them in a suicide pact. The film ends with her husband, Peter, as a trainer in a telemarketing firm, a clear parody of such firms as Programmes, which employs mainly Exegesis graduates (Heelas, 1991), akin to the prosperity wing of the New Age as considered by Heelas, discussed below, and Roberts (1994).

The marked consistency of this trend to stereotype nonformative spiritualities as a New Age Movement is worrying not least because of the abdication of the responsibility of accurate and contextual analysis which should be the hallmark of governance and investigation. Instead, social analyses appear to build on other authorities' critiques, particularly in viewing such spiritualities, alongside a host of other phenomena, as alternative (Sebald, 1984). Thus, the term New Age has been applied to travellers (Lowe and Shaw, 1993), communes (Pepper, 1991) and any non-Christian worldviews (Frisk, undated).

What is more worrying are the reasons behind such formulations. Although this Thesis contends that a New Age Movement does not exist, the social phenomena that are considered part of that clearly do; the widespread presence of the four sorts of practice described above is not in doubt, although there are no reliable figures for practitioners, partly because surveys usually rely on definitions of New Agers (as in Heelas, 1996:108-115 and York, 1995:53-55). That these practices are boxed together as New Age should concern any sociologist. For in doing so, the authorities above are able to castigate, ridicule and reduce those practices for their own purposes. In other words, the boxing of phenomena allows a lid to be placed upon them, such that they are potentially oppressed.

Wallis investigated this process as it applied to Scientology in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, suggesting that the "moral panic" surrounding the group was exacerbated by Scientology's punitive reactions to social authorities (1976:205-213). His list of various categories of moral crusaders against Scientology (211) concords with the analysis above and may be compared with the Roman Catholic church's gross over-estimation of the number of spiritualists in America in the nineteenth century (Nelson, 1969:24). The situation with nonformative spiritualities is, however, different in that they do not constitute a social movement with established leadership. The labelling of these phenomena as New Age, contrary to Wallis' theory of labelling (1976:207), erects a straw person which may be knocked down with whatever prejudices or theories analysts have already adopted. Although different authorities box nonformative spiritualities together for their own diverse purposes, the fact that they are so regularly boxed and castigated means that something akin to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is at work.

By hegemony, Gramsci meant a unified authority in which practice was linked with theory, therefore defining and constructed the world for those who fall under it (1996:12-13, 261-264; from notebooks written between 1929 and 1935). Thus, whilst the maintenance of the concept New Age Movement bears little relation to reality and may seem like an innocuous act, it is part of a hegemonic construction by political authorities and therefore likely to oppress those people who practice that which is so branded. What forms such oppression may take is beyond the scope of this Thesis, but it may be noted that most field subjects admitted they did not talk about their spiritualities except to close friends or those attending their groups. In particular, two police constables who attended the Essene Meditation explained that they were very careful not to mention their spiritual interests to colleagues. Although this did not stop them practising or seeking other groups, or, indeed, in

organising and advertising groups and therapies and even finding employment in these, it may indicate the social repression of openly pursuing nonformative spiritualities in the view of wider circles of family, friends, acquaintances and colleagues. This situation may therefore be described as one of hegemonic encapsulation. The fact that academics studying such spiritualities have readily adopted the New Age framework, should give rise to particular concern over the role such analysis plays in modern Britain.

2. Four Formulations of New Age

New Age Movement studies are characterised by a lack of fieldwork but strong reliance on primary literature, leading to the reification of terms used by self-professed New Age authors. Thus emic views, taken from those they study (see Geertz, 1986), are commonly appropriated. Such representations pose a significant difficulty for an understanding of the phenomenon, since the politically informed views, in Cohen's sense of social power conflicts, of certain people within the phenomenon under study will be replicated. Salzman argued that a cultural model, "enables various forms of orientation, organization and action", and thus culture is equipment used by people for *enhabilmentis* or enablement (1981:243). Through a discussion of how brahmans, ascetics and kings interacted in traditional Hindu society when each held a different hierarchical model that placed them first, Salzman concluded that models contain potentialities that may come to the fore depending on context (233-239). Salzman's analysis suggests that such distinctions and their models are not the result of belief systems or theologies, but of enablement, in other words the establishment and reinforcement of social power. When adopting the models of those under study, attention must therefore be paid to the prejudices in which it has been

formulated and employed. But as well as using such models, many analysts are guilty of placing them within schemes of contemporary society such as postmodernity (Lyon, 1993; York, 1994), sociologies of reflexivity (Heelas, 1996), secularisation theories (Bruce, 1996), or a mixture of these, in a reductionist rather than dialectical manner. The differences in worldview purported by each means that there is little common ground between social theorists, leading to a position of incomprehensibility between many of them. Four main formulations may be discerned, as highlighted in the Introduction, and these are now considered in turn, although with an emphasis on Heelas' work. In particular, attention is paid to their views on channelling.

J. Gordon Melton and Wouter Hanegraaff were concerned to understand the New Age Movement historically, the former by concentrating on Asian religious influences in America, the latter on Christian esoteric influences. Melton claimed that, "channeling is possibly the single most important and definitive aspect of the New Age" (1992:21). Although he traced channelling to the nineteenth century, Melton believed that the nineteen-seventies experienced a "new wave" in which the New Age movement, "accepted and redirected [channelling] to the goal of facilitating the personal transformation of the channelers' clients" (22-23). Melton developed this argument historically: arising from several spiritual streams of American culture, the New Age movement is a contemporary phenomenon distinguished by a transformative vision (1988:34-53; Melton *et al.*, 1990:xxii-xxix). This vision was proclaimed by certain early exponents, such as Baba Ram Dass, whom Melton described as the "first national prophet" of the New Age in 1971 (1988:36), then grew by networks out of the existing spiritual culture (Melton *et al.*, 1990:xxviii). Melton therefore developed the notion of New Age and its central practice of channelling from the spiritual traditions of New Thought, Spiritualism, and "the Theosophical/Ancient

Wisdom Tradition" (1992:17). This historical placement allowed Melton to predict that the movement will be short lived - indeed, already is in decline - leaving only channelling as a remnant (1988:51; 1992:28-29; Melton *et al.*, 1990:xxx-xxxi). Melton's analysis is primarily a study in the history of ideas, akin to Albanese's placement of the New Age within the American tradition of nature religion (1990), although it is clear he believed it to have sociological veracity.

A similar argument may be made concerning Hanegraaff's doctoral thesis (1995). Hanegraaff placed channelling - one of the five major categories within the New Age (1995:19-35) - in the context of the western esoteric tradition which today is mirrored in secular thought: "*The New Age movement is characterized by a popular western culture criticism expressed in terms of a secularized esotericism*" (439). The four other categories are healing and personal growth, New Age science, Neopaganism and, as mentioned above, New Age in a restricted and in a general sense (37-100). To investigate each of these, Hanegraaff drew on a large number of texts and although he considered different authors in turn, the discrepancies in belief between them is seen as insignificant to their common worldviews, although different camps in the movement are distinguished, such as "strong and weak this-worldliness" (105). Hanegraaff considered this worldview in great detail through what he called, recalling William James, the "varieties of New Age experience", by which he meant how various realities are interpreted. The thrust of his analysis is therefore concerned with ideology and belief systems and a unified perspective is attained by seeking to impose an interpretive order on those authors he studies. He explicated two fundamental assumptions behind this worldview:

"All forms of New Age thinking share at least two general assumptions about the nature of reality. The first of these [...] is that reality is an

unbroken, unified whole [...] Although reality may appear as broken and fragmented from a limited perspective, a deeper harmony is revealed from a holistic point of view. The second general New Age assumption is that reality is engaged in a process of evolution. Whilst the Holistic Assumption tends to emphasize the unity of space, this Evolutionistic Assumption emphasizes processes in time" (137-138).

From this worldview of contemporary New Age authors, Hanegraaff discussed the tradition of European esotericism which lies behind it, moving from the Renaissance and Enlightenment to Romanticism, Transcendentalism and Jungian occultism (305-432). Whilst fascinating, this historical study is not made to bear greatly on his foregoing discussion except in supposed equivalence between ideas and terms. For example, Hanegraaff convincingly showed that the roots of H.P. Blavatsky's use of the terms reincarnation and karma lie in the European esoteric idea of ascendant metempsychosis rather than Asian religions (400-406), but this does not necessarily hold true for contemporary authors, even if they are influenced by Theosophy. The twin aspects of his study - textual and historical - led Hanegraaff to conclude that "New Age religion" is a movement, "based on a common pattern of criticism directed against common cultural trends" (433-434). This basis is of "association by [historical] contiguity" and "association by [ideological] similarity", but, more importantly, because "they [the authors he considers] are opposed to the same things" (439).

One of Hanegraaff's main points of difference with Melton is the extent of influence of Asian religions on the New Age. The latter's historical reconstruction led him to view this as important (Melton *et al.*, 1990:xiii, xxvii), whereas Hanegraaff's history of esoteric ideas

required a devaluation of this influence (1995:383-389). The true influence of Asia on these spiritualities cannot fully be gauged except by research undertaken with participants alongside textual analysis. The lack of such evidence haunts Hanegraaff's study, even though he claimed his formulation of a Movement rests on the discernment of a "structure of beliefs" in the literature (1). For example, his very choice of which New Age books to read, helped by two booksellers in Utrecht (ii), assumes a common social context to which they are related. And his claim that, "my arguments and discussions will refer to the written sources alone, and will have to justify themselves without recourse to other kinds of information" (4), comes immediately after expressing how useful discussions and participation with New Agers were in providing a "'living' background" to his research (4). Thus, like Melton, Hanegraaff needed to depart from purely history of ideas analysis in order to say something about the contemporary phenomena his study was ostensibly about, such as occult groups, paganism and practices such as channelling. As such, by drawing upon self-professed New Age authors, they both claimed that the movement began in the nineteen-seventies. Hanegraaff admitted that, "'New Age religion" was born in the 19th century and had reached maturity not later than the beginning of the 20th [...] it was only in the second half of the [sic.] 1970 that this cultic milieu "became conscious of itself as constituting a more or less unified movement"' (439). This mixing of sociological conclusions with historical and textual study is methodologically unsound and for this reason should be set aside for further evidence. Light may be shed on these conclusions by York and Heelas, although it will be seen that their studies, like Melton's and Hanegraaff's, are methodologically problematic.

Heelas' and York's studies of the New Age both uncovered the importance of channelling, if their continual references to channelled discourses may be relied upon. But their

emphases upon placing this within the special social conditions of the contemporary western world highlights their differences. Heelas was concerned with the multiple trajectories of modernity and viewed the New Age as the spiritual equivalent of the self's need for reflexive creativity. He interpreted channelling in terms of such self-reflexivity, arguing that the receiving of inner voices means that individuals place their authority on themselves (1996:34, 39 n.7, 89-90). In contrast, York sought to formulate a picture of secularisation that would accommodate the New Age without compromising its characterisation as leaderless and without authority (1994:16).

York's statement that the New Age movement is an authority-deprived network of networks (1991:326) repeated the self-professed New Ager Marilyn Ferguson's conclusion a decade earlier (1981). However, he conflated this with a confusing number of secularisation theories and typologies. Without explaining the abbreviated terms, his last paragraph can be given as demonstration of this:

"If the SPIN of SPINs concept is combined with the church-denomination-cult-sect typology as a special application within the SMO, i.e., the RMO, - one expanded through the contributions of Wallis, Stark and Bainbridge, Bird, Lofland and Richardson, etc. - to analyze formations, changes and transformations among the NRMs and cells or segments which constitute the reticulate polycephalous structure comprising the holistic movement, we have a viable sociological tool which is applicable to contemporary late twentieth century developments and study." (1991:326)

What York sought was a way to interpret interrelated networks which he understood as comprising a single movement, although, like Hanegraaff, he distinguished between the

New Age and "Neo-pagan" camps of that, understanding the latter to be more orientated to the earth and the physical side of existence (1991:150-179; 1994:18). He believed that an interpretation of society as postmodern aided this by providing an image of pluralism in a fragmented world, such that the movement reflected, "the freedom inherent in the current religious supermarket consumerism" (1994:15). However, this analysis rests much more on texts than it does on fieldwork. In his doctoral thesis (1991), York presented the ideas of a range of New Age and Neo-pagan authors, cursorily bringing in a variety of statistical surveys, by himself and others, to illustrate how issues such as sexuality are incorporated into their worldviews. This textual emphasis poses a problem for his sociological conclusions - York devotes only eleven pages, out of a total of three hundred and twenty six, to "New Age and Neo-paganism as Practised and Observed" (1991:222-232), in which he discussed one pagan ritual and two groups. Whether or not more extensive fieldwork was carried out by him - as also by Heelas, as shall be seen below - is beside the point: the lack of presentation of it in their work means that it does not play an important role in the development of their theses.

The procedure of list-making that these analysts employ is common in religious studies of nonformative spiritualities, which serves to confuse readers as to the contexts in which the analyst is theorising. This is taken to an extreme in Geisler's theological article (1987:303-309). In a review of Heelas' *The New Age Movement*, Dawson was highly critical of the analytical methodology of New Age studies, complaining that, "The range of material covered is so vast [...] that too often the analysis itself dissolves into a litany of names, places, events, books, therapies and so on" (1997:392). The procedure of list-making may be used in order to disguise a lack of contextualised analysis, possibly because many authors do not limit their scope, choosing instead to cover too wide a subject area which is often

reified as the term "New Age Movement" (Heelas, 1996:107-108; York, 1991:51-56), "cultic milieu" (Campbell, 1972), or "counterculture" (Roszak, 1975:26-29; Heelas, 1996:84-90). For example, York's claim that, "the New Age movement is especially an American-Canadian-British-Dutch-West German-Australian-New Zealand phenomenon. There is also a growing presence in both France and Italy as well as within Scandinavia" (1991:54), is not especially helpful. These labels cannot possibly apply to all the phenomena lumped together without far more extensive empirical research. This issue will arise again in the following presentation and analysis of Heelas' work.

Heelas (1993) also paid attention to postmodernity, in his treatment of the New Age as a resource. Although he maintained that self-religiosity is not postmodern, because of its metanarrative of the self, Heelas claimed that the way in which self-religiosity is used is postmodern (1993:110). As a source of postmodern experiences for people, this conception of the New Age fits Bauman's (1992) elucidation of postmodernity and seems to lie behind Woodhead's (1993) delineation of it as a post-Christian spirituality. Bauman wrote of the "imagined community" that exists in postmodernity, resulting from the privatisation that follows the collapse of social authorities (1992:xviii-xix). Heelas' portrayal of the New Age as a "Disneyland world" consumer culture (1993:110), parallels Bauman's claim that "individuals are engaged [...] first and foremost as consumers rather than as producers" (1992:49). However, Heelas' later discussion relating to "uncertainties of modernity" (1996:135-152), concentrated on the breaks that people have with the past rather than the continuance of social structures into the present. In this regard, his analysis comes to bear more on conditions of capitalism than postmodernity. Although New Age responses to the culture of capitalism may vary from posing an alternative to embracing it, characterised as "the counter-cultural", in which he locates paganism, and "prosperity"

wings of the New Age (1996:84-98; 138-148; on the latter see also 1991 and 1992), it is the drive for self-fulfilment in each which unites them in a single movement. This unification is primarily attested by the common language, or *lingua franca*, of self-spirituality (1993:104; 1996:18-29), which corresponds closely to William Bloom's introduction to his edited volume *The New Age: An Anthology of Essential Writings* (1991:xv-xix).

Heelas claimed that, "The New Age shows what 'religion' looks like when it is organized in terms of what is taken to be the authority of the Self" (1996:221), despite the citation of many authoritative leaders who established groups, practices and ways of speaking (205-208, 222). Heelas' main fieldwork appears to have been with Werner Erhard's est, Robert D'Aubigny's Exegesis and the Rajneesh Movement (see also Heelas, 1987 and 1991; Thompson and Heelas, 1986). The former two being training groups that forcefully cajole participants in order that they accept their worldviews, as Kohn's powerful analysis made clear (1991). But despite this, a thorough analysis of social power does not enter his sociology. Instead his analysis rested upon notions of self, expressivism and reflexivity (see also Heelas, 1992) which have been developed in Anthony Giddens' work, especially *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1994).

Paul Heelas' notion of self-reflexivity in the New Age movement was criticised in the last chapter, but the present debate allows further analysis of his earlier remarks on selfhood. Heelas charted the contemporary concern with the self as arising with the expressivism of the nineteen-seventies, when people were "self-explorers" (1992:141). The psychological wing of this was radicalised in the "self-religions", the most influential of which was est, which lie at the "heart of the New Age" (139, 143). Heelas importantly placed these developments in the turn from "public to private identity provision" (148), recognising that

this can be utilised within the workplace, where work is seen as a spiritual discipline, giving rise to a "self-work ethic" (157). The aim of this ethic is to reveal the self as powerful and therefore sacred (146-147): "By working, participants suppose that they have the opportunity to 'work' on themselves, thereby actualizing the God within" (157); "so long as one is able to liberate oneself from what one is doing in order to experience what one 'is', then one can experience anything" (158). This emphasis on selfhood is reflected in some Christian critiques of the New Age, such as in the Roman Catholic Caldecott (1992) and Johansson's evangelical Protestant assessment (1994). The use of rituals in new religious movements was recognised by Bird to contribute to practitioners' sense of self-worth and authenticity, through charismatic authority (1978). But like Heelas, Bird stopped his analysis at that point, concluding that rituals do not establish social relations (1978:174).

Heelas cannot be said to have replicated in his own conceptual scheme the notion of selfhood expressed by those he studied, for he acknowledged that what New Agers think they are doing is different from the actual authoritative socialisations they in fact undergo (1996:206-207). But what he did was to bracket this notion in a phenomenological manner, leaving it unanalysed with regard to such structures of power. Whilst he applied sociological reasoning to why such a notion of selfhood might be sought - or why people turned to psychologised expressivism, as noted also in Sutcliffe's analysis of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland (1995b) - Heelas' analyses remained incomplete by not addressing the question of how it arises and functions in people's social lives, in contextual social practice. In other words, a folk model has been left unanalysed, yet it is essential to understand why the notion of selfhood is so constructed. Fieldwork for this Thesis shows that the reason for this lies in the new conceptions of themselves that nonformative spiritualists constructed through their experiences of new practices. By taking their involvement in these seriously

people posited a radical difference in themselves, articulated through the idea of what may be described as self-as-essence.

A much earlier treatment by Heelas in 1982 came nearer to addressing this issue, by claiming that subjective experience can be an influence on social structures (1982). Even here, though, Heelas implicitly alternated between two notions of selfhood: the self-as-essence and the self-as-personality. The former is an articulation of the person understood to be constituted by an essential, unchanging component which manifests in thought and behaviour: people are how they are because that is what they are. The latter concept, however, differs by being sociological rather than metaphysical. It sees a person as created by social relations and therefore as changeable. Both these notions are used, at different times, although without recognition of them or of their difference, by Philip Rieff's analysis of contemporary society (1987). For example, Rieff clearly took account of the social world's influence by claiming that a "new personality" is formed by cultural institutions which, "bind and loose men in the conduct of their affairs with reasons which sink so deep into the self that they become commonly and implicitly understood" (1987:2). But he also claimed that, "By psychologizing about themselves interminably, Western men are learning to use their internality against the primacy of any particular organisation of personality", such that they are freed from the "compulsions of culture", they lose all morality, and have no need for secrecy and deception (1987:21-22). A change has therefore occurred from "religious man", who seeks salvation through belief, to "psychological man", who seeks pleasure through feeling and is a "user of any faith that lends itself to therapeutic use" (24-27).

Heelas drew on Rieff to develop his account of the New Age and expressivism (1996:174).

Their similarity may be seen by the following two statements by Heelas: "What happens in the subjective is in large measure socioculturally defined or constituted" (1982:81); "The self-religions must be clearly distinguished from those movements where sociocultural institutions determine the subjective by providing meanings and techniques which take away the experience of individual autonomy or selfhood" (83). He claimed that through their use of psychoanalytic notions, the self-religions allow the conceptualisation of "Idiosyncratic subjective experiences [... thereby] obscuring possible divergences in experience" and meshing individuals' experiences together in the group (76). But unless he meant that experience of the self is illusory, Heelas placed himself in a quandary, for he distinguished between that experience and its understanding and use in group context. The fact that he did not appreciate the significance of the difference he drew, is shown by his claim that the meshing process - whereby autonomous experience of the self is conceptually interpreted through the "standard code of psychobabble" in order to relate to others' experiences - leads to the avoidance of discord and anxiety (76-77). Since his main primary source is textual, being the magazine of Kerista, a Californian self-religion, his claim may be questioned by more empirical analysis. Fieldwork for this Thesis shows dissonance to be ubiquitous in nonformative spiritual practice. The meshing processes of groups cause dissonance because subjectivity has a social meaning as it is experienced.

In 1991, Kohn recognised that Heelas had provided the best explanation of self-religions, in terms of individuals turning to them as a result of their experiences of transformation in therapy, since they found the clinical language of psychotherapy unsatisfactory (1991:134; see also Heelas and Kohn, 1986). Even so, by focusing on three such groups - the Da Free John movement, Scientology, and est or The Forum - she noted that, "where radical subjectivism is encouraged among followers, radical authority will be exerted by their leader"

(1991:136). Therefore, theories that rest on an unqualified claim of individual empowerment in terms of the self cannot be relied upon (135). Unfortunately, through his emphasis on adoption of authors' common language, Heelas largely limited himself to an analysis of beliefs rather than social power. Although a more constricted application of Heelas' theory could be advanced regarding nonformative spiritualities, rather than the formative groups Kohn considers, it would still have to deal with the problem of the various authorities that are established. For, as the next part will explain, nonformativeness does not mean the absence of social power rather than the fact that one authority becomes part of a multiplicity of authorities so far as individuals are concerned. Further, since Heelas' theoretical basis rests on an interpretation of expressivism as it has been applied through psychotherapy to religion, he was unable to delineate between expressions of expressivism without rejecting his very assumptions.

One way in which Heelas could have escaped his quandary of a dual conception of self is through Cohen's analytical scheme considered in the last chapter, which says that whilst the creation and maintenance of selfhood cannot be separated from social power relations, it yet acts autonomously within the social world. But this scheme requires that selfhood is itself subjected to analysis, such as of the symbolic interaction in which individuals engage. Heelas made little attempt to do this, a point emphasised by the fact that in all his writings he neglected to bring life histories and spiritual experiences into contextualised analysis. Instead, as noted before, he relied on primary literature of books and pamphlets and thus on textual meaning, the trait of postmodernist analysis as defined by Gellner (1992).

The correspondence between text and action has been philosophically explored by Paul Ricoeur, who in *The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text*, applied "the

notion of text as a good paradigm for the so-called object of the social sciences" (1971:529). Poole criticised Ricoeur for abandoning the "real world" and placing analysis "in an ethical and political vacuum" (1993:207), which may be compared to the last chapter's criticism of the sociologists of knowledge. Likewise, postmodernist anthropological analyses, such as by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Marcus and Fischer (1986), focused upon ethnography because it allowed them to view social studies as texts, since the social experiences of fieldworkers have been written up and therefore turned into texts. But ethnographies arise from an engagement with the world of social relations, which is not formed of discrete units and therefore not best represented by the paradigm of the text. Ethnographies are inevitably flawed representations of the experiences of fieldwork and as such, analyses of ethnographies cannot be fully understood in terms of them. Such analyses are not built on interpretation of ethnographies, for example by applying to them questions relating to the motivation of actions as Ricoeur held (1971:550-553), but on interpretation of experiences. Whilst the writing of ethnography is vital for the interpretation of fieldwork experiences, it is these latter that are of primary concern.

The strange affinity that seems to exist between New Age studies and authors who profess a New Age, shown by the adoption of the latter's folk models by the former, may in fact lie in their common attempt to interpret social reality as a text. New Age proponents do this through an ideology of the power of thought and language, thereby attempting to encapsulate social power structures within an idiom of meaning, even if social authorities to establish common meaning are lacking. The common culture in which this situation arises would seem to be influenced by psychotherapy, as shown by Rieff above, which attempts to deal with social relations by the ritual decontextualisation of people from their situations.

The bizarre consequences of this textual-based method as applied in sociology is shown by Heelas' claim, in evidence of the pervasiveness of the New Age, that in the Yorkshire town where he lives, "There is an extensive New Age library - mine" (1996:106). As the foremost British academic concentrating on New Age spirituality, Heelas has a wide influence on how nonformative spiritualities are understood. The definition of them as self-religions, where selfhood is largely left bereft of contextual analysis has meant not only have they been categorised together indiscriminately, but that there has been no real concern for participants' practical engagement with them. It is no surprise that Heelas' conclusions match those of Hanegraaff's explicitly textual-based study, as the latter has himself pointed out (1996), for they focus on many of the same authors, such as Marilyn Ferguson, Louise Hay and Shirley MacLaine.

The variety of New Age critiques that have been presented in this part are unified by their common delineation of contemporary phenomena both as New Age and as a movement. This is a curious fact to acknowledge, given the different agendas which separate them: political motivations by journalists, the need to forge an identity by theologians, and the pursuit of grand narratives of theory by academics. This may be explained by what does unite them: a reliance on textual analysis rather than empirical studies or, more importantly, extensive participant observation. In particular this led to a conflation of New Age and paganism, which ignores the relevance of fieldwork, such as Amy Simes' study of paganism in the East Midlands (1995:490-499). The following explanation of the fieldwork for this Thesis as dealing with nonformative spirituality, counters these conclusions and methodologies, and seeks to show why attention to social power is so essential, for understanding both the phenomenon as a whole and people's religious biographies.

PART III. NONFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY: SEEKERSHIP AND DISSONANCE

1. The Notion of Nonformative Spirituality

As explained already, this Thesis is concerned with the social contextualisation of power. In some ways, the sociology of religion has largely failed to theoretically flesh out its use of the notion of power. This has advantages in that the discipline has allowed itself to develop without the self-obsession that can follow analysis of a necessary, but ambiguous, concept. But its disadvantages have become increasingly obvious as it has turned from examination of established religions to those that establish and maintain different social structures. The term nonformative refers to the relative absence of formal social structures compared to those which are established in churches, sects and other organisations and which exist in a consistent form for their members. This should not imply the absence of social authority in nonformative spiritualities, for in each group there were leaders who organised meetings and events. Rather, the term nonformative refers to the inability of such authorities to establish and maintain an organisation that is structured in terms of goals, in other words, in terms of consistently maintained collective actions and understandings of experiences. This inability is due to the nature of seekership of participants, although, as seekers themselves, group leaders also act against the establishment of such authorities. Instead, in these groups, participation was idiosyncratic. Because no formative influence over participants is exercised, these groups are unable to establish a tradition of leaders and led and therefore have no over-riding authority of form. So participants are able to critique and interpret their experiences by other spiritual authorities and thus find their own meanings

in them. Although the social group in which practices occur is not sufficient for understanding attenders' experiences, this does not mean that sociological analysis is rendered impotent. Instead, it is the whole range of social contexts of attenders that is of interest - the variety of groups and events they attend, as well as their home lives and biographies. In other words, idiosyncratic behaviour means that the wider world of participants is crucial to their understanding.

As a sociological concept, nonformative refers to three elements: the attitude of participants, including leaders, both in behaviour and beliefs; the social organisation of particular groups and events; and the social organisation of the Network as a whole. However, the concept should not be treated in a reified manner: nonformative does not define a person, a group, or a wider social context. Rather, it is a tool which describes qualities of social power in relation to each other. Thus, formative elements were present in each of the groups studied and individuals' biographies contained times of formative behaviour and belief. But the over-riding thrust was towards nonformativeness, as in the subversion of formative group structures and the displacement of formative periods of biography with nonformative ones. The concepts of formative and nonformative may be seen as existing in a relationship of tension together, similar to O'Dea's explanation of dilemmas present in the institutionalisation of religion (1961).

Churches and sects which exercise formal control over their social structures present a relatively transparent model of power involving clearly defined authorities. This model has been utilised by those studying them and found to be a useful tool, as in the work of the British sociologists Bryan Wilson (1966; 1970b) and David Martin (1969). But religious phenomena that do not explicitly present themselves as exercising formal structures of

social power are not making such a model available to sociologists. There has resulted the tendency to treat them within the church-sect model anyway, or within models of society supplied from other sources, such as secularisation and postmodernist theses, as shown in the previous part. This has meant that such phenomena have not been sufficiently analysed with regard to themselves, only in relation to an imposed context. An appreciation of nonformative religious structures is, however, increasingly important to religious studies in general, since, as Davie pointed out, the contemporary membership of many established churches has become less formal, a situation she characterised as "believing without belonging" (1996:74-75).

The sociologist James Beckford recognised the growth of what he called "new spirituality" or "holistic spirituality" that has occurred alongside that of the conservative churches in recent years (1992:17). Emphasising the interconnections that exist between humans and non-humans, the personal and the public, and the physical and the mental, these spiritualities are occasionally, he said, typical of the "new sensibility" of postmodernity (17-20). But most are products of modernity by their sense of optimism of transformation and the use of science and rationality by which this is to be achieved (21). What the sociology of these spiritualities requires is an approach that can, "conceptualize religion as a cultural resource or form [rather] than as a social institution", since social symbols have floated free from their religious organisational origins (22-23). The results of this analysis, which ties symbolic and political approaches together, led Beckford to claim that, "It helps to make religion sociologically problematic in ways which are virtually inconceivable in the terms of the sociological classics" (23).

With this in mind, it will be useful to look at the notion of movement as it has been applied in New Age studies. As shown above, the four academics looked at each view the New Age

as a movement, although only York based this on analysis of social structures. Melton, Hanegraaff and Heelas based the use of this term on a perceived worldview: of individual transformation, secular esotericism as opposed to western culture, and a common language, respectively. There is certainly a sense in which a common thread of ideas may be regarded as a movement, as Hanegraaff points out in the case of Romanticism (1995:348-353) and Kvaloy for Green philosophy (1990), but this cannot simply be identified with a social movement. These studies assume that a movement of ideas entails a social movement, without paying sufficient regard to the ideas in social context. Even if authors do use many of the same ideas, and even if these are taken up by people running workshops for example, they are not necessarily interpreted by their readers or workshop attenders in the same way. In fact, the nonformative nature in which people read books and participated in groups and events in the network studied for this Thesis, meant that ideas could often be interpreted in dramatically different ways, as a study of the Essene Meditation in the next chapter shows. The problem here is one of meaning: the meanings given to ideas by those who use them cannot be understood except by contextual analysis. Textual analysis is insufficient to decide such issues. The recognition of the disparity between movement of ideas and social movement is summarily recognised by most New Age analysts, by drawing attention to the lack of leadership and social organisation (as in Heelas, 1996:16 and York, 1994:16), but this valuable information is generally neglected as analysis proceeds.

A concept which takes better account of this lack of social authority is Barker's portrayal of the New Age as made of up a network of family resemblances (1989a:189). However, like the term network, this is useful only if the structure and qualities of the resemblances are analysed. This may be compared to York's similar concept of the SPIN, standing for "Segmented Polycentric Integrated Network", which draws attention to "the 'holistic

movement' as a SPIN of SPINs, which includes New Age, Neo-paganism, the ecology movement, feminism, the Goddess movement, the human potential movement, Eastern mystical groups, liberal/liberation politics, the Aquarian Conspiracy, etc." (1991:326). This shows that, in the last resort, the articulation of the New Age as a movement rests again on correspondences between worldviews and beliefs. In fact, as York showed, the concept of SPIN was developed to provide an anthropological account of networks with common aims, but lacking in unified leadership or central authority structures, such as the Black Panthers and Palestinian guerillas, then extended to cover tribal societies and Protestant sects (319-320). But these networks are united by either a common enemy or common ethnicity or religion, resulting in common action, not simply by a common worldview, belief-structure, language or personal experience of transformation. If interpretation of the New Age is not to remain based upon textual similarities, attention needs to be turned to the social organisation of groups within wider society. The reason nonformative spiritualities may be analysed together, lies in the family resemblance of the four main practices of channelling, meditation, divination and holistic healing. But such resemblance cannot be taken to constitute a movement, for, on the one hand, practitioners' interpretations of their experiences are idiosyncratic, and on the other hand, practice is not directed towards either a common enemy or a common identity.

If involvement with religion in general increasingly takes the form of believing without belonging, casual attendance, or its use as a cultural resource, studies of nonformative spirituality may be seen as important to the development of the sociology of religion in contemporary Britain. Of increasing importance to this will be a focus on people's biographies, or what might be called their spiritual careers, much as this has become of consequence to anthropological studies in recent years. The common experience of

people's biographies in the Nottinghamshire Network was the seeking of new experiences and dissonance encountered in that, concepts which require close examination.

2. Seekership and Dissonance

The common experience of people's biographies in the Nottinghamshire network were the twin aspects of seekership and dissonance. Whilst groups would be regularly attended at times, all people were found to have certain periods of seeking in their lives, when new groups and events would be attended and new practices learnt. Thus, seekership was not constant, but may be described as sometime seekership, which helps explain the tension between formative and nonformative social structures. The effect of this sometime seekership took a common form of dissonance, whereby bodily experiences and beliefs were shocked by alternative realities. That dissonance, rather than consonance, resulted from this, could be seen by the way people reported how their lives had changed. This was typically couched in terms of confusion and upsets, as the case study of Michelle, presented later in this chapter, shows. The aim of this section is to understand how seekership and dissonance may be interpreted through the theory of social power in performance of the last chapter.

Steven Sutcliffe's work, based on fieldwork and textual study, provides the most satisfying account of seekers' lives in context. As regards the social organisations within which people seek, Sutcliffe wrote, "New Age identification and proselytisation is and has been restricted to the predilections of discrete groups and individuals, rather than characterising the coherent agenda of a large and enduring collectivity, let alone an operative movement"

(1997:101). Instead, drawing on Campbell (1972), he viewed contemporary phenomena as the latest developments in a long tradition of cultic milieu: "the alternative network is a largely extra-ecclesial countercultural web that both generates and supports variant religious cultures. As such it has persisted in the shadows of mainstream religion and penetrated its margins over the last one hundred years or so" (1997:102 and 1995a), where "'New Age' is a term episodically articulated *within* its wider networks of religious alternativism" (1997:105). This helps explain the predominance of spiritualism and related social phenomena, such as the Theosophical Society and its splinter groups, in the Nottinghamshire Network.

Within the cultic milieu, Sutcliffe distinguished three seeker role-models: the singular seeker, the serial seeker and the multiple seeker (1997:106-111). The first, "unusual in New Age circles", focus on an inherited tradition and are often attached to an institution, such as the Findhorn Foundation and The Lucis Trust (106). The second changes direction and affiliation more than once, adhering to a tradition only temporarily (107). He noted that, "the serial seeker is a type common both to the pioneers of New Age and to prominent individuals in the alternative network in general" (108). Therefore, the most usual experience of people is multiple seeking, which "proceed[s] sequentially and diachronically [...being] typically a multidirectional and synchronic activity [...where] a number of religions or facets thereof are filtered and explored more-or-less simultaneously" (108). The attitude of multiple seekers is openness to change through new experiences and thus displays, wrote Sutcliffe, a hedonistic or ludic character (109). He recognised that the prevalence of such seeking precludes a social movement (110-111), although the issue of multiple meanings of beliefs is not commented upon.

Sutcliffe's notion of the multiple seeker closely fits the findings of this Thesis, except that

whilst a variety of practices were pursued simultaneously, it was found that they were interpreted according to one over-riding experience temporarily. For example, although the Spencers attended the Essene Meditation, channelling workshops, a ufology group and practised various holistic health therapies and divinatory techniques, it was channelled experiences and discourses, on the Ascended Masters, which provided them with a way to interpret their experiences at the time of study. Thus, it would be better to describe seekership in the Nottinghamshire Network as a mixture of multiple and serial seeking. The case of Christine, also an Essene meditator, illustrates this, as presented in the next chapter. Her influence by channelling was displaced by that of Rudolf Steiner's theology, leading to a change in direction of her practices and reinterpretation of them.

As suggested by Sutcliffe's emphasis on openness to new experiences, a three-fold attitude of eclecticism, nondogmatism and holism was displayed in the Network (explored in relation to practice of holistic health therapies in Wood, 1999), although this could be tempered at various times as seekership was temporarily suspended. That is, people sought different experiences and interpretations from a variety of sources, but treated these not as final authority by integrating them with their previous experiences. The first two attitudes compare with multiple seekership, but it is the holistic attitude which integrates experiences into a coherent interpretation and which is necessary for the formation of self-identity and for nonformative spiritualities to function as social phenomena, for otherwise commitment to practices would be absent. This triad of nonformative attitudes contrasts with the greater tendency towards exclusivism, dogmatism and particularism of formative spiritualities, and may be compared with many elements of the New Age belief-system formulated by Hanegraaff and Heelas. What is of interest here is how different experiences of reality displace each other, a notion central to the understanding of seekership in any form.

From the point of view of individuals' self-identities, some realities are more shocking than others. Shock does not arise from the brute existence of a new reality, but from the way in which its confrontation with individuals in practical engagement takes place. Thus subjective shock need not follow individuals' transitions between realities, as Giddens pointed out (1977:18-19). The description of transitions as dissonant does not necessarily refer to an upheaval in the life of individuals by opposed forces, but the meeting of differences. It is tempting to characterise dissonance as either positive, leading to a development of individuals' roles and identities, or negative, where these collapse. By this, their careers may be said to have developed or ended, as described, for example, in Lewis' descriptions of the experience of spirit possession (1989b:89-90). Such a scheme would, however, be a metaphysical rendering, since through the collapse of one identity another is formed, although it may not function so well within wider society. The interaction between individuals and society is one where each acts to change the other, so careers, as the paths along which individuals work, are also mutable. A new career may form out of old ones, although this may not be recognised by those involved. This is a case where phenomenological analysis is unable to grasp the wider picture of social reality, instead becoming fixated on individuals' self-perceptions.

As explained in the last chapter, it is important to include the body in sociological theory, rather than to concentrate solely on cognitive aspects. The importance of bodily performance means that the emphasis laid upon "cognitive dissonance", as in Festinger, Riecken and Schachter's influential study *When Prophecy Fails* (1956), is misplaced. Festinger *et al.* described how an American group that predicted aliens would land on earth at a given time, coped with the fact that their prophecy was not fulfilled. Their social psychological aim was to assess what would determine "the increase of proselyting following unequivocal

disconfirmation of a belief", of which they distinguished five conditions:

- "1. There must be conviction.
 2. There must be commitment to this conviction.
 3. The conviction must be amenable to unequivocal disconfirmation.
 4. Such unequivocal disconfirmation must occur.
 5. Social support must be available subsequent to the disconfirmation."
- (1956:216).

By seeking an understanding for this phenomenon primarily in cognitive terms, Festinger *et al.* not only circumvented the dynamics of power relations beyond their passive notion of social support, but misconstrued the application of cognitive dissonance. Their description of the group in fact demonstrates that cognitive dissonance will not have an effect on social relations. Their research suggests that unless the performances involved in preparing for landing aliens were conflicted by a dissonant social reality, the knowledge that they did not come as prophesied would not be sufficient to rupture the group. In other words, cognition that is not accompanied by a change in power relations experienced through performance will not alter anything. Such a view gains strength by the argument of Festinger *et al.*, that the realisation of false prophecy leads to group members increasing their proselytising efforts, so that dissonance is reduced simply by larger numbers accepting the prophecy (1956:28). This contradicts their notion that the dissonance of disconfirmation is clearly perceived by those involved, yet shows how social power is the foundation of the group. Larger numbers are sought for conversion so that the power of the group is extended, not so that dissonance is dampened. The reasons for this are to be found in what occurred after the aliens did not land: there was intense media interest, that was even covered on a national level (188-189, 230-231). This provided performative

opportunities for group members, allowing them to attempt to extend their authority much wider than before, as well as furthering group identity. Likewise, the fact that the group did not grow may be seen as a matter of social relations with a wider audience, rather than due to lack of cognitive conversion.

In a study of the responses to disconfirmation of prophecies concerning the end of the world by the Watch Tower magazine of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Schmalz showed how the third and fourth conditions of the scheme presented by Festinger *et al.* were not applicable, yet increased proselyting occurred (1994). This disconfirmation of their theory again points to their inadequate grasp of the significance of power relations; Schmalz argued that different organisational structures determine reactions to disconfirmed prophecies (1994:303). His description of the relations between members with authority and those without (295, 300-302), is a good example of how beliefs are tools in power struggles, and may be used as evidence that dissonance is to be seen in terms of bodily performance, not simply in terms of cognition.

Issues of bodily dissonance have been best expressed in the notion of existential shock or anxiety (Macquarrie, 1973:127-132). Whilst this is usually interpreted in a cognitive sense, such as through the realisation of self-mortality, the writings of many existentialists show that this cognitive understanding is predicated on the bodily realisation of contingency. The most pertinent existential texts have been fictional novels that present possibilities of existence for individuals, as in Kierkegaard's novelettes in his pseudonymous works (such as *Either/Or*, 1987a [1843] and 1987b [1843]) and Sartre's *Nausea* (1965 [1938]). McCulloch, for example, showed how Sartre's model ofthetic and non-thetic consciousness is based on bodily activity (1994:8, 101, 126). So although the existentialists do not proffer a

sociological interpretation of reality, their theory of the body is a useful corrective to the cognitive approach. For them, the bodily realisation that existence is contingent, is aroused by the experience of different ways of living. Typically this comes about by the death of a close friend or relative, but it may also come through contact with other cultures. Here, individuals' ways of living no longer are understood by them to be natural and necessary.

The cognitive approach that has dominated analysis of reality transitions may be further explored by turning once more to Batson and Ventis' *The Religious Experience* (1982). Characterising religious experiences as "reality-transforming", Batson and Ventis sought to show how the different stages involved are creative ones (1982:63). Like William James before them, to do this they focused on those personal experiences that are most dramatic and intense, but unlike him they attempted this by an "intrapsychological explanation" that utilised a cognitive model of reality (56, 63). For them, creativity referred to an increase in differentiation and integration of cognitive organisation that results in more effective behaviour towards a wider range of experiences and people (87-88). Batson and Ventis identified four stages of the creative process: preparation in which there is a "baffled struggle", incubation where the attempt to solve the problem is dropped, illumination to gain new insights, and verification that elaborates and tests the solution (77-78). In religious experience, this is applied as existential crisis, self-surrender, new vision, and new life (82-85). For them, "*religious experience involves cognitive restructuring in an attempt to deal with one or more existential questions*" (86). Emotions were seen by Batson and Ventis to merely "accompany" these stages, giving "hot cognitions" that are invested with personal meaning (87).

This theory bears some similarities to James' analysis of conversion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1985 [1902]:189-258). Building on his theory of multiple realities, James

viewed the self as divided such that different aims exist closer or further from the centre of the mind (189-194). Alteration of these relative proximities comes about, he wrote, through "emotional excitement", as occurs at times of conversion (198). But as to, "*how* the excitement shifts in a man's mental system, and *why* aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central", he said, "Neither an outside observer nor the Subject who undergoes the process can explain fully how particular experiences are able to change one's centre of energy so decisively" (196). This is because James' analysis rests on his theory that ideas play the active part in an individual's psychology and behaviour (197). This is similar to Snow and Machalek's analysis by reference to worldviews or "universes of discourse", in a paper they propose as a sociology of conversion (1984:170), but contrasts with Straus' attempt to understand the collective nature of religious conversion (1979). Whilst Batson and Ventis present some "facilitators of religious experience", such as drugs, meditation and language (1982:98-131), their model is unable adequately to answer this problem, except to emphasise the existential root that drives creativity. The folk models often relied upon to explain conversion need to be related to the wider context of people's lives, as Holy and Stuchlik contend (1981b:5). For although new experiences appear as dissonant realities to people, sociological analysis needs to view them in relation to cultural connection, and people's engagement with them as being prefigured and established before such shock occurs, which is why attention needs to be paid to people's biographies.

Batson and Ventis' theory of religious creativity is influential upon their typology of religiosity, which is worth commenting upon with regard to seekership. Criticising an earlier dichotomy of extrinsic orientation, where religion is used by people for utilitarian ends, and intrinsic orientation, in which the religion is lived for itself (as in Allport and Ross, 1967; and see Schaefer and Gorsuch, 1991), Batson and Ventis identified stranded elements

(1982:139-148). They therefore proposed a three-fold typology of "ways of being religious", with the intrinsic and extrinsic types being complemented by a third, the quest orientation (149). Religion as quest involves the elements of integration, where problems are faced without their simplification, doubt and self-criticism, and incompleteness and tentativeness (149), with the result of more cognitive restructuring and complexity than the other two types (162). This is clearly equivalent to their conception of creative religious experiences and may be compared to seekership.

The quest orientation of religion correlates strongly with presentations of spirituality by, for example, Button and Bloom's anthology *The Seeker's Guide: A New Age Resource Book* (1992) and Lash's *The Seeker's Handbook: The Complete Guide to Spiritual Pathfinding* (1990). Both volumes guide the reader through various themes that are important for "the period of profound transformation" through which everyone is passing (Button and Bloom, 1992:11). Such an approach was influential on Heelas' conception of New Agers as searching for self-actualisation and self-understanding (1996:190-192). But analysis of people in the Nottinghamshire Network showed that seekership must be understood in a different light. For these, openness to new experiences and a willingness to work with new realities was tempered by periods of religiosity that may be understood as more intrinsic or extrinsic. If theoretical emphasis is shifted from cognitive satisfaction to the social sphere of bodily performance, then it becomes clear that groups are attended in part for purposes of sociability. People were brought into groups by kin, friends or acquaintances and likely to stay so long as a certain level of socialising was maintained, as also found by York (1991:322). The nonformative stance of groups, with attitudes of eclecticism and nondogmatism, meant this socialising was one of the major features of their existence, for authority structures were not strong enough to limit the experiences gained from the group.

Participants were therefore free to bring discussions or even practices of other spiritualities into the group context, although it will be seen that this was largely precluded by the most strongly formative group in the Network, the Anthroposophical Society. Even single events were likely to be attended by groups of friends, as was found to be the case at the crystal healing workshop held by Michael and the two channelling workshops. The mobility exercised by people towards nonformative spiritualities was therefore as much a function of social allegiances and the power relations within those, as of religious quest. Seekership may therefore be compared to the pursuit of transformations as studied by Straus.

From the supposition that it is wrong of sociologists to always focus on, "the compelling forces of circumstance and the actions of others", Straus attempted to categorise the way in which religious seekers pursue their transformations (1976:270; and see 1979). His material was gleaned from two hour "guided conversations" with fifteen subjects, each of whom was involved in groups that he believed dealt with transcendence, usually with reference to "Ultimate Reality" (252-253). With the exception of the evangelical and charismatic Christian groups, his subjects' other groups - listed as Nichiren Shoshu or Soka Gakkai, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Kundalini Yoga, Divine Life and Eckankar (253) - are commonly found in New Age studies, peppering the analyses of Heelas and York. Straus did not explain why he classed these new religious movements as transcendental, so it would appear that his argument is circular: he already decided which religions embody seekership before beginning his research. The stages of seekership he drew out from the interviews may be compared to Batson and Ventis' stages of creativity. The first phase of a "strategy of creative bumblng" involves three stages (1976:254). The subject first becomes an overt seeker, intentionally tapping into sources to maximise the probability of "trip encounters" (254-256). Tactics are tested to do this, for example trying

to appear casual and spontaneous whilst attending events (256). The result of this is recognition of "prospective life-changing means", which, wrote Straus, turns the seeker from an "object" into a "prospect", from a proselytiser's point of view (257-258).

Straus referred to the second phase of seekership as "strategies of creative exploration" (1976:259). Again, there are three stages. The first is checking out the religion being encountered, by a "step-by-step *experimental* rationality" (260). Second comes the attempt to engineer transformation by loose association or hanging around with the group, followed by a "formal entrance" into it, then working to learn the "*objectified* agency of change", such as yoga, meditation, or chanting (261-264). The last stage is the realisation of life change, in which verification of transformation is sought before it is maintained (265-268). Once this is completed, the seeker begins to act as a "trip agent", bringing others into the group (268).

Straus contended that this "questing" is ubiquitous in the United States, where his study took place (1976:269). Most of his interviewees were white middle-class college students, with an average age of twenty two years and equal numbers of women and men (253). He did not, however, attempt to see the significance of the involvement of this sector of society in seekership. By placing analysis on an emic understanding that is lifted out of the social context, Straus bracketted out the wider picture that would help him understand seekership more accurately. There are three problems with this. First, he paid no attention to the individuals' histories of experience that started them on their careers of seekership. From his point of view, what drove them was merely the logic of the most economic means of self-transformation (259). There is no explanation of why transformation is sought in the first place. Second, Straus was not interested in previous or future exercises of

seekership, yet evidence shows it is unlikely that once one of these new religious movements has been joined, it will not be left for another (see Heelas, 1996:113). Third, the importance of friendship and socialising was seen as important only within the sub-stage of association, carried out through "friendship networks" of group members (1976:261). That Straus artificially lifted out individual accounts from their context, may be seen by his reliance on the notion of transcendence as an explanatory factor, which is equivalent to other writers' suppositions of cognitive and idealised existential concerns.

A defence of Straus' theory could purport that he isolated a particular interpretation of seekership and therefore did not mean to address wider issues. But in fact he drew general conclusions from his analysis and by drawing a sequential set of stages he necessarily involved those wider issues. The same may be said concerning the analyses of James, Festinger *et al* and Batson and Ventis, which brings to the fore the ambiguous relationship existing between psychology and sociology (see Mauss, 1979). The following case study illustrates the analysis of this chapter by looking at the experiences of one woman in the Nottinghamshire Network, not simply through her practices and beliefs, but also her wider social context. In this way it is hoped that a more adequate grasp of what is usually described as the New Age Movement may be achieved.

3. Michelle: A Case Study in Nonformativeness

In 1925 Howard Becker wrote, "The life history, more than any other technique except perhaps participant observation, can give meaning to the overworked notion of process [...] Social process, then, is not an imagined interplay of invisible forces or a vector made up of

the interacting of multiple social factors, but an observable process of symbolically mediated interaction" (1974:116-117). Becker proposed the life history as a method by which to enrich and extend the scientific cravings of a sociology intent on producing "findings" through "single study" (118-119). Its use in this Thesis reflects not only a desire to place religion in wider social context and personal history, but also to take a step back from the usual studies of nonformative spiritualities. However, as Whitehead explained (1987:92), reported biographies also function as projections for people's new meanings and must therefore be treated with care. In a network situation, what people say may be checked through using different people who know each other. Knowledge of wider social contexts is also useful. In Michelle's case, it is necessary to understand her working-class background in the following account of her religious career, for she lived in one of the numerous small Nottinghamshire towns which were economically ruined by the closure of coalmining pits in the nineteen-eighties. Her life history was related in two long interviews in 1996 and added to at several meetings of the Spiritual Fair and through discussions with friends and fellow seekers.

Michelle first encountered a ghost when she was fifteen. She told her mother of this frightening experience, who informed her that all the female line in their family had the gift of sensitivity to the spirit world. Her mother explained that she had decided not to develop it, but her grandmother had done so, as could Michelle if she so chose. Michelle decided she wanted to encounter this ghost again, who had appeared with a worried mien and wringing her hands, to see if she could resolve her trouble. To this end her mother helped her research into the building in which the ghost had appeared, and discovered that in the past a woman had given birth to a still-born baby there, which had been buried in the local church. It seemed to Michelle that the ghost's troubles arose from the fact that she did not

know what had happened to her child. Michelle often returned to the place of the encounter and when the ghost appeared there to her again, told her what she had found out. She never saw this ghost again. Michelle said that her only child, a daughter in her late teens, had recently discovered she too had the gift. She had been more open with her daughter about this family history than her own mother had been with her, presenting her with the same choice of whether to develop it or not. Michelle's openness was due to the fact that since that first experience she was subject to, and sought, many more.

On marrying and buying their first home together, Michelle and her husband experienced poltergeist activity. When a human sized stain appeared on their bedroom carpet they decided to leave; Michelle's subsequent research uncovered the fact that a vagrant had died on that spot in the house, being discovered there by the builder who was modernising it immediately before Michelle and her husband moved in. Michelle claimed that after that incident she became very interested in her gift. This may be because the world of the dead had broken in upon her family life, making it a more personal experience than her encounter at fifteen. However, even that earlier experience shows her interpretation of spirit activity as a problem to be resolved: the ghost was "troubled" and needed Michelle's intervention in order to be calmed.

Michelle's next experiences were increasingly personal. Within the year 1971, her deceased maternal grandmother and step-grandmother both appeared to her, with information on the imminent death of relatives. Michelle kept this information to herself, which turned out to be accurate. She was not happy with this, for she did not wish to have foreknowledge of deaths, despite the very close bonds in her family between mothers and daughters. Clearly, Michelle considered the moral structure of these bonds to be transgressed in the

premonitions: she had no control over what was being done to her. It seems no coincidence that this issue of control changed over the ensuing years as Michelle developed a strong identity where she was the one exercising choices.

Over the next seven years Michelle and her husband tried to start a family, she described herself as preoccupied with this, but only after three miscarriages was her daughter born. Although her active spiritual career stopped during this time and the early years of bringing up her child, the intensity by which it took off again shows that her experiences of ghosts and premonitions early on in life were still influential. It was to organisational, doctrinal religion that Michelle turned when she came back to her mystical career. Although she had been brought up to attend Anglican Sunday school, the ghostly encounter at fifteen had been one reason she left this. Michelle started attending the local Anglican church's healing evenings with her mother in 1984. During these sessions, the vicar would lay his hands on the participants, resulting in many dropping down flat and being healed from illnesses. Michelle went up for this once, describing the experience as a feeling of "great power and heat" rushing from the vicar's hands on her head to her feet and out beneath them. Michelle soon started attending the services there and began experiencing spirits again: in the building in which she ran a second-hand book stall with her parents, seeing Jesus in the church, and receiving a written message telling her that she had gifts. On relating these to her church friends, with whom she had become very involved and attended retreats, Michelle was told she needed help and should pray not to see such things. Indeed, a canon sent to visit her spent two hours explaining that it was wrong to see such things, to which she was very antagonistic.

Michelle continued to attend the Anglican services, but decided not to speak to any others

about her spiritual experiences. By now a change of vicar meant the healing services were no longer available. The next chapter in her life completely upset this fragile stability. Having suffered for over a year with abdominal pains, in 1986 Michelle was admitted to hospital for several months after a collapse due to a bowel infection. In operation for an abscess, Michelle suffered septicemic poisoning which left her clinically dead for two and a half minutes, during which time she had a near death experience. During this, she felt surrounded by bright light and seeing someone in the distance, approached him. He told her that she could go no further, since she had work to do. Michelle described this experience as the "biggest thing" to happen to her, a "turning-point" which "coloured" her next ten years. This was followed by a succession of out-of-body experiences whilst she recovered.

The crucial importance attributed by Michelle to her near death experience was not exclusively to do with that experience itself, for it was whilst she was recovering in hospital that her mother made her promise to cut off all contact with her church friends. Threatening never to speak to her again, she told Michelle that the church was not the place she should be. According to Michelle, she knew she could not have coped with this maternal break, for she admitted to having been very close to her mother, describing her as a "sister, friend, mother, and comforter; everything all rolled into one". Accordingly, she followed her mother's instructions. This left her free to embrace the world of spirits, since Anglican church life could no longer interfere with her experiences.

Michelle's health problems continued into 1988, in 1987 undergoing a hysterectomy at a time when her mother fell ill from cancer. She was put in the same bed in the same ward of the hospital Michelle had been in during her previous illness, a situation with which

Michelle found very difficult to cope. Her mother died shortly after her release from hospital, and it was this death that prompted her to a radical change in the experiences Michelle sought. Her mother's death may be seen as the second that Michelle had experienced, the first being her own during her serious illness. First of all she tried to contact her mother using a medium, only two weeks after her death. The medium seemed to think this was too soon, so Michelle took the task on herself, employing the meditation technique she had learnt at church. This enabled her eventually to see and speak to her mother's spirit every night. From this followed a series of paths she pursued, expending a great deal of time, energy and money on these. Peppered throughout the ensuing years were shocking spiritual experiences which arose to break her realities and create new ones. These need to be understood in relation to the social shocks to which she was also subject.

Michelle's subsequent history of experience comprised various paths that overlapped and intersected each other, but which may be separated out as mediumship, witchcraft, astral experiences, past lives and shamanism. Each of these shared some elements of a common discourse, to do with the ritual participant's movement between levels of reality. However, the different traditions within which each practice was located meant that these were understood in different ways and not necessarily seen as commensurate by Michelle. As shown by her movement from one to the other over the next few years, there was a definite limit to equating each with the rest. Michelle appears to have used spiritual traditions at different points in time. It could have been possible for her to interpret her experiences in terms of Anglican social life and language, but her turning to other paths to do so was both a reflection of her past history of experience, including the close relationship with her mother, and of her increasing control on self-identity. Michelle studied mediumship for eight years, attending workshops and later sitting with a trance-

medium, one who is transfigured through bodily possession, twice a week. In 1991, she joined a witchcraft coven, run largely by postal correspondence from Somerset. Michelle was initiated after only eleven months, rather than the year and a day that the coven usually required, which reflected her nondogmatic attitude. Her involvement with the coven led Michelle to practise visiting the astral plane, a dimension of life beyond the physical to which, she said, anyone can get. She said one can experience life as fully there as on the physical earth. The coven worked on these two dimensions: the coven leader would visit the members on the astral plane, where there were also powerful spirit helpers who worked with them. Michelle continued this practice after she left the coven, in which she felt she did not develop as she should. She began an astral relationship with a penfriend she had contacted through the coven, who was in prison in New York, practising this for two hours every night. Increasingly, she felt she knew this man from a past life and began to explore that.

Her forays into past lives involved Michelle with another disciplined practice: using the pathworking technique she had been taught by her coven for an hour every night, whilst burning incense and listening to Tudor music, an era with which she felt a strong affinity. She discovered that many people who were of importance in her current life had been related to her at that time: the American with whom she had the astral relationship turned out to have been her husband, her best friend had been her sister, and her brother in those times she later found out now to be the manager of a voluntary organisation in which she was involved.

The fifth practice to mention in this analysis was Michelle's involvement with shamanism. Attending several workshops with a British follower of this path based in Dorset, Michelle

danced and rode the drums, culminating in an out-of-body experience. Michelle's introduction to shamanic techniques parallels her contact with other practices. In one workshop, she stood out from other novices through a particular experience, resulting in the shaman advising her to pursue this path, just as she had been encouraged to develop her mediumistic abilities by a medium leading a sitting when she had seen things in a seance which others had not. Further, Michelle was not new to out-of-body experiences: she had many during her long stay in hospital in 1986. Following the shamanic path at home, she used a smudgin mixture, given her by the shaman, to cleanse her own aura and facilitate her imagination, much as she had used incense whilst transgressing into past lives.

Each of these practices involved learning techniques to facilitate movement between different planes of existence. The importance of this for shamanism is that it integrates the various planes into a worldview and teaches their knowing use for conscious purposes, as King showed for Polynesian Huna shamanism (1988). Shamanism did not replace Michelle's other practices, but articulated them into a more coherent and meaningful framework: she continued her interest in past lives, astral visitations and mediumship. "Riding the drums was", said Michelle, "the most powerful thing I've ever done". Although very keen to pursue the shamanic path, she said "everything seemed to work against" that intention. She never made it down to Devon, where her teacher held training weekends, nor did her idea of setting up a shamanic lodge in Nottingham with Michael, a friend also being trained by her shaman and who is looked at in the next chapter, ever come to fruition. This was in the early nineties; Michelle described the eight years up to then as a time when "everything really happened". There were many people coming round to her home in order to have their fortunes read by Tarot and runestones, and she even appeared on television to talk about reincarnation. Clearly, they were sociable times for her, and ones

in which her own disciplined, private practices were grounded. Significantly, it was also during this time that Michelle had two nervous breakdowns. If those may be viewed as crises in identity, following Laing's analysis (1978), then her feeling of being on a path at that time may be seen as synonymous with various dissonances she was experiencing between the practices with which she was engaged. For the notion of a path itself indicates a difficulty in keeping on it. One telling point made in the course of interview was that the trance medium she sat with attended a shamanic workshop with her, but disliked it and never went back. Michelle described him as not being on the shamanic path, noting that this was a common experience amongst attenders. Further, although this medium, in his sittings with Michelle, would always be transfigured by his spirit guide, a Roman soldier, Michelle never attained that level of mediumship whilst with him, though she grew in her attunement to the spirits.

After those eight years of spiritual upheaval, Michelle felt alone and without a path. She now turned to organised Christian religion again, becoming involved first with the local Pentecostal church, then the local Mormon one. Her experiences of possession in the former church - such that, for example, she had to be dragged over the church door's threshold and shook throughout services - meant that she was told she needed exorcism in order to be baptised. This was after two months of church attendance; she immediately refused and left. Michelle was baptised into the Mormon church three weeks after meeting two of its missionaries. She described her first year there as very happy, and felt she had previously been on the wrong path. Her second year there, however, made her question one of the very bases on which she had joined. Michelle had asked the two missionaries, "Can I be self-expressive in this church?" Their response was affirmative. The increasingly strict codes of conduct she received in membership showed this to be false. Of great

importance to her attitude at this time was the Mormon criticism of her involvement with politics - Michelle was an active member of the local Labour Party branch - and the injunction not to associate with homosexuals, of whom she had several friends, such as at a local women's group. She left the Church after two years. Although at first, Michelle said she had experienced a "pioneer feeling" of community there, as, for example, Davies discerned for the early years of the movement (1987:12-14), the obvious dissonances with the rest of her activities were more important than this. And although she described herself as having been high up in the local Church social structure, she only had one real friend there in whom she could confide. She left only the week before the first of these interviews and over the next four months re-joined, then left again.

Michelle's break from the Mormon church was prompted by being called by a work colleague to divine using the Tarot again, during which time she experienced her first full possession. She then received a written message which came, she said, out of nowhere, telling her not to waste her gift and led to her re-established contact with Michael and attendance at the Spiritual Fairs he organised, as well as joining ufology and medium training groups. "I am in the middle of nowhere at the moment", Michelle said, which she does not like but is trying to be patient.

As a case study, Michelle provides a wealth of material by which to consider how dissonant experiences impact on individual seekers. In viewing seekers as performers of bodily techniques, analysis grounds them in what are called material conditions of existence. Debates on material conditions split along materialist and idealist camps: the former claiming that material, primarily economic, factors determine behaviour, whilst the latter claims this role for ideas. Marx (1972 [1843-1844]:115-129) and Weber (1991 [1904-1905])

are often held up as the foremost theorist by each respective camp, particularly in the light of their writings on religion. Yet their works were not so simplistic, as Kolakowski (1989:137) showed for Marx and Hill (1973:99-104) showed for Weber. Hill concluded in favour of a "dual orientation" in which, "Both material and ideal interests have their own internal dynamic, but each depends on the other to maintain its historical momentum" (1973:107-108). However, this sociology merely replicates the philosophical materialist-idealist split; anthropological studies have been better able to portray ideas as part of the material conditions of individuals' lives, because ideas exist only in the context of being used in performance.

The contextualisation of ideas in structures of social power forms the strength of Obeyesekere's study of symbolism in the lives of Hindu ascetics (1981). Here, Obeyesekere took exception to a related classic philosophical split, that of the public and the private: he countered Edmund Leach's view that, "individual psychology cannot have cultural significance [and] publicly shared symbols cannot have individual psychological meaning" (Obeyesekere, 1981:14), to propose that, "There is no question of private versus public symbol: the symbol acts on both levels at the same time, the one reinforcing the other as in a cybernetic model" (85). Central to Obeyesekere's view was his careful contextualisation of the ascetics' religious lives in their histories of experience of family, illness and employment, in other words their material conditions, without which his study would be unable to proceed (1981:20, 33, 84-89). Likewise, for the case of Michelle, four loci of material conditions may be identified which are important for understanding her religious experiences and discourse: family, illness, employment and voluntary work.

The strong link shared by Michelle with her mother was evident with her own daughter.

As well as discovering she too has "the gift", Michelle's daughter followed her into both the Pentecostal and Mormon churches. Such mutual dependence between mother and daughter must not be allowed to shadow the independence displayed by each. Her own daughter, Michelle said, would join in the religious discussions with the two Mormon missionaries who used to call round for her. Further, her daughter left the Church only six months after being baptised into it. The very fact that spiritual experiences are of urgent and intense meaning for the individual, points to the strong individuality that these women possess. An example of this is provided by Michelle's encounters with her own mother on the "other side", after she had died. The attachment to her mother, in her need to have her as a configuring element in her experiences, is matched, however, by her manipulation of this figure in order to pursue what she wants - in this case, direct contact with spirits. The familial ambiguity is clear, and seems to lead to strong relationships between mother and daughter: each needs to use the other to achieve their goal of religious seeking.

The effects of illness on Michelle have been recurrent in the preceding analysis. It is important to view illness neither as a result of spiritual experience nor as a result of stress which the latter might cause. Nor should spiritual experiences be seen as a consequence of illness, as many early analysts of shamanism did, understanding shamanic ecstasies as evidence of schizophrenia (Lewis, 1989a:161-165; and see Lévi-Strauss' comparison of shamanistic healing with psychoanalysis, 1977:197-204). The relationship is not one of cause and effect, but of contexts which help to condition, although not determine, existence which rolls out from them. As Eliade recognised, sickness and dreams are important for becoming a "technician of the sacred" (1970:33). Thus shamans are often described as "wounded healers", as in Achterberg (1988) and Eliade (1970:27), which may be compared with Nouwen's conception of Christian ministry in contemporary society (1972). Another

person in the Network, who had worked with Michelle and knew her well, said she had undergone a personality change after the long term she spent in hospital, from being shy and inward to chatty and outward. In line with Michelle's own analysis of this time as a turning-point, this may be seen to mark her transition from involuntary, immature spirit possession to one which is voluntary and mature, as described by Lewis (1989a; 1989b) and which shall be looked at in more detail as regards channelling careers in the next chapter. The experiences Michelle had of spirits afterwards were always sought, unlike her premonitions and poltergeist activity: Michelle had taken greater control of her identity.

The third and fourth material conditions which need to be considered are likely much more important than could be construed from the interviews with Michelle. Her employment and voluntary work were often mentioned in connection with her spirituality. According to her friend mentioned above, Michelle held a string of low paid jobs throughout her life, which were unstable and entailed little status recognition. For some years, Michelle had been a cook in a nursing home, but during the course of fieldwork with her she was sacked from this post after taking time off work due to illness. Previous to that, she was a care assistant. It is interesting to note that in her encounter with her dead mother's spirit, the latter had become a nurse, something her mother had always wanted to be, but never achieved, in real life, and something which is obviously related to Michelle's jobs in the caring professions. A nurse has relatively more status, job security, and income than Michelle has ever had, and thus acts as an ideal lifestyle compared to which her own life is deficient. By contrast, a year after these interviews were held, Michelle became a manager in a local nursing home, due to her experience of chairing a local volunteer bureau.

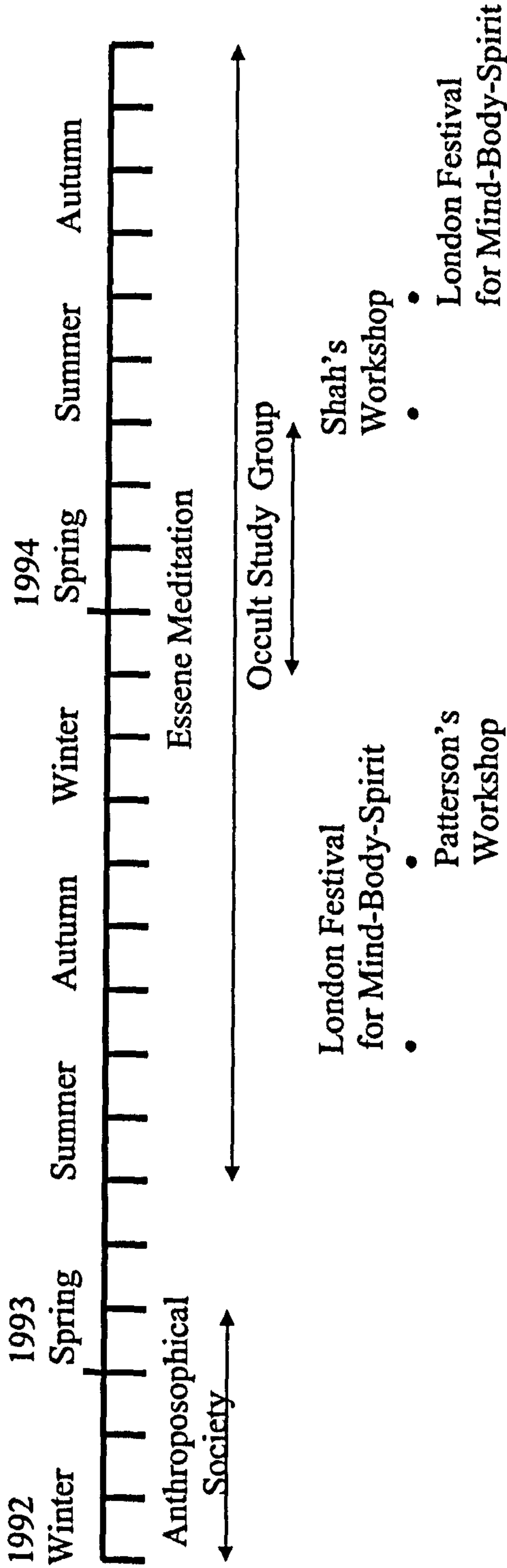
When Michelle's lack of fulfilling employment is coupled with her voluntary experience, a

structured background to her life is made apparent. Since her near-fatal illness, Michelle became heavily involved in social groups which seek to enact change in her own community. It is worth noting that this followed her parents' concerns: the local headquarters of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, at which they were treasurers, was where Michelle encountered her ghost at fifteen. By becoming involved with a women's group, the Labour Party, and a local volunteer organisation, Michelle said she sought to "pay back" what she received by returning from clinical death. She interpreted her life as one of service to others. Thus it is that all four material conditions were interlinked: other members of her family - her daughter and father - worked for the voluntary group, for instance. Her husband, however, was not related in any way to these activities and she mentioned him in passing only a few times during the course of six hours of interview. It was her husband who brought most of the money into the household and controlled its outgoing, according to her friend, and spent most of his spare time with their Airedale, which he took to dog shows. Her husband never figured in her spiritual experiences, unlike people at work or at the volunteer organisation. So it is in the context of a working-class wife's role that Michelle had these extraordinary spiritual experiences and the accumulation of social power through various interest groups.

Michelle's biography was typical for many encountered at the Nottinghamshire Network and illustrates how a mixture of Sutcliffe's notions of serial and multiple seeking are worked out through networks. At various times, Michelle held particular self-identities according to her dominant practices, which could even include formative groups such as churches. However, these were only temporary, lasting a couple of years at most, and were always matched with an openness to new experiences and ideas. This openness, characterised by the twin attitudes of eclecticism and nondogmatism, led to dissonance, which shocked her

from one self-identity to another. Important to this was her manipulation of different symbolic systems which she adopted from the various groups and practices. However, Michelle's attitude of holism meant that these changes were seen by her as constituting a single path, reflected in her growing confidence and competence, in particular with spirit possession. This career and attitude would not be possible were it not for the nonformative nature of the groups and networks within which she worked. This allowed much deviance from group actions and interpretations, even when she had studied for some time in a particular tradition. In the next two chapters, this biographical form of analysis is complemented by study of groups over a period of time, leading to a more complete and detailed application of the issues raised in this chapter.

FIRST PHASE



SECOND PHASE

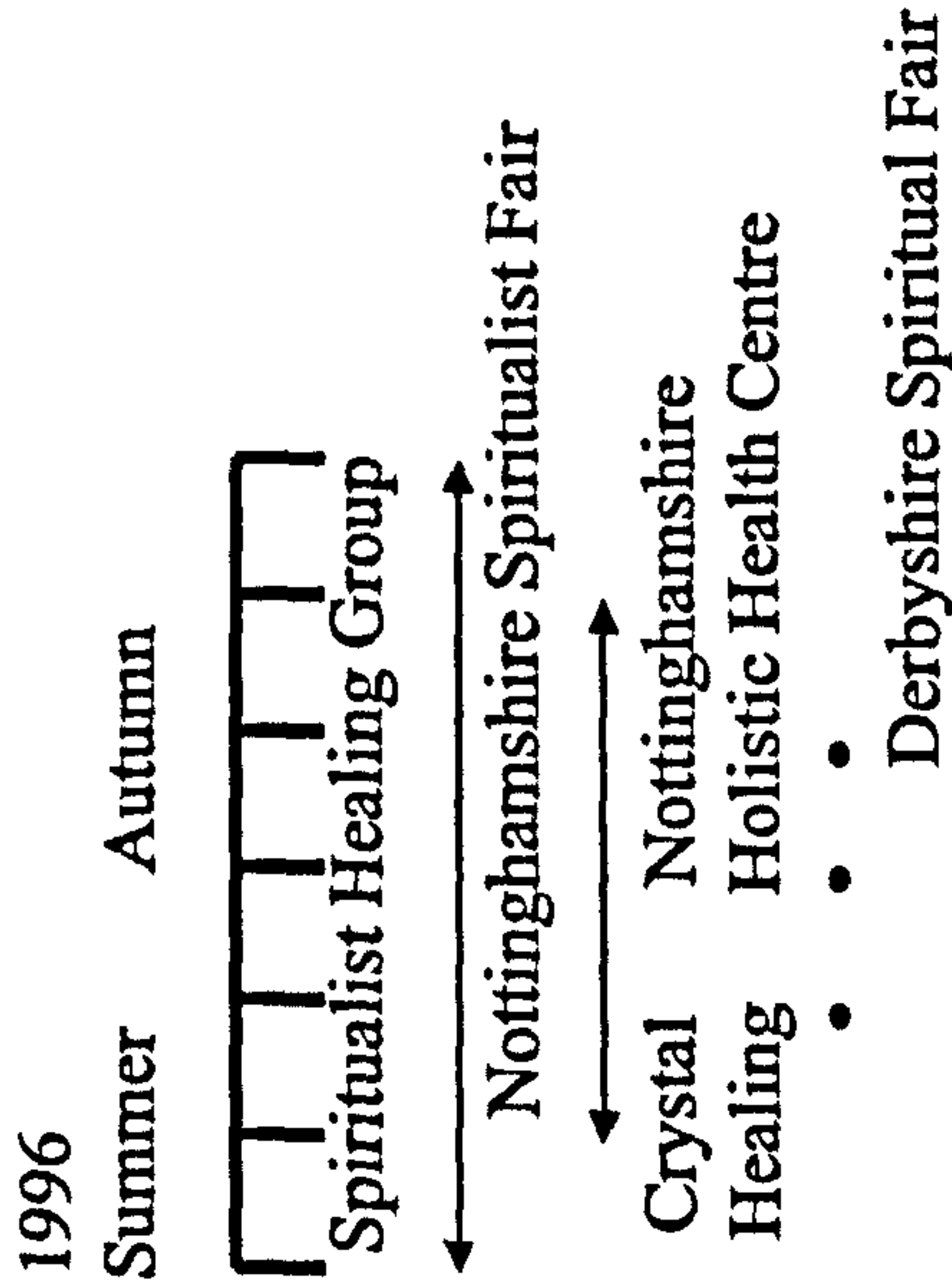


FIGURE ONE : TIMESCALE OF FIELDWORK

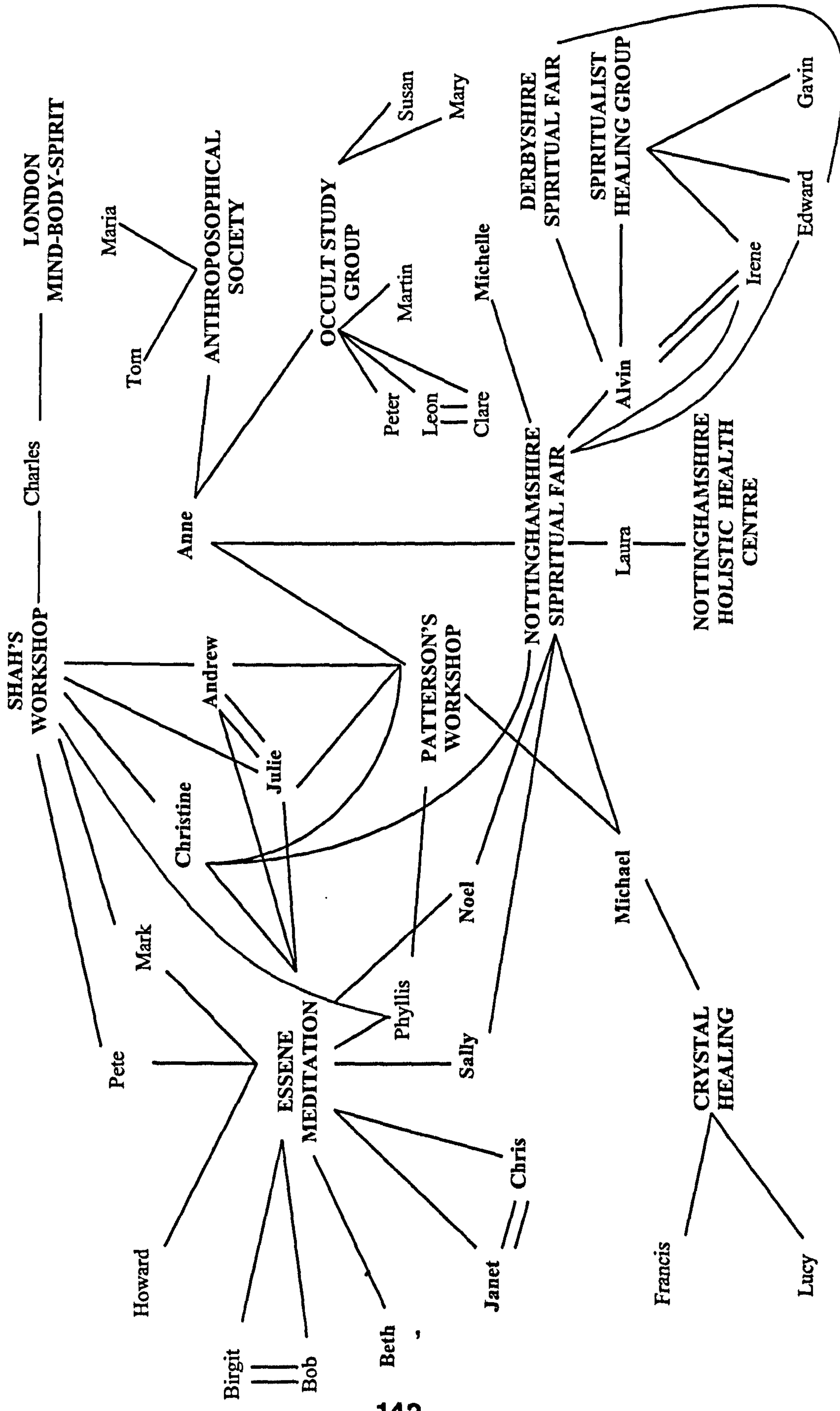


FIGURE TWO : THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE NETWORK - RELATIONS BETWEEN GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS IN FIELDWORK

Names in bold refer to key field subjects in text

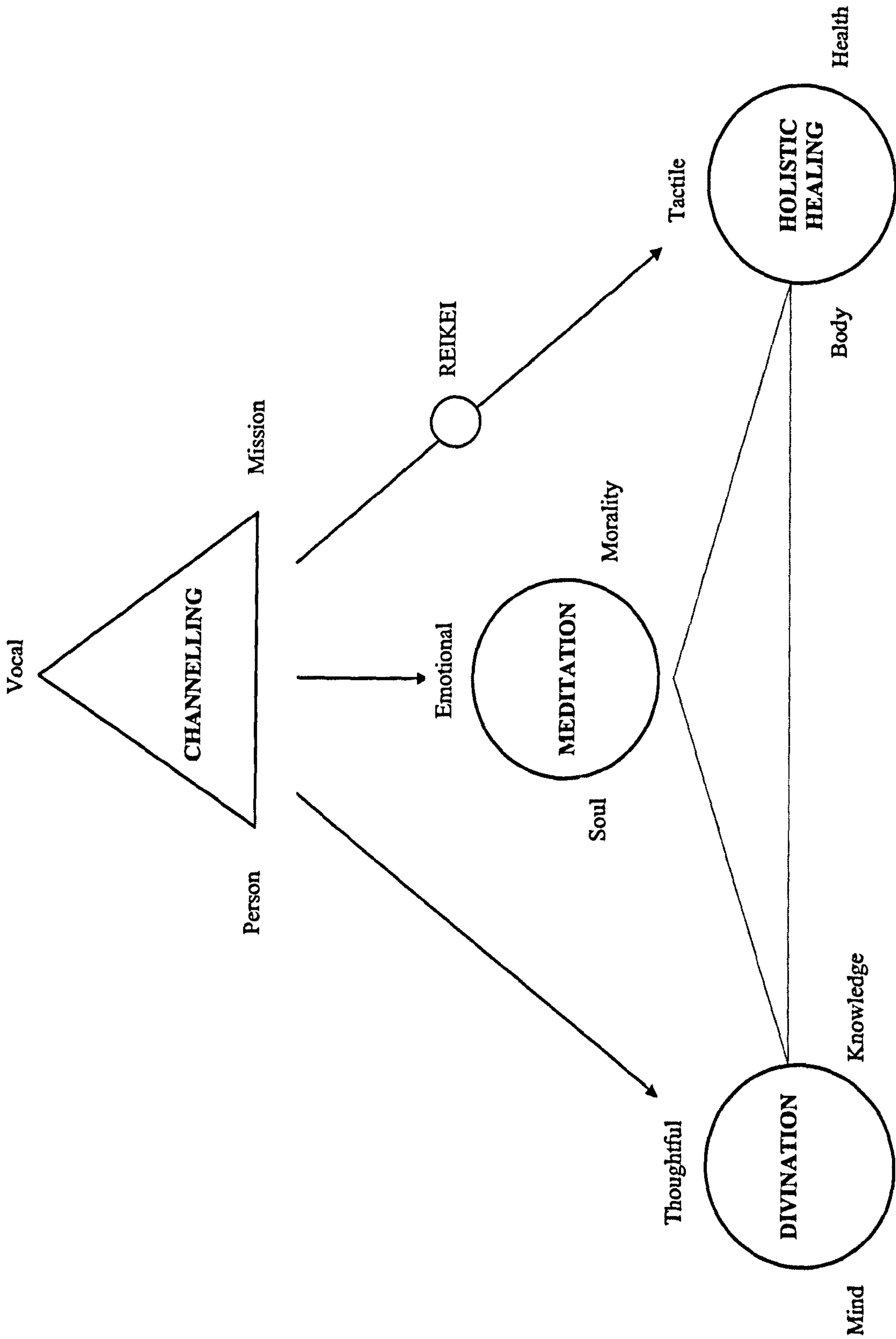


FIGURE THREE : STRUCTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN FORMS OF POSSESSION

CHAPTER THREE: THE ESSENE MEDITATION AND CHANNELLING

Introduction

A key group in the Nottinghamshire Network was the Essene Meditation, which met one evening a fortnight and was studied over an eighteen month period. This chapter discusses the Meditation from three angles. First, the practice of the meditation itself is looked at: the symbols used in the ritual and its place within the evening as a whole. Second, two channelling workshops that were organised and attended by the meditators. This considers the prevalence of channelling in nonformative spiritualities and builds up a model of the channelling career. Third, the wider spiritual biographies of meditators, which looks at the relationship between the two couples who led it and the authority they had in the group. The role of channelling is seen as important in this and particular attention is paid to one of the meditators. This chapter therefore builds on theory from the last chapter: the relationship between the four main sorts of practice and the concepts of nonformative seekership and nonformative groups. It also introduces new theory: the functions of rituals and symbols, and anthropological debates on spirit possession, especially by Ioan Lewis, insofar as they are relevant to the Meditation.

PART I. RITUAL AND SYMBOL AT THE ESSENE MEDITATION

1. Description of the Essene Meditation

The Essene Meditation group was discovered through association with Anne, an attender at Anthroposophical Society meetings. The group was organised by Janet and Chris Lovell, who led the meditation, and Julie and Andrew Spencer, the couple in whose home the meditation was held. The form the Meditation took throughout the eighteen month period of research remained fairly constant; the following is a description of it. Around fifteen people attended, with roughly equal numbers of men and women, and ages ranging from the mid-twenties to the mid-fifties. The majority of participants were in their late twenties to late thirties. Scheduled from eight to ten every other Friday evening, people would arrive from seven-thirty and had usually all left by eleven. The time spent meditating took place in the Spencers' converted attic, lasting three quarters of an hour from eight-fifteen to nine. The rest of the time was spent socialising downstairs. The time before the meditation consisted of chats, where everyday personal knowledge was enquired after, such as how people were keeping and how their week had been. After the meditation, speech took the form of informal discussions, often between small groups of three to five people. Julie made drinks for everyone and laid biscuits out on plates - many people chose herbal teas, of which she had a wide selection, some sitting on dining or lounge chairs and others standing. Nearly everyone knew each other and were friends with at least two of the others. This meant that no-one was left out of the informal socialising; everyone had people to talk to, although not everyone talked with all the others, and the discussions were open, in the sense that anyone could join in.

The meditation itself comprised a number of different sections. To call people upstairs Julie rang a bell, at which signal people took off their footwear and left them either downstairs or outside the meditation room and went up to the attic. As people settled into their positions, Janet Lovell - who with her husband Chris ran the meetings - would be seated cross-legged on the floor at the far end of the rectangular room. In the middle would be placed a thirty centimetre squared metal sheet, with a white candle at each of its corners and sometimes a vase of flowers, such as daffodils, in the middle. Few others sat cross-legged on the floor; there was a sofa along one side and others sat on dining chairs or with their backs against a wall and their legs outstretched. Chris sat next to Janet and operated the cassette recorder which was playing quiet ambient music of the type that is classified in the music business as new age (see Berman, 1988). Either Janet or Chris, depending on who was leading the meditation that night, invited everyone to close their eyes and after a couple of minutes of silence would read a passage from *The Essene Gospel of Peace* (Szekely, 1977). The Essene influence on this Meditation will be considered in the third part, when the Lovells' biographies are looked at. For the present part, the Meditation will be described as it was encountered, with information on the Essenes provided as it was presented to the group.

The readings from the *Gospel* typically focused on light and the need to send this to the rest of humanity. Essene theology taught through these readings emphasised relations humans have with angels and with male and female aspects of divinity: the body was linked with the "Earth Mother", spirit with the "Father God". Essene angels represented different qualities, such as the "Angel of Love", which if let into human lives leads to peace and harmony, and the "Angel of Creative Work". At one time, readings over three consecutive meetings covered the body, thought and feeling as the three types of existence experienced by

humans, explained as being the Essene terms for body, mind and spirit. However, these were not of interest simply as a human anthropology, but as showing how people are linked to each other and to wider aspects of the cosmos. The reading on thought, for instance, focused on peace with oneself, others and the wider universe. At the end of that meditation, Chris told everyone to send the released white light energy to "trouble spots around the world" such as Bosnia, Israel and Rwanda.

The common theme of the meditation, then, was the description of inter-relationships between various elements, both within the person and between people and their social, physical and spiritual environments. The quality of these relationships were seen in terms of conflict and peace, depending on the harmony that prevailed in their balance. Often the readings drew attention to an "inner war", which needs to be resolved by establishing contact with angels. This may be compared to Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical cosmology (see 1969 [first published in English, 1909] and 1973 [first published in English, 1922]), as can the spiritual practice of meditation itself. The aim of his spirituality was to teach contact and integration of "higher knowledges" (Steiner, 1973:14-15, 131-146), to be achieved through a method of meditative observation. Steiner's teachings and influence will be referred to throughout this Thesis and will be seen as important in the origins and growth of many religious biographies and groups.

The Essene readings sometimes led to further talks by whoever was leading the meditation, which especially focused on religious matters of Buddhism and Christianity. Christ was linked to love as Buddha was to peace. On one occasion, Chris told a story of chanting monks waiting for the appearance of Buddha from the skies. Here, he directed attention to the relationship between the monks and the villagers, who toiled the earth to provide

them with food. The most polemic talk was given when Mark led the meditation, one of only a few who infrequently did so. Mark read a poem he had written on the modern destruction of the environment, which was both humorous and depressing. He then turned his attention to the "Earth Mother, who is our body", chastising society for neglecting her. After the reading and talk, attention would turn to a led visualisation, in which Janet or Chris would, without reading, talk participants through an imaginary scene.

These visualisations nearly always took place in "the eternal and infinite garden", in which meditators were invited to enter by pushing the doors to the garden open. Once inside, a journey was undertaken, often involving nature, with some sort of transformation of the meditators. For example, on one occasion, Janet pointed out the moonlight and night sounds from insects and "small furry animals". Resting on a rock next to a brook, everyone was told to transform their dark side. During Mark's visualisation, the meditators were led to a lake before changing into swans. The swans glided on the lake, feeling the water on their bodies, then flew off higher and higher into the sky until the whole Earth could be seen beneath. In one of Chris' visualisations, meditators were again lifted high up in the air, above "fluffy white clouds", by the "Angel of Air", until all that could be seen was the Sun. This situation sometimes changed, such as one time when the place entered was "the garden of eternal and infinite mystery", high up on slopes to a rocky outcrop where many people were harvesting vegetables and fruit. Here, meditators worked with their "brothers and sisters", who were not identified, to distribute the harvest. Chris used this to illustrate that as well as giving, people must also take.

After the transformation or act which took place in the garden, the led visualisation ceased, the music was turned off and a silent meditation lasting about fifteen minutes followed.

The visualisation then resumed, with the transformation ended and everyone being told to walk back to the door of the garden, usually with the sun risen and shining, and pass through the doors, closing them. Janet and Chris would speak slowly and clearly throughout the visualisation, providing description in the form of short sentences followed by short silences. The tone was also authoritative - they dictated what would be experienced and felt in the garden - and more controlled than during the other parts of the meditation. This tone and the various elements of the visualisation, may be compared to a visualisation in the crystal healing workshop led by Michael, to be looked at in the next chapter, as well as shamanic workshops as, for example, experienced by Michelle.

After the visualisation Janet and Chris called on everyone to "dispel darkness" and send light out to all humanity and to the people named in a white Healing Book that lay next to the candles. After another silence the instruction was given to come out of the meditation by imagining "a flower closing to a tight bud" or "an equi-sided cross within a circle" at each of seven chakras located at the crown, forehead, throat, heart, solar plexus, crotch and root. This was in order to seal the power that had been used during the meditation, to protect everyone as they came out of it. People gradually left the room, moving out singly, during a period of about five minutes.

Whilst the meditation was the centre of the evening's activities, it cannot be said to be the only reason for attending, but must be understood in the context of what it followed and preceded. The talks beforehand re-established friendships between people who may have not seen each other for a fortnight or longer. Once this recognition was over, a shared experience in the form of meditation allowed the discussions and networking that were to take place afterwards. The meditation, then, did not function solely as an activity for its

own sake, but to facilitate later activities in the form of invitations to other spiritual events, discussions of spiritual topics and the learning of other spiritualities. Everyone present at the Meditation was engaged in at least one other group and two or more different practices that they talked about and saw as significant to their meditative practice. The Spencers' and Lovells' many activities, focused around healing rituals, will be looked further on. Other attenders were involved in channelling, a number of holistic therapies and forms of counselling, and divinatory techniques such as astrology.

2. Sacrality and Ritual

It is useful to compare the meditation with Victor Turner's work on liminal periods in rituals. In *The Ritual Process* (1995 [1969]), he developed Arnold van Gennep's work, *The Rites of Passage* (1977 [1908]), as a liminal period bounded by pre-liminal and post-liminal phases. Of particular interest to Turner was the middle, liminal phase between statuses, for during this time initiates experience a feeling of solidarity and non-competitiveness with one another, unlike when they bear status. He named this form of social bonding *communitas* and argued that it acts as anti-structural in society (1995:96-97, 125-130). From this point of view, the meditation may be seen as framed by an early evening period of uninitiation into spirituality, and a later evening period of being able to talk about and develop a spirituality. However, since the level of social structure at the Meditation was not high, little anti-structure was apparent. The meditation itself may be seen in terms of *communitas*, in that the meditators jointly acted in ritual. They were recipients of a knowledge that was passed onto them by the one leading the meditation. This is suggested by the sending of white light and the visualisation, as well as the emphasis on peace and love in the readings

and symbols. The sharing of *communitas* is further emphasised by one occasion in which all were asked to stand up and hold hands in a circle whilst Chris read a prayer by White Eagle to mark the start of the break of the meditation meetings for two months during the Summer.

However, the lack of opportunity during the meditation to talk about what was experienced did not necessarily mean that competition was not present. The wider context of the meditative practice needs to be investigated to determine both how participants perceived it and how they acted in relation to it. Some indications of these are found during the meditation itself. For example, although the Lovells led the meditation, they were not leaders in the sense that they established strict authority for the group as a whole. The relation between them and the Spencers is a complicated one which will be considered in due course. Others could perform in different ways during the meditation, such as the occasion on which it was led by Mark, and another time when Christine left to go downstairs early because a crystal on a shelf behind her head was affecting her. Further, during the circle prayer, Chris invited everyone to join in but only he and Janet knew the words. There was also opportunity for individual performance by choosing where to sit and when to enter and leave the room. Certain people usually took the sofa and other chairs, whilst one man, Howard, always brought a small wooden seat to kneel back on.

These points suggest that it would be wrong to claim that the meditation acted as a liminal phase between fixed statuses; it is more appropriately viewed as a middle phase which released certain social dynamics by relaxing everyone and setting the frame for spiritual engagement later on. Instead of a threshold - the term liminal derives from the Latin for this, *limen* (Turner, 1995:94) - the meditation appeared to act as a step of implicit

competition, leading up to a level of interaction where competition could be explicitly realised. Thus, it might be described as liminoid, in Turner and Turner's sense of a voluntary undertaking that leads to personal transformation (1978:35). In this way, the personal relations of participants displayed on first arriving can be viewed as changed into a context where it was acceptable to engage in the competitive spiritual pursuit of debate and networking, yet still remain friends and spiritual colleagues. How this was so can be investigated through the concepts of sacred space and time, which point to the spiritual power in meditation that facilitated such change.

In a review of the historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith's work, Bolle described how "the Sacred" is a category mistakenly used to explain ritual (1990:209). He joined with Smith to argue that ritual, rather than being a response to the sacred as Mircea Eliade purported, is instead that which makes things sacred; power explains sacrality, not sacrality power (205-209; Smith, 1978:91-92). This reverses a tradition of treating the sacred as an ontological category which demands reaction - such as Rudolf Otto's essentially theological work *The Idea of the Holy* (1950 [1917]) - replacing it as a construct by social groups, as in Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1968). The latter, sociological rather than phenomenological, method allows the understanding of various sorts of sacrality depending on context. Eliade had drawn attention to the importance of place in different cultures' formulations of the sacred, but his emphasis on the study of ancient Near Eastern texts biased his view towards the notion of the "Centre" being central to ritual, as both Bolle (1990:205) and Smith (1978:xii) pointed out. By recognising the political importance of place, though, Eliade had shown how the notion of location helps elucidate ritual: Bolle suggested that the emphasis on ritual space makes people think (1990:210-211) and Smith drew the conclusion that a "locative vision of the world" found in ritual contrasts with a

"utopian vision" of no place, these two functioning as "coeval existential possibilities" (1978:101). The same might be said about time, given the prescribed regularity of many rituals.

The establishment of special time and place for the Essene meditation was clear from the performance. The time was bounded first by the tolling of the bell to call people upstairs, second by the silent period of meditation on entering the room. A similar period ended the meditation, after the chakras had been closed. Corollary to this sacred time was the sacred space of the meditation room. Specially converted for the Spencers to practise their healing therapies, the room contained many symbols of their spirituality: posters showing the positions of the chakras and yogic movements, candles, crystals and incense burners on shelves, and wall hangings with Asian designs. Although the room was used because it was large - and that was one reason the Lovells claimed the meditation was not held in their home - this practical consideration does not nullify the sacrality established in it, such as the discreet covering over of a massage table which was placed away in one corner. The control of this spatial aspect of sacrality accorded the Spencers a position of power that would otherwise have been lacking.

By sharing a sacred experience the Essene meditators were able to talk to each other in more personal ways. The description of what the meditative experience had been like could lead to the expression of other feelings. However, it is important to note that this generally did not include Essene terminology from the meditation, except by the Lovells, reflecting the nonformative nature of the group. On one occasion Julie told how she had been led to confront some truths about her mother, which had surprised her. As well as such personal matters, the meditation could act to release thoughts about religion and politics,

such as free will and crime. This theorising was spiritual in the sense that value judgements were made on the basis of the speakers' religious beliefs. In arguing for the notion of free will, Chris and Phyllis, another regular attendee, spoke of the self's creative energy. Against that Howard argued for the view that since God knows all that will happen, people's actions are determined.

Similarly, during the debate on crime, Janet said that the lack of morality in many families these days was a result of the abdication of responsibility. Responsibility was a key idea in the Lovells' spirituality, indicating the capacity to self-develop. Political debates would often feature at the Meditation, showing that expression could be given to different, strongly held opinions. The Lovells and, to a lesser extent the Spencers, held conservative views, blaming people's misfortunes on themselves and contrasting contemporary society with that in their youth. In contrast, Birgit's point of view was more socialist: during one debate, she claimed that although there was as much poverty during the economic depression of the nineteen-thirties, there was not such a gap between the rich and poor, such that the latter did not feel so estranged and turn to crime. It is important to recognise that differences, both spiritual and political, were aired at the Meditation, even between people who engaged in other practices together. For example, Birgit had received healing through flower essences by the Lovells.

By conveying confidence on personal views, the meditation ritual therefore acted to provide individuals with social power, not necessarily in the sense of bringing them to deeper self-knowledge or fulfilment, but to bolster confidence in their practices and beliefs. As seen, this led to increased competition in the form of discussions, but also through invitations. The Spencers would often hand out leaflets advertising books, such as Schlemmer and

Jenkins' *The Only Planet of Choice* (1993) and Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (1994), and events such as channelling workshops, holistic health fairs and on one occasion a national gathering in London. They would also buy batches of ten books which they had found useful, at a reduced price from publishers, to sell to the others. By doing so, they helped establish and maintain their own leadership within the group.

The sacred aspects of the meditation can therefore be seen as preliminary to spiritual competitiveness, rather than being solely an experience of *communitas* before defined statuses were assumed. By experiencing this sacred ritual together, the meditators emerged on a common plane of willingness to interact spiritually, rather than on a common plane of equality. Drawing on Smith's work, competition may be interpreted as arising from the possibilities of space and time that the ritual conveyed. The quiet, relaxing time of meditation was conducive to setting people at ease with their views, by giving them an opportunity to review them, as they tested their views within the ideas presented to them by the readings and visualisations. But it also spiritually empowered them to engage with others after the meditation.

This may be compared with the usual interpretations of meditation to be found in both primary and secondary literature, which focus on awareness and transformation of the self. In writing what George Trevelyan called, "the meditation textbook for the new age movement" (Bloom, 1993:back cover), William Bloom described how breathing is used to focus awareness so that a six-fold procedure is achieved. The six points are centring of self, aligning of self with the inner self, review of the period since the last meditation, expansion of consciousness to link the personal with the cosmic, awareness of environments, and service by sending energy to others (1993:11-87). The Essene meditation incorporated the

first, fourth and fifth - these two during the visualisation - and sixth points, but also had its own - the closing down of awareness and energy, which the Lovells named grounding. Further, few of the Essene meditators adopted postures that would allow for deep breathing as described also in the psychologist Herbert Benson's book *The Relaxation Response* (1980); those few that did, such as Howard and Chris, were conspicuous. The common posture was simply to sit comfortably on an easy chair. Therefore, this emphasis on self-transformation misses the point of social location which appeared at the Essene Meditation. Although self-review was a part of that, it was placed within the wider context of establishing a spiritual relationship with other meditators in terms of practices and beliefs. If transformation is to be analysed, this needs to be done in a less detached and subjective way, paying attention to the social structure of the transformative context. By employing such a method, the Essene meditation may be interpreted as personally transformative, as seen in the next section.

Three themes of this social location could be distinguished in the post-meditative phase. First, networking was prevalent as people sought out new experiences that might suit them and explained to others what they had found useful. A range of materials would be discussed, such as television programmes and cassettes they had heard, as well as books read. These were used to stimulate discussion on their practices, rather than being of intrinsic interest themselves. For example, one evening the Spencers explained about some cassettes they had heard which dealt with the United States Government's involvement with extra-terrestrials and the way N.A.S.A. had covered this up. Whilst a subject of interest to many of the meditators, the point of the discussion was framed within experiences of channelling and a ufology group. The cover-up was perceived as just another way in which the Ascended Masters were contacting Earth people.

Second, there were sharing of problems and attempts to help people through these. Julie once explained to a few around her that she and Andrew had become increasingly absent-minded in recent weeks, linking this to their movement to a "higher plane of consciousness" which the channeller Sheila Patterson had explained to them, as will be shown in the next part. She asked if others were going through a similar time, expressing surprise when some said they were not. This led onto a discussion of how to cope with changes in the way someone feels. Difficulties with spiritual experiences were also discussed; in particular, experiences of channelling led many people to a greater understanding of their meditative practice. Both Birgit and Phyllis talked of the need to move beyond religion which inserted a mediator, such as Christ, between oneself and God. These two had been brought up as Christians but had not attended for many years. They interpreted channelling as a more direct route to God, although this was challenged by Christine's interpretation as shown in the third part.

The establishment of leadership was the third theme and this could be through dominance of discussions or by actions that emphasised spirituality, such as the adoption of serene postures, hugs and other physical contact, and taking time alone to relax or look at something. Although these three themes could be found at times other than after the meditation, they were particularly emphasised during the period afterwards. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the third part, when the authorities of the Lovells and the Spencers are considered.

It was not so much that people were brought emotionally closer together through the meditation, but that their relationship as spiritual seekers came into heightened focus. In this sense, some sort of spiritual transformation through the meditation did occur. The

competitiveness that was engendered need not be seen in negative terms as spiritual fighting, but as committed exploration and testing. In other words, as active seekership, as described in the last chapter. This analysis helps explain why the meditation was held on Friday nights, which in contemporary Britain is identified as a social time due to the end of the normal working week. An Occult Study Group, looked at in Chapter Five, also held its meetings on this evening. The social life that the Meditation afforded its participants is also shown by the New Year's Eve parties that the Lovells threw, where they organised circle dancing, poem readings and food. The fortnightly regularity of the meditation further suggests the significance of this night of the week; the organisers did not expect people to give up every Friday night to attend. That people, especially the core group of the Lovells, the Spencers, Christine, Mark, Howard, Phyllis, Birgit, Pete and Bob, did attend testifies to the socialising that occurred at the meetings.

3. Meaning and Symbols

As well as the ritual performance, it is important to consider the symbols used at the Meditation in order to understand people's experiences of meditating. As seen, in the meditation certain powers were called upon for transformation of the person and the relation between person and wider environment. The visualisation locates the experience of these powers as within the body, as shown by the bodily transformation and work that often occurred, but were understood to originate in extraordinary realms, or those not ordinarily experienced. The attention of the meditators were drawn to these powers by Essene readings, the led visualisation and the chakra system of the body. The meditators were seen to act as conduits for these powers, channelling them through their own bodies

and out into the world, and by doing so heightened their sense of sacrality. By performing with these powers, the meditation transformed participants into people who were linked with their world, thus allowing the spiritual exchange that followed. It is important to note that this sociological explanation does not rest on psychological hypotheses of altered states of consciousness - as seen above, there was little evidence of occurrence of these in the Essene meditation - but in the social structuring of the ritual performance.

These issues may be investigated through David Preston's analysis of the practice of Zen meditation, his primary concern being the uniting of the social context with personal experience: "with learning how members come to share common experiences and meanings in this rather esoteric setting [of Zen], and how particular practices figure into this process of personal transformation and membership acquisition" (1988:7). Preston viewed the body as the locus for this experience, such that thought and belief became secondary as a form of phenomenological reduction occurred (10, 49). Such a common construction of reality, including spiritual reality, was experienced through the Essene spirituality at the Meditation. However, as van Hove pointed out in her analysis of ideology in the "New Age circuit", investigated through participant observation, meanings of sacrality concerning the body and the higher self vary widely (1996). This situation at the Essene Meditation may be explained through the nonformative nature of the group.

The transformations that occurred in that setting could not be as easily controlled as in other meditative settings, like Zen. This meant that transformation was more idiosyncratic and took different forms, enabling the variety of positions on which spiritual competitiveness rested. There were three reasons for this, which may be compared with Zen meditation. First, the bodily practice of meditation was not ritually prescribed. Unlike

in Zen, different postures and choices, for example of where to sit and next to whom could be adopted (Preston, 1988:39, 63-64, 106, 113). Second, despite the Essene content, meditators generally expressed the opinion that it was the silent period that was of most importance to them, which they found relaxing. Although Zen meditation is also silent, it is not relaxing even if it is calmness and stability are experienced, but instead is an intense experience, especially physically. Further, during meditation spiritual conundrums set by teachers, called *koans*, are concentrated upon, the answers to which are assessed at a later date (37, 117, 141). Third, the Essene meditation occurred only once a fortnight, for less than an hour, unlike the long periods practised each day in Zen (33). Despite these differences, it is important to recognise what constructed reality there was between Essene meditators, including the experience of spiritual energies (119). This may be looked at through the use of symbols.

The key symbol in the meditation was white light. Turner understood some symbols to act dominantly both ideologically and emotionally (1967:19-47). Dominant symbols maintain their meaning through different rituals and coalesce during times of *communitas* so that strongly-held values are equated with intense affects, leading to people's placement in the flow of ritual process (Turner and Turner, 1978:135-136). From this point of view, white light may be understood as organising the extraordinary powers encountered in meditation and to re-balance them by sending them in certain directions, which may be compared to Eliade's analysis of the symbolism of light (1976:93-97). This symbol was developed in the meditation by each participant banishing darkness from themselves and the "eternal and infinite garden", through sending it across the world in order to heal, and through protecting it by closing their chakras. This was the most obvious influence of Essene Network spirituality throughout the evening and concords with the symbolism of many

other spiritualities in the wider Network.

The Essene teachings used by the Lovells can be seen as dualistic, with the "sons of darkness" pitted against the "Sons of Light", as shown by the Morning and Evening Communion based upon the *Essene Gospel of Peace* (Szekely, 1977). These Communion, which acted as the theological basis for the Lovells' talks and visualisations in meditation, have a recurring theme in which peace and understanding is gained by the qualities which the Angels impart to people's bodies. For example, the Friday Morning Communion - there is one for each day of the week, the mornings focused on the "Earthly Mother" and the evenings on the "Heavenly Father" - reads,

"Angel of Air, enter with my breath and give the Air of Life to my body"
[quoted from the *Gospel*]. Know, oh Sons of Light, that the angel of Air is the messenger of the Heavenly Father, and no-one comes before the face of God that the angel of Air lets not pass. For we do not think of the angel of Air when we breathe, for we breathe without thought, as the sons of darkness live their lives without thought" (from an Essene Network leaflet distributed by the Lovells).

Such a theology is comparable to Alice Bailey's, as well as Steiner's, as shown by her Great Invocation which focuses on Light and Love to infuse people from God and therefore alter the way of the world. However, the emphasis on bodies shows that the dualism of these three theologies is not meant to divide people from each other or from the world, but to point to the results of improperly balanced forces. The history of this is located by Albanese in Emanuel Swedenborg's theology (1992) and may therefore be linked to the New Thought groups identified by Melton as precursors to contemporary phenomena

(1992). But unlike the more authoritative writings and groups which these historical figures established - reflected in today's Lucis Trust and World Goodwill for Bailey, the Anthroposophical Society for Steiner and the Swedenborg Society - the balance of powers as a symbol at the Essene Meditation could not function without reinterpretation by each meditator. Although these other groups were to be found on the fringes of the network, as shown by fieldwork at Anthroposophical meetings and the London Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit and by their occasionally read writings, they should be seen as formative in comparison with the social organisation of the Meditation.

This may be seen by the subsequent discussions of this symbolism after the meditations. Here, it was clear that white light had different meanings for people, indicating the different social contexts of the participants. For some, such as Julie and Christine, white light represented love. For others, such as Beth, Sally and Noel - three friends who attended for three months - it stood for healing. Whilst for the Lovells it meant the rectification of order. These meanings could only be elucidated by studying people in different contexts, their acts as well as their language. The relevance of using Turner's analysis is therefore questioned, for this nonformative attitude to symbols pointed to the inability of key symbols to act dominantly for the whole group. Therefore, the extent to which meditators shared in an experience of ritual flow must also be questioned. However, despite these differences, there was a limited range of meanings of the symbol, as also for the lesser symbol of peaceful nature as represented by the garden and the buds of the chakra system. This is best understood as a range of balances, including health, social order and mental calm. A variety of interpretations of these were made, which in some cases led to disruption of calmness, for example in people's personal relationships.

The use of language at the Essene Meditation was therefore idiosyncratic to a large extent, relating to people's spiritual biographies rather than group meanings. This should be understood in terms of the undisciplined group control of practices, which, however, should not be used to infer that individuals themselves were undisciplined either in their group or private practices. The issues that Whitehead raised pertaining to ritual experience therefore need to be carefully considered. According to Whitehead,

"in therapy, as in ritual, a process is engendered whereby the structures of feeling and cognition are linked up to a wider, and publicly sharable, vision of reality that is existentially satisfying - and, as a subspecies of this, ideologically appealing - through the medium of symbolic formulations that "fit" the deeper structures of the self while simultaneously making assertions about the world. The intensity with which this symbolic connection is made, the profundity in other words, of visionary apprehension, is not a function just of the "inner fit" of the symbolism but, perhaps more important, of the view of reality being articulated by it" (1987:97-98).

Whitehead showed how this vision of reality is intimately related to the group context in which experiences occur, thus, in Scientology auditing, insight "invariably appear[s] as a validation of Scientology theory" (1987:166). She noted that, as in Zen meditation, intense practice is used to hasten and magnify such psychological changes (230). Herein lies the difficulty of analysing groups with weak structures of social power. At the Meditation, meanings of symbolic formulations were not shared by everyone and thus experiences in rituals did not lead to a common vision of reality, even if discursive themes were apparent. More importantly, practice was rarely intense. The emphasis during meditation was on creative visualisation, rather than the attainment of a particular experience such as insight,

loss of self, or detachment from habits. Nonformative groups are therefore quite a different social phenomenon from either cults or sects, such as Dianetics and Scientology, at which Whitehead looked. It is for this reason that analysis of discourse and symbolism is not central to this Thesis. Rather, more emphasis is placed on performances of social power and the development of spiritual careers through people's biographies.

Common meaning through spiritual experience of ritual and symbol was established as a possibility at the Essene Meditation, which was only temporarily and locally actualised. Channelling is next investigated to show how such establishment could be disrupted by other experiences. The influence of channelling on the Meditation shows how similar symbols and beliefs, such as a plan for the Earth and contact with God, could be rearranged such that correspondence of meanings in people's meditative experiences was hard to achieve. Thus, the spiritual competitiveness that seekership fostered at the Meditation acted to challenge any single authority that sought to impose understanding. The importance of channelling to many of the meditators helps show how meaning must be understood through the variety of people's experiences rather than only by their attendance at particular groups.

PART II. CHANNELLING

1. Perspectives on Channelling

As pointed out in the last chapter, many commentators on the New Age Movement view channelling as central. Therefore, before turning to fieldwork with channelling, it is of interest to see how these views delineate the phenomenon so that a more accurate portrayal may be gained. Academic analyses treat channelling as some form of movement arising from the nineteen-sixties in which various individuals linked themselves to the discourses of wise cosmic spirits who talked through them, such as J.Z. Knight with Ramtha and Jane Roberts with Seth (Hanegraaff, 1995:23-25). Hanegraaff characterised channelling as "articulated revelations" to stress that, "the only common denominator [of various channellings] appears to be the fact that people receive information - messages - which they interpret as coming from a source other than their own normal consciousness" (1995:20). However, the notion of revelation does not sufficiently stress the mechanism of such reception, in which people act as conduits for other powers, in other words as channels. As will be seen, it is this aspect which is most useful when analysing the phenomenon, allowing comparison with other forms of possession, such as in spiritualism and shamanism.

Melton was more emphatic on the role of channelling. Like Hanegraaff, Melton appreciated the importance of channelling because his historical discussion allowed him to see the central role that spiritualism in its various forms, especially the Theosophical school, had played in nonformative spiritualities this century, as discussed also by Sutcliffe's analysis of "modern religious alternativism" (1997:103-104). Melton claimed the novelty of

channelling lay in providing a new function for those who use it, that of, "facilitating the personal transformation of the channelers' clients" (1992:23). However, he, like Hanegraaff, did not consider channellers who have not published, like Shah and Sheila Patterson who are looked at below, mainly because, as stated before, their analyses were literature-based and lacked participant observation. However, because of their involvement in social networks of other channellers and audiences interested in their communications, these other channellers provide invaluable information about this phenomenon which enriches textual studies.

Aside from academic treatments of channelling, there are two perspectives of interest to an understanding of the phenomenon, for they show the various ways in which channelling is treated by those who encounter it in a religious context. These are as a spiritual awakener and as a spiritual rival. The first of these maintains a critical appreciation of channelling. Whilst accepting the general thrust of the phenomenon, they judge its elements according to their values of authentic spirituality, which are based on the need to awaken people to the reality of the spiritual world and so lead to a reformed culture. Although they may have channelled in the past, most spiritual awakeners are not now channellers, but are invariably cultural critics who concern themselves with contemporary western culture as a whole. Spangler and Thompson are strong examples here: in *Reimagination of the World: a critique of the New Age, science, and popular culture* (1991), they criticised "suburban channeling" for assuming that any product of the unconscious is valuable and for producing idols such as Ramtha (1991:9-10, 128-132). Spangler, who himself channelled a spirit named John (Spangler, 1984), sought to reinvent the notion of the New Age in terms of an open-ended imaginative emergence of the sacred in a new planetary culture of global awareness and cooperation (1991:56-57; 1984:77-84), denouncing its uncritical and glamorous aspects.

Coming from the point of view of psychotherapy, Christina and Stanislov Grof viewed channelling - along with past-life memories, shamanic adventures, and possession states - as a "spiritual emergency" in which previously unconscious aspects of the psyche are awakened (1991:73-99). They viewed this awakening as a good thing, for, "Spiritual development is an innate evolutionary capacity of all human beings. It is a movement toward wholeness, the discovery of one's true potential" (1). But in the form of an emergency certain dangers present themselves which may have negative consequences for the individual (39, 47-60), leading to problems with self-identity and functioning in everyday life (71-72). In the second part to their book, the Grofs therefore gave advice to produce and deal with these emergencies in a controlled way, drawing on "other times and cultures". They related this to contemporary society, claiming that the "current global crisis" which results from political, military, technological and economic attitudes and strategies, may be resolved through the "radical inner transformation of humanity on a large scale" (235). They therefore promoted "supportive networks for people undergoing crises of spiritual awakening" (237) in order to minimise the dangers of trying to achieve this.

Spiritual rivalry, as a second perspective on channelling, is the attempt to denounce some or all channellers in order to claim spiritual superiority. Leviton offered a critique of channelling on the grounds that it comes from the old gods of human evolution and may be influenced by "Brothers of the Left", "black brotherhoods", or merely the channel's own self (1994:169-171, 275). Further, Leviton wrote that channelling is taken on by those lacking in rigorous training in the occult, without "corroboration, peer review, or attempt at substantiation" (168). The extent to which such views are intentionally racist and anti-socialist can only be gauged by a fuller knowledge of Leviton; what is clear is that he comes from the standpoint of an Anthroposophist, basing himself on Steiner's evolutionary

scheme in order to correct contemporary spirituality.

Leviton contrasted channelling with Steiner's method of "super-consciousness", in which, "human beings unfold thoughts out of their own inner activity and one draws forth moral impulses from these self-generated or pure thoughts" (1994:143, 187, 196). Steiner, wrote Leviton, reunited rational science with spiritual intuition through the notion of *Freiheit*, the "spiritual freedom of the inner human being", creating a "spiritual science" (142, 176). Through such correction, Leviton hoped to aid the initiation of the "new Michaelic culture" whereby the ego evolves through imagination into a wholeness not trapped by the conditions of time and space (85, 208-210, 287). This redeployment of Steiner's cosmology may be understood through Leviton's history of experience which includes training under a Zen Buddhist and channelling Archangel Michael, before his interest in Steiner and the Anthroposophists (37-40). By ridiculing related phenomena - he characterises Commander Ashtar as "a slightly bombastic Jean Luc Picard of some behemoth starship cruising Earth's ionosphere" (32) - Leviton reserved for himself the accolade of spiritual authenticity.

Criticism of channelling also comes from individual channellers. The Nine who channelled through P.V. Schlemmer claimed that other channels are not pure, since their emotions are involved (Schlemmer and Jenkins, 1993:381-382). Likewise, during her workshop *Exploring the Multi Dimensional Self* at the 1994 London Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, Trisha Caetano said that channelling today has become trance-mediumship, where the channel's body is often taken over not by spirit guides but a part of the channel's own psyche which is in denial. Her workshop was designed to teach people to open instead as a channel to "Universal Knowledge". Like academic analyses, these spiritual critiques do not consider channelling in social context, yet this is essential if the importance of the phenomenon in

contemporary spiritualities is to be gauged. Therefore, channelling influences on the Essene Meditation are now considered, which will also explicate in more detail some of the key themes found in channelling.

2. Shah's and Patterson's Workshops

In 1994 an event was attended in which Shah, a channeller from Santa Fe in the United States, held a one day workshop in which she both displayed her channelling performances and talked about them. Shah - the use of this pseudonym in the Thesis reflects her monosyllabic stage name - was in Nottinghamshire by the invitation of Julie and Andrew Spencer. About fifty people attended Shah's event, which was held during the daytime in the function room of a leisure centre. Most of those who came were known to the Spencers, many of them attending the Essene Meditation. Shah sat quietly on a chair at the front of the hall, next to a table; chairs for the participants were arranged in rows facing her, as for a public lecture. To begin the session, she relaxed by meditating and sipping water methodically, during which time she introduced herself and then assumed her channelling state.

In channelling, the performers claim to allow some or all aspects of themselves to be partially or completely taken over by a disembodied entity, as described in Klimo's thorough presentation of these phenomena (1988:185). The explained mechanics of this will vary in different accounts. Some say that their spirit left their body and mind so that the entity's spirit could assume it, as in Shah's initial experiences, considered below. Others ascribe the change to the entity using their whole selves as channels through which to direct words, as

in Bloom's explanation of channelling the Christ Sparks, whom he believes expanded his ordinary consciousness (1995:10-12). What is commonly clear is that the words spoken during the state of channelling come from a being separate from the channeller.

Whilst the key point about the state of channelling lies in the actual words spoken, reflected in the desire of channellers to publish and circulate their discourses, it is essential to consider the way they are spoken. Shah's channelling voice was rather slow and very precise. It came across as controlled, even when she was correcting something she had just said, as happened a few times. Her voice was monotonous and placid, the only noticeable difference in intonation being when a humorous remark was made - then it would become slightly quizzical and patronising. With regular pauses in the speech, she displayed few of the emotions normal to a public lecture on emotive subjects, such as the fate of humankind. Yet the very placidity and quietude of her voice gave an impression of calm care, not indifference, as shown by the reaction of her audience. In Goffman's terms, this may be described as a "personal front" in which appearance is controlled in order to maintain decorum (1971:93-94). This was needed to legitimise the message being delivered, which was one of respect as shown below, but was also important for the channeller to cope with the task of concentration for several hours. The establishment of a performative norm through "gestural speech" (Tyson, 1988) allowed Shah to sustain her reality, without which her audience would have no chance of being brought within it. This reality may be described as direct experience of the Ascended Masters.

"I love to bathe in the essence and vibration of your beings", said Ashtar to the participants who had travelled from the surrounding area and beyond to see Shah. Commander Ashtar was believed by Shah to be an Ascended Master, a being who has evolved far beyond

earthly physical existence to become what is effectively a high-positioned cosmic administrator. He heads Ashtar Command, which at the present time is organising the Earth's transition to higher energy frequencies, resulting in evolutionary progress for humankind. Ashtar is one of the handful of Ascended Masters whom Shah habitually channelled, and throughout his speech on the day in question, he remained complimentary to all present. "You are all Masters in what you do", he told his audience, "and worthy to receive the energies which will infuse the Earth over the next year." From the outset of his "communication" - as Shah called her channelled messages - it was clear that Ashtar held great respect for everyone present.

Ashtar's spoken manner of care and respect may be linked to the content of his message and the question may be posed why Ashtar cared so much about those in the room. For a start, his work as an Ascended Master lay in restructuring the Earth and humanity, so that each body may, "be a totally different being [...] encompassing the greater light of God within and without." This ascendancy from the physical body - which includes the emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of human existence - was the mission of Ashtar Command. Propagating its message and initiating humans' action to help fulfil the mission was therefore an important part of Ashtar's work. On the other hand, as an Ascended Master, Ashtar had an intricate knowledge of the cosmos, and humanity's place in it. Two of his facts are instrumental here. First, as humans everyone is already a Master and encompasses God, it is just that people do not realise this; the notion of realise here referring both to a mental acceptance of the fact, and an active display of it. Second, as humans everyone has both chosen and been chosen to be on Earth at this point in time so that they could work with the incoming energies for ascension. Thus, Ashtar cared for and respected people since they are embodiments of God, and are participating in a hard

mission. As he said in his communication, he recognised that compared to humans, he has it easy.

This channelling event was not a socially detached phenomenon of merely espousing a message to eager listeners. Instead it was in part a reaction to the audience. Ashtar's attitudes of care and respect towards everyone in the room meant that their appreciation and thoughts about his message were important to him. This was displayed in the question-and-answer session which followed his initial speech; the former lasted at least as long as the latter, roughly forty minutes. The dozen or so questions asked ranged from points about Ashtar's speech to personal points concerning the questioner. Those addressing Ashtar were allowed to explain what they meant in a detailed way and to make their own points of view clear within the question itself. After his rather lengthy answers, Ashtar would ask if he had answered to the questioner's satisfaction, and on a few occasions, questioners continued expressing their own views. Ashtar's responses always directly addressed the question put to him, no matter how personal from the questioner's point of view. Mark from the Meditation, for example, asked whether the messages he had received through his own channelling were authentic or not. Ashtar replied that they were, for if he looked deeper into them, he would discover that the, "mannerisms and character of them are not your own". Another questioner said that she had been in Egypt recently and felt "electrified" there, whereas back in Britain, she told him, "I feel like I'm struggling again". The reason for this, Ashtar explained, was that she had touched upon a "past life sojourn", because she had lived a previous incarnation in Egypt.

The following discussion of Ashtar's message will be supplemented by information given during the rest of the day's proceedings. This included Shah reading out a communication

previously channelled from Lord Sananda, who acts as second in command at Ashtar Command, called The Law of Abundance or Abundance in Higher Consciousness, a further channelled session involving Sananda himself, plus a question-and-answer period directed to Shah. There are three interrelated themes that may be discerned in analysis of the messages of Ashtar Command: anthropology, mission, and theology.

Anthropology, here meaning theories of what it is to be human, was placed in historical context by the explanation of the effect of pre-earthly existence on present earthly existence and to a future post-earthly existence. The transitions between these historical evolutionary stages involve a plan which necessitates missions being undertaken both by humans and other cosmic beings, notably those at Ashtar Command. Lying behind this plan and its missions are the realms of higher beings, and, ultimately, God. The following is an exposition of these themes.

Humans on Earth today have freely volunteered to be in this place at this time and had their choice accepted. They have been veiled from this choice ever since, however, so that they would not desert the mission. But now is the time - and the nineteen-nineties will be one of the most important decades in the history of the Earth - that these veils are being lifted through energy infusions sent by Ashtar Command, leading to an evolutionary restructuring. This will mean that they shall have greater consciousness and integration of dimensions higher than their present Third Dimension. As Ashtar informed everyone, humans shall begin to resume their "states of perfection once again". "Lightworkers" is the term used to describe those who will be woken from the deception first, and begin to display the "light of God" within them, for the benefit of awakening others. Ascended Masters are working in various ways with individuals and groups to help this awakening.

This is especially true during times of meditation, when knowledge is imparted to the higher dimensions of the human. Although interference from a person's own self, or even false knowledge by other beings, are possible, Ashtar said that scepticism should not be exercised to the extent that reception of true messages is blocked.

Sananda's communications seem to be especially concerned with how humans should work with their missions on Earth. He emphasised grace as the gift from God which is the force behind love and which strengthens the faith needed in these missions. Through such faith will come prosperity or abundance. In asking what sort of prosperity will be experienced, one of the key aspects of the theory of mission is highlighted: mission is individual. Therefore, what people do in their missions cannot be generalised, nor can the sort of prosperity they will receive. "Simply by being the light that you are," Ashtar said, "you will be creating a whole within the law of oneness," and thus carrying out these missions.

Mention of a law directs attention to considerations of those who make decisions concerning missions. During the day's events, Shah also showed a slide show of over a dozen other Ascended Masters, illustrating her descriptions of their work with photographs or drawings of them. This was possible since each Master, with the exception of Ashtar, has at various times incarnated on Earth to help humans develop spiritually. Thus, Sananda was Jesus, and other Masters have been King Arthur, St. Francis of Assisi, and Shakespeare. Thus Masters are not different in kind to humans, since everyone can, and will, attain their status at some point in time. This is because all have the light of God within them, and it is to a perfect state with God that all will eventually arrive. That God lies within everyone, whatever their appreciation of that truth, leads to the consideration of an immanental theology alongside a transcendental one: the transcendence relates how the immanence of

God works within the situation in which it is placed.

A channelling event, such as the one given by Shah, is therefore extremely important given the premises of the themes articulated. The directly channelled imparting of cosmic knowledge to individuals on Earth is a way not only of guiding them through their lives, but also of demonstrating care and respect for their lives. This encouragement, particularly in the form of question-and-answers to the Masters, allowed those who attended to gain recognition of their spiritual career paths. It is interesting to note that several questions were concerned with individuals' healing therapies, a topic which was obviously of great concern to them. But this social interaction is equally important to the channeller herself. Shah's Nottinghamshire event took place during a nine week tour, her longest since she had started channelling the Masters in 1988. Six months previously she had been channelling across Australia for seven weeks. She was therefore able to talk about her work - in other words, about her mission as a lightworker - as well as to do that work both by channelling anew and discussing previously channelled material. Channelling, then, is not a dry deliverance of knowledge from Masters to humans, but a dynamic working with material by audience, channeller and Masters.

Six months previous to the event led by Shah, the Spencers had organised for an Australian channeller to come to Nottinghamshire for a day's workshop, attracting around forty people. Sheila Patterson, although she did not channel on the day, told participants that she was in continual communication with "the Masters". She displayed this by describing how Archangel Michael was present in the room, with whom she proceeded to banter. The emphasis of the event, it seemed, was to empower everyone to act as the Masters they already are, as informed through an introductory letter received on attendance. Patterson

was an active performer, speaking loudly with expansive gestures. The jocular tone of the day was set out in the leaflet which advertised it:

"This workshop is designed to look at, in a lighthearted way, the Divine Plan for Earth, why we are here and to help awaken, activate, inform, release weariness and buried emotions, empower, align with Source and to discuss the final steps to going home and the reuniting of the Twin Souls. It is fast moving, informative, fun and suited to those who feel they are here to help at this special time of planetary evolution into Light. She [Patterson] hopes to assist you to perceive your own truth."

The way in which Patterson treated these themes bore similarities with Shah, both in terminology and exposition, and which may be compared to Riordan's analysis of the content of channelled discourses (1992:110-123). However, she also introduced a lot of different material, which set the tone of the day in quite a different manner. The evolution through various dimensions of existence figured prominently in her talk. Humans exist in the Third Dimension, she said, which is concerned with materialism, sex, and control. However, at this moment in history everyone is making the decision whether or not to move to the Fifth, a dimension of higher vibration where there is no time. The leaflet, *Program Ascension: Bringing in the Light-Body*, available for sale on the day told how to ascend from the Third to the Fifth Dimensions, by assuming a "lightbody". The growth into this body is a gradual process whereby, "You will need to adapt, learn, grow, and function into your full stature", eventually leading to ascension from the physical plane. Like Shah, Patterson understood that this would happen to many "Lightworkers" who are now on Earth - beings from the Fourth Dimension who made an active choice to be here at this time. Alongside these, "Starseeds" are present from the Fifth Dimension. Patterson gave

everyone attending the event a sheet, *The Divine Plan for Earth*, telling them what they were and to remind them that, "I am here in service to the light [...] I am here to assist the birth of a planet into the new dimensions [...] I am here to channel vast quantities of light onto the Earth plane [...] I am a multi dimensional Master [...] Now is the time to detach, as agreed, to fulfil my task and return home".

The insistence that each individual has undertaken to be part of a divine mission which is supervised by the Ascended Masters places Patterson's cosmology alongside Shah's. But she also developed an emphasis on explicatory detail which Shah did not. These differences of message were linked to her interaction with the audience. Even when Shah was not channelling her attitude was relaxed, quiet and controlled. This was reflected in her care for the audience - her messages were ones of encouragement and respect for the task people were undertaking. Patterson, though, employed a different gestural speech, which was encouraging in a different manner. She tried to establish her audience's enthusiasm by provocatively reminding them what they were. On several occasions she mentioned their power to create their own reality - "one hundred percent of the time, all of the time" - and that the truth within everyone is that "I am that I am". At the end of the day she led everyone in dancing and chanting to the repetition of "YES I AM!" for several minutes. Patterson's attitude to the audience was, therefore, not one of quiet respect, but effervescent mobilisation. The importance attached by Patterson to experience was also highlighted by the exercises in developing intuition which she taught her audience. This involved facing a partner and saying the first word which came into the mind - which she said will have been placed there by "higher realms" - then overcoming reserve by speaking over each other.

Patterson's performance as a channeller was much more detached from the audience than was Shah's. Through her message and behaviour she set up a distinction from them which made her appear unapproachable. The feeling was that people were being told things rather than having them suggested to them; that they were cajoled rather than encouraged. Andrew Spencer later related in private conversation that he did not feel drawn to Patterson, but felt "over-powered" by her, although it is important to note that he invited her back for another workshop the next year. Her tone was established in the introductory leaflet, detailing her experiences:

"Over the last 25 years, she [Patterson] has had many personal experiences of Universal Phenomena including re-experiencing creation, re-establishing herself back in this density after all agreed upon realities disappeared, activation of the 12 chakra system, increase in vibration rate to incorporate the Light Body, involvement in multi-dimensional battle of the forces, living free of time and space, assisting with the activation of the New Age programme through other dimensions etc."

Patterson related some of these experiences during the course of the day, including her battle with the dark forces to reprogramme the Atlantean computer, when she needed to "take on" a large Lemurian body. Evolutionary ideas of the "root races" of humankind have been prevalent in many sorts of western spiritualities, especially since the influence of the Theosophical Society. Lemurian is one of these, and the now lost continent of Atlantis is a related idea since it is surmised to have been the home of the next, Atlantean, root race, as Steiner surmised (1986:94-95) and as discussed in Anthroposophical Society meetings attended for research. In drawing on these notions, Patterson was not just placing her messages alongside them, but placing herself in important connection with them. The

fervour of Patterson's speech, by contrast to Shah's calmness, shows that her transformations of speaking reflect a more troubled experience of other dimensions: evidence for this was provided in her accounts of working with the Masters, which she connected with extreme physical discomfort, as in the Lemurian tale, and mental fatigue. This was a different personal front to Shah's, but one equally needed to sustain her reality during several hours of concentrated performance.

A more remarkable example of Patterson's importance was her claim that she had caused the percentage of karma completion for individuals on Earth to be reduced from one hundred to fifty one percent. Karma was here understood as the amount of debt accrued through previous past lives and must be paid back in order for the individual to evolve further, in other words, to ascend. The notion of what sort of debt this is was not explained, but Patterson reduced the amount which needed to be completed by challenging the "Karmic Board" to incarnate and try to complete one hundred percent of the karma they accrued by doing so. Because they failed in this, the amount was reduced.

The contrast between Patterson and Shah is therefore clear with respect to the self-importance of the channeller. The information Shah gave her audience about herself concerned how she became a channeller. Patterson spoke very little about that aspect of her life, but much concerning the extraordinary experiences in her mission. Shah's workshop focused around the Ascended Masters, whom she twice channelled during the course of the day, but these were mentioned less frequently by Patterson, who herself did not channel. Whereas the message was treated as of utmost importance by Shah, Patterson's emphasis was on the experience of evolving towards ascension. This placed her in a position of authority over, and detachment from, her audience, who had not

experienced what she was talking about. The main difference between Shah and Patterson therefore concerns legitimation. Shah established her authority by channelling and participating with her audience. In contrast, Patterson assumed her authority, as shown by her claims in the leaflets advertising her workshop, and was not concerned either to channel or to engage personally with the audience.

These differences were recognised by Phyllis, a regular attender at the Essene Meditation, who later explained that she could not comprehend how Patterson could operate in more than one realm at the same time, so that she could, for example, work in Australia and India simultaneously. She did, however, think that this might come about through "higher development". Phyllis said there had been inconsistencies between Shah's and Patterson's teachings, and so was keen to go to the later event which was to be given by the Patterson, since this was advertised as a "question-and-answer" session. The very different relationship set up between channeller, audience and Masters by Shah and Patterson may seem curious given their similar contexts and beliefs. However, given the importance of religious biography in nonformative seekership and the nonformative nature of groups, like the Meditation, in which they function, this difference not surprising. But there did appear to be a similar career path by which people came to channel and which may usefully provide points of analysis with other examples of spirit possession, as will now be investigated.

3. The Channelling Career

Shah's channelling workshop included a question and answer session about herself, from which emerged a detailed picture of how she began to channel and its subsequent

development. Her career as a channeller may, initially, be divided into three stages: automatic writing, initial verbal channelling, and mature verbal channelling. Shah said that in 1988 she was approached in meditation by a being who described himself as a "Master Teacher". According to Shah, he instructed her to keep a daily journal, through which would come messages from outside herself. This "written channelling", as she described it, is known as automatic writing where subjects' hands move as if controlled by someone else, and words are written which were not recognised by the subjects as being in their conscious minds. Shah's Master Teacher said he was to teach her for two years, in preparation for the Masters speaking to her. She was, he said, to let trust and guidance grow between them.

Two years later the second phase of Shah's channelling career began. She attended a workshop led by Eric Cline, whom she described as part of the "Ascension Movement". This Movement is concerned with channelling messages from the Ascended Masters in order to help fulfil their plans on Earth. The aim of the Movement, Shah said, is to complete this plan so that all humans will themselves ascend, or move to a higher realm of being, such as is now occupied by the Ascended Masters. Clines channelled verbally during this session, and Shah recognised the concepts he was talking about, confirming the information she had received through written channelling.

The night after Clines' workshop, Shah went to meditate with two friends in an "ascension chamber", a specially designed pyramidal structure. There, the Master Teacher requested to channel verbally through her for the first time. This lasted ten minutes. He then told her that Sananda, an Ascended Master, wanted to do the same. Shah related how she froze and felt resistance creep all over herself because she did not wish to appear foolish in front

of her friends. However, she decided to surrender her "body, mind and soul", which resulted in her somersaulting backwards out of her body in slow motion, as Sananda's essence entered her body. He spoke through her for fifteen minutes. The next night another Master, Ashtar, channelled through her - "That went really well", she said - and the next week he spoke through her at the larger meditation group she was attending.

At the time of her workshop in Britain, Shah can be described as having entered the third phase of her channelling career. Exercising a high level of competence in her verbal channelling, Shah organised tours confident that the Ascended Masters would communicate through her on request. Shah had also built up a large repertoire of eight Masters on whom she regularly drew. She claimed that each has a different personality which she could feel whilst they were using her as a channel. Since 1991, Shah had been publishing newsletters containing her channelled communications and was considering publishing Sananda's messages on the "Law of Abundance" in book form. Thus, she had come to share in the perception of reality afforded by channelling, although many aspects of this were open to individual interpretation and development, as seen in her differences with Patterson. The doubts about the validity of Shah's experiences as a channeller which lasted about one year were no longer evident during fieldwork. It was Shah who requested which Master was to speak through her and when, not the other way around as was the case when she first started. She had also built up her energy level able to deal with the experience of channelling - Sananda originally spoke through her for fifteen minutes, but in the workshop this lasted for forty minutes. To sum up, Shah may be said to have become a mature channeller.

A second case of a channelling career may be described through reference to a manuscript

of around sixty typed A4 pages, owned by Julie and Andrew Spencer and written by a friend of their's, Ben. In this manuscript, entitled *Prepare the People*, Ben related how he began to channel. He wrote that he awoke early one morning, unable to relax. After taking pen and paper to his bed, he recorded how, "Without notice my hand started to move". He was writing without needing to think about what to write: the words came out of nowhere, and the speed at which his hand worked amazed him. It was signed "ELD KLON." Ben told how automatic writing continued over many months, but his reaction to it was ambiguous: "some I accepted, some I denied, it was to [sic.] outrages [sic.] to be true". Eventually he felt the burden of it all too much to bear alone, and showed his writings to a group of close friends. Most of these accepted it as a message, and Ben was encouraged enough to circulate his communications on cassettes, then as a manuscript. He wrote that, "The changes that it [the experience of channelling] has brought into my own life are endless and the benefits continue to come." According to Andrew, who used to work with Ben, channelling led him to leave his job as a time and motion manager and move to Manchester, where he became involved with others interested in channelling. This also allowed Ben to concentrate more on teaching *tai chi*, an activity he had been pursuing before channelling, and which Andrew claimed had made him used to inward experiences.

Although the situations of Shah's and Ben's experiences of channelling were quite different, not least because Shah was living in the United States, the accounts of their channelling careers demonstrate a similar gradual social process of competence. Before starting to channel, they were both involved with spiritual activities which involved others - Shah meditated in a group and Ben taught *tai chi*. Andrew Spencer's words may be echoed to say that they were both used to inward experiences. The difficulties encountered by Shah and Ben in channelling were overcome through social contacts, which helped to erase their

doubts and encourage their experiences. In accepting the validity of these, Shah and Ben validated their own importance as channels for knowledge - to the extent that channelling is now central to their lives - and they disseminated that knowledge freely and widely. In doing this, they acted as foci for others. A similar sequence of experiences is related by the American P.V. Schlemmer in the Afterword to her and Jenkins' channelled volume (1993:392-395), passed round the Meditation group by the Spencers. In her case, encounters with spirits began in childhood, encouraged by a grandmother who was a medium. But it was not until she was forty years of age and had already opened a school in Florida to teach metaphysics that Tom, one of the Council of Nine who are the authors of their book, possessed her.

Klimo's research into channelling also highlights this pattern of spiritual practise, the importance of partners and friends, and the unexpected manner of initial contact with the spirit, as in the careers of Kevin Ryerson and Jane Roberts, who channelled the Seth books, a series of best-selling discourses on social problems (1988:29-30, 45-46). Miller's portrayal of the careers of these, and other, well-known American channellers (1990:147-155, 164), although placed within a Christian critique, provides further evidence for this career sequence. Drawn from a doctoral Thesis on the psychology of mediumistic development, Klimo presented a seven stage "channelling development": conceptualisation of a nonphysical reality, preparation for contact with this reality, gestation of emotionally relating to this reality, recognition by name with this reality, activation of the choice to be a channel, integration by balancing with this reality, and maturation of the "mediumistic personality" in the life of the channel (1988:132-134). Whilst a useful guide to the cognitive reaction to encountering a spirit, this scheme largely ignores the social context in which channelling takes place and in which a psychological investigation needs to be based. However, material

is provided which may be used, alongside the analysis of Shah and Ben, to present a sociological construction of the channelling career in six stages:

1. Individuals are used to spiritually interpreting inward experiences and have some competence in dealing with them.
2. Unsettling experiences accompany what is perceived to be an exterior agent breaking through the individuals' selves, resulting in the imparting of new knowledge outwardly, through either speech or writing.
3. Doubt and embarrassment of these uncontrolled experiences slowly disappear as they are demonstrated to valued friends through channelled discourses.
4. These others come to form the basis of audiences which recognise and appreciate the channels and share to some extent in their reality, leading to increased self-control over the experiences.
5. These controlled experiences are allowed to take a central place in the individuals' lives, who now see themselves as important figures within a wider movement.
6. The growing sense of having a mission leads the individuals to control their audiences through teaching and formal dissemination of the knowledge.

This model may be compared to Ioan Lewis' cross-cultural anthropological analyses of spirit possession. From his own fieldwork, he found that a Somali woman who becomes possessed passes through two phases if she is to become a shaman (1989a:83). The primary phase involves the onset of possession, which is diagnosed by a shaman when the woman

falls ill. The secondary phase places the woman as a permanent member of the shamanistic cult as her periods of possession become chronic, allowing her the possibility of attaining the position of shaman herself. This change from uncontrolled, involuntary possession to controlled, voluntary possession is found cross culturally where there are mature performers of spirit possession. Such performers now act for others rather than just for their own benefit. Accompanying this, wrote Lewis, is a cure in those physical and mental illnesses which were previously manifest, and often an increase in their material wellbeing (59-62).

In his later work on spirit possession, Lewis twice developed this idea of the changed state of possession from involuntary to voluntary. His first development was to posit a middle phase between these two extremes, which signifies identification with, and domestication of, the spirit (1989b:88-89). This second phase is only reached, however, if the spirit is not rejected, such as by exorcism. Having accepted the spirit, the afflicted person comes to control it, becoming a healer rather than the patient. Lewis, however, believed he could differentiate even further, to develop a possession career of the shaman, acknowledging for this the work of a report by Alice Morton on Ethiopian women. In this career there are five stages of possession, each accompanied by a change in the possessed's involvement with the shamanistic cult (90-91). Stage one is "spontaneous possession", with an initial very intense cult involvement. Stage two is "domestic possession", where cult involvement is at a low level, but at stage three, this increases with growing ability at "adept possession". This leads to stage four where the possession is at an "expert-assistant" level and involvement with the cult is intense but steady. Finally, stage five, where cult involvement is a little higher than the previous stage, as "expert possession" has been reached. Lewis pointed out that at each stage, a cure may rid the afflicted of possession, and that at the expert stage the possessed may be replaced by another shaman. Only at this end stage,

then, does the community's acceptance of the possessed as a shaman become a crucial factor in the status of possession.

Lewis' five stage model of the shaman's career is, however, somewhat misleading because the sort of cult involvement experienced by the individual varies at each stage. The mature, expert shaman controls the cult by choosing, training and initiating new shamans. That is the fifth stage, but at stage one the sort of cult involvement is submittance to the mature shaman. Stages two to four, then, would seem to be a process of overturning this relationship to the cult: the possessed grows in the social power held in the cult as control of spirits is learnt. It is this progression of career within a cultic context that distinguishes shamans from channellers.

For Lewis, shamans' careers are bound up with their cult involvement but whilst social contexts are essential to channellers' developments, these are various, unrelated, and comprise different sorts of organisations. It was in meditation, and as part of a weekly meditation group, that Shah experienced her growing powers of spirit possession. This group was not, it must be emphasised, one concerned with channelling. The only encounter of such a group was the event led by Eric Cline. It is not clear, however, what sort of involvement Shah has had with channelling groups since then, although her comments suggest that she acts on her own. What is different now that she is a mature channeller is her alignment with the Ascension Movement, which she understands to be comprised of all those whom the Ascended Masters are working with at the present time. It appears that this is understood to be a movement by Shah only because of a common set of ideas and aims, not as a result of common social organisation. It is spread by those on Earth through workshops like her own, she believed, as well as by contact with

channellers' written materials; as such, the notion is theological, not sociological. In contrast, Ben became involved with a channelling group in his new location, despite his initial experiences of channelling on his own, but he remained involved with other spiritual activities.

A second fundamental difference between the channellers and shamans is that the primary purpose of the channeller is not to heal, but to deliver communications. Although many sorts of spirit possession can function to channel messages from the spirit world to this world, this is usually a secondary and related aspect to healing. Even the phenomenon of glossolalia found in the charismatic churches of Protestantism, where the Holy Spirit is thought to speak in an unknown language through believers, is intimately associated with those churches' healing practices. Like healing, speaking in tongues is understood to be a gift from God, representing the baptism of the faithful Christian (Goodman, 1973:188-189; Williams, 1984:73). Healing remains a factor found in spiritualist circles, as Skultans showed (1974), but it may have been the appropriation of spiritualism by the Theosophical Society that led to the primary orientation towards cosmology rather than healing that continues amongst channellers today. For H.P. Blavatsky's spiritual powers were manifested in her books and letters of personal instruction for her followers, rather than messages dealing with health, as in turn of the century spiritualist circles (Owen, 1989:107-108).

These differences show that compared to shamans, channellers' careers follow another path. There is not the close link that shaman have with particular cultic organisations, nor are their maturations as channellers dependent upon acceptance into a healing role by the wider community. Channellers are more free in ideology, social ties and performance. They can travel more easily between different locations and social contexts, for they do not

have a fixed audience or group function. It is the lack of such prescribed social forms that characterises channelling as part of the phenomena investigated in this Thesis as nonformative.

However, the popularity of shamanism in the modern western world also requires attention. Several people in the Network had experience of shamanic practices, such as Michelle and Michael, or were influenced by shamanic traditions, such as Huna cosmology on the Lovells. Townsend described "neo-shamans" in North America as "agglomerations of people who come together in workshops and in local meetings", eclectically employing their techniques for individual purposes (1988:77-79). He equated this with Troeltsch's (1931:691-694, 729-806) and Campbell's (1978) class of "mystical religion" (Townsend, 1988:82). The problem with this view is that it neglects, on the one hand, the ideal conception of various tribal shamanic cults that have been conflated into a technique of shamanism (see Johnson, 1995:163), and on the other hand, the variety of contexts in which this is pursued. Carlos Castaneda's books and Michael Harner's courses have been influential in establishing the idea of an essential shamanism to be found in all the different shamanic traditions throughout the world, that can be distilled and learnt by individuals on their own, as taught in Harner (1990 [1980]), or by apprenticeship to a single teacher (Castaneda, 1976 [1968]). To conclude that involvement in this ideal constitutes a movement of neo-shamanism is to misunderstand what is taught and learnt, and why; as Kranenborg demonstrated by her juxtaposition of Surinamese *Winti* in the Netherlands with western spiritualism, spiritual healing, and paganism (1993). Shamanism in the West is not a social movement but an umbrella term to describe socially localised techniques. However, different shamanic techniques are equivalent to each other in their social function, that of healing through spirit possession, in the way that channelling refers to the function of

providing discourse through possession.

Whereas shamans, mediums and glossalaliacs fulfil cultic functions and as such play a formative role in their social context, this is greatly reduced in the cases of the channellers considered in this chapter. Even for close associates who follow their careers, the channellers do not fit into an established role that structures their spiritual lives. Whilst attenders at channelling workshops may accept the legitimacy of their messages, the role such messages play will vary considerably, as will their interpretations. This is because of the lack of any strong group which exerts an authoritative use of the message: many people attend channelling events alone or in small groups, likewise, channelled books are not studied as a group. The groups that interest themselves in channelling are loosely formed, even if, as in the case of the Essene Meditation, leaders do exist. The fact is that unless social structures of authority have been formed, even leaders will remain largely impotent, unable to extend beyond the boundaries of idiosyncratic interpretation and practise. This remains the case because many participants attend for that very reason. But also channellers themselves may not wish to play a cultic role, preferring instead the social looseness that allows them to develop their own spiritual career within a multiplicity of social settings. The histories of experience of many people presented in this Thesis provide ample evidence of this desire for freedom and this issue is now considered by another look at the Essene Meditation.

PART III. POWER AND AUTHORITY AT THE ESSENE MEDITATION

1. The Lovells and the Spencers

The only formal recognition of the Essene Meditation as a group lay in the list of telephone numbers of regular attenders, so that the Lovells could contact them concerning any changes, such as one week when heavy snow forced cancellation. But whilst direct group leadership was lacking, certain themes can be discerned which suggest the presence of authority. For whereas the Lovells' actions and discourse centred round calmness and order, by contrast those of the Spencers' were unsettling and challenging. In short, the meetings were pervaded on the one hand by a static performance and on the other by a dynamic one.

The Lovells' performance was displayed especially in their discussions of social issues. During the discussion on the rise of crime mentioned above, Chris blamed this on the breakdown of the family and Janet added that these days there are no morals as parents have abdicated their responsibility. They argued against Birgit, who blamed crime on the lack of hope young people have who knew they would not get a job on growing up. The performance of this discussion was dominated by Chris, who was concerned to argue for his idea of individual responsibility for actions. As interviews with him and Janet clarified, this was a spiritual notion relating everyday life with self-development. Chris habitually reprimanded others for using the left hand side of their brains, which he equated with academic and scientific analysis which limited self-development, saying, "That's your left brain at work". In so doing he reserved spiritual and creative thinking for himself.

The Lovells' prime area of self-identity was in their role as professional healers employing herbal medicines, astrology and hypnotherapy, which they used to help clients come to terms with their lives. Even when these uncovered unsettling experiences, this was seen as preliminary to getting rid of conflict and change so that calm might once more prevail. For the Lovells, then, self-fulfilment meant the attainment of steadiness. In one of his discussions, Chris explained how people should try to live life as if on the touchline of a football match, not as a player involved in the game, and so be detached even to the extent of appearing cold and hard, like all true religious masters. This is, he explained, because everyone occupies the place they are supposed to - people should not interfere with one another's karma, except if their hearts tell them to. This attitude lay in stark contrast to that of the Spencers'.

Julie and Andrew did not dominate discussions by protracted expositions of their views, as the Lovells did, but by enthusiasm. By this, they were able to relate their experiences, especially those in the meditation, which they linked to their other spiritual activities. As shown above, they regularly distributed books and leaflets, as well as organising the channelling workshops. As self-professed social catalysts they often complained about being too busy and their discourse centred round transformation and consciousness-raising. To understand this difference between the Lovells and the Spencers, their biographies, gleaned from interviews as well as the Meditation meetings, are now presented.

Whilst the Lovells' and Spencers' biographies contain ostensible similarities, there are striking differences too and these need to be taken into account to understand the power relations taking place at the Essene meditation. Both couples came from and retained lower middle-class status by entering semi-professional careers. They also both married in their

twenties to raise families and left the churches they were brought up to attend - Church of England for Janet and Julie, Welsh chapel for Andrew, and Chris was baptised a Methodist but educated at a Roman Catholic school. None of them found that these churches gave them enough meaning or depth, religious feelings they only discovered years later after searching and involvement with non-churchly spiritualities.

The Lovells' interest in spirituality only really developed after they had married. They began attending a Christian Science church for eighteen months, but disillusionment with the archaic emphasis laid on Mary Baker Eddy's writings, the centrality of which is shown by Peel's history of the movement (1965), turned them instead to spiritualism, where they became part of a development group, and to the Anthroposophical Society. Spiritualism, they said, is now known as channelling and channellers are just mediums. Thus, the criticisms they had of that experience were applied by them to channelling: most of the time they believed mediums to be shamming their performances, for they could distinguish between the contents and presentations of different performances. "Authentic mediumship", to use their term, was different from normal speech, since it flowed and was even. According to them, this reflected a true message from a spirit, which cannot be turned on or off as easily as those channellers do who are paid for set times to communicate. They believed that most channellers are communicating their own thought-forms, which is why the Ascended Masters are always well-known western figures rather than eastern teachers such as Buddha. Janet and Chris gave examples of how people's thoughts can create realities for themselves, linking this with a Huna Polynesian cosmology which says that thought-forms are energies which can become trapped in people's auras and continue to exist. Although they did not attend either of the channelling workshops and personally rejected channelling, their expressed opinion was typical of most people

encountered in the network, concerning spiritual ideas, groups, and practices: they recognised it may be useful or helpful to some people. Chris used the phrase "horses for courses" to say that what is right for one person may not be so for another.

Whilst such channellers and groups which focus round a medium were not felt by Janet and Chris to be suitable for themselves, they were involved with an organisation in which the phenomenon played a key role. This was White Eagle Lodge, a group established in Britain in 1936 by Grace Cooke, who channelled a spirit teacher and healer known as White Eagle. Cooke had been a spiritualist medium since 1913 and turned from giving evidence for people's survival after death to philosophical teaching, under the guidance of White Eagle, who is seen as a messenger from the White Brotherhood (Nelson, 1969:201-203). The Lodge therefore has links with the Theosophical School and the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. According to *The White Eagle Lodge: Purpose and Work*, an introductory booklet published by the group, "The purpose of the Lodge teaching is to help men develop this inner light [of the Christ spirit] (which is their true nature) so that it radiates throughout their whole being, and out into the world to bless, to heal and to comfort others". Cooke's husband, Ivan, took on the task of communicating White Eagle's teachings after her death in 1979, and since his death in 1981 this passed to her two daughters. Janet and Chris' interest in healing work led them from spiritualism to become registered healers through the White Eagle Lodge, a status they gained by attending weekly healing sessions and fortnightly meditations run by their local group. Healing is central to the work of the White Eagle Lodge, and is understood to work in a variety of ways, on body, mind, and spirit levels. Groups hold services for contact healing and absent healing regularly, and members are asked to spend five minutes a day on a healing prayer for all those who require it; information about the prayer is available on a separate leaflet, *There Is Something You Can Do - Now!*.

Although Janet and Chris were not channellers, their experiences of spirit possession, which included some training in performing it themselves, were influential on their role as healers. They were both professional full-time therapists: Janet in astrology and psychotherapy, and Chris in Bach flower essences. Janet had an interest in how astrology relates to the personality, seeing these as concerned with cosmic energies as described by their Essene cosmology. These relate to physical illnesses - similar to Andrew Spencer's work on biorhythms, to whom the Lovells sometimes referred their own patients. They saw the role of healers as making patients aware of the energy changes that are affecting them, thus removing ignorance and therefore fear, so that precautions can be taken and a level balance of personality maintained. The idea that energy forms can assume a life by themselves and come to act negatively, as described in Huna cosmology, was also central to Essene teachings as discovered by the Lovells. They had many stories describing how negative energies created by imbalanced personalities come to attack others, and Janet's psychotherapy counselling was primarily concerned with negating these.

Their initial contact with Essene teachings came unexpectedly by a book literally jumping off the shelf at Janet in their local public library. From this, she discovered Edmond Bordeaux Szekely's editions of Essene texts, which Chris believed to have been translated from Szekely's photographic memory of them in the Vatican library. He published the first *Gospel of Peace* in 1928. According to a leaflet for the Essene Network, Szekely, "taught their [Essene] teachings to many visitors who came to a ranch in Tecate, Baja, California called "Rancho La Puerta" during the 1940's. It was a health and study centre drawing on topics such as education, meditation and ancient spiritual philosophies". These religious features frame the Network's understanding of the Essenes, who are described as follows:

"An ancient brotherhood who lived in the middle East 2,000 years ago.

They withdrew from the crowded and dirty towns and cities to form communities on the shores of lakes and rivers, where they were able to lead a simple, loving and harmonious lifestyle.

"Each had their own separate accommodation but shared in the daily work in the fields. Their days started with the particular communion with the earthly angelic force (or energy) for that day and finished with the communion with the heavenly angelic force. Some time each day was spent in study and for those with the knowledge of healing there was time to help and heal others whether within their own brotherhood or from outside. They had a great knowledge of horticulture and lived in harmony with the natural forces around them. There is strong evidence that John the Baptist, John the Beloved and Jesus were all Essenes and that Jesus spent much of his early life living and learning with the brotherhood, in preparation for his 'Ministry'".

The main attraction of the Essenes for the Lovells was the conception of an ancient culture that retreated from wider society to set up a self-sufficient community looking after itself. Here the morality of Essene living, focused round individuals taking responsibility for themselves in the context of acting for common purposes with others, particularly concurred with the Lovells' critique of spirituality built up from their other experiences. Further, Janet's practice of hypnotherapy and the past-life regression to which this had sometimes led, is also found in texts relating Essene lives, as in Cannon's presentation of the life of Jesus gleaned from this therapy (1992). The Essene Network was set up, said Janet, "to fulfil the vision that one day the Essene Wisdom could be grounded and brought to light in England".

The Essene Network was established through contact with the Biogenic Society which Szekely founded in 1928, which itself attempted to apply Essene teachings to living, nutrition, medicine and fulfilment in the twentieth century (Szekely, 1977:69; 1978:5). By doing so, the Lovells contacted George Trevelyan, who had promoted Szekely's writings and Essene living (Trevelyan, 1978:9). Trevelyan was a prominent figure in nonformative spiritual networks through his founding of the Wrekin Trust, an adult educational establishment focusing on "the spiritual in man" (Nesfield-Cookson, 1996) and promotion of the Findhorn Foundation (Trevelyan, 1986:8-10), whom Bloom regarded "as the father-figure of the New Age movement in Britain" (1991:2), words which were echoed by Janet. He was also a regular speaker at the London Festivals for Mind-Body-Spirit before his death in 1996. Trevelyan's interest in the Essenes (1986:81), as well as in Steiner's cosmology (1977:138), prompted the Lovells to ask him to act in an honorary capacity, which may be seen as legitimating the Network, although he also spoke at the retreats they held. The fact that the Lovells founded their own organisation, rather than becoming members and setting up a local group of Biogenics, shows that after their previous spiritual experiences they sought to exercise their own authority. This, coupled with the sort of leadership that Chris in particular enacted at the Meditation, suggests their greater tendency towards formativeness than others at the group.

The Essene Network, set up in the nineteen-eighties, was organised through correspondence since the members, of which there were less than one hundred, lived across the country. Like the membership of similarly organised groups, such as White Eagle Lodge and the Lucis Trust, practice was individual with people expected to perform rituals at similar times each day. For the Network, these were morning and evening communions, which, according to Chris, had three objectives: to make people aware of the energies of

nature and the cosmos, to make them aware of their own bodily energies, and to form a link between these two (Szekely, 1978:29-52). The only time the Network organised meetings for all members were in the yearly retreats to the country. Aside from that, there were two or three local groups which met up, such as the Essene Meditation. However, although based along Essene lines, the Meditation only ever included two members of the Network, Janet and Chris themselves.

To enact the Essene lifestyle, the Lovells set up the Meditation five years before research with the group began. Before the numbers grew too large, the meditation was held in their own home, and at that time it included a time of self-reflection on the week by each member in front of the group - something the Lovells likened to the Essene "weekly inventory". They were not happy that this was subsequently dropped from the Meditation, which they would have liked to act more as a teaching group, but some members were, they said, only interested in their own interpretations of Essene readings. This again draws out the point that although some discourse and symbolism was shared at the Meditation, that was limited by the rejection of formative authorities. In contrast to a weekly inventory, which would have established greater social control over performances involving discourse, people preferred to informally talk to each other, thus being able to employ and share symbolic systems as they chose.

Julie and Andrew met when each was in their first marriage and beginning engagement with nonformative spiritualities. Whilst she raised her children, Julie casually attended a spiritualist development circle with her husband, but it was only by taking yoga classes to get fit and being introduced to meditation on a candle that her interest in spiritual matters grew. Casually attending a holistic health therapies fair she met Andrew, who was leading

a workshop on biorhythms, something she had heard about but thought sounded crazy. It turned out that they shared the same birthdate and Andrew asked to keep in touch with her, telephoning every six weeks to check on her biorhythms. Andrew introduced her to a professional medium who led Julie in a workshop on healing and dowsing. This medium told her that she had healing powers, which she did not at first believe even though she experienced a "sense of coming home" at the workshop. This led to a realisation of what had previously been missing in her life; consequently she began attending many healing workshops.

Andrew too had become interested in healing when introduced to yoga by a friend who repaired a nasal problem of his by "natural methods". This, coupled with criticism of the materialistic bent of those with whom he went to church and the disappointment he felt by the lack of interest in Indian religious texts shown by a young vicar to whom he presented them, led to cessation of involvement with the Church of England. Subsequently he became more engrossed in healing, leading to his involvement with Julie. This eventually led, Julie said, to strong urges to leave their partners and move in with each other. She found that resistance to this was useless and becoming "very, very traumatic", so they tried living together for a week and got on terribly. Despite this, not long after they bought a house together, moving in with Julie's thirteen year old daughter, but continued having doubts. Two things stopped them splitting up, according to Julie: their "knowledge" that what they were doing was "right", and continual consultations with the Tarot cards and runestones which always told her to stay with Andrew.

The Spencers claimed that their lives had been changed by taking notice of feelings. David described themselves not as "psychic", but as "sensitive" to the world around them. This

world goes beyond what is experienced materially to include a spiritual dimension which manifests in feelings that surround places and objects, and in meaningful coincidences. Julie claimed to be able to intuitively contact the extra-material life of places, such as the sadness of a Scottish village where a massacre had taken place and a feeling of dislike towards the new cathedral in Coventry. With regard to the Spencers it may be purported that the importance of this worldview is not that it organises the world - indeed its application is piecemeal - but that it provides for collective action. On first moving in together, the Spencers became part of a "fountain light group" to alter the bad feeling that surrounded their Nottinghamshire town. This practice was carried on by the sending of white light to "trouble spots" in the world during the Essene meditation. The development of an ability to recognise meaningful coincidences showed Julie that there is a pattern underlying the universe. It is for this reason that both she and Andrew frequently employed divinatory techniques, especially concerning their most important decisions. "These coincidences used to amaze me", she said, "but nowadays my eye just twinkles as I think to myself, 'that's cleverly arranged'". David pointed out that it was especially in meeting people that these coincidences figured.

The Spencers practised divinatory techniques of astrology and pendulum dowsing to glean information from this pattern in order to make better sense of their own lives. David dowsed by asking a pendulum questions to which it could answer yes or no, depending on the direction of its swing. He explained that his unconscious mind operated the pendulum, which acted as a mediator between that and his conscious mind. Since the unconscious is in tune with the pattern of the universe, the conscious mind can discover things it could never possibly know. Pendulum dowsing was particularly common amongst people in the network and may be viewed as part of the science of the unconscious that the

psychotherapist Carl Jung was instrumental in popularising. Jung's influence is significant, for example, on the volumes on pendulum dowsing by Nielsen and Polansky (1986) and Spiesberger (1987). By relating esoteric spirituality with self-development, in books such as *The Integration of the Personality* (1948) and *Synchronicity* (1987 [1952]), Jung helped legitimise the scientific basis for spiritual matters that had been sought through spiritualism and the Theosophical Society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The practice of both astrology and dowsing can involve established discourses, which is interesting to consider in the nonformative context. Feher distinguished between New Age and non-New Age astrologers, the former using it as "one more tool in their spiritual quest", whereas for the latter it "is more likely a predictive craft, independent of spirituality" (1992:188). Those who do not incorporate astrology into a broader spiritual framework generally consult astrological columns rather than reading their own charts. Such columns tend to focus on more mundane aspects of life, relating to work and relationships, as Adorno found in his analysis of a Los Angeles newspaper's column in the early nineteen-fifties (1994 [1952-1953]). This column particularly pictured the world in a harmonious way, predicting that non-confrontational resolutions could maintain such harmony (Adorno, 1994:51-60, 98-112).

This differs somewhat from one aspect of the spiritual practice of astrology, which, like other divinations, may be used to explore disruptions in life. Thus, although the Spencers used pendulum dowsing to answer everyday queries, such as where to find lost keys, they also dowsed for spiritual purposes, for example to find out whether a particular holistic health treatment should be pursued. Likewise, the Lovells consulted astrological charts to gain insights into their patients' states of wellbeing, which could be important for treatment.

In this way, divinations were utilised within their broader spiritual discourses, fitting into ideas of balance and imbalance, but could also challenge these and lead to new approaches and thus new discourses. The fact that divination - like mediation, holistic healing and, especially, channelling - was understood to access extraordinary levels of reality, meant its practice had spiritual authority which allowed it to move beyond mundane enquiries and discourses. As such, divination was one practice related dynamically to other practices, just as Evans-Pritchard understood oracular usage amongst the African Azande to be related to witchcraft and magic (1972:387).

To return to the Spencers' biographies, another context in which Jung's psychology was influential upon them can be traced through their friendship with a spiritual teacher who set up an institute in Wales. In *Towards the Whole Being: Excerpts - Essays - Aphorisms*, a typed manuscript which the Spencers lent out to any interested meditators, this teacher built a theology on the sexual polarity that he viewed as the basis of existence. The main result of this theology was an understanding of the differences between men and women, which was one of Jung's key concerns (1948:18-21) and which was also articulated in Geoff Lomas' book *Omniology* (1996), on which he presented a talk at the Spiritual Fair. It may be suggested here that by concentrating on differences between men and women, these spiritualities deal with problems of kinship. For it is the relations between mothers, fathers, daughters and sons, between siblings, and between sexual partners that give rise to sexual differentiation (Ollenburger and Moore, 1992:34). It is therefore possible to interpret the tackling of gender issues that is present in so many of the spiritualities as dealing with problems between kin, an issue which will be considered in the Conclusion.

Not long before fieldwork commenced, the Spencers had become actively interested in

ufology and channelling, which they linked by viewing the Ascended Masters as aliens. This interest was often expressed at the Meditation, as already seen. One way in which they led informal talks to these issues was by mentioning sci-fi television programmes and films. Thus, Andrew claimed that Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek*, had incorporated into that television series things he had heard during channelled discourses by, for example, The Nine (Schlemmer, 1993:xiii). The relation between the Flying Saucer Movement and spiritualism was noted by Nelson, who understood this in terms of both originating in the study of unexplained phenomena ignored by science and which could lead to the growth of cults around messages received from aliens or spirits, as in the Aetherius Society, founded in 1954 by George King who acted as a medium for members of a Space Parliament (1969:151-152). Sci-fi enthusiasm was also central to the spread of Dianetics, according to Wallis (1976:56-57).

Despite strong similarities between the histories of experience of the Lovells and the Spencers, the difference in their outlooks needs to be investigated. This can be done only by viewing their beliefs in context, as part of a social performance. In such a way, the correlation between each couple's spirituality and social contexts is highlighted, and thus the importance of the focus on biography adopted in this Thesis. Whilst a comparison of the two couples' beliefs may lead one to conclude that they are so similar as to constitute a single phenomenon, the performances in which these beliefs take place leads to a quite different conclusion. The latter view allows a more realistic presentation of the Essene Meditation since it deals directly with issues of social power, rather than inferring them from detached treatments of belief systems. To attempt this, several concerns of the couples are now considered - firstly, ones on which they share common beliefs, then those which highlight discrepancies between them.

The beliefs of the two couples has been influenced by coming into contact with illness and death, particularly through their healing work. The Spencers did not view death as the end of life, believing that people carry on as spirits. They were therefore favourable towards spiritualist churches, whose funerals, they said, are more cheerful than those of the Church of England which carries an incredulous attitude. Further, spiritualist churches let people know, through mediumship, of the future life of loved ones who have died. The Spencers had set up a cancer care group to help people deal with what this illness means for their mortality. Using a variety of therapies to ease pain and worry, they did not force their beliefs on any patients but were there to talk about such matters if the latter so wish. A healthy attitude towards death was also essential to the Lovells' spirituality and their critique of religious groups. They left Christian Science because the adherents refused to accept bodily death, which Chris described as a misinterpretation of Mary Baker Eddy's writings on the subject. Like the Spencers, Janet and Chris viewed death as a new step in the life of individuals.

There was also agreement and a common interest in the present time here on Earth as a "new age". The Spencers believed in a "plan" relating everything in the universe together, which people must "go" or "flow" with, by exercising self-responsibility. The Lovells talked of the "Aquarian Age" rather than the "new age", which they felt has become a hackneyed term, as attested by "dramatic global events" representing a "seed change in people's attitudes". By this they meant a change in consciousness which had led to the resolution of conflicts in South Africa, Palestine and Israel, and Northern Ireland - these views were expressed in late 1994. Janet criticised channellers and their so-called Ascension Movement for talking as if people need do nothing to attain the Aquarian Age, as if it will arrive regardless. Instead, she said, it must be worked for - again echoing her belief in self-

responsibility. This marked the main point of difference in the practices between the Spencers and the Lovells, the former being very involved with channelling and the idea that in due time people will begin to bodily ascend to higher levels of reality. This interest of the Spencers was coupled with participation in an ufology group. They believed that extra-terrestrials live amongst humans in order to help them evolve, by introducing new technologies and concepts of other realities. Studying phenomena of unidentified flying objects, a practice known as ufology, the Spencers were able to investigate for themselves the increased alien activity around Earth.

There were thus two different attitudes performed by the Lovells and the Spencers, which may be seen as arising from their social contexts, including their spiritualities, despite many similarities in language and belief. Whilst both couples appeared to value detachment as healers and a conservative critique of social problems, these beliefs lead to different consequences for each. The pursuit of change in the Spencers' home lives and understanding of the nature of reality had led to the dynamism that was portrayed in their performance at the Essene meditation. Whereas the pursuit of stability by the Lovells in their personal life resulted in a static performance. The effect of these performances on the Essene Meditation are now considered.

2. Power and Performance at the Essene Meditation

Attendees at the Essene Meditation engaged not only in the meditative practice itself, but also in spiritual seekership, as has been seen in the first part. This meant that varieties of leadership were possible. On the one hand people could be encouraged to deepen their

interest in Essene teachings. On the other hand they could be directed to other spiritual activities that were present. The performances of the Lovells and the Spencers during the meditation evening strongly suggests that they respectively fostered each of these. The Lovells were more likely to be found seated in the living or dining rooms, holding conversation with two or more others. This afforded them time to explain their spirituality - their beliefs and practices - and thus try to convince them of the efficacy of the meditation. The point was not to convert people to the Essene Network rather than the suitability of what might be called Essene living. So, Janet in particular would converse with others about the therapies she practised, since these were a fundamental part of her Essene spiritual life. The Lovells may be said to have acted to convince by example and explanation: portraying what they did in their lives as working or being efficacious in terms of individual and collective wellbeing of body, mind and spirit. Thus it was important for them to lead the meditations in order to control the content and for them to calmly but forcefully take time to engage with people afterwards.

The Spencers did not lead the meditation but facilitated by holding it in their home. This made them somewhat detached from the Essene way of life that was implicit in the readings and visualisations; it is important to note that they never led the meditations. In contrast to the Lovells, after the meditation the Spencers would move around the rooms much more and usually remained standing, often in the kitchen. By hosting the meditation in their home, they were able to act more easily than the Lovells. They had excuses to interrupt conversations by moving away from or towards them because they were performing the role of hosts, such as making drinks and greeting people and bidding them farewell. This different way of interacting accorded with their spiritual aim of networking or being catalysts. They were not so concerned patiently to give example to and explain beliefs and

practices but to draw people's attention to different events and literature. If someone did talk to them at some length about spiritual lifestyles it became clear that they were involved in a bewildering variety: holistic therapies, ufology, divinatory techniques and channelling. Such discussions contrasted with the Lovells' more focused and systematic debates.

These couples may be seen as holding several different aspects of leadership in the group: their visibility through directing or hosting the Meditation, their work as experienced and varied healers and their wider spiritual interests in ufology and channelling, for the Spencers, and White Eagle Lodge and Steiner for the Lovells. As seen, these aspects were performed during the meditation evenings, serving to set them apart from other attenders. They therefore more strongly determined the establishment of sacred space and time, as well as the meanings given to personal experiences, than those others. However, this generally led to ambiguity due to the differences of their leadership.

The performances of the Lovells and the Spencers at the Essene meditation can be described by the two sets of characteristics discussed above, each of which was clearly related to their histories of experience. The Lovells displayed a static performance where there was a focus on the Essene lifestyle. Their dominant form of speech was moralistic, with standard relations between people established and prescriptions concerning these in practice explained. Thus the Lovells spoke decisively of the place of healer and those being healed, as well as criminals, nation-states and their governments. This structure to their spirituality may be said to have arisen from their search for a structured group that dealt efficaciously with their social world: spiritualism, Christian Science, White Eagle Lodge and the Essenes. Attention must also be drawn to what seemed to be a stable home life, which was important in their spiritualities, for example the ideals established and enacted by White

Eagle Lodge (1969:202): a long-lasting marriage, the retention of middle-class lifestyle, and two children educated at a Steiner school. In fact the Lovells had experienced a career path that concentrated their spirituality, leading to increased selectiveness of practices, a more highly coherent belief-system, and the leadership of their own group which included running correspondence and weekend gatherings, plus a fortnightly meditation.

In contrast, the Spencers' performance may be described as dynamic. Their dominant narrative was affective, with a focus on feelings, by which is meant not just emotions but expressing their reactions to what they experienced, as shown by their use of intuition. While there were certainly systematic elements to their beliefs and practices - such as an evolutionary cosmology and careful study of holistic therapies - these were open to new influences that could reconfigure them, reflected in their multifarious discourse, unlike the Lovells' discourse which was more focused. Like the Lovells, they too had been increasingly involved with spiritualities over the years, developing their own preferences and ways of dealing with these, yet they had neither established their own group nor sought adherence to one. Instead the Spencers continued to interest themselves with novel practices. Again, this was reflected in their spiritualities, as seen by the discourse and lives of channellers. Unlike the Lovells they had had upsetting home lives and had not left employment in order to support themselves by their spirituality. They may still, however, be said to have travelled a career path, but not one that became increasingly focused.

However, these two dominant performances, static and dynamic, did not compete to eliminate each other. Whilst there was little friendship between the two couples outside of the meetings, there was certainly mutual respect as evidenced by their referral of patients to each other's therapies. As shown by their bodily performances after the meditation, each

couple largely kept to their own positions in the house and could therefore engage with others independently of each other. The continuity of the group and its core members leads to the conclusion that these functioned together to sustain the group. To point to this functioning is to see each performance as forming a locus of power that existed dependently upon the other. An explanation for this is afforded by the fact that their static and dynamic spiritualities were only so in relative regard for each other. There were aspects of the former that were dynamic, and aspects of the latter that were static. So, whilst the Lovells acted to propagate the Essene way of life, an inclusion in this was not only a tolerance for other people's lifestyles but also openness to new beliefs and practices that could add to their own. Likewise, the Spencers' inclusive regard for new spiritualities was checked by the importance of several key focus points of their existing spirituality, particularly issues of hierarchies of dimensions of reality and spiritual evolution, as found in channelling, dowsing and ufology.

This issue can be used to elucidate the peculiar nature of nonformative spiritualities as compared to other sorts of religious organisations. Whilst the meditation ritual was a group performance, the absence of shared expressions or acts meant it did not necessarily function as collective action in the sense that most rituals, especially as looked at by anthropologists, do. The times in which such action occurred were few and far between: the circle prayer to mark the break for summer and the New Year's Day gatherings. This would appear to be different from the meditation as it was some years before, when participants gave a weekly inventory of their lives, as well as from the Essene Network retreats. As this chapter has shown, tendencies towards dominant authorities were enacted by the Spencers and the Lovells, but the influence of authority beyond the evenings themselves was limited. As pointed out in the last chapter, as a nonformative group the

Meditation existed in tension between authorities that sought to make it more formative and those that sought the opposite. This dilemma was reflected in the group constituency, for although a core of people attended regularly, many others were casual attenders and the relevance of these authorities to their lives was not great. Sally, Noel and Beth, for example, attended for two reasons: the quiet time during the meditation and to meet people. They said they were not so interested in the Essene readings and visualisation. How one meditator in particular was affected will now be looked at in more detail.

3. Christine

Of the fifty or so people who attended Shah's channelling workshop, one of those from the Meditation was particularly affected. Christine asked Lord Sananda about a matter experienced in her sleep: she had dreamed she was floating near Saturn and told certain things which she forgot once awake. Sananda responded by telling her that she had indeed been to Saturn, invited there by the planet's tribunal council, and been told of what was to happen on Earth in the future. Yet because part of herself was not ready for this information, the council veiled it from her consciousness so that she could assimilate the information gradually. Christine seemed satisfied with this answer; there was opportunity to continue the discussion with Sananda, yet she chose not to.

Christine's changing reactions to channelling were followed through the ensuing months. A fortnight afterwards, she spoke about the consequences of Sananda's communication to her. Christine had started to channel the Master Kuan Yin after Shah's event, although even before then she had felt the presence of the Ascended Masters and seen archetypal

images of them in her mind. Kuan Yin was one of the thirteen Masters on whom Shah gave biographical notes in her workshop, only three of which were women in their most famous Earthly incarnations. According to Shah, Kuan Yin was a Chinese Lady who had been taught by Buddha and as a Master she concentrates on the healing of women and children. It is pertinent to note in relation to this that the other lasting impression of Shah's channellings held by Christine was that she had predicted Easter Sunday of that year to be a day when the Masters were sending new energies to Earth, and that was the day chosen by Christine to have her two young children "christened", as she put it, in a non-Christian ceremony. Christine's channelling of a particular Master was therefore involved with other aspects of her life which she deemed of spiritual importance.

Two months later, Christine reported that after starting to channel Kuan Yin she had been thrown into emotional turmoil concerning its validity and benefits, eventually deciding to stop altogether. Instead, she spoke with disdain about channellers, whom she described as "jumping onto a bandwagon" with their egos. "There is", she said, "too much glamour involved". Christine claimed to have developed this critique from different sources, the main one being Rudolf Steiner's warnings against entertaining spirits that could in fact be Luciferic. According to Steiner, Luciferic beings are "those physical beings who have remained behind at an earlier stage of evolution" (1986:147), and are thus not to be trusted with regard to "higher knowledge" in spiritual development. Of occultists, amongst whom he counted the Theosophists, Steiner wrote, "They have not the slightest interest in the blessedness of the individual" (1969:212). He understood the Theosophists to be concerned with the demonic principles of Lucifer and Ahriman, which despiritualised experience of time and space, respectively (Roszak, 1975:133-135). His belief that these demonic principles needed to be spiritualised by the synthesising force of the Christian

logos had led to his break from Blavatsky (Washington, 1993:154-155).

Christine explained three other influences on her distrust of channelling. One was an idea taken from a lecture on spiritual matters concerning the Aquarian Energies which were acting on people. The lecturer had said that if knowledge of such matters was sought, people should turn directly to God himself rather than to lower spiritual beings, such as the Ascended Masters. Christine interpreted this as meaning that she should look inward for knowledge, where she said God is to be found, not outward into space to find Ashtar Command. A second and related point was that Buddhist teaching, which Christine had recently been reading about, suggested to her that spiritual progress was hard work, in contrast to channelling which she said did not require discipline or practice. Thirdly, she expressed the view that thoughts could create autonomous entities. This led her to believe that if channelling was just imagination, that which is imagined could be created on the spiritual plane, with all sorts of possibly harmful consequences.

The case of Christine draws out the differences in spirituality between the Lovells and the Spencers. Her channelling experiences exhibited three realities that relate to these. The first was her dream in which she floated near Saturn and was told important things. The second was Shah's explanation of that dream, and Christine's consequent channelling of the Ascended Master Kuan Yin. The third was her multifaceted critique of channelling, and eventual rejection of it. The first and second realities may be characterised as influenced by the attitude of the Spencers and the third by the Lovells. The first two were concerned with personal mission and change, which was interpreted by Christine as a radical new knowledge. But the third taught her an acceptance of her own abilities, in particular to contact God direct for knowledge. This latter new reality seemed to reassert Christine's

sense of stability, although only after throwing her into emotional turmoil concerning the validity of her channellings.

Concerning Christine's first reality, the significance of dreams themselves and the existence of alien life forms on other planets who are concerned about what is happening on planet Earth, were common topics amongst members of the meditation group, led largely by the Spencers' interests. Even before Shah's event, moreover, Christine had not only heard about the Ascended Masters, but felt their presences and seen "archetypal images" of them in her mind. The second reality may be seen as a fulfilment of elements of the first: interpretation of the dream by an Ascended Master himself - Sananda, as channelled through Shah - and channelling of another Master, Kuan Yin. The power of this reality lay in the fact that it drew together the two elements of the former reality: the dream was interpreted as an experience led by the Ascended Masters. Through this linkage, Christine's spiritual life was given direction: she had received a mission. The continuation of her channelling career depended upon its maintenance, in the form of increasing experience and by not being overthrown by a different reality. Whilst the former aspect was at work, by Christine's continued channelling of Kuan Yin, doubts about its reality increasingly figured in her mind because she engaged with other spiritualities.

The influences which eventually overturned Christine's channelling career and established a new reality for her were characterised by the attitude of the Lovells. It is significant to note that they had an intimate link with Christine through her two children, for whom they stood as "godparents" on Easter Sunday in 1994. Christine viewed this date as important because Shah had said it would be a day when new energies would be released over the Earth by Ashtar Command, since it was the anniversary of the resurrection of Sananda,

who had been incarnate as Jesus Christ. But the crucial involvement of the Lovells, who did not attend Shah's event and held an openly sceptical opinion of channelling, facilitated a reinterpretation of the date of the christening, once other factors had begun to delegitimise Christine's own channelling. This delegitimation process was not itself a radically unique realisation by Christine: it was grounded in previous spiritual experiences, such as knowledge of Steiner's work, as well as engagement with new ideas such as to be found in the lecture on Aquarian Energies. Despite helping to overthrow Christine's old reality, even this lecture had similarities with the teachings of the Ascended Masters. The lecturer told of the influx of Aquarian Energies into the body, as the Earth was realigned to a different axis, which was to happen that year. This would lead to a realignment of humans' spinal columns, making them more upright in posture, but with the unfortunate result that they would also be more susceptible to skin reactions.

This lecture demonstrates the ambiguity of meanings in individuals' lived experiences. As a diatribe on Aquarian Energies and the alteration of humans resulting from these, the lecture appears to fit more closely with the Spencers' upsetting spirituality. Like the channelled discourses of Ascended Masters, these matters are concerned with factors breaking in upon and overturning the human world, and how individuals are to cope with that. A decontextualised analysis of this lecture would equate it with those channelling events already considered, but through the life of Christine it took on a different meaning. Instead of confirming the Masters, it came to devalue their communications to secondary importance by emphasising contact with God. This may be seen as an issue of spiritual authority: whilst channelling figures God, as did the Spencers' spirituality, the lecture claimed a more direct link in order to establish its authority beyond these. The significance of the lecture therefore lay not in the way a transcription of it may be said to function as

a text standing unambiguously for itself, but in context of the lives of people involved, whether they are the lecturer, the participants or those who hear about it through others. In Christine's life this ambiguity was continued by her involvement in the next group, which rejected neither channelling nor spiritual discipline to find God within.

Two years later, contact was renewed with Christine at the Spiritual Fair. She was holding a stall for a group named Hundredth Monkeying!, which she explained was an ongoing project whereby people into all sorts of spiritual activities could link through meditation in order to change the world. To articulate this idea, the group adopted the subtitle, "An inner aid project to help midwife our world through needed global evolutionary changes", and sold information packs to explain in more detail what is done. According to these, Hundredth Monkeying! runs "inner aid retreats [...] which [...] focus on consciously building up an intensive energy-field, strong and clear enough to get through to people in need or to influence the collective psychological programming underlying human actions" (Jenkins, 1996:3). The idea of the hundredth monkey, referring to the last individual needed to create a critical mass that will change a state of affairs, was adopted by Ken Keyes in a book criticising nuclear armament (1982), from the scientist Lyall Watson's work (Amundson, 1991). As Amundson pointed out, it has become a common symbol by which to conceptualise social transformation.

The main retreat of Hundredth Monkeying! lasted for a week in the summer at Glastonbury; the first was in 1995 when one hundred and thirty people attended. Christine had attended the 1995 and 1996 retreats where, she said, "Everyone does what they want". After the first one she had left the Essene Meditation. This, she explained, was not a rejection of the group, rather than the wish to become involved with an organisation which

was more encompassing and satisfying to her. Significantly, when asked about her attitude to channelling, Christine replied it was not right for her, but she knew, and had attended camp with, people who did channel. This eclectic framework was established by the group organisers who stressed its "multi-faith, pluralist" nature (Jenkins, 1996:1). This does not mean the retreat days were unstructured, for there were two main activities. In the mornings a meditation was followed by three to six hours of "AllTing", a "people's parliament using a talking stick [a stick passed around such that only the bearer may speak to the group]" to discuss different issues (3). The afternoons were devoted to "investigating world-healing methods and the personal and wider implications of such inner aid work", using, "a range of variant approaches [...] meditation and visualisation [...] conflict-resolving and spiritual methods, distant healing, psychic work, earth-healing" (3-4). It was emphasised that everyone participating was a "student *and* teacher" (4).

It is no surprise that Christine should have been attracted by the Hundredth Monkeying! group and ideology. This attraction would seem to be made particularly strong by two points. The first was the emphasis laid on meditation by the group (Jenkins, 1996:17-18), corresponding to Christine's practice of this technique at the Essene meetings and especially her renewed reliance on it when she rejected channelling to focus on contacting God directly. Second, the founder and leader of the group, Palden Jenkins, was one of the compilers of *The Only Planet of Choice* (1993), the channelled discourse from The Council of Nine delivered to P.V. Schlemmer. As noted above, this text was passed around the Essene meditation group by the Spencers, including to Christine. Whilst much of this book is an evolutionary diatribe on "Planet Earth", the impetus behind the Council's decision to make contact like this lies in the contemporary environmental and psychic problems that society faces (Schlemmer and Jenkins, 1993:42-49). The Nine instruct humans to become involved

with their "fellow men" (241-242) as the "New Age" is created on Earth (304). In creating an active group to follow these instructions (Jenkins, 1996:4), alongside an ideology of eclecticism and nondogmatism, Jenkins articulated the nonformative structure with which people like Christine engage. So although she had entered and then left the channeller's career path, Christine remained spiritually involved and influenced by this form of spirituality.

The importance of distinguishing the channelling career from that of shamans is highlighted by the case of Christine. Since she was not experiencing channelling within a cultic context, alongside teachers and colleagues, she was more open to other influences. There were also few social pressures on her to continue channelling. Despite her close friendship with the Spencers, there is no evidence that they tried to dissuade her from abandoning her channelling practise. Neither the Spencers nor the Lovells appeared to exert much social pressure on her. Thus, whilst Lewis' analysis of spirit possession is useful for drawing out issues concerning channelling, its use must be tempered by an acknowledgement of the differences that exist in the cultures upon which he focused compared with nonformative spirituality. A similar point may be made concerning anthropological analyses of ritual and symbolism. The nonformative context in which Christine experienced spiritual powers meant that dominant symbols could not so easily be established or, if they were, their meaning could not be guaranteed. The variety of other spiritual contexts with which people engaged, to which presentation of their biographies pays attention, facilitated against the establishment of spiritual authority and thus against common constructed realities in any strong sense. The ambiguities of discourse, as a result of it being only loosely shared in nonformative contexts, meant that it was much easier for Christine to stop channelling compared to the spirit possessed in other cultures, who often require exorcism (Lewis,

1989b:89-90). This shows that nonformative attitudes, such as holism, were, like seekership itself, only engaged with temporarily, again emphasising the formative/nonformative dilemma that existed, both for groups and individuals' careers.

This discussion of how social power was enacted at the Essene Meditation has sought to apply the concept of nonformative spirituality in Chapter Two. It has been seen how, even in a context which is identifiable as a social group, the exercise of authority and definition of symbols was ambiguous for most participants and can only be properly understood when their histories of experience are taken into account. The next two chapters turn first to a context in which this would be expected to be even more pronounced, the Spiritual Fair, and then to three in which this would not be expected, spiritualism, the Anthroposophical Society and the Occult Study Group.

CHAPTER FOUR: FAIRS AND HEALING

Introduction

Whereas the last chapter focused upon the practice of meditation at the Essene Meditation group, the present chapter turns attention towards another part of the Nottinghamshire Network, a Spiritual Fair and the prevalence of holistic health therapies. As channelling was important for understanding the Meditation, so spiritualism is seen as central to the Fair. The same sorts of issues, as theoretically developed in the first two chapters, are again considered: how social authority is built out of performance, and how individuals relate to the group and to the network as a whole through careers of seekership. As before, this is analysed through both description of the group and people's biographies, with attention paid to theories of charismatic authority. The manner in which health is socially constructed by holistic healers will be analysed through comparison of different healing contexts and possession will be shown as useful for understanding these.

PART I. THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE SPIRITUAL FAIR

1. Description of the Fair

The Spiritual Fair which provided the second main focus for fieldwork had been running for over a year by the time research took place during the summer and autumn of 1996. Over this time, it had changed its name twice, from Psychic Fair to Earthlights Festival to Mind, Body and Spirit Festival, but had continued to be held in a small city centre hotel. In this Thesis, it is called a Fair rather than a Festival, since the latter usually refers to larger scale, more diverse gatherings held over a number of days, such as the Glastonbury Festival and the London Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit. At the time of research, it welcomed about one hundred and fifty people each Sunday it was held, with approximately equal numbers of men and women. There were around twenty stalls from people throughout the East and West Midlands, selling goods and offering healing or clairvoyance sessions, as well as ten speakers throughout the day, in a hall that could hold about sixty people, and, towards the end of the summer, four longer sessions of healing instruction lasting an hour and a half held in a separate room. The Fair was invariably busy, despite the stalls being set up in only two rooms, and although some of the lectures were attended by as few as fifteen people, others were so popular that there was standing room only. Running from ten in the morning to six in the evening, the daily entrance price was less than two pounds and even cheaper for children and pensioners; lectures were free and the longer sessions each cost no more than five pounds.

People at the Fair occupied one of two categories: producers, who led stalls, lectures or

workshops and consumers, those who attended these. The distinction between producers and consumers in the New Age was made by Hart and Janssen's Dutch study, which viewed the attitude of the former as systematic and that of the latter as vague and eclectic, and which compared these two categories with church professionals and church lay people, respectively (1993). However, producers at the Fair also acted as consumers, paying interest in the other stalls and lectures, and were often consumers in their wider religious behaviour. This reflected the fluid nature of leadership in nonformative spiritualities, as shown in the last chapter, where authority is fluid and difficult to establish consistently. The difference between systematisers and eclectics, at least as regards this Network, therefore cannot be held too strongly. Rather, people displayed predominantly systematic or eclectic attitudes at different times in their careers, depending on the sort of seekership in which they were engaged, as either serial or multiple, as discussed in Chapter Two. The difference between producers and consumers, then, must be defined for each new context.

At the Fair, there were three types of producers: spiritualists, other healers and cosmologists. The presence of usually a half dozen spiritualists reflected the interest of Michael, the main organiser of the Fair, as will be seen in the next section. However, the spiritualist lectures were often the most heavily attended and they were able to carry out paid consultations at their stalls throughout the day. The most common producers were holistic healers, but the interests of these tended to concentrate on four common therapies: crystals, aromatherapy, flower essences and Reiki. There was a clear cross-over between these two types, since the most prominent aspect of spiritualism presented was that of healing through the laying on of hands or through an elucidation of health and other personal problems by clairvoyance, the obtaining of information through spirit helpers. Clairvoyance could take place through consultation of Tarot cards, where it was believed

these spirits interpreted the meanings for the consultants of the cards which were displayed.

Cosmologists comprised the smallest of the three types of producers, represented by, for examples, a local Buddhist monk who styled himself as a Maitreya, talks on the Aquarian Age, American Mayan cosmology and Feng Shui, a Chinese technique for working with the Earth's energy as it is altered through physical objects, and even one individual's own constructed cosmology, Omniology (Lomas, 1996). Surprisingly, there were only a couple of lectures on spiritual histories or traditions, such that not even astrology figured. This differed from some of the other groups studied, such as the Anthroposophical Society and the occult studies group, as the next chapter will show.

In all three types, the sort of product being sold varied between producers. Some of the healers and cosmologists came from local businesses and were therefore interested in promoting their services outside of the Fair. These included a floatation tank centre, courses in "practical philosophy", Feng Shui consultations for people's houses and workplaces, and a reflexology clinic. Half a dozen of the stalls sold books, from shops across the Midlands. Those who held these were also practitioners of therapies and would use them as an introduction to the books they sold. Whilst the spiritualists did not publicise businesses, the consultations they gave at their stalls promoted the need for further private consultations and healing. This was also common for other healers, whose displays of healing power were explained to consumers to be only an initial taste of what should be carried on over a longer period. Evidence from fieldwork with some of the producers, such as Alvin, a spiritualist, and Sally and Noel, who practised a variety of healing techniques, showed that interest outside of the Fair was generated from only a two or three people from each Sunday it was held. Therefore, by far the majority of consumers did not follow

up their experiences at the Fair through the producers they met there.

However, the level of interest which was generated by the Fair suggests that it provided people with the means to orientate their current spiritual practices. Anne, who had been met at the Anthroposophical Society and with whom Patterson's channelling event and the Occult Study Group was attended, said that the Fair showed her the wider picture of her own concerns. It did not lead to new practices or beliefs for her, but validated her career path. In this respect, the Fair may be compared with the Essene Meditation, which also located people within their careers and patterns of seekership. Probably the most important aspect of the Fair was the common experience it afforded friends and relatives. Most attenders came with another two or three people, often with sexual partners, children or parents: Sally and Noel were siblings, Anne attended with her daughter, and a Shiatsu workshop was attended by a group of six friends comprising three couples. Many of the producers, such as Alvin, also came with their partners.

It appears that this joint attendance was of greater importance than the interaction with producers themselves, since the meanings of experiences, as at the Essene Meditation, were interpreted by relating them to their spiritual biographies through talks with trusted friends. Through regular attendance at the Fair, people encountered many of the same producers each month. About a half dozen producers gave lectures more than once at these Fair and many more were found to nearly always have a stall there. The Fair, then, could be thought of as a regular ritual, with the same variety of practices and beliefs presented time and again. The common theme of these variations was healing through spiritual powers and, like the period of meditation at the Essene group, attendance at talks and consultations at stalls functioned as ritual times bounded by discussions with other attenders, such as at the Fair's

coffee shop. Like the Meditation, attention must be paid to the authorities established at the Fair, in order that people's experiences there can be understood. This is now looked at through the history of the Fair, especially its establishment by Michael, and the leadership enacted there.

2. Origins and Development of the Fair

The origins of the Fair need to be understood in the context of Michael's life, which was expounded through interviews, at the Fair and at a crystal healing workshop he led. In his early forties, Michael had for many years been interested in spiritual practices, attending Transcendental Meditation and rebirthing classes. More important to him, he said, was his training at a spiritualist development circle and with the master shaman with whom Michelle had studied. Alongside Michelle, Michael had organised the shamanic workshops in the East Midlands. During much of this time, over a ten year period, he was on tranquillises, prescribed by his doctor, for he found his state of mind very unsettled. At the time Michael was working as a sales manager, at which he said he was good and making a lot of money. He was, however, dissatisfied with this, finding it meaningless, so he gave in his notice and lazed around for a year, during which time several experiences occurred that set him on his present spiritual career path. For one whole night, from six in the evening till eight the next day, Michael experienced automatic writing, penning quatrains or four line rhymes that were, he said, "like new age platitudes, generalisations - garbage". Although the poetry was, he said, "rubbish and meaningless", he could not stop writing them:

"At the time, I felt I was doing something momentous; it felt really important, as if I had to do this, although it meant nothing in terms of how

it could be translated for anybody else. My whole mental effort was so speeded up that I felt I was burning up in some way. I felt so open, I felt I could reach out to the information coming into my mind. Everything was really clear. I wanted to sustain this state. It was like getting a glimpse into what was possible."

When he eventually did stop writing these, Michael went for a walk on a nearby common, experiencing a "real high". A few days after this, also whilst on a walk, Michael began to hear voices in his head, where people were holding a conversation about him as if he could not hear them. He described this as "a very disempowering experience", until they condescended to invite him into their conversation. Although Michael did not want to say either what that talk was about or show any of the quatrains he had written, he said these were experiences of great force and consequence that were important for his later experiences.

Towards the end of his year of unemployment, Michael began to help in a friend's crystal selling business, to show him how it could be done in a more profitable way and to demonstrate to himself that he could be successful: "I did it to show what sort of a person I could be". Alongside the mail order business, his friend frequented spiritual fairs, and invited Michael to attend one of these. There, Michael said he was "on a high" the whole day, and that his body took on the pains of people coming to his stall to purchase crystals, over which he had no control. Whilst there, he had two photographs of himself taken which showed the state of his aura and were framed on his living room wall. The first picture, taken at the beginning of the day, showed a discoloured aura around his body, the second was almost uniformly white. What this showed, he said, was that his aura had

changed from ill to well, for he had spent so long around the healing powers of crystals.

This experience led Michael into forming his own crystal selling and healing business. He converted his garage into a showroom containing thousands of crystals of all sorts and sizes, some priced at several hundred pounds. He claimed to have been taught crystal healing by his "spirit guide", involvement with whom he experienced as different from his previous encounters with spirits, and whom he had first had contact at the spiritualist circle. This guide taught him how to control taking on others' pains and to develop his use of intuition. In private interview, Michael expressed the opinion that it was madness to use crystals in healing, but the fact was, they worked. This utilitarian attitude, noted by Heelas within the prosperity wing of the self-religions that teach the attainment of capitalist success (1996:58-67, 166-168), did not necessarily arise from a feeling of power and confidence, but as being the basis for these to develop. Michael was not sure why crystals worked, so he judged them according to how they felt to him. This feeling, he said, could not be put into words and needed to be simply accepted if frustration was not to result. He explained that this was a hard thing to teach, for people want knowledge such as when and how to use crystals.

Likewise, Michael found that Reiki healing, which he also practised, felt "comfortable and gentle". He contrasted Reiki with channelling, which he said feels "more urgent" and leaves the practitioner less protected. Having attended Sheila Patterson's channelling workshop, he found its emphasis on ascension "escapist and disagreeable". From his own experiences, he said that channelling provides no framework in which to put what is experienced, for it is as if someone else were trying to take over, like the voices he had heard in his head. Whilst Michael denounced the ascension ideology and the over-powering experience of channelling as unacceptable to him, spirit possession remained essential to

his spiritual career, in his interest in spiritualism, practice of crystal healing and reiki and use of a spirit guide.

Michael recognised that the experience of psychic phenomena was a common way in which people were introduced to spirituality. Without any help from others who had been through similar experiences, he said there would be a danger that emotional imbalance could occur, as it did to him for a while. For Michael, one of the functions of the Spiritual Fair was to give a "framework" so that people can understand their experiences of psychic phenomena. This framework teaches that such phenomena are not really what spirituality is all about. People therefore need to be taught how to bring their astral body, which by tapping into the "universal unconscious" allows such occurrences, back into their physical body, such as by the "grounding" ability of crystals. He viewed his years on tranquillisers as due to the inability to see that his mind was unsettled because he was having "inner experiences": only when he started Transcendental Meditation did he find that he was not alone in this. "Ninety seven percent of experiences of spirits in the head are chauvinistic higher consciousness experiences", he said, lamenting the fact that no "new age counselling service" exists to help people through this.

The point of spiritual development, according to Michael, is the ability to help others, not to gain power that may be exercised over them: "In terms of my own life, it's about being a nice person, about relating to other people". He explicitly related these issues of development to social authority: the Fair was intended to avoid the dependence that often results from more formal events, such as spiritualist development circles. In these, others' views of what is and should be happening in the mind and body are imposed upon those new to such experiences. So those producers he allowed in the Fair come recommended

through friends as being ethical: "Intent is all important", he said. When a spiritual teacher is needed, he said that a humble one should be chosen. Often this will be a spirit guide, although whether this is the "higher self" or a separate being, Michael was unable to answer, for he said he was unable to distinguish between the two.

This nonformative attitude was reflected in Michael's beliefs, which were not built up into a system rather than operating as a multiplicity of cosmologies. For example, he had recently become interested in theories of extra-terrestrials from "higher planes", which he found a "fascinating cosmology", but was not concerned to integrate with his other spiritual interests at the moment and indeed rejected some encounters with this issue, such as Sheila Patterson's. Each of these cosmologies, he said, could come into prominence at different times: "I can switch cosmologies, but can't point to one and say, 'That's right', although that would be a wonderful point to arrive at". This is not to say that different spiritual practices and interests were unrelated to each other by Michael and many others in the Network. Certainly they were, such that a unified self-identity and experience of being on a career path could be created and maintained. But the establishment of an enduring cosmology that solidly fixed these relations by integration to one another appeared to be absent. Only with severely dissonant experiences, most typically through spirit possession, were these various elements questioned more fundamentally and a change in career likely to occur, reflected through commitment to a more limited discourse and symbolic system. It may therefore be suggested that social nonformative spiritual practice was the basis on which a psychological nonformativeness, in terms of a belief-system or cosmology, was established. These points are useful for understanding the establishment and maintenance of authority at the Spiritual Fair.

Michael said that he knew all the speakers and stall-holders at the Fair personally, as well as about a fifth of those who attended. That, and the fact many people were met who had been encountered in other groups investigated during research, strongly suggests that networking was an essential element to the Fair's success. Michael kept a mailing list to send out details of each month's fair, also including leaflets for his own crystal business and workshops, compiled from people he had "picked up from different sources". He said that initially he had maintained a lot of control over which producers to have in the fair, according to his own ideas about what people wanted, but later on he had let others take a part in that choice, which had led to a greater mix of talks, less concentrated on "psychic phenomena". It was for this reason he changed its original name of Psychic Fair. Michael's ideal for the fair was to make it "user friendly", to avoid it being an isolating experience and "to take the fear out of psychic phenomena and mediumship", showing it instead to be entertaining. He believed that those who attended were "called" there by some sort of force and trusted his "higher self" that whoever needed to attend, would do so. It may be said, then, that Michael ran the Fair partly for his own sense of mission: "I believe what I'm doing is right", he claimed. He invited "universal support" for his venture and believed that only if he blocked the "flow" would it fail.

Michael's attitude to the Fair was therefore caught in a dilemma: on the one hand he exercised a large degree of control over its contents and development, but on the other hand he viewed it as empowering people and as being led by forces other than his conscious self, such as his higher self and spirit guide. This was reflected by many of the producers at the Fair and can be compared to the tension that existed at the Essene Meditation, as the next section investigates.

3. Authority at the Fair

One of the spiritualist healers who gave talks and held a stall at the Fair said, "There's nothing more normal than healing - it's not paranormal, anyone can do it". He explained that because of this, he called himself a "healing channel" rather than a "spiritual healer", to emphasise the fact that the people who heal are as important as that which heals through them. On hearing this talk, Michelle disagreed, saying that healing was a gift which was not given to everyone. However, it was clear that the spiritualist held a high degree of spiritual authority: he claimed to have worked with Matthew Manning - a healer known nationally for his television appearances, books (1977; 1987; 1989) and tours (such as his *No Faith Required* U.K. tour in 1995) - and talked about the spirit who uses him as a channel to heal, a Dr. Jameison who died in 1869 and whom he had verified by checking municipal records. He said he entered an "altered state of consciousness" when healing, so that he could recognise his spirit guides.

Thus, although this speaker's talk democratised healing, it also served to create a gap between him and the audience by drawing attention to his spiritual authority, as had Patterson's channelling workshop. It may be claimed that, unlike Michelle, he was able to ideologically democratise healing because he held a high degree of social power: with his wife he had been a member of the National Federation of Spiritual Healers for ten years, he had been active on the spiritualist circuit, he regularly healed and he was a producer at the Fair. At the time, Michelle held no such positions of social power and therefore sought to consolidate her authority in her practice of spiritual power. This ideology of democracy within a performance of authority was common for other speakers too. During his talk on Omniology, in response to this researcher's question whether his system was just theoretical

or included practical elements, Lomas said, "Each person grows to the divine in their own way. You can't tell others what to do". However, his talk, entitled *Transformational Knowledge*, didactively set out a system of the universe, based upon the dual evolution to that which is base, such as lying and cheating, and to that which is not base, such as love and compassion, which is manifested as Itheshe, the triple elements of it, he and she.

The emphasis on biography displayed by the spiritualist healer and Lomas' recollections of how he developed Omniology at certain times in his life, was common amongst the lectures given at the Fair, used to establish spiritual authority and therefore to legitimate lecturers positions as producers in relation to the audience of consumers. Although the performance of presenting biographies at the Fair and during interviews was from the perspective of the speakers and were therefore biased towards their pursuit and attainment of a career, the very fact that biography was emphasised by them is of importance. It constituted a major way in which social authority was established, by presenting the attainment of spiritual authority through the wide knowledge gained through seekership. Thus, the talks cannot be fully explained economically, by the need to sell goods and services, since many of these, in particular spiritualist healing, were offered free or at minimal cost. Although clairvoyance consultations at the Fair cost around five pounds, talks with spiritualist and other healers made it clear that what was important to them was their practice of healing and the attempt, as also expressed by Michael, to do good. Instead, performances by producers at the Fair were used to unite social authority with spiritual authority. Explanations of spiritual authority through the presentation of biography helped establish social authority. And enactments of social authority by occupying prominent positions, as speakers and stall holders, helped establish spiritual authority. Each therefore legitimated the other and this provided the impetus which allowed seeking within nonformative spiritualities to continue.

Michelle's case shows what may happen when social authority and spiritual authority are not matched and therefore do not legitimate this seeking. Although she was spiritually proficient in those groups to which she belonged - the Wiccan group, shamanistic workshops and spiritualist workshops - Michelle never attained a position of social authority in them and this helps explain why at various times she departed from nonformative spiritualities to join formative churches: the Church of England, Pentecostal and Mormon churches. In these, however, she found it difficult to establish spiritual authority; when she did display her abilities the church authorities attempted to stop her, leading to her departure. This also explains her enthusiasm for presenting her biography in interview: it was a way for her to legitimate her career of seekership.

Such attempts at legitimation at the Fair could lead to competitiveness between producers, for each attended the Fairs as an individual with his or her own spiritual authority rather than as members sharing a single authority as those in formative spiritualities, such as Christian clergy, are more likely to do. Attention must therefore be drawn again to the false impression that may arise if analysis rests only on language. Many of these producers employed common beliefs, but this in itself did not establish a share in a common social authority. Rather, the meanings of these beliefs were built out of the individual authorities that were established and therefore remained separate from one another. This competitiveness was displayed by Alvin at another fair he attended, in Derbyshire. Having set up his stall at this fair, Alvin complained of a lack of clients, attributing this to his position at the back of the hall, but also to another medium who had a stall nearer the entrance and was doing better business than he. She was a woman who spoke loudly with a commanding tone to her clients, unlike Alvin who was soft-spoken. He explained that she had placed a spell on the other mediums' stalls, which meant they were surrounded by

negative energies and to counteract this, he did a spell of his own. Later on, he said his spell had worked, but that the effect of her spell was likely to linger and he therefore continued to complain about her.

By deriving authority from biographies of spiritual experiences rather than from membership within the group context, as displayed through rivalry and competitiveness, the producers at the Fair further demonstrated their nonformative attitude. Both Alvin and Michael held criticisms of spiritualist development circles for allowing human teachers to take precedence over spirit guides. Irene, Alvin's wife, would not join such a circle, disliking groups for the jealousies that arise in them. A crystal healer who had adopted an ancient Egyptian name given to him during channelling and who regularly gave talks and held a bookstall at the Fair, described how he had been brought up as a Roman Catholic, but now had no time for religion, despite using crosses with crystals on them as "healing instruments". This attempt to break down the authorities of groups was reflected in producers' eclectic belief systems. The crystal healer, on explaining how he had developed his use of the healing energy from his palms, said it was what other people call *chi*, Reiki, *prana* or spiritual healer. Further, like Michael's views on crystal healing, many of these healers at times claimed that search for knowledge of why a therapy worked could be distracting, even though, on further questioning, they had extensive views on just such issues.

It was therefore common for people to ideologically distance themselves even from those groups with which they were involved, drawing attention to their own reasons for attendance and therefore to their own careers. Thus, Sally, Noel and Beth attended the Essene Meditation, they said, for the energy which was generated during the quiet

meditative time, not for the Essene content and visualisation, and Anne frequented Anthroposophical meetings for the variety of people there, not for the group's teachings of Steiner. Thus, a flexible attitude towards authorities and groups was adopted, which allowed for their greater or lesser embrace depending on their formative influence. In other words, a variety of positions, both socially and theologically, were used to check the extent of the establishment of authority into individuals' lives. As explained in Chapter One, social authority depends on its recognition, and thus its enduring construction was rendered extremely difficult within these nonformative groups. Such a view questions the relevance of Weber's analysis of charismatic authority, which has been commonly applied in sociological studies of new religious movements with a strong emphasis on healing, as in Wilson's thurmaturgical type (1975).

Max Weber's typology of social legitimation comprised traditional, charismatic, and bureaucratic authorities. He wrote, "All *extraordinary* needs, i.e., those which *transcend* the sphere of everyday economic routines, have always been satisfied in an entirely heterogeneous manner: on a *charismatic* basis" (1968:1111). Weber believed that,

"charisma knows no formal and regulated appointment or dismissal, no career, advancement or salary, no supervisory or appeals body, no local or purely technical jurisdiction, and no permanent institutions [...] Charisma is self-determined and sets its own limits. Its bearer seizes the task for which he is destined and demands that others obey and follow him by virtue of his mission" (1113).

Weber's sense of charismatic authority is, however, peculiarly decontextualised, despite the qualifications to his theory that point to the routinisation of charisma and its formulation

as an ideal type that in practice will always be found mixed with the other forms of authority (1968:1121-1122). As Wallis pointed out, Weber did not properly consider, "the social nature of the emergence, recognition and maintenance of a charismatic identity", which comes about through, "an interactional process, in which each party secures social status in an exchange of recognition, affection and reinforcement of worth" (1982:26). Analysis of authority in the Nottinghamshire Network shows that charisma must be built up and therefore requires certain social conditions, allowing, especially, the pursuit of a spiritual career. This belies Weber's view of ideal types, which Hill interpreted as the filtering out of "extraneous factors" (1973:150), for it is not that the careers of charismatics may sometimes appeal to other sources of legitimacy (Hill, 1973:161), but that these are inextricably bound up with charisma. It is his model of ideal types that has led to misinterpretation of Weber's contextual analysis, as Waddell showed (1972), and Ollenburger and Moore described how ideal types cannot be used as a model by which to compare the approximation of real instances (1992:38).

Berger (1963) directed a new criticism against Weber, namely that his theory of charisma was influenced by the state of Protestant Biblical criticism of his day. This interpreted the Old Testament prophets as religious innovators representing an underprivileged strata rather than acting as cultic functionaries. Berger claimed that the notion of "charismatic office" was alien to Weber's understanding (1963:949). All interpretations of Weber need to take account of his sociological aim of explaining the "historical efficacy" of ideas, against the "Marxian theme" of ideas as mere reflections of social and economic relations (Berger, 1963:949; and see Hill, 1973:169). Because he was not an idealist, recognising the interdependence of ideas on social contexts, Weber resorted to Goethe's idea of "elective affinity", suggestive of ideas as representative of the spirit of the time, whereby ideas and

contexts pick up themes from one another, as in the "protestant ethic" of capitalism, (Berger, 1963:950; and see Hill, 1973:104-106).

If charismatic authority, in Weber's sense of the term, is established in either formative or nonformative settings, then attention must be paid to the social situation in which it originates and develops. The charisma displayed in the four practices of channelling, meditation, divination and healing in the Network, suggest that it was curtailed by both the charismatics themselves, through their continued seekership, and their audiences, through their temporary and varied allegiances. This is another way of describing nonformativeness. The only performance in the Network which may be said to have displayed the classic elements of charisma as described by Weber, was Patterson's channelling workshop, yet this was notable for being a single event from an outsider. Whatever charismatic authority was established within the workshop was, as seen in the last chapter, countered afterwards. It may be suggested that Patterson's channelling in fact could not have remained a permanent fixture of the Network, for the nonformative attitude disallowed it. This again highlights the difference between the Network and many organisations, such as Scientology and est, considered alongside these practices as New Age and thus the need to bring in issues of social power and organisation when classifying groups.

The attitude of both producers and consumers at the Spiritual Fair may therefore be seen as a reaction against both formative groups and the formativeness of groups, that is, against groups with an established authority structure and the tendency of groups to create such a structure. It was a reaction against social authority, theologically displayed through emphasis on individual spirituality. On its own, this analysis could concur with the characterisation of nonformative groups as self-religions, but the fact that by rejecting one

group's authority individuals work with a number of such authorities shows that it was social formativeness, not authority as such, that was rejected. The difference here is subtle, but crucial. Theories of New Age spirituality and self-religions rely on the expression of individual authority by participants. But only by considering the structures of social power within which people expressed their authorities can these be seen in their contexts of social reality and come under sociological scrutiny. The reaction against, and rejection of, social formativeness allowed leaders in these groups to exercise authority only within limits set by their own varied spiritual involvement and those of their participants. It was in this sense that groups functioned to maintain nonformativeness. By comparing the Nottinghamshire Fair with the London Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, the latter may also be seen in this light, despite the presence of internationally known, often explicitly New Age, authors.

4. A Comparison with the London Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit

Unlike the Nottinghamshire Spiritual Fair, the internationally famous London Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, which was attended in 1993 and 1994, was run by a company, New Life Promotions Limited, and comprised a large organising team to deal with its various aspects. These covered around a hundred stalls, a dozen lectures and workshops each day, and a dozen performances and demonstrations each day. Both years, the Festival took place over ten days, in the Royal Horticultural Halls. It had started seventeen years before, in a much smaller venue. Like the Fair, the Festival was not expensively priced: five pounds per day and less for those with concessionary passes, and half price on two of the days. However, lectures and workshops ranged from five to thirty pounds, with durations of between one and five hours. The performances, on the central stage in the hall, were free. According

to the brochure for 1993, the Festival,

"brings together an astonishing range of some of the most important subjects concerned with the changes occurring in the development of human consciousness and natural health [...]

"There are also many new exhibitors this year offering an enormous variety of services and products relating to alternative medicine, healing, animal welfare, ecology, spiritual development, personal growth and the psychic arts".

The majority of the lecturers were authors who also toured, such as Matthew Manning, Denise Linn and Paul Solomon, and these would hold a number of lectures during the course of the Festival. Sheila Patterson was also present, repeating the workshop she had given in Nottinghamshire. Very few of these speakers, however, held stalls, although their writings could be found on the numerous bookstalls. Their future tours and workshops, as organised, for example, by new Life Promotions, were also widely advertised. This was quite different from the Fair, where the majority of the stalls were held by people who offered personal services and used lectures to explain and advertise these. The stalls at the Festival were predominantly devoted to companies selling a range of products, rather than services. When services were offered, this was usually to sell a product, not to gain clients for future services. However, there were also a number of organisations present, notably those of the western esoteric tradition, such as the Anthroposophical Society, the Theosophical Society, the Lucis Trust, the Aetherius Society and The Swedenborg Movement, and of the Hindu tradition, such as the Baha'i Faith and the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre. None of these were represented in lectures or workshops, although some held demonstrations of healing power or yoga on the stage. The Festivals, then, were

oriented to economics and consumerism to a far greater extent than the Fair.

The range of speakers at the Festivals was international, with many from the United States and others from Australia and New Zealand. Only a handful came from South America and continental Europe and none from Africa or Asia, apart from India. This, coupled with the orientation towards products at the stalls, meant that the effect of the Festival was to create a distance between consumers and producers. This was reflected in the common theme of self-development found in many of the talks, as acknowledged in the brochure and which bore close resemblance to Paul Heelas' *lingua franca* of the New Age movement, discussed in Chapter Two. This theme drew attention to impediments to development, such as ties to kin and sexual partners, and presented visualisation rituals to overcome these.

In Nicki Scully's *Ritual for Forgiveness* lecture in 1994, the audience was taken through a visualisation to discover what bound them too closely to other people and therefore blocked their creative energies for development. The root of such binds was, she said, the lack of forgiveness given to them and this could be redressed by visualising the cutting of these. The didactic authority of these lecturers established their differentiation from the audience, who were instructed what to do and why. Charles, with whom the 1994 Festival was attended, noted that there was little information given by speakers on their personal lives and histories. This contrasted with the Fair, where biography was an important aspect. The emphasis on self-development cannot necessarily be interpreted as self-empowering the audience, for it rested on the idea that their lives needed developing and were therefore lacking in certain respects and that the speaker knew how to combat this.

The emphasis on imagination to alter reality featured in many of the presentations. Andrew

Ferguson, also in 1994, talked about how dreams relate into action due to energy which flows through all levels of life. The aim of his talk, *Creating Abundance*, was to enable the audience to translate into reality that which they craved, in a limitless way. It is no surprise to find that the language and practices of these speakers matched those found in literature classed as New Age, since they were authors themselves. Phyllis Kystal's *Cutting the Ties that Bind - Puberty* (1991) is a particularly striking example of this and she was also present at the Festivals. On imaginary rites of cutting ties that bind people with their parents, she wrote, "The more emotion involved, the deeper the subconscious is impressed with the new message, and thus, the sooner the message will be put into effect" (1991:198). The imaginary rites are effective because of the energies created during their performance, according to Kystal (199-200). Thus, nothing else needs to be done. She did advocate that a letter be written to the parent whose ties have been cut, informing them of this. However, this letter should be unmailed, for it "bypasses the conscious mind of the person to whom it is addressed but reaches his subconscious", which is more powerful (199). Techniques using the imagination, as also in Manning's self-healing guide (1989), are therefore seen as more efficacious than direct physical and interpersonal ones.

At the Festival, it seemed as if consumers' own explorations took second place to analysis of their lives by producers. This could be seen in the lack of teaching in particular therapies, rather than general theories of healing centred on the self and imagination, and in the lack of divinations, such as the clairvoyance found at the Fair. This may be explained by the different roles of the Festival and the Fair. The Festival was not tied to a particular network, taking place just once a year rather than monthly like the Fair, and attracting many hundreds of people from across and country. Authority at the Festival was therefore established in a more detached manner than at the Fair, indeed, it was assumed rather than

built up through biography and personal contact. The audience had to express much more selection, especially in the lectures, which at the Fair were free, but also amongst the stalls, given the large number of these. This appeared to result in less experimentation than at the Fair: people would go to lectures and workshops taken by authors they had already read or heard about and would spend time at stalls which reflected their particular interests, as can be seen in the case of Charles.

Charles had been met at Shah's workshop, which he had attended on his own after seeing it advertised in a London esoteric bookstore. A Londoner who worked in television management, Charles used the term New Age to describe "the divinity in everything" but said he was wary of the patriarchal side of the New Age, which denied the life-affirming quality of women. As such, he was interested in women's occupation of positions of power and had become interested in the Theosophical School and its female leaders, H.P. Blavatsky, Annie Besant and Alice Bailey. This was also why he made the effort to travel from London to Nottinghamshire to see Shah channel.

Charles said had been brought up a Christian, before he "violently rejected" his religion. After that, he had attended meetings of World Goodwill in London, part of Bailey's Lucis Trust which was formed in 1932. This had encouraged him in meditation, for World Goodwill teaches triplets of people how to mentally link together in what Bailey called occult meditation to, "use an invocation for light and love to illumine the human scene" (Sinclair, 1985:74-75). Charles' interest in channelling had stemmed from this, for Bailey had split from the Theosophical Society to create her own organisation centred round the communications she received from Djwha Khul, a Tibetan Master (12-19). In recent years, Charles said, his anger against Christianity had been quelled and he had increasingly been

drawn to the Bible and Christianity, though with a different attitude. He viewed Jesus as a Christ, rather than as Christ, equivalent to what the Hindu tradition calls a Maitreya. "We are all Christs", he said, "but Christianity doesn't recognise this. We need to bring out our Christhood from within ourselves".

Charles' interest in the London Festival centred round the presence of Theosophical groups there and he complained about what he called the lack of "intelligent systems" at the lectures and other stalls. He was mainly concerned with gaining more information about that with which he was already involved and did not use the opportunity to experiment with new techniques or learn about new belief-systems. From one of the stalls, he bought a channelled text by the Master Hilarion, entitled *The Letters of Paul: A New Spiritual World View* (1989). This was a new interpretation of letters in the New Testament, by the Ascended Master which had originally incarnated as Paul, in order to make their esoteric content more explicit. Charles reserved his attention for these groups even though they explicated beliefs found in the systems of self-development of other producers, especially those speakers considered above, such as "There is nothing outside of the self which is cause" (1989:43).

As seen also at the Fair and Meditation, then, beliefs were interpreted according to the context of consumers' concerns, rather than built out of the immediate context in which they appeared. Self-creativity, for Charles, made no sense outside of the context of Christhood found in the Theosophical School and channelling with which he was familiar. Thus although differentials in social power existed between producers and consumers at the Festival, these were temporary and limited, arising out of immediate performances, rather than being strongly established. In that respect, despite the differences between the Festival

and the Fair, the former may still be considered nonformative, even if some of the organisations represented were formative ones themselves.

Two final issues may be addressed in this section, to clarify comparison of the Festival with the Fair. The first concerns the ethnicity of participants. Despite significant minorities of non-whites in Nottingham and, especially, London, only a few were present at these events: only about half a dozen consumers and none of the producers at the Fairs, and merely a tiny minority of consumers and virtually none of the producers at the Festivals. As a black man, Charles was conspicuous at Shah's workshop for being one of only two non-whites, both black males, and not much less so at the Festival. He talked of his trouble in coming to terms with the emphasis on white, Aryan people in channelling and the Theosophical School. In Shah's talk on the Ascended Masters, none were black and the majority were blond-haired, blue-eyed and white-skinned. On being questioned about the meaning of the Great White Brotherhood, Shah answered that white stood for white light and was not a racial term. "All beings", she said, "are equal in God's eyes". Charles linked his anger with racism with his anger against Christianity: just as he had come to appreciate the latter, so he had come to have love for the former and their victims. He said he was learnt to cope with the "non-black side of the New Age", especially as he viewed New Age people as those most moral in Britain.

The second issue is the presence of spiritualism at the Festival. Unless Matthew Manning is classed as a spiritualist healer, and he did not talk about this aspect of his training, none of the speakers taught from the tradition of spiritualism, in stark contrast to the Fairs. Both years, the National Federation of Spiritualist Healers held stalls and demonstrations, but these did not cover clairvoyance. However, other forms of possession were more visible:

several talks and workshops were on channelling and shamanism, including ones by shamans trained within their native American traditions. This lack is further contrasted by the Derbyshire weekend fair, which had talks and demonstrations on spiritualism and psychic development, and seven out of thirty five exhibition stands held by spiritualists and psychics giving "private consultations/readings", according to the brochure.

This difference may be explained by the greater presence of spiritualism in nonformative networks in the provinces than in London. Certainly, this tradition was essential to the development of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, as the autobiographies of the founders, Eileen Caddy (Caddy and Hollingshead, 1988) and Peter Caddy (1996), and the research of Sutcliffe (1995b), show. However, this theory cannot be held given the different role of the Festival compared with the Fair. As already noted, the latter existed within a network, being more closely tied to other groups and their interests, whilst the former was run by a company designed to promote established authors, lecturers and groups. Since spiritualists, especially those involved within nonformative networks, operated individually in their spare time and by word of mouth, they were not well-known producers and would therefore be omitted from the more consumerist oriented festivals. Since further fieldwork was not undertaken in London, their presence in networks there cannot be commented upon, but there is no reason to suppose that the tradition would be less visible within nonformative networks there than in Nottinghamshire.

Discussion of fairs and festivals in this part has brought into prominence healing therapies and spiritualist healing and raised many issues about them. These include the establishment of authority in healing and diagnosis, the use of the imagination and the comparison of different techniques with each other. Building on the ethnography of this part and bringing

in fieldwork with three healers in particular, the next part attempts to address these issues.

PART II. HOLISTIC HEALING

1. The Social Construction of Health

The theme of health was central in the Spiritual Fair. Spiritualism, the most prominent practice at the Fair, is strongly concerned with healing and the second most featured aspect were holistic therapies themselves. The latter were also common at the London Festivals. This part seeks to show how social performances of healing involve the establishment of authorities which define illness and health, as many sociologists, such as Bryan Turner, have shown. In his discussion of how the body is treated in social structures, Turner distinguished between disease and illness (1984:205-206). The former is ill health defined in terms of the natural world or as Turner put it, is "nature oriented", whilst the latter is ill health defined in terms of the social world, or is "culture oriented". "Disease is thus a system of signs which can be read and transformed in a variety of ways", he wrote, and so knowledge of disease is intimately linked to social power (208). He called this exercise of power a "government of the body" (178) and claimed that it had passed from religious to medicinal institutions through secularisation (211-225). Crawford, for example, explores the social construction of health under capitalism in terms of patterns of control and release of the body (1985). Within religious contexts, these issues may be usefully explored through two studies by Skultans (1974), on spiritualism in a South Wales town and McGuire (1988), on American suburban healing.

Skultans placed her work in cross-cultural comparison with Ioan Lewis' studies of spirit possession, which focused upon reactions to social oppression. Drawing from his fieldwork

amongst Somali pastoralists, Lewis found that spirit possession formed a part of the conflict which arose between husband and wife, what he called the "sex-war" (1989a:64-70). It may be noted, however, that Lewis' theory was criticised by Wilson (1967) for viewing this society from a western feminist perspective. In the patriarchal Somali society, wrote Lewis, women are those most prone to possession for they are downtrodden and neglected, and given few securities or pleasures. Wives who become possessed are first taken ill by *sars*, spirits who demand satisfaction through gifts, understood to be malevolent in the Islamic framework of Somali cosmology. The cure is either to join a shamanistic cult where the woman learns to master the *sar*, or for the husband to beat her in order to stop such behaviour.

The "sexual asymmetry" (Rosaldo, 1974:23-35) through which Lewis linked possession with healing was traced by Skultans in Welsh spiritualism. Skultans recognised two key elements to spiritualism: how spirit possession relates to illness and how it allows the assumption of usually denied roles (1974:5). The latter places spiritualism within a context of social oppression, which denies roles to some members of society. The sort of mediumship investigated by Skultans was comprised of small circles, which women attended for healing. She defined illness for each woman as being, "inextricably woven into a wider fabric composed of her other social and personal problems" (28). The circles taught the women to deal with their pain through becoming spirit possessed (7). Each circle operated on its own, but was related to others through a loose allegiance to the Spiritualist Church, which provided them with published materials, and a formal building in which the circles met for wider healing rituals. The Church was Christian, like many of the spiritualist organisations from the late nineteenth century, but unorthodox as regards the theology of the main Christian churches in Britain. Nelson defined spiritualism as a cult, having broken from the

orthodox Christian tradition and turned attention to "problems of individual[s] rather than those of the social group", and which emphasises, "a deep personal religious experience of a type which would be defined as psychic, mystical or ecstatic" (1968:470). However, unlike sects, formal authority on each local spiritualist group is limited, since they are only loosely affiliated on a national level (477-480). However, as Skultans' analysis showed, individual problems are also social problems.

Skultans explained that the sort of women who attended the spiritualist groups were those who were experiencing pain (1974:29). This pain was couched in terms of illness, where physical conditions are referred to alongside domestic conflict and isolation (2, 38). In short, Skultans said they were generally women experiencing difficulties with their partners in married life (56-58). Lack of both communication and confidence in marriage was a major factor, which may be viewed as one important way in which the social oppression of these women was embodied.

Spirit possession provided a performance for these women such that they learnt to express themselves within a social context, that of the spiritualist circle. But it is crucial to note that whilst men made up only a small percentage of the membership in these groups, they comprised about half of the mediums and nearly all of the healers (Skultans, 1974:45). Thus, it was men who healed them in order that they could become possessed (50-51). In these groups, then, men played active roles whilst women assumed complementary passive roles. These "developing circles" acted as "ritual of reconciliations", wrote Skultans, whereby the women became better able to cope with fulfilling the feminine role which their marriage partners expected of them (3-4, 44-45).

This case shows that although the experience of pain by these women was primary for their involvement in spiritualism, it needed to be defined and managed or, as Turner would say, governed. This was done by the spiritualist mediums, who acted as healers. Symbols were used to do this, placing the pain in a general pattern as "one instance of a recurring series of events" (Skultans, 1974:76). However, symbols were only relevant as they were used in practice and Skultans identified three ritual ways in which sickness was treated: the taking-on of conditions by fellow sufferers and mediums, the laying-on of hands by male mediums possessed by a spirit doctor, and message-giving where a spiritual diagnosis was provided by the medium (40). She pointed out that the healing was seen as complementary to orthodox medicine, as increasing the vitality and resistance of the women, such that "spirit" really meant "power" (30-31).

McGuire and Kantor's (McGuire, 1988) survey of ritual healing in suburban America provides a second study of how health is socially defined and managed. They rejected the appellations "alternative" and "marginal", acknowledging instead that ritual healing forms part of a "larger system of beliefs, of which health-illness related beliefs and practices are only one part" (McGuire, 1988:5). Yet it seems precisely because of this that they should be described as holistic, a term they also reject (1). As McGuire wrote, medical healing often treats disease rather than illness (6-7); it is therefore a function of ritual healing to establish a universe in which the individual experiencing pain is placed in moral relations to other elements. As she showed, this is done by the ritual use of symbols and language in each of the five sorts of groups (213-238). These five, which are typologised according to the sources lying behind their belief-systems, are Christian healing groups usually practising the laying-on of hands; eastern meditation and human potential groups such as Transcendental Meditation, Rebirthing and est; traditional metaphysical groups such as

Christian Science; psychic and occult groups, which also includes spiritualists, crystal healers and diviners; and manipulation or technique practitioners of, for examples, shiatsu and reflexology (18-31).

However, in her quest to typify nonmedical healings, McGuire unduly created paradigms of their worldviews (1988:57, 87, 115, 152) which on the one hand prohibits their relation to each other and on the other hand leads her to over-emphasise the cognitive government of pain (187-188). Also, employing the notion of paradigms, she divided medical and nonmedical healing from each other, such that they could only be used in comparison with, not explanation of, each other (5). But as Giddens has shown, the notion of paradigms is wrongly used in sociology to draw unbreachable boundaries between different modes of thinking, treating them as closed systems and ignoring their common elements and the fact that "*all paradigms [...] are mediated by others*" (1977:143-144). This may be compared with Carrithers' criticism of theories of culture which portray different societies as unchangeable and therefore incommensurable (1992:13-23). Such a point of view is as relevant when considering different parts of a society, not just societies as such.

When considering the social construction of health, it is important to take into account the points of contact between different constructions and therefore between different social authorities. The patterns of seekership found within the Nottinghamshire Network show that people's experiences of authorities are the locus of these contacts. What McGuire's study therefore precludes are any movements between different ritual healing groups made by individuals, as well as the interaction with different worldviews, such as that in allopathic medicine. As regards nonformative spirituality, the establishment of worldviews and belief systems, like the establishment of leadership, is partial and temporary. Attention must

therefore be given to this when considering cognition, as shown by the large part given to imagination. An exploration of this helps to show how social constructions of health are made personal to those involved.

2. The Importance of Imagination in Nonformative Spiritualities

Social constructions of health need to address the disparity between ideal and actual scenarios in people's lives, or their dissatisfaction with what they experience compared with what they would like to experience. By addressing this, holistic health therapies may be likened to magic, ritual activity in which different realities converge upon one another. Weber placed magic within the locale of "mythological thinking", in which the everyday world was linked analogously to the unalterable sacred, calling it analogy rationalised into symbolism (1966:9-10). Resulting from the "process of abstraction" of spirits, from individual entities lying in or near objects to essences following their own laws (3-4), "Magic is transformed from a direct manipulation of forces into a symbolic activity" (6). But there is no need to separate manipulation from symbolism, for whatever change is desired, symbols representing ideals will be needed to articulate that transformation. In holistic therapy, this is typically achieved by the guided use of imagination through symbols, as the practice of aromatherapy demonstrates.

As a practitioner of aromatherapy, Robert Tisserand described smells as evocative of emotions and memories, and as abstract - there is no language to describe them (1990:vi). It is these two qualities which give them an "almost unworldly quality", indeed in German essential oils are termed ethereal oils (xii). Tisserand could have said of smells that they are

other-worldly rather than un-worldly, for though abstract, they have a content taken from the world of sense-experience. The abstract conditioning of smells allows them to immediately stimulate the body and emotions, through the brain to which they enjoy unique access (Melton *et al.*, 1990:30). Tisserand pointed out that olfactory nerve-endings in the nose, which are covered only by a thin layer of mucus and replaceable if damaged unlike other sensory nerves, transmit sensory experiences straight to the limbic system, which is thought to have been the first part of the brain to evolve and is of great importance both to human emotional responses and memory (1990:116, 128-130). Smells, then, have a unique power to evoke emotions in the memory (140), so that they may be re-experienced. So, in aromatherapy the patient is given access to different states of mind which transplant present, unhelpful states, thus allowing for a healing context to be established which can be acted upon by the medicinal properties of both odour and massage.

Although essential oils may access that part of the mind specifically related to memories, it does not seem quite so obvious that memories are the only psychological content used in the creation of a better state of mind or mood. For particular odours are employed not because patients have smelt them before in a pleasant situation, but because they are deemed by healers to be medicinally useful in treatment. Usually a blend of essential oils is used, for a blend is viewed by aromatherapists as forming a natural system through which one vital constituent oil may operate in harmony with patients' bodies (Tisserand, 1990:48-49). Furthermore, synergy is effected, where the different oils together contain a potency greater than the sum of their individual parts (71). These principles are recurrent throughout holistic health techniques. For example, one of the principles on which homoeopathy rests is the "Law of Similars": "that which makes sick shall heal", in other words, a remedy should be applied which resonates or is in harmony with, the state of the

patient (information taken from a leaflet on homoeopathy distributed by a Nottinghamshire holistic health centre). Harmonisation between the remedy and the patient allows the body's self-healing powers to be most effective - the notion of a natural life-force is important here and ties holistic health techniques to Eastern philosophies where concepts such as *prana* and *chi* - Indian and Chinese terms, respectively, for the vital force of an organism - are central. Such symbols, alongside ones of balance, flow and harmony (Albanese, 1992), are commonly employed to facilitate this self-healing. However, patients use such symbols contextually, as they relate to the reasons for treatment and thus the ideals of wellbeing, as discussed below.

The choice of essential oils used in aromatherapy is tailored to patients' individual emotional and bodily needs, through a variety of means such as counselling and, occasionally, dowsing (Tisserand, 1990:156). It is therefore unlikely that the blend will exhibit a smell which has previously been experienced. It seems clear, then, that the psychological processes that operate in the healing performance are imaginative ones, rather than ones strictly concerned with memory. The failure to make this point, by practitioners such as Tisserand, is no doubt due to the stigma which surrounds the word imagination as applied to healing. It suggests a scenario of self-deluded healers and patients deluding each other still further. Thus, although Tisserand said essential oils evoke moods, he was careful to state that these are different from those moods created by the wearing of perfume and that the essential oils are different from perfumes (4). It is possible to substitute the term imagination for that of memory in Tisserand's book and still make sense of what he says: for example, he stated that odours evoke the memory of emotions (140), but to say that they evoke the imagination of emotions, and that this may include memory of them, would appear more plausible from analysis of the practice.

Discussions with Laura, an aromatherapist at a holistic health centre in Nottinghamshire, showed that in undergoing aromatherapy treatment, patients are placed in a quiet, still state where the atmosphere is infused with essential oils and the body is being massaged. It is difficult to discern what thoughts occur in patients' minds, but fieldwork suggested these are related to the reasons for treatment. These will have been delineated in conversation with the aromatherapist, who often will have been trained as a counsellor and thus be professionally able to identify particular problems and talk them through with the patient. Ideal conceptual representations would therefore have been brought out into the open, though it would seem that these need to be worked upon by the patient during treatment. Ideals of health may state certain conditions, such as the alleviation of backpain or the curing of recurrent migraines, but the content of these conditions, if they were actualised, is not given by these ideals. It is by the imagination that ideals are filled out or given content and thus given meaning to the patient. For example, the alleviation of backpain may be seen as an ideal, symbolic statement which a patient attempts to make actual by its elaboration through the imagination of being able to lift his or her baby in his or her own arms again. In doing so, the ideal is contextualised, relating it to the patient's social world. Since smells set up contexts which are amiable to moods, it is almost certainly whilst undergoing treatment that patients' imaginative processes are at work, particularly given the quiet and relaxed atmosphere in which this is done.

This analysis is similar to Beckford's (1984) notion of holistic imagery in new religious and healing movements, except that it seems to be individuals' locations in their world, rather than the construction of worldviews, or as he put it, world images, as such, that is of importance. Further, although it may be true that healing rituals such as aromatherapy, "promulgate an image of the person as someone who rationally selects, discovers or creates

a specific identity [that] tend to support a crucial part of the middle class value system, namely, the belief that people should be trained for specific professional roles" (1984:267), this may be an emic view and should therefore be placed within analysis that accords a place to social authorities in such identity constructions.

The concept of identity is important for understanding the practice of nonformative spirituality, because the seekership that this involves confronts individuals with disparate and challenging social realities, as Epstein noted (1978:100). Notions of health that constitute a prominent part in such practice, through the performances of holistic therapies, leads to the suggestion that constructions of identity and of health are intimately linked. This is corroborated by the wide meaning given to health, in terms of wellbeing within all aspects of individuals' environments. Health, then, is built up holistically to refer to people's suitability to lifestyles, their mental and spiritual states and their self-development, as well as their physical health. Such a perspective is not unique, but reflects that found in many sectors of British society today, including the medical sciences. The scientist Fritjof Capra, for example, wrote that the World Health Organisation of the United Nations defines health as a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely an absence of disease (1989:119). He viewed this as a move away from the reductionist paradigm influenced by Cartesian-Newtonian thought (125), comparing it with "traditional views" as found in shamanism, Hippocratic medicine and Chinese medicine (333-347).

The use of the imagination in rituals is one method by which notions of identity and health are constructed, through the attempted concretisation of ideals. By employing such a method, nonformative spiritualities draw heavily from humanistic psychologies, as Heelas (1996:53) and Sutcliffe (1995b:24-25) have recognised. The humanistic psychologist John

Rowan employed "symbol drama" to "set off the imagination" (1967:22). Symbol drama is a technique whereby psychologists instruct patients to make up a mental story using concepts they suggest. These concepts are deemed important by the psychologists, for they are traditional spiritual symbols such as journey, wise being and gift. Each patient is expected to fill out the concepts and so, "each person will have a different journey, a different teacher and a different gift" (22). As described above, symbols must be given content by the individual in order for them to be useful. Here, imagination relates to the filled-out symbol, which is now a piece of encyclopaedic knowledge, for to imagine something is to be saying something about it: it is to be analysing it. As Rowan writes: "For example, we might say - 'imagine a meadow'. Already in that simple thing each person will imagine a different meadow" (22).

The strongest influence on this method is Carl Jung, whose investigations into European medieval alchemy were important to the development of his psychoanalysis. Central to alchemy was the concept of *imaginatio*: Ruland's *Lexicon Alchemiae* of 1612 stated that, "Imagination is the star in man, the celestial or supercelestial body" (quoted in Jung, 1948:221). Since the star is the alchemical expression for the quintessence of a thing, imagination, said Jung, must be the concentrated extract of the forces of corporeal and psychic life of man (222). The practice of alchemy was *operatio*, practical chemical work with metals, in dialectical conjunction with a strict ascetic or self-examination. The aim of the alchemist was to become so pure and godly that the *operatio* resulted in the production of gold from worthless stone, the *materia prima*. In other words the essence of a thing was sought, this being equated with the purest form any material object could assume; gold and God were therefore structurally related. Yates described how this "psychological orientation towards direction of the will" emerged from the European Renaissance's

conjunction of magic and science (1964:156).

Jung interpreted alchemical practice as a case of psychological projection: though they did not consciously realise it, the alchemists' psyches were projecting themselves onto the matter with which they operated, in an attempt to explain to their consciousnesses the essence of both matter and psyche (1948:212-215). He held that the unconscious reason why the imagination became important to the alchemists was because it was the psychological function which enabled them to picture and actualise those content of the unconscious which were beyond nature and so not experientially available (226). Jung called these the "collective archetypes" (269-270). The alchemical process is characterised by Jung as the "process of individuation", which is initiated and directed by the unconscious part of the psyche and unless people recognise that their psyches are comprised of unconscious as well as conscious elements their individuality will not be completed. The unconscious, then, forces a person to confront it and alchemy was one method in which this was done.

However for Jung, it was not the active imagination which operates through symbols in order to apprehend the archetypes, but the archetypes which project themselves through symbols to the imagination. Conscious minds are passive recipients of symbolic processes directed by ideals. Thus, Jung was careful to delineate imagination from fantasy. He saw the former as semi-spiritual in nature, which is crucial for their ability to receive archetypal symbols, since these have a numinous character, whereas the latter, by implication, is merely a frivolous thought-process, in that it does not aid individuation (1948:221-222). This view of fantasy has been echoed by George Trevelyan, who said of imagination that, "It is the first step into initiation knowledge of the invisible and higher worlds", unlike fantasy, which is mere unreality (1986:72).

These examples show that the imaginative use of symbols to effect transformation concerns the obligation to selfhood that Cohen's social analysis requires. If self-identity is understood in social terms, as an understanding of the individual's special position within group contexts, then the imagination may be seen as one means by which this is envisaged. The important place accorded imaginative practices in nonformative spiritualities parallels the lack of enduring authority structures, such that individuals act as the points of contact between the various authorities with which they are involved. This was seen at the Essene Meditation, where the meditation period centred round a silent time. Drawing from the last chapter, this may be seen as allowing people the opportunity to imaginatively construct relations between their various spiritual practices and authorities. As already shown, the result of this was a renewed self-confidence in spiritual discussion and competitiveness. A further example of imagination in spiritual practice was a crystal healing workshop held by Michael. His leadership at this event was stronger than that of the Lovells' at the Meditation, because it functioned more as a healing ritual.

Held at his home for three hours one weekday evening, Michael led eight people in a visualisation and explained various aspects of using crystals, such as how to feel their energy and clean them. All the participants, except this researcher, were white women, ranging from their early twenties to late fifties. Although Michael advertised the workshop with his mailings about the next Spiritual Fair, it had originally been organised for six of these women, who applied to him together, so only two others had responded as a result of this. The seventh participant, Lucy, was a neighbour and close friend of his. Francis, one of the group of six, had been referred to him by a reflexologist to whom she was going for healing to combat stress from work and looking after two grown up sons. She had persuaded two of the typists from her workplace, at which she was a personal assistant, and three of her

friends, to come. Two of these, a nurse and a teacher, complained of job stress leading to migraines several times during the course of the evening. None of them had any experience of crystal healing. After being allowed to peruse his crystal showroom and to handle any crystal and look at the books there, the group formed a seated circle in the living room and Michael passed various crystals round, asking what it felt like to hold them before explaining their properties. For example, everyone was given a piece of rose quartz to draw round their palm which had already been pressed with their thumb in order to loosen its energy centre and make it more open to the crystal's energy. The responses to this were typical for people's interactions throughout the evening.

Francis and the nurse said they felt the quartz pulling on their palms, but the teacher and one of the typists were most vocal in explaining what they had felt. The other two of the six friends were very quiet, barely speaking even when pressed. Michael's performance established his authority during the evening. His posture was to sit cross-legged on the floor next to a pile of crystals and he altered his tone of voice to give emphasis to what he was saying. When asked a question, he would often turn his face downwards with his eyes closed and pause before speaking slowly. At other times, stopping himself in mid-speech, Michael would breathe deep, long and loud several times before continuing. The fact that all the other attenders were women must be seen as significant in his maintenance of authority that evening.

Michael explained to the group that there were no right or wrong ways to use crystals, the only criterion should be if they "feel right"; he applied this even to anything he said about them in the workshop. He said that children instinctively know which crystals are good for them, for their intuition has not been blocked by years of adult behaviour. Michael

recommended that the "inner child" should be allowed to play when using crystals. His common theme was of an "underlying interconnectedness of energy", such that he related crystal power to human energy in the chakra system, as well as their use in pendulum dowsing. He pointed out that whilst some say crystals themselves have consciousness and are therefore actual beings, others hold that they just contain energy. As for himself, he said, he was not sure which was correct, nor did it seem to matter for crystals are just tools and not as important as people. The importance of crystals in healing techniques is attested by Jones and Jones' description of how to use them with meditation, divination and channelling (1996:100-105). At the end of the workshop Michael said that everyone was now qualified to heal with crystals and, in theory, needed no more training for intuition would do the rest. However, he added, in practice it would be useful to learn more.

The longest part of the evening was devoted to a guided visualisation concerning imagined, not physical, crystals. Throughout his guidance, Michael reiterated that if anything he said did not sound appropriate or feel right, then it should not be done. The visualisation took the form of a series of actions, with a pause after each one. These were as follows:

"Imagine you are outside and there's a crystal in front of you, on the ground...

"See it grow and grow until it is large enough to step inside...

"You will find yourself surrounded by the crystal's light...

"There is a stair ahead of you - go up it...

"You will find a room - go to its far corner...

"There is an old, dusty chest - open it...

"Take out what you find inside...

"Feel what you have to do with it...

"Replace it - or bring it with you, if that's appropriate..."

"Go out of the room, down the stairs and out of the crystal..."

"Thank the crystal..."

"Watch it shrink to its original size".

Michael then brought the group "back to everyday consciousness", which he said was sometimes a difficult thing to do, since people often want to stay where they were in the visualisation. He questioned everyone in turn to find out if they wanted to talk about their experiences, especially what they had found in the chest. One had found a hairbrush that had belonged to her mother, another an old teddy bear she had owned as a child. A third had found nothing and a fourth said she had found it very difficult to visualise anything because the room was so dark. Several of the others did not speak about their experiences.

The guided use of imagination therefore clearly established Michael's leadership whilst limiting its extension. He did not offer explanations concerning the objects people had found during the visualisation, nor for how they had felt performing it. Nor did he chastise those who had found it difficult or discovered nothing. As such, this healing ritual may be likened to the Essene meditation. This distinguishes these from the channelling events, since Shah and Patterson provided explanations for the experiences recounted by members of their audience, such as people's dreams. It also dissociates them from the sort of leadership given at formal religious groups centred round performances of meditation and the exercise of the imagination, for example in Zen Buddhism looked at in the last chapter. Such imaginative practices are clearly qualitatively different from that encountered at the Nottinghamshire Network, which were much less disciplined and devoid of leadership that sought to evaluate progress. The variety of healing rituals by nonformative seekers meant

that constructions of health, as of identity, remained personal matters, although built up through experience of a number of social contexts. This is now investigated further by comparing a number of therapies practised by three friends.

3. Reiki Compared with Other Holistic Therapies

Three friends first encountered at the Essene meditation were Sally and Noel, who were siblings, and Beth. Their interests in various healing practices formed much of their conversations with other members there. Sally worked as a reflexologist and Beth as a masseur, but Sally and Noel not long before had been initiated into the first order of Reiki at a weekend workshop in Suffolk. Noel had been introduced to Reiki through a friend: during massage in which Reiki energy was directed into him, Noel had a vision of an eye, which gradually widened to display a smile, then a whole dolphin. Noel explained that dolphins and whales are from other worlds and are "pure love" - his friend had experienced the same vision during his own first Reiki session. Whilst she had not been initiated into Reiki, Beth participated with Sally and Noel in a weekly time they set aside to practise the technique on one another. Sally also used the Reiki energy in the flower remedies she often combined with her reflexology, to give them extra potency.

Reiki had become a popular and growing holistic health therapy during the early nineteen-nineties, as shown, for example, by its increasing conspicuousness at the London Mind-Body-Spirit Festivals. Leaflets on offer from various stalls at the 1994 Festival explained its history. Reiki is claimed to be an ancient Japanese healing technique rediscovered in the last century by Dr. Mikao Usui, a Chinese Christian missionary (information is taken from

the leaflet, *Reiki Initiations and Training with Reiki Master Margaret-Anne Pauffley*, which includes an article on Reiki from the *Daily Mail*, 9 April 1994). Usui, after long searches for "the secret of physical healing", was led to a Japanese Zen monastery where he found an ancient *sutra*. Meditating on this, he had a vision of four healing symbols and afterwards realised he now had the ability to heal. According to Pauffley, the word Reiki refers to *ki*, the life force which flows through the meridians of the body - equivalent to the Chinese *chi* - and *rei*, meaning spiritually guided. On being initiated into mastership of Reiki, individuals are able to channel the *ki* energy through themselves to wherever it is needed. This is usually done by laying-on hands, similar to massage, but the energy may also be stored in other substances for healing or transmitted over long distances.

As a healing system, Reiki conforms to Aagaard's characterisations of "alternative therapies", which he relates to eastern religious ideologies (*Healing and Therapy, parts I, II and III*, undated a, b and c). Aagaard rightly pointed out that an anthropology is at work in these, that rests on a "micro-macro cosmology" (undated b:2-3). So, meridians on the body correspond to those on the Earth, and life-force in the body corresponds to that in the cosmos. As explained further on, the wider implications of Reiki practice support this view, but Aagaard neglects the important point that it is in the mind that practitioners understand the real power of many healing techniques to lie. Although Aagaard admitted that the anthropology of healing therapies, the way in which they view the human, establishes a symbolisation in the minds of those involved - which he called the "occult body consciousness" and criticises from a Christian theological perspective (undated c:7-8) - his construction of the healers' "models of explanations" is unnecessarily mechanical and does not give proper weight to the visions, intuitive use of symbols, and imaginations of illnesses which are a vital part of, for example, Reiki practice. An examination of Sally,

Noel and Beth's maturations as Reikei users will help elucidate this.

The root of the three friends' continued interest in Reikei is to be found in its overtly spiritual mode of operation. Both Sally and Noel said that this distinguished it from the therapies of reflexology and aromatherapy, which they respectively practised. These two therapies involve the use of oils in massage, although reflexology is confined to the feet, within which, it is believed, access can be gained to all parts of the body. During interviews with these three, Noel reported that since being initiated into Reikei he had left his aromatherapy training course unfinished, despite having spent two years of work and money on it. Compared to Reikei, he said, it just was not spiritual and potent enough. Whereas Sally also had felt her reflexology course to be lacking in spirituality, initiation into Reikei had led her to assimilate it to provide that spiritual element, rather than abandon it. This difference in attitude may be explained by reference to ideology and material conditions: Sally had an income from her other therapies, which she practised at local holistic health centres. Noel, on the other hand, was in the middle of a tough training course with no guarantee that he would be able to make money as an aromatherapist once it was completed, especially given the large numbers of qualified practitioners in Britain. Further, Noel had a strongly developed sense of the change of era that he believed would come into being on Earth in the near future. He spoke of the "great pull" he felt towards California, where he perceived the "catastrophic changes" leading to the "new age" will manifest themselves most sharply. A sense of rootlessness may be one key to his embracement of Reikei - Noel admitted to having difficulties coping with the world which is why, he said, he often needed to camp in the countryside by himself at weekends.

Whilst Sally and Beth were less vocal than Noel during interview, they were open about

their backgrounds when they did speak. Sally, like Noel, was brought up a Roman Catholic in Belfast and although she took the decision to stop attending church at fifteen, she said she still felt guilty every time she entered a chapel. Unlike Sally and Noel, who since have not been involved actively with organised religion, Beth was a non-community-living member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) for several years from when she was seventeen. Her rejection of that focused on the guilt it made her feel and, more importantly, the lack of silent meditation - ISKCON meditation involves the chanting of *mantras*, whether alone or in a group.

Johnson located reasons for the rise of ISKCON within the counter-cultural rejection of "conventional affluent" values, especially in the United States, where the movement was founded in 1966 (1976). He viewed its interpretation of the Hindu notion of millennial cycles found in the *Bhagavad Gita* as articulating the desire for a new age of peace and love (1976:34). But ISKCON required self-surrender and devotion to the group in terms of dress and behaviour, expressed through mantra chanting: "Affection for other human beings was completely forgotten in the ecstasy of spiritual devotion. Thus, it was in the mantra that private emotions became regularized, predictable, and collectively affirmed" (47). The effect of this, concluded Johnson, is that members were converted to acceptance of society's mores (49). The emphasis on silent meditation was the reason Beth liked the Essene meditation, although she said she "switches off to meditate silently" during the visualisation part of that, which she found too detailed and long. Sally and Noel agreed with this assessment and all three of them gradually ceased attending after only four months. In contrast with Noel, Beth felt "more calm and settled than ever before" - she had three children, the youngest four years and the eldest eleven, and her house where the interview took place was well furnished and spacious. Towards the end of the interview, Beth

expressed optimism concerning current society: "People are more open for ideas now, because of the nineteen-sixties; that didn't fizzle out, but has become the contemporary situation".

Although each of these three friends can be characterised as spiritual seekers, open to new practices, many different attitudes can be encompassed by this term. It should not therefore be used as a conclusion of social analysis, but a tool for further exploration. Noel, for example, expressed interest in a variety of spiritualities: Subud, originally an Indonesian group, that practises silent meditation (Barker, 1989a:211), the writings of White Eagle, ISKCON and Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, Jesus and the Quakers. This does not mean, however, that his thoughts and practices were confused or transitory, nor that he had idiosyncratically fused all these into a homogeneous spirituality. Rather, it is a critical use of facets of each of these, dictated by more fundamental criteria, which allowed him to become interested in them without losing that sense of purpose which was an important part of his self-identity. Noel's spiritual criteria included himself as an active role in spreading what he called the "new age". Another criterion was his sense of God as love which acts as the "highest power" by which to deal with "earthly matters". Bodily dissonance through the experience of Reiki shocked Noel into a strongly developed establishment of these criteria, reinforcing the spiritual side to life which he had felt missing by concentrating upon aromatherapy.

As a seeker, Noel worked with agendas for exploring and assimilating new phenomena. This social perspective was understood by him in self-intuitive terms: "There's so much spiritual material to deal with in the world today, that you must go with what feels right for you". In practice, this meant his emphasis on God as love led him to interpret various

phenomena in a way that others might not. By saying that White Eagle, for example, gives a "true picture of God", Noel reaffirmed his own position by exercising critical criteria on material. The White Eagle book, *Jesus: teacher and healer*, for example, drew attention to God's love for humans - "Just surrender yourself to the all-loving Father-Mother God, for all is love and none of you need fear life - either here [on Earth] or the life in spirit" (1985:68-69) - but correlated this with God's act of sending spiritual teachers to mediate between humans and himself (19). But the idea of the necessity of mediation with God was absent in Noel's spirituality. Reiki, he said, involves trust in God and therefore love and security - this can open psychic powers, as was the case with Shimara, the Reiki master who initiated him and Sally. Shimara channelled John the Baptist and unlike much other contemporary channelled material, Noel could tell it was "good stuff, from the heart". Noel's use of White Eagle's teachings were therefore selective for his own purposes; he did not adopt the symbolic system presented in White Eagle's writings, but utilised parts of that alongside those from other traditions and groups.

If Noel displayed one kind of seekership, Sally enacted another, more focused, sort. Her history showed how healing had been in the forefront of the way she had acted in various groups. On one occasion at the Essene meditation, a conversation she was having with Janet Lovell made clear their affinities, for like Sally, Janet was interested in the deeper, spiritual side of healing. As Sally had begun to invest more time in Reiki, this being more potent than either massage or reflexology, so Janet had begun to focus more on hypnotherapy for healing, since it occasionally led to "natural past-life regression". During regression, she explained, "emotional outpourings" are released which heal problems that have been deep-seated in the person for many reincarnations. Janet claimed to have accidentally discovered this phenomenon during a regular hypnotherapy session, when a

male client spent three hours reliving his experiences as a prisoner-of-war in a German camp during the Second World War. The amount of emotion he expressed left no doubt in Janet's mind that the regression was genuine - and it struck resonance with the Essene spirituality she practised, since a key text on Essene life by Dolores Cannon had been written using a patient's regressions to a past-lives as a member of that community (1992:17-23).

Sally said that she had always stayed religious despite reacting against organised religion, specifically Roman Catholicism. Her interest in reflexology began after attending a workshop and she qualified to practice it in September 1993. She did not embark on this career with spirituality in mind, indeed, this did not feature in the training course at all, but "to help people". Once she began practising it, however, she said her religious character meant she felt something was missing from reflexology: a spiritual aspect. As mentioned above, the connection between religiosity and healing to help people was provided by her initiation into Reiki. For purposes of research, contact with Sally and Noel was re-established two years after meeting them at the Essene meditation, at the Spiritual Fair. One month, Sally held a stall and gave a talk on Reiki. She said she had started the course for the third level of initiation into Reiki, but had not abandoned her previous healing techniques. From this and various other points she made, Sally can be said to have spiritualised her past experiences in line with that focus she now expressed as healing to help people.

It is possible to compare Sally's spirituality with that of the Lovells', and Noel's with the Spencers'. As shown in Chapter Three, the former couple's was stabilising, the latter's provocative; Noel certainly healed to upset people in their lives, whilst Sally's direction was

more placid in healing to help people. In personal terms too, Noel expected radical change and involved himself with a variety of groups, compared to Sally's focus on a healing career. These differences were also reflected in their commitment to symbolic systems: Noel was more manipulative of these than Sally, as shown by his more multifarious discourse. Like the Lovells and the Spencers, however, Sally and her brother remained in close active contact with each other: their differences in behaviour and outlook had not marked distance between them. By joint interest in Reiki they were able to link their developing spiritualities in a way that would seem to function together, similar to the relationship between the Lovells and the Spencers.

Sally had become very serious about Reiki by the time of this renewed research contact: her stall at the fair functioned to attract clients for herself but also to get people to join a Reiki development group she was trying to set up. Stage three in Reiki includes teacher training so that initiates can act as training Masters themselves; in her lecture, Sally said that she planned to start her own workshops in September 1996. Her talk of the history and spirituality of Reiki, entitled *A Life Force Energy Healing*, had strong resonances with aspects of the Essene meditation group which, however, she had not attended for two years. According to her, Reiki was learnt and used by the Essenes, a Gnostic sect as she called them, and thus it is likely that it was used by Jesus. This point was placed within a wider historical scheme of practice of the technique: she claimed Reiki was taught in Lemuria to schoolchildren and is mentioned in ancient Buddhist texts. On examining aromatherapy, it will be seen that such historical constructs are a common way to establish the credentials of holistic health therapies. The legendary land of Lemuria is frequently referred to in this connection, in particular by those influenced by Steiner, who taught that Lemuria originated the third "Root-race" of humankind, between the second "primeval" existence and the

fourth "Atlantean" one (1986:91). A second point of comparison with the meditation group was Sally's claim that past-lives sometimes reappear during healing by Reiki. The emic view of the mechanism of the technique, which is based on the mind, explains this. In acting as a channel for the energy, said Sally, Reiki practitioners use their intuition to locate where to place their hands on clients' bodies. The energy has its own "consciousness" and knows what to do to heal - this may be on the "physical, emotional, mental, spiritual or soul dimensions". In receiving it, clients can exercise their psychic faculties to perceive past-lives and images. This is why clairvoyants often see the energy as a beam coming through the practitioners' hands.

When dealing with seekership, it is important to consider why one spirituality rather than another comes to be dominant in individuals' lives, such as Reiki for Sally and her brother Noel. One way to explore this is to compare and contrast Reiki with two other therapies with which they were involved, aromatherapy and flower essences. This will be done through discussion of four points: the role of the healer, the training and knowledge involved in attaining competence, the cultural history of the practice, and the contexts in which healing operates. Thus, corollary to the above debate on the imagination, the practice of these healing therapies are seen as rituals in which personal experiences are related to their social context of being shared with others. As Whitehead noted for Scientology auditing and Jungian analysis, participants' selves are thereby situated within the larger cosmological and collective order, ennobling sufficiency and sparking a higher sense of purpose (1987:96). This is particularly apt as regards the practice of Reiki, which may be understood as similar to channelling, suggesting that it is a special sort of holistic therapy, as evidenced by its rapid popularisation.

As described above, Noel had a strongly developed sense of living at an important time in history and this related to his feeling of having a place to play in current events. Hence his weekends spent camping alone in order to deal better with the world helped him understand his place and purpose in the world. When met at the Spiritual Fair, Noel too was due to give a talk, on flower essences, which he had begun to practise after discovering Reiki. "My job in this lifetime", he told his audience, putting his hand on his heart, "is to raise people's consciousness". He said he increased the power of the flower essences by imbuing them with Reiki energy, as Sally had begun to do two years previously.

Like Beth, he had now taken the second initiation in Reiki, but only Sally was doing the third at that time. Noel's understanding of his active role in contemporary society had been heightened and focused by use of Reiki. In the interview two years before, he had already described himself as a "lightworker", "an active person for the new age" - although he had attended neither Sheila Patterson's nor Shah's channelling workshops, at which this term was used. He said that his therapies used Reiki since it is an active power in the world, being the energy of the Earth, the first of five rays of energy in the universe. Indeed, it was through the use of Reiki that Noel had "realised about life" and thus needed to spend time alone, "to work life out for myself, to balance". Noel's seekership role as an active promulgator of the new age may be compared with Sally's role of healing to help people. Both found in Reiki a practice to which they could relate and use to focus previous practices and so develop their own self-identities.

The second point of comparison between Reiki and other therapies has to do with its training and knowledge. For aromatherapy and reflexology these were non-spiritual, according to Noel and Sally. This may have resulted from their institutionalisation, where

nationally recognised training courses have been established to allow their alignment with state medicine. However, the spiritual side was usually a key facet in the original development of these. Marguerite Maury and Robert Tisserand, both of whom helped establish and popularise aromatherapy, certainly included a spiritual element to their understandings of the practice. Maury, a trained nurse and surgical assistant, researched the healing powers of aromatic substances and developed aromatherapy's reputation in France since the Second World War (Ryman, 1989). This continued a line of investigation there that had begun with Rene-Maurice Gattefosse who practised the use of essential oils earlier on in the century and had coined the term aromatherapy in 1937 (Tisserand, 1990:42-48). With her husband, a chemist specialising in homeopathic medicine and acupuncture (Maury, 1989 [first published in France in 1961]:7), Maury explored "alternative therapies" such as Zen, yoga and meditation which influenced her work (Ryman, 1989:10). This, coupled with her emphasis on massage and aroma, led Tisserand to describe Maury's technique as "holistic aromatherapy" (Tisserand, 1990:43-44). It is clear from her own writings that Maury had a spiritual understanding of aromatherapy. The essential oils extracted from plants are a "product of energy" which enact an "alchemy of creation" (Maury, 1989:81). This creative thrust means that the oils rejuvenate - Maury's book was first published in English as *The Secret of Life and Youth*: "Mankind must be forced to continue on its way. It is not therefore the repetition of early youth [when rejuvenation is experienced]; we shall really find ourselves faced with a new type of man: the man who is ripe and evolved can continue his life in full force" (227-228). This optimism, as might be expected, is placed in an evolutionary scheme: "Each of us is strictly alone in his evolution" (203).

Modern training in aromatherapy seems, then, to have discarded those spiritual influences that led to the development of the technique in the first instance and replaced them with

intense teaching on physiology and biology, as Noel complained about. Likewise it has taken out the esoteric component which comprises an explanation of its efficacy. Tisserand, who established an influential British school of aromatherapy, pointed to the "esoteric philosophical values and beliefs" held by practitioners (1990:47). He likened the practice to a door and key: for a particular client, the aromatherapist must choose the right oils to unlock illnesses. But this is just the first step in healing, for then the client is, "going through the door and facing up to what is on the other side" (46). Tisserand explained that in the Germanic languages, essential oils are called "ethereal oils", evoking the "almost unworldly quality" they possess (xii).

The deployment of essential oils by Doctor Edward Bach, a London Harley Street specialist who turned to homeopathy before living and working in the Welsh countryside to distil remedies from flowers, somewhat parallels Maury's work. Like her, he created a closed therapeutic system: "38 Remedies [which] cover every negative state of mind known to man", according to information from the leaflet, *Bach Flower Remedies*, used by the Lovells. Bach turned to various spiritualities, at one point studying Steiner, which he fused with a proclaimed scientific method. As with aromatherapy, this leaflet states that flower essences should be accepted as a natural remedy - they have a vibrational resonance with the body and particularly the mind and emotions. A practitioner of Bach Flower Remedies at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland wrote, "The Remedies work on an energy level, entering into direct contact with our Higher Self. I believe they are a pure and wonderful gift from God" (Bauer, 1990:16). Bauer quotes Bach's opinion that, "*they will obtain the greatest benefit from this God-sent gift will be those who keep it pure as it is; free from science, free from theories, for everything in Nature is simple*" (16).

The development of Reiki, by assimilating ideas formerly associated with other therapies, is a strong reason for its current popularity and its use to re-evaluate the rest of an individual's spiritual life. But in contradistinction to aromatherapy and flower essences, Reiki has no basis in the natural sciences, either in ideology or history. It is purely an esoteric technique as the initiation into mastership shows. As Sally explained in her lecture, initiates use symbols to make the energy stronger and undergo four ceremonies used to open channels or chakras in themselves so that Reiki can be used, "for the rest of life". As the Reiki Master Mari Hall wrote, "Everything you [the Reiki initiate] do, everything you say, is an example and demonstration of Reiki. You are living your Reiki. You are Reiki!" (1997:22). Reiki power is identified with the "Unconditional Love" or "divine essence" of God (7). It is not that the mind directs it, but that the therapist now naturally has the ability to heal; Reiki acts automatically. This ideal understanding, however, must be set in the real application of Reiki by people like Sally and Noel, who clearly do consciously direct the power by their use of flower essences as well as sending it long-distances. This is also implicitly recognised by Hall, who suggests that the power is invoked before use, in order to give thanks for being able to act as its instrument (28). It is therefore appropriate to consider the Reiki practitioner as a channeller of healing energy, although the seat of power may be envisaged as different from other therapies.

The purported histories that lie behind the recent rediscoveries of the different holistic health therapies is a third point of comparison shared by Reiki. Accounts of aromatherapy typically trace its ancestry through ancient civilisations: Egyptian, Greek, Roman, the Islamic early Middle Ages, and the Germanic late Middle Ages (Stead, 1986:9; Tisserand, 1990:15-33). In his lecture, Noel traced the use of flower essences to various indigenous peoples and the Greek therapist Paracelsus. Since flower essences should be accepted as a natural

remedy, Noel noted that children work particularly well with them, a comment which may be compared to his view of their use by indigenous peoples. This structural equation of the naturalness, in terms of naivety and openness, of children and indigenous peoples compared with the unnaturalness and civilisation of adults and westerners is one that has a long lineage in modern European thought. It is an important component of the stereotyping function of nonformative spiritualities.

A fourth and final point of comparison between Reikei and the other therapies concerns the operating contexts of healing. The great changes occurring in the world today, which Noel explained in interview in 1994, were reiterated in his 1996 talk, but that time he was more clear about the effects they had on individuals. "In the modern West", he said, "we're getting nowhere fast": society is repressing people by its norms, leading to a situation in which people are not taking charge of their own lives and feel unimportant and unworthwhile. Many of his clients, then, came to him depressed - he saw his healing role as getting them to consider whether they are doing what they really want. Noel explained that he empowers people so that others do not tell them how to live.

Stress was the key term Noel used to describe the modern condition. Bach, he said, noticed the link between different personality types and illnesses - disease could be understood as arising from the emotions and different people exhibit different tendencies to emotions. Bauer recounted that Bach distinguished between, "archetypal soul qualities which might be expressed by people either positively or negatively depending on the health of their thinking and feeling patterns" (1990:16). For their practice of flower essences, the Lovells had drawn up a chart of personality types corresponding to various characters taken mainly from British television situation-comedies, to help people recognise themselves. So, the

Red Chestnut essence will help people who are like Harold in *Steptoe and Son*, whilst Agrimony or Mustard alleviates a disposition like Tony Hancock's. Interestingly, Jesus, who would have benefitted from the remedy Sweet Chestnut, is placed in a miscellaneous category, between Alf Garnet, from *Till Death Us Do Part*, and Donald Duck.

Personality types like these are a further structure of stereotypical classification, allowing the realisation and enforcement of an individual's identity through placement in the social world. By engaging with a therapy in this way, individuals' own narrow social contexts are related to their wider place in society, helping to foster a sense of role-awareness and mission. The mechanical models of empowerment articulated by these therapies comprises a theory of negative and positive energies which flow through the individual: negative energies or imbalance lead to inappropriate and unauthentic lives. As a pure energy force, rather than a technique of affinity between a substance and the human body, Reiki is thus believed to have a direct effect on an individual's existence. According to Sally, Reiki is a positive energy which disperses negative energies on any number of dimensions - the energy knows what to do and its long-lasting effect means that once in operation it can start to change those life contexts which led to the build up of negative energy or imbalances in the first place.

The simplicity of Reiki mechanics means that theories of personality are not required as a basis to its use. But the social reality of therapy practice, in which identities play a crucial part, mean that it acts better, both ideologically and socially, in conjunction with other, more explanatory, therapies. This helps explain why, despite acknowledging its greater potency, Sally continued to use it with flower essences and reflexology, Noel integrated it with the adoption of flower essences, and Hall recommended it as the basis of other healing

techniques (1997:97-113). So although Reiki bears comparison with healing therapies, and thus may be properly described as one, it differs from them through its purely spiritual interaction. Reiki energy needs no physical mediation, therefore differing in its operation from plant therapies, such as aromatherapy and flower essences, mineral therapies, such as crystal healing, massage therapies, such as reflexology, and bodywork therapies, such as shiatsu. Reiki may be described as a therapeutic superstructure which spiritually guides these.

The initiation and practice of Reiki therefore parallels that of channelling. This point is further emphasised when Noel's experience of first having Reiki practised on him are recalled. His description of this is similar to that of involuntary spirit possession, in that it shocked and overwhelmed him. For both him and Sally, experience of Reiki clarified their sense of self-identity, enabling a reaffirmation of their spiritual roles. The ideology of Reiki reflects this social practice of it: it is an independent spiritual power that is exercised in real healings. Like channelling, then, Reiki acts to establish and maintain competence with other spiritual practices. These similar social functions are reflected in common understandings of Reiki and channelling as the transmittance of spiritual powers through a mediating body. It is therefore not fanciful to describe Reiki as a form of spirit possession in the Network, a notion reflected by the position accorded it on Figure Three in Chapter Two.

This discussion has attempted to show the importance of holistic health therapies in the lives of nonformative spiritualists. By constructing notions of health and illness in ritual contexts, these enable people to locate themselves in the world and to relate to others. It is important to note that the distinction between practitioners and patients, like that

between producers and consumers, changed according to context: few nonformative spiritualists underwent holistic healings without practising some sort of healing themselves. This reflects the career path of the spirit possessed to which Lewis drew attention, linking holistic healings with channelling. By this career, however short or multifarious, personal experiences become further contextualised through contact with other healers.

This chapter has further explored nonformativeness as it is worked out in practice by individuals. Consideration of the Spiritual Fair provided a new context with which to compare the Essene Meditation. Although these two were quite different in their aims and organisation, they functioned similarly within the Network, with informal authority structures and weak leadership as regards participants. This has also been found within the practice of holistic health therapies. However, the weak boundaries of the Network means that many people became involved with formative groups which posed a threat both to the nonformative attitude and to the structure of practices - channelling, meditation, divination and holistic healing - found within it. The next chapter explores this structure in more detail as it is compared with the practices of more formative groups which many of the seekers had encountered. These are spiritualism, the Anthroposophical Society, and the Occult Study Group. In particular, the place of possession within these is considered, both in practice and historically. Through this debate, a wider picture is drawn of the place of nonformative spirituality in the religious life of contemporary Britain.

CHAPTER FIVE: NONFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND OTHER

RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Introduction

This last chapter draws together the major themes from previous chapters in order to place the Nottinghamshire Network within its wider religious context. This comparative perspective considers nonformative spirituality alongside the related religious traditions of spiritualism, the Anthroposophical Society and the Occult Study Group. Fieldwork with these traditions is drawn upon to show how they differ from the groups and contexts considered in previous chapters, particularly in the negotiation between formative and nonformative structures of social power. This is highlighted by the involvement of people already encountered in the Network. However, many similarities are also seen to exist, both historically and in terms of similar practices, since meditation, divination and holistic therapies are often utilised and spirit possession remains of great importance. Theories of social organisation from Chapter Two are reconsidered, as notions of movement, cult and sect are debated in light of this.

PART I, SPIRITUALISM

1. The Historical Context of Spiritualism

Spiritualism has featured throughout the presentation of fieldwork in the last two chapters. Many people encountered in the Nottinghamshire Network had trained with mediums or been involved with development circles. Further, spiritualist groups such as White Eagle Lodge were found to be influential and spiritualist healing was common. As discussed in the last chapter, there is little reason to believe the prevalence of spiritualism in Nottinghamshire marks the Network studied as a special case. However, it is clear that historically spiritualism found a strong home in the county. Figures collected by Geoffrey Nelson show that in 1908, there were eight spiritualist societies in Nottinghamshire, this number being exceeded only by six other counties and that in 1964 in the East Midlands, there were twenty three churches affiliated to the Spiritualists' National Union, with a combined membership of six hundred and seventy two, despite the smaller population of this region compared to others, for example the West Midlands (1969:284, 288). Three aspects of spiritualism will be considered in this part. First, some historical aspects of the phenomenon, with particular attention to attempts to establish authority. Second, an analysis of how the social organisation of spiritualism might be viewed, through considerations of what constitutes a movement and a cult. Third, spiritualist healing as it is practised and the nonformative aspects of the movement.

One particularly interesting account of Victorian spiritualism is Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room* (1989), in which issues of gender conflict are explored. Owen viewed seances as one

of the arenas where women could be the centre of attention, acting as mediums for spirits to communicate and embody themselves in this world. Spiritualism in this form of drawing room spectacle organised by small bands of enquirers, came to Britain from the United States, where it had arisen in the late eighteen-forties (Owen, 1989:4-5). But in Britain it developed in the context of Victorian society, specifically the morality of gender: "the subversion of existing power relations between men and women" (xiii). This was linked, as she acknowledged with regard to Ioan Lewis' work on spirit possession, with the low status, powerlessness, and sense of personal deprivation experienced by women (49).

However, mediumship could be ambiguous (Owen, 1989:53-55), for theatrical displays of it often transgressed the boundaries between the two ideals of women as morally and spiritually superior, best expressed as an "angel in the house" (6-10) and as depraved, bestial and sexually rampant if not kept under control (7). It was in private mediumship and the spiritualist associations which arose in Britain, rather than public displays, that these boundaries were kept intact (24-25, 79), although not without difficulty. Owen noted that women spiritualists, who formed the vast majority of mediums, came from middle-class and respectable working-class backgrounds, so, "Female mediumship and the authority it implied was thus a restricted practice" (9). This sort of mediumship, then, appeared to be the reserve of the business class and skilled working-class, rather than either the traditional landowners or upper-classes, or the unskilled working-class who had little hope of being able to attain respectability in the form of employing their skills.

The darkened room in which the spiritualist's seance took place allowed a performance which in effect turned the situation into a "battleground" (Owen, 1989:11). Such practices as women being the centre of attention, providing communications, behaving as men, and

taking the initiative in relations with men (210, 218-220) were a "radical challenge to cultural orthodoxy" (202). Owen, however, seriously questioned the effect of this challenge on the basis that the Victorian ideal of femininity was always endorsed, even by those spiritualists who did not promote the social idea that the woman's place was in the home (27-28). Spiritualism, she claimed, in the end "conspired" to restrict women to existing social relations, because it was,

"founded upon a misbegotten principle and a compromised understanding of power. It claims the transforming power of a feminine that is split off from the social, endowed with the trappings of universality, and placed beyond the world of men and women. As such it can offer only a severely limited vision for the future. Femininity is not a pre-ordained given, power does not proceed automatically from the female body, and spiritual power is not to be equated with sexual equality" (242).

The ideology of spiritualism was thus one of conservative reform to achieve a state closer to the natural order of things. It was not one of potential gender or class revolution, through which a new order could be established. As such, this historical account draws the same conclusions as may be made from Skultans' study of Welsh spiritualist healing, considered in the last chapter. There, it was seen that traditional women's roles were reinforced through an invigoration of their relationships with husbands.

Owen's focused analysis provides a useful counterpoint to Geoffrey Nelson's broader approach. Like her, Nelson viewed spiritualism as an ambiguous phenomenon in which a variety of moralities could be found towards wider society and which he linked to the essentially democratic nature as expressed in the belief system that anyone could be communicate with the spirits (1969:x-xi). As such, spiritualism was reformist of the social

order (222). Nelson traced the effect of this nature through the early years of spiritualism in Britain, in which regional and national associations had great trouble establishing themselves and only managed this when mediums came under increasing attack from various sectors of society, including the judiciary as the Witchcraft Act of 1735 was invoked in a number of cases (91, 96-97, 111-112, 165-167). Even with the establishment of spiritualist churches, authority was decentralised and dispersed, reflected in the circuit system of visiting mediums, adopted from the Methodist and Congregational churches (117-120, 211-214).

Nelson interpreted the loose social organisation of spiritualism as arising from its containment of charisma (1969:240). He noted how this stemmed from the very inception of the phenomenon: "Spiritualism is based on the freedom and spontaneity of mediumship and many people feared the effect of formal organisation on this spontaneity" (1968:474). From this it follows that leadership, even of a charismatic kind, "never has exclusive claims to authority" (480). Although there were, at times, prominent national figures, such as Emma Hardinge-Britten, who helped establish the Spiritualists' National Union (S.N.U.), and D.D. Home, who left no legacy of an organisation, no figures stood for the whole of spiritualism (1969:241), not least because of the split between Christian and non-Christian spiritualists (105). Charisma, wrote Nelson, played its greatest role at the local level through a number of mediums (242). Thus, "one man shows" were often viewed as fraudulent, credit for spiritual power was usually given to the spirit guides rather than the mediums and some messages from the same spirit were sometimes received through more than one medium (243-245). These points resonate strongly with contemporary channelling, for example Ashtar was found to channel through Shah and Patterson. This local level ambiguity of both spiritual power and, as Owen shows, social mores in spiritualism,

hindered social organisation despite frequent attempts to link spiritualists to one another. However, a closer elucidation of the social organisation of spiritualism points to significant differences with phenomena such as channelling.

2. Spiritualism as a Movement

After rejecting the relevance of church-sect typologies for characterising spiritualism, Nelson concluded, "Spiritualism then is a cultic movement containing within it centralized cults and a large number of independent local cults" (1969:234). As such, he contrasted it with occult groups, in which hierarchical structures exist to transmit the charisma of the founder, but likened it to the flying saucer movement and witchcraft (234). There are, he wrote, three features of cults: an emphasis on personal religious experience which is mystical, a fundamental break with the religious traditions in which they arise, and a concern with the problems of individuals rather than social groups (232). By considering Mitchell's (1973) six criteria of groups in turn, explained in Chapter Two, it may be seen that Nelson was right to view spiritualism as a movement and that as such it is to be distinguished from nonformative spirituality.

First, although recognition of membership was not a feature of the spiritualism as a whole, since it was never represented by one body, large national organisations and unions did exist: principally, the S.N.U., the National Federation of Spiritualist Healers (N.F.S.H.), the Union of Spiritualist Mediums and the Greater World Christian Spiritualist League. However, attempts to certify mediums by the S.N.U. in the early part of the twentieth century failed (Nelson, 1969:127-128). Thus, despite its ambiguities and containment of

charism, spiritualists did succeed in forging enduring links between local groups and mediums. This was achieved by two means. On the one hand, a bureaucratic rather than charismatic leadership, such that organisations were led by committees concerned with administration rather than the increase of spiritual power. On the other hand, a focus on the practice of mediumship, especially to protect what was considered authentic mediumship.

Second, spiritualism did establish a system of norms and rules to some degree, as seen in groups' defence of authentic mediumship and rejection of fraudulent mediumship and activities such as clairvoyance and fortune-telling (Nelson, 1969:155). The discrediting of some mediums and activities in the United States had led, in the late eighteen-fifties, to the "recantation movement" which reacted to counter this through authentic and moral mediumship (22-23). Nelson claimed that, "The lack of cohesion within the movement as a whole, the existence of many groups and societies, is directly attributable to the lack of a consistent body of teachings accepted by all spiritualists" (205). However, many normative beliefs were held in common, principally that the human personality survives death and that it is possible to communicate with the spirits of the dead (205), but also the existence of God, the brotherhood of man and personal responsibility (193-199).

The third criterion, following from this, were some common aims and interests, especially the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena that served to propagate spiritualism in the first place (Nelson, 1969:10, 91). It is also important to note the close association with socialism and social reform (122-123), as shown by the charity work of some spiritualist organisations (199).

Closely linked to this is the fourth of Mitchell's criteria, the capability of joint action. Some parts of the spiritualist movement were able to organise supportive efforts for Britain during the First World War, such as through fundraising (153). The establishment and endurance of churches throughout the country, with circuit ministry and national affiliations, demonstrates an ability to organise action outside local, or even regional, boundaries. Church services were also loosely standardised, as in the popular adoption of Victorian hymns and creation of new ones (213-214, 227). Further, most groups promoted meetings and distributed literature, such joint action being the basis for the establishment of the regional organisations, such as the very first one in Lancashire in 1875 (111).

Mitchell's fifth and sixth criteria for the constitution of a group concerned the establishment and maintenance of roles. Again, spiritualist groups were successful in achieving this to a limited extent. Although everyone was recognised as having the potential to become a medium, the difference between practising and potential mediums formed a division of labour. Mediums would lead church services and development circles, but the committees on regional and national federations could be anyone, these organisations usually being open to election. The fact that leadership was not invested in one person's charisma meant that as mediums died or retired, the structures of labour division remained.

By focusing on these criteria, key differences between spiritualism and the Nottinghamshire Network are highlighted. First, in the Network, no such membership-oriented organisations existed, nor did research uncover any in Britain as a whole. The only lists of people that did exist were for the purposes of mailings concerning events such as the Spiritual Fair, or telephone numbers to let people know when a meeting, such as the Essene Meditation, was rescheduled or cancelled. Central mailing groups could be joined, for example Pathways

which held a stall at the London Festivals for Mind-Body-Spirit, but only to receive regular bundles of advertisements for events and courses of a host of lecturers, demonstrators, healers and groups throughout the country. Apart from this, some groups would mail regular information about themselves, although these were generally more hierarchically structured organisations such as the Findhorn Foundation and White Eagle Lodge. One reason for this was that, in contrast to spiritualism, no single core practice existed on which to focus organisation. Although channelling and other forms of possession, such as spiritualist mediumship, were central to people's spiritual careers, these did not remain common practice and were often surpassed in attention by meditation, divination or, especially, holistic healing.

The second through fourth criteria distinguish spiritualism as a movement from nonformative spirituality even more clearly. Although the latter may, as Heelas has shown, articulate a common language, the wide meaning with which terms are invested reflects the lack of even the most basic common norms and aims. This meant that people approached meetings and practices with different goals in mind and thus the authorities that did exist were unable to promote joint action beyond the common experience of ritual participation. Thus, analysts who seek to interpret nonformative spirituality as a movement have tended to focus on the more authoritarian groups such as the Findhorn Foundation, which appear to have little in common with nonformative networks, except to function as resources. In fact, as the life histories of many people showed, formative groups were often drawn upon, though in a nonformative way. Further evidence of the confusion that exists in trying to encapsulate nonformative spirituality as a movement with norms and aims is shown by the spectrum of social issues with which it is supposed to be associated. Thus, the New Age Movement has been variously linked with environmental concerns, alternative traveller

lifestyles, rampant capitalism and developmental economics. Again, evidence for this is provided by recourse to relatively formative groups: for examples, the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, Summer festivals, est and Schumacher College, respectively.

It is the fourth and fifth criteria that mark the greatest difference between spiritualism and nonformative spirituality. Within the Network, the division of labour was minimal, as seen in the loose leadership during rituals, as at the Meditation, or to organise events, for example the Fairs. Even within these contexts, labour was little divided: Michael assumed sole responsibility for running the Fair and at the Meditation the only division was between the Spencers acting as hosts and the Lovells leading the ritual. Further differentiation between roles was almost entirely absent, especially since most healers and other practitioners conducted private rituals, consisting merely of therapist and patient.

This discussion has sought to show why spiritualism, but not nonformative spirituality, may be considered a movement, despite the difficulty of groups' establishment of belief systems and charismatic leadership. The main difference between the two was the focus on mediumship exhibited by spiritualism, for this commonly acknowledged form of practice provided the basis for group formation. Although channelling was central to many people's practice and seekership in the Network, it was not a permanently visible performance in the way mediumship is for spiritualism. However, as a movement, spiritualism contains nonformative elements which are examined in the next section as regards a spiritualist healing circle.

3. Spiritualist Healing

According to Nelson, healing formed a part of the spiritualist movement from its earliest days and continued to be practised at church services and in circles (1969:200). This aspect, like others, became formative through the establishment of federal organisations to certify, aid and protect healers. The largest of these, the National Federation of Spiritualist Healers, had, at the time of Nelson's research in the nineteen sixties, a membership of over two thousand five hundred, published a monthly magazine, *The Spiritual Healer*, provided insurance, legal and advisory services, referred patients, organised lectures and demonstrations and negotiated with National Health Service hospitals for the admittance of its healers (200-201). Its committees were made up of healers and much authority was delegated to regional associations. This section will introduce the formative-nonformative dilemma in spiritualism by focusing on fieldwork with a spiritualist healing circle led by Alvin Simmonds from the Spiritual Fair. In particular, the constructed reality shared by healers and patients is considered and compared with those looked at in the second part to the last chapter.

Twice a week, Alvin held a spiritualist healing, with his wife, Irene, and friend, Edward, which was observed in 1996. Observation of this did not seem to disconcert healers or clients: all patients were asked if they would prefer it if the researcher was not present, but none requested that. The pre- and post-healing discussions provided valuable information on both healers' and patients' attitudes and responses to the performance, allowing a picture to be built up over a six month period. The healing took place in the Simmonds' own home, a bungalow in a working-class suburban area. This was usually in their living room, although Irene preferred it to be in the conservatory so that they were not in the way of the

twenty year old son from her first marriage. To get the room ready, Irene would tidy up - which including removing their various pets: rabbits, cat and dog - then light incense sticks, draw the curtains, turn on an audio cassette of soft, ambient music and switch on a lamp that had a revolving shade made of a cylinder of gold, blue and red transparent strips. The patient would sit on a stool around which the other three would position themselves on an easy chair, stool, chair arm or by kneeling on the floor. The healing would last between twenty to forty minutes.

The following description of one healing session is typical and shows how these were dynamic ritual performances, despite being conducted in a silent and still manner. The patient, Gavin, sat with his head straight, but eyes closed and with his hands on his knees. Alvin knelt in front of him, Irene stood behind and Edward sat to his side. Each healer took a couple of minutes to relax and concentrate, with their heads bowed, and Alvin held his hands upturned on his knees. In their own time, they then placed their hands on Gavin, spending several minutes in the same posture or performing the same hand actions, before shifting position, although sometimes only slightly. After ten minutes, Alvin said a few words to Edward which resulted in them changing positions and allowing each a minute or so to stand back from the healing before continuing. Irene took longer to change and was also the last to finish healing, prompted by quiet coughs from Alvin.

Each session therefore comprised a number of smaller performances in which the healing was stopped and started by each healer three or four times, with each of these containing several changes in hand action. This "laying-on of hands", as Alvin called it, took three forms: a sweeping massage from the top of the patient's head down the sides, to the neck, shoulders and back, which he called "polishing the aura"; rigid placement of both hands on

a local part of the body, such as the cheeks, back of the head, or a thigh; or more relaxed placement where the hands are further apart, covering a wider area of the body, such as both knees, an arm, or the back. These involved the patient intimately; at one point, for example, Irene was seated in front of Gavin with her legs apart, holding both his thighs with her hands. Each of these postures were not necessarily held for a shorter or longer time than the others; within the limits set by time and indications to each other, the healers were able to decide which sort of posture to take and for how long. When all three had finished, they stood or sat back, again relaxing and concentrating, and Gavin took a minute to open his eyes, stretch himself and feel round different parts of his body, such as his neck and back, to see how he felt.

The healers appeared exhausted after each session, flopping down into comfy chairs, yawning and stretching. Alvin once described himself as "dripping with sweat" because of the exertion. Gavin said that beforehand his neck and shoulders had been feeling tense, but now they were "much better". His illness was a trapped artery in the neck, about which he had that week been to see a private neurologist, on Alvin's advice. Gavin described how each healer felt different and explained that he received vibrations from Irene, heat from Alvin and concentrated energy from Edward, although other patients described their differences in other ways. Like the other patients, Gavin always expressed satisfaction with the healing, claiming an improvement in symptoms. This was, however, no quick remedy, but an ongoing treatment; whilst some patients only required a few sessions, others were likely to need several months of weekly or fortnightly attendance. Before and after the healing, Alvin and the others would discuss with the patient how their illness was and whether any new symptoms or other pains had arrived since the last session, then how that treatment and future ones should proceed. Akin to the other holistic healings looked at,

these consultation periods constituted important parts of the session as a whole. However, despite being within a more formative setting, few spiritual symbols were used in this discussion, which focused more on the experience of pain.

A spiritualist healing therefore establishes a space and time of sacrality, relating these to the patient's state of health and their previous and future sessions. Despite this, at times there seemed an irreverential attitude: once Alvin kept a pencil behind his ear and another time he and Irene criticised the cassettes she had put on. During each healing afternoon, Alvin booked in four to six patients, charging no fee, although he accepted donations. He saw his work as complementary to "orthodox medicine", always advising patients to consult their doctors and to take what they prescribed. He kept about twenty patients on his books, who varied in their requirements and explained that any more than this left him and Irene no time for their own lives. Alvin said that as one patient finished treatment, another always seemed to come to them for help and so the number stayed roughly the same. He said there were three ways in which people heard about his work: through word of mouth from patients or other healers, through advertisements at fairs and spiritualist churches, and through his practice of other spiritual pursuits, such as the Tarot and clairvoyance, for which he charged fees.

Neither the healers nor the patients at this circle expected or claimed a dramatic improvement in the illnesses that were treated. Instead, the generally chronic illnesses were understood to require chronic healing, taking place over several months and in conjunction with allopathic medicine. Edward explained that the spirit healer with whom he worked should not be seen as a miracle worker, but as a doctor with increased insight. Commensurate with this, the healing energies were not seen as divine powers or of special

spiritual significance, rather than as more focused, deeper and naturally occurring than those that people unconsciously benefit from in everyday life. Thus, despite the religious beliefs of spiritualist healers, in line with those outlined above for spiritualism as a whole, the healing itself was not interpreted in a religious manner. That this was so, despite the spirit healers that were involved, is explained by the assumed scientific stance of spiritualists, who viewed the existence of spirits and extraordinary powers as merely an extension of the physical world. Alvin claimed that attitudes to "spiritual healing" held by scientific and medical authorities were beginning to change, leading to a "new science" in which spiritual powers would be understood. This concurs with Nelson's emphasis on the scientific investigative attitude to spiritualist phenomena throughout the development of the movement and it is significant to note that after training in a development circle, Alvin established his own investigative group based on one that had existed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The relaxed attitude in which the spiritualist healings took place differed from nonformative holistic therapies, however, with regard to the imagination. In the latter, as the last chapter showed, patients were expected to imaginatively work on their problems after talking them through with therapists. But the spiritualist framework within which the former took place meant that the spirit healers, mediated by the spiritualist healers, undertook the healing work. The patient was expected just to sit as comfortably as possible and try to relax. There was very little talk, afterwards, of inner experiences undergone during the healing, only a discussion on how the illness felt compared with before the session. This may be contrasted to the insights gained during holistic therapies, which formed the main talking points after those, as also in other imaginative practices such as meditation. Creative visualisation, then, played no significant role at the spiritualist healings, so far as discourse

was concerned. Instead, attention must be turned towards the spirits of the dead that operated through the mediums.

In spiritualist healing and clairvoyance, Alvin claimed access to eight spirit guides, all of whom once lived on earth, but at different times and in different cultures. The spirit guide he had worked with for longest was Lee, who Alvin said appeared to him nearly twenty years ago and since then had formed an "intimate relationship" such as is rare between any people. Alvin managed to trace her to Vietnam, finding that she lived and died there earlier on in the century. Lee came to him often, he said, comforting him when he is troubled and she promised to be with him until the end of his life. He could often see her near him even in everyday situations and during clairvoyance she stood behind him to tell him about his client. To direct his healing work, Alvin had a spirit guide who was a medical doctor on earth; again, he had verified what the spirit told him by checking birth and medical records. The most important spirit he worked with, though, was White Cloud, a native American chieftain who acted only to allow Alvin's spirit guides access to him so that others with malicious intent could not interfere with his work; thus he described White Cloud as his "doorkeeper". He had only spoken to White Cloud five times, to be told things of great importance, although he saw him during performances.

The sort of possession that Alvin experienced was therefore not trance-mediumship, although he said he had experienced that once, so may be compared to Michelle's and that in Sheila Patterson's workshop. Clearly, though, it would be wrong to dissociate it from the bodily possession as demonstrated by Shah, for Alvin saw and heard his spirits and, in healing, had his hands directed by them in order to send energy. His history of relationship with each one was quite as full as Shah's with her Ascended Masters. The difference

between them must be located in the aim of possession: Shah delivered long spoken discourses and answered questions, whilst Alvin directed energy or carried out clairvoyance, which involved short explanations that were not spiritual revelations of general concern. Even so, Alvin would commonly talk about his spirits to patients, explaining why he had directing his hands to particular areas of their bodies and thus suggesting where the true cause of their pains were located. This may be compared to Michael's crystal healings, for he worked, he said, intuitively. Spirits did not direct his choice of crystals for healing, but he worked through trial and error, asking patients to hold crystals and then studying them to see whether the colour of various parts of their auras had improved.

At the time of research, Alvin may be described as mature in his spirit possession career, directing his group contexts. It was through him that Irene and Edward, who originally came to him for healing for cardio-vascular problems and alcoholism, began to acquire their own spiritual powers. Edward had acquired a medical doctor as a spirit guide and begun to practise aromatherapy, reflexology and homeopathy. Alvin was acting as Irene's trainer to be a certified healer with the Healer Practitioner Association (H.P.A.), for which she needed to spend nine months training with a certified healer and to have three people whom she had helped heal vouch for her. Alvin dominated in the explanations of healing during fieldwork, and he led the consultations at the Spiritual Fairs.

Unlike channelling and holistic therapies, spiritualist healing may be seen as cultic for four reasons. First, it is usual to train for a long period with an established healer. Second, this training usually takes place in a context where others are being trained, such that the trainee forms part of a group. Third, there are more marked stages to this training, such as becoming used to spiritual phenomena, acquiring a spirit guide or healer, acquiring a

doorkeeper and, eventually, taking on clients by oneself. Fourth, standardised forms of recognition exist for mature, established healers, such as certified membership of the H.P.A. or N.F.S.H. These points relate to many of the criteria of a group, discussed in the previous section, which may now therefore be seen as extended to spiritual careers. Compared to the model of the channelling career in Chapter Three, the career of spiritualist healers is embedded within a single group structure to a far greater extent. As such it may be compared to the shamanic career as elucidated by Lewis. Nelson, in fact, viewed spiritualism as the British outlet for shamanism (1969:254) and the fieldwork presented here supports his view that the phenomenon is cultic.

Despite these considerations, Alvin, Irene and Edward held certain views and engaged with practices that challenged the cultic context of their spiritualist healing, which are relevant for the relationship between nonformative and formative spiritualities. Alvin held strong views on spiritualism and those involved with it. He said he did not describe himself as a spiritualist, for there are too many politics involved within spiritualism, although he occasionally attended those spiritualist churches in the region which he described as "nice". He was critical of the spiritualist circuit, claiming that contemporary spiritual readings concentrate on the audiences' feelings, rather than providing concrete facts about their lives, such as street names of where people used to live. This meant, he said, that people are not given the evidence that will convince them their dead loved ones are alive. It was in such a way that Alvin himself came to know of his departed father's afterlife. Likewise, Irene expressed dissatisfaction with spiritualist groups and regularly attended a United Reform church for its preferable atmosphere. Both Alvin and Edward engaged with other, holistic, therapies and actively participated in the Spiritual Fairs. Further, these two practised reading the Tarot, which distinguished them from many groups and people within the

spiritualist movement which has historically opposed clairvoyance.

Spiritualist healing for these three, but especially for Alvin, was a form of experience not fully prescribed by spiritualism as a social phenomenon, but which needed to be understood in terms of engagement with wider spirituality and other groups. They therefore challenged the formative structures of spiritualism, however limited these were in any case, with an attitude that brought their practices into contact with nonformativeness. As such, they existed on the edge of the spiritualist cultic movement. This issue will be explored more fully in the last part to this chapter, after discussion of similar dilemmas within Anthroposophy, and an Occult Study Group, elucidated through fieldwork.

PART II. THE ANTHROPOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND OCCULT STUDY GROUP

1. Authority and Charisma in the Theosophical School

Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical Society, like Alice Bailey's Lucis Trust, was created through a split with the Theosophical Society, which itself had arisen in the context of American spiritualism towards the end of the nineteenth century. The reasons for this split may be elucidated through leadership within the Society. A discussion of this issue will show the similarities and differences with spiritualism and suggest the manner in which more formative groups arose out of the spiritualist movement. Peter Washington's (1993) detailed description of the people and events accompanying "the emergence of the Western guru" - his characterisation of a number of influential spiritual teachers operating in the United States and Europe this last century and a half - is useful in highlighting this by the predominance of charismatic women in the Society and the relations they had with male leaders.

Attention must foremost be concentrated upon the co-founder of the Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, or Madame Blavatsky by which she is tellingly referred. Blavatsky's life became infamous in the popular journalistic media of the time, and in contemporary esoteric circles she is affectionately considered a powerful figure who shocked people into questioning themselves, in much the same way Aleister Crowley is remembered, sometimes as Uncle Aleister, such as by Leon, from the Occult Study Group. Blavatsky's own stories of her life before arriving penniless in America are shot through with magical adventures,

in particular her travels in Tibet to train with Himalayan Masters (Washington, 1993:30-34). The fact that these formed a basis of people's fascination with Blavatsky meant that she could act in sometimes the most astonishing ways but still be accepted as a woman of sacred wisdom or "theosophy" (55) and paranormal abilities.

Blavatsky's spiritual power was displayed in her mediumistic acts, which involved automatic writing, seances, and materialisations of people and objects, especially of letters telling others what to do (Washington, 1993:41-51). Her seances, however, differed from the usual spiritualist meetings in the United States at the time by her command of the spirits: she was a dominant medium, not a passive one. Washington wrote that by dominantly acting as the medium for spirits who claimed to be from a "Great White Brotherhood of Masters", Blavatsky placed herself on a higher occult level than other spirit mediums, and in order to organise her success in this, she wrote a "bible", *Isis Unveiled*, published in 1877, and founded a "church", the Theosophical Society, set up in New York to study occult ideas in 1875 (47-49). Blavatsky travelled to India in 1879, with her Theosophical co-founder Colonel H.S. Olcott, visiting Hindu sacred sites and spiritual teachers. She then settled in Bombay to establish herself as a teacher, and in 1882 moved to Adyar, near Madras, where the Society's headquarters were established and still remain (60, 66-67).

Joscelyn Godwin's analysis of *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (1994) is interesting in this connection. Godwin uncovered the western esoteric tradition in which Blavatsky was trained and which she used her Society to promote, and wrote that this found expression in spiritualist teachings (1994:188). Before arriving in the United States, Blavatsky had travelled to Cairo where she set up the *Société Spirite* in 1871 to investigate mediums and other occult phenomena and met with Freemasons and a Sufi (277-281). Soon after the

establishment of the Theosophical Society, according to Godwin, the leadership was forced to turn it into a secret society with differing degrees of membership, signs of recognition, and appropriate seals, all akin to Freemasonry (287-288).

Godwin viewed the formation of the Society as marking the coincidence of two themes in western culture that had been in development ever since the eighteenth century: the Enlightenment's adversarial stance towards the Christian churches and the revival of occult sciences (1994:292), such as astrology, alchemy and ritual magic, practised in deliberate opposition to the prevailing beliefs of scientific materialism (xii). Blavatsky traced her source of power to the Brotherhood of Luxor, an Eastern collection of spiritual Masters, linked by her in *Isis Unveiled* to a mystical fraternity in the United States (283), the figures of which continue to survive in spiritual organisations as the Ascended Masters (366). But by 1889, wrote Godwin (xii, 328-331), Blavatsky had turned from western to eastern esotericism, moving beyond the narrow limits of Boehmian monotheism to encompass pantheistic Mahayana Buddhism, as shown in her volume *The Secret Doctrine*, published 1888. As the "main vehicle for entry of Buddhism and Hinduism into the West", Godwin viewed the Theosophical Society as underpinning the "New Age movement", which he saw as an "exoteric reflection" (379).

Other literary studies also locate the origins of the Theosophical Society in western traditions. Alexander (1992:30-31) noted its contemporary rise with New Thought, a broad Christian tradition of metaphysics and healing practices, with which Theosophy shared a common ancestry that included Swedenborg (see also Lang, 1988 and Taylor, 1988) and Mesmer, both of whom viewed occult forces in scientific terms and such a perspective is, as already explained, central to Hanegraaff's analysis (1995:399-406). However, a reliance

on the history of ideas leads these scholars to neglect the influence of the East on Blavatsky, as on contemporary nonformative spiritualities. An article by Hutch (1980) contradicts the simplistic differentiation between eastern and western religions that they portray. Hutch sought to place Blavatsky in her Russian religious traditions, claiming that she acted as a *volkhy*, those who were, "recognized as non-Christian folk leaders, healers, magicians, and wonder-workers - in short, typical religious shamans" (1980:325). By uniting shamanistic traditions, which she may also have come across in India (329-330), with the spiritualism of America, Blavatsky portrayed herself as a saviour, cleansing the latter's "various misunderstandings and corruptions" (336-338). If Hutch's contention is correct, then the continued influence of Blavatsky and her Society helps explain the eclecticism of nonformative spirituality towards many religious traditions from around the world.

Two other Theosophical leaders are worth considering to show how women's power significantly directed the Society. Annie Besant, who later became President of the Society (Washington, 1993:124-125), left her Anglican clergyman husband at the age of twenty-seven to become involved with radical left-wing London politics. She soon allied herself with Theosophy, rising to a high status which allowed her to tour India in 1893, where she preached spiritual liberation to the Hindus (94-97, 105-106). Although Besant did not channel the Masters herself, other female leaders did. One was Katharine Tingley, who after breaks from two marriages and charitable work in hospitals, took an interest in spiritualism. After joining the Society, she began to communicate with the Masters and became head of the American section of the Society in 1896 (108-110). These various positions of power within the Society were made possible by the structure of the organisation, along Masonic lines of Lodges, which were placed under national control by independent sections according to country. By 1885, there were one hundred and twenty

one Lodges, one hundred and six of which were situated in Eastern countries (68).

There were striking similarities between the women who rose to leadership within the Theosophical Society, as Godwin had shown (1994:333). First, they had broken from stale marriages to embark on a lifestyle of freer expression. Blavatsky spoke of her marriage at seventeen to a forty year old Russian Government official, in 1848, whom she soon left (Washington, 1993:30-31). This lifestyle could take various forms, but travel, sexual affairs, involvement with radical politics, and experience of different social statuses were recurrent elements. Second, involvement with unorthodox spiritual practices grew through investigation of spiritualism. It was at a spiritualist meeting that Blavatsky met Olcott, who was writing on the topic for a New York paper (29). This led, thirdly, to relations with the Theosophical Society and a rapid rise through its authority structure to the highest levels, or in Blavatsky's case the co-founding of it, coupled with writing on esoteric matters. Whilst Blavatsky co-founded the Society, it was not pre-ordained that she should lead it so forcefully, for in fact its formation was proposed by a group of people meeting in her flat to study esoteric knowledge scientifically (53-55). It was through the use of her mediumistic abilities that Blavatsky turned this proposal into what became her own organisation.

This pattern of women's power in the Theosophical Society was repeated again in the rise of Anna Kingsford to president of the London Lodge (Washington, 1993:70-74). Kingsford was a medium who had acted as the channel for famous personages such as the Virgin Mary, from whom she had also transcribed dictations, and this ability continued after her association with the Society, aided by Edward Maitland, who became vice-President of the London Lodge in 1883. Kingsford had qualified as a doctor, living a lifestyle that kept her free from her husband, a clergyman, and campaigned for women's rights and anti-

vivisection. From the upper-class, Kingsford could exercise a financially independent existence, which was reflected in her social independence. This is a crucial factor for understanding the rapid social rise of all these women, both in different areas of life and within the Society itself. Linked to this was a factor whereby these women were independent enough to be able to gather money around them. As Washington said of Besant, "Annie had a genius for raising money and attracting rich benefactors which was to be crucial in her domination of the Society" (107). There were many such generous members, but the female ones displayed strong wills and were mostly single, widowed, or divorced, and with private financial means (137).

The Theosophical leadership of these women was marked by a female-male sharing of power, described by Godwin as an intense but sexless relationship with an older man (1994:333). Each of the female figures discussed were tied in authority with particular men: Blavatsky with Olcott, Besant with Charles Leadbeater, Tingley with William Quan Judge, whom she succeeded as head of the American section, and Kingsford with Maitland. These complementary pairs, suggested Washington, were in the form of a "male/female, submissive/dominant combination" (1993:119). This is not to say that rifts did not occur between these pairs: Olcott decided not to settle with Blavatsky in Adyar, but travelled as a missionary into Buddhist areas of the East, especially Ceylon where he helped create a Buddhist revival (66-67). This split was in part a reaction by Olcott against Blavatsky's magic tricks which she claimed were actions by the Masters. Likewise, it was the excesses of expressions of their spiritual powers which caused the women leaders to increasingly become engineers of a social organisation, and which simultaneously repelled those men with whom they had acted in complementary partnership to attain such potential power in the first place. Tingley, for example, formed a community at Point Loma in California

which celebrated "theatre as sacrament", where she acted as director, celebrant, and star performer (111-113).

The relationship between Besant and Leadbeater was more ambiguous, since the latter also fitted into the female model of an idiosyncratic guru to which the women leaders aspired. A former curate in the Church of England, he rose to a highly popular and influential role within the Society through his association with Blavatsky, with whom he travelled in India. Leadbeater exercised his spiritual independence by claiming esoteric knowledge of the past lives of Theosophical Society members and their present statuses. Also, in 1916, Leadbeater became ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church in Australia, a breakaway Catholic sect which had been established by an English Theosophist, James Wedgwood, in 1915 (Washington, 1993:139-141, 208). It is pertinent to note that Besant and Leadbeater's conflicts, unlike those of the other couples, were ranged on the same level against each other, with both claiming exclusive esoteric knowledge from the Masters. An important factor in this conflict was the upbringing of Krishnamurti, a young Indian boy whom Leadbeater had identified as the embodiment of the Lord Maitreya on Earth (128-130). Besant and Leadbeater, though, generally allowed each other their own space, reflected in their geographical separation, with Besant usually resident in Britain and Leadbeater in India, then Australia.

Steiner's split from the Theosophical Society must be understood in terms of the spiritual power of the leaders which was based on mediumistic displays of skills and the increasing use of Asian religious traditions. At the time of this split, Steiner was leader of the Austrian Lodge, most of whose members he took with him to form the Anthroposophical Society. This was prompted by disagreements between him and Blavatsky on the sorts of spiritual

practice within the Society: following from the Western esoteric tradition, Steiner wished to focus more on meditation than mediumship (Godwin, 1994:361-367; Washington, 1993:146-152). This was to be achieved through a method of meditative observation of self and environment that can be traced back to J.W. von Goethe's study of the natural world (Edmunds, 1982:12-14). This emphasis on clairvoyance as a natural science, may be likened to Hanegraaff's notion of *Naturphilosophie* that is prevalent throughout western esotericism (1995:57-59).

Although, as the next section will show, Steiner became and remained a central figure in the Anthroposophical Society, his relative lack of charismatic leadership based on spiritual skill, compared to the Theosophical Lodges, meant that his Society has been more enduring. The subsequent history of the Theosophical Society, by contrast, has been more insecure, especially in the United States and Europe, since many Lodges were focused round the charisma of temporary leaders. The next section will seek to show how authority is bureaucratised within the Anthroposophical Society, through a discussion of fieldwork with a Nottinghamshire group, and thus how it differs from the cultic movement of spiritualism and became even more formative than the Theosophical Society.

2. Authority at the Anthroposophical Society

A fortnightly Nottinghamshire Anthroposophical Society group, which was attended by around a dozen people, was studied for four months during 1992-1993. Attention is paid primarily to the establishment of authority at this group and only secondarily to the discourse and constructed reality, in line with the ethnographies in previous chapters. In

this way, the varieties of experience of participants is more closely followed.

To begin this analysis, it is useful to consider the importance of Steiner for the group. There were three ways in which he acted as the focal point for the meetings. First, visually, a photographic portrait of him was placed on the central table, around which the chairs were arranged. Next to this stood a vase with fresh flowers, which may be understood to signify not only the naturalistic basis of his theology but also serenity, which was encouraged and controlled at the meetings. Second, and most obviously, the meetings centred round extracts read from his texts. The text focused upon during these months was *At the Gates of Spiritual Science* (1986), taken from lectures Steiner gave in Stuttgart in 1906. Around fifteen pages were read each meeting, this being done slowly and by different readers for each few pages. No interruptions to this were allowed. Third, during the discussions on the texts, thought and speech were constantly brought back to Steiner's own words and ideas by the group organisers. Their interjections and the structure of the meetings themselves, served to establish authority. One particular way in which this was achieved was by openly acknowledging that Steiner wrote at the beginning of this century, before many of the group's contemporary social and spiritual concerns. But this led not to the rejection or partial acceptance of his work, rather than an effort to understand how it applied to contemporary situations. Thus, the decision was made that the next text of Steiner to be studied was to be his lectures on Europe of his day, to help a better understanding of the troubles in Europe in the early nineteen-nineties.

The Anthroposophical meetings were led by Tom, who spoke quietly but clearly with an unassuming manner. He opened and closed the meetings and established the structure they took. They commenced and ended with a few minutes meditation, during which time

people would sit with clasped hands and down-turned faces, postures more similar to Christian praying than meditation at, for example, the Essene group. The initial meditation was followed by a passage read by either Tom or Maria, a German-speaking woman who would sometimes read it in German then translate it into English. These took the form of prayers, addressing the meeting's clarity and practical usefulness. Following from Steiner's spirituality, then, the Christian tradition was prominent both through performance and speech. On one occasion, after a debate on part of the text, Tom remarked that people can also ask Christ and God for help, as well as reading Steiner. Then came a short period of silence. Being held in a public meeting room, times for informal conversation between the fifteen or so people who habitually attended were short, although the small size of the group meant that everyone greeted and parted with all the rest personally, using first names.

During the discussions that resulted from Steiner's text, a variety of experiences would be introduced which for purposes of this analysis can be placed into three categories of sources. First, there were cultural differences, such as one Greek-speaking woman who pointed out how Greeks discuss dreams more freely than do the British. Secondly were ideas and practices from other groups, such as the Rosicrucians. Theories, particularly from literature, provided a third source, such as Jung on symbolic archetypes in dreams. Speakers, however, often were not given the opportunity to explain at length their views from such experiences. This was because either no-one took up their comments and questioned them, or the discussion was brought back to Steiner's writings, or a criticism - either of their opinion or the way they were expressing it - was made by one of the leaders. The following two examples help to explain this.

On one occasion, Tom reprimanded one man who was explaining that the Great Pyramids

were built as a ritual arena for coffins. The difference in their tones was significant. This man had raised his voice but, in responding to him, Tom spoke quietly. Since there was no one arguing with the man, the lack of response given to speakers may be seen as causing him to express his view in stronger terms, in an attempt to provoke some discussion. On such occasions, the leaders were provided with the opportunity to chastise; that time Tom explained how everyone has their own point of view which must be respected and pointed out that was how the group worked. A discourse of serenity, where new, though not necessarily contradictory, views did not at first provoke response, therefore served to facilitate a stronger response as the alternative views were expressed more vehemently. For then it was clear that this discourse had been overstepped - and as speakers were chastised for so doing, their views were devalued and concomitantly dropped by them. The discussion could then resume its focus on Steiner.

For those who informed their speech with Steiner's concerns, this conflict did not arise. For example, one woman, explained why people should be vegetarians. Although this could have led to disagreement through its promotion of a tradition commonly found in eastern religions, the woman's explanation utilised Steiner's ideas in order to support her view, with the result that nobody countered it. She said that by eating plants, people add the etheric element in them to their own. Further, she explained that animals should not be eaten because, on the one hand, they bear an astral element, like humans but unlike plants, and, on the other hand, they are already decaying when eaten. However, for those who did not inform their speech with Steiner's concerns, frustration resulted which led either to them leaving the group or staying in it without being able socially to develop their spirituality in new ways.

On another occasion a new female attender tried to defend the practice of yoga in the face of a passage read concerning its inapplicability to westerners. Steiner equated eastern religion with yoga which is learnt from a guru. "This absolute surrender of one's own self suits the Indian character; but there is no place for it in European culture", he wrote (1986:115). Throughout his discussion of the "Eastern Way", Steiner emphasised how it cannot be applied to Europeans, for Indians as "the first sub-race of the Aryan race" are distinguished from the fifth sub-race of the "Germans and Anglo-Saxons", pointing out that this is "to which we ourselves [his assumed readership] belong" (99-102). This evolutionary difference appears total, ranging from economics, such that western capitalism means that the eastern path of *yama* cannot be applied (117), to bodily posture, such that *asanam* cannot be followed in the West (120-121). During this discussion it was noted by Maria how other cultures cannot be comprehended because they are at a different evolution to the west. Thus, she explained, eastern practices should not be sought for spiritual development. In contrast, the new attender strongly disagreed, saying how yoga had been beneficial to her; she never attended again after this meeting. The importance of this debate to Anne, as described below, illustrates an important point about the group's clientele.

Anne was a retired civil servant whose active participation in the Nottinghamshire Network resulted in contact with her in several different contexts. Meetings with her at a local Anthroposophical Society for four months in 1992-1993 had led to attendance with her to Sheila Patterson's channelling workshop. She was met again at the Occult Study Group in 1993-1994 and once more at the Spiritual Fairs. Anne had been attending the Anthroposophical meetings for several months before the commencement of fieldwork, alongside many other groups including occasional Theosophical Society meetings. Her dislike of the manner in which the woman who defended the practice of yoga had been

treated, however, convinced her to stop going. After that meeting, and on another occasion, she explained why. Anne had heard that this woman was in fact a clairvoyant who had found the telephone number of one of the Society's group organisers using her psychic abilities. Anne was impressed with this and highly estimated the woman's spiritual powers. Hence she was not happy that someone with such powers could be treated in such an offhand manner. In other words, Anne's knowledge of the spirituality of the clairvoyant gave her a yardstick to measure that of the Anthroposophists, which she found lacking. On the second occasion at which she talked about this, Anne pointed out that Tom was a weak leader and Maria too dominant - it was the latter who had disagreed most strongly with the clairvoyant. Whilst this second explanation differed from her first, it showed that participants did not judge merely by their personal feelings. They also set up social standards by appreciating the behaviour of others. The criticism of someone whom Anne believed to have psychic powers, coupled with an unstable leadership, led to her departure from the Anthroposophical meetings.

This raises the issue as to what extent a group fixated on a closed body of knowledge, such as Steiner's, can function within a nonformative network. Two points may be made regarding this. First, the Anthroposophical meetings concerned themselves just with Steiner's writings and not his exercises designed to open the self up to "higher worlds", which involves changing attitudes (Steiner, 1973:131-137) and specific exercises, as described in *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds: How is it Achieved?* (Steiner, 1969). Roszak wrote that Steiner contributed to one of the few meditation systems native to the Western world, but instead of developing this, his followers merely propagated his writings (1975:129). Participants' bodily performances were therefore not controlled except in the discourse developed during the meetings, which encouraged quietude, serenity and a lack of opposition. By

neglecting Steiner's emphasis on clairvoyance, modern Anthroposophists drew a distinction between themselves and nonformative spiritualities, as highlighted by Leviton's (1994) critique of channelling considered in Chapter Three. But many people were willing to accept this discourse for the duration of the meeting, to gain an insight into Steiner's work and its application to contemporary concerns, and afterwards used these as they liked. Thus, the group was utilised in a nonformative manner. However, as Anne's case showed, there were limits to this and it is likely that once such limits are transgressed a nonformative participant is unlikely to return. It may therefore be suggested that nonformative participants are unlikely to attend ritual performances in groups with strong leadership, for that would influence their experiences. But such groups will be attended if rituals are absent. Participation at the Essene Meditation supports this view, because despite the authority structures established by the Lovells and the Spencers, the meditation ritual itself allowed for silent imagination.

The second point in answer to how the Anthroposophical meetings could be utilised by nonformative participants concerns the eclecticism of spiritual seekers, which sometimes required them to discover knowledge about dogmatists if these feature in other contexts with which they were involved. Steiner is one such figure - his particular importance lies in emphasising the European mystical tradition and the place of Romanticism in that (Roszak, 1975:126-130). As an interpreter and applicator of that tradition, Steiner's voice is a correlative one to those who draw more on eastern religions, such as the other Theosophical traditions and the Hindu and Buddhist new religious movements in the west. The concerns of Carl Jung and humanistic psychotherapies lends further credence to Steiner's importance. Jung was the favoured author of Anne, on whom she spoke most often, and is widely influential on other spiritualities, such as paganism, which have close

links with these nonformative ones (see Wood, 1995). In *The Integration of the Personality*, a key text which focused on European alchemy, Jung wrote, "If now he [the modern Protestant who has rebelled against religious symbolism] should go and cover his nakedness with the gorgeous dress of the Orient, like the theosophists, he would be untrue to his own history" (1948:63). Anne's interest in the western mystical tradition was further shown by her second favourite author, David Icke, whom Washington placed in the line of modern western gurus (1993:2-4).

The Anthroposophical meetings may therefore be understood as containing a double membership, both formative, those who were interested in following Steiner's teachings and Anthroposophical discourse, and nonformative, those who sought Steiner as one figure amongst many in whom they were interested. The former was comprised of a core group of leaders and regular attenders, whilst the latter was a fluid membership who would not attend regularly. This second membership formed probably half the total group size and were more likely to leave. Once these latter left the group, however, the formative nature of the core group facilitated against their return. The power structures in the Anthroposophical Society are now compared with another group which Anne attended, one directed towards occult studies.

3. The Occult Study Group

The meetings of a Nottinghamshire Occult Study Group attended in the four winter months during 1993-1994 were devoted both to socialising and exploring in detail a presented topic. This was done through a talk and discussion lasting approximately two

hours, followed by a couple of hours' time for socialising. There were around fifteen attenders, with men and women in roughly equal proportion, but the average age of about thirty years was some ten years younger than those other groups with which fieldwork was conducted. The meetings were rotated between three speakers' houses - during the whole of 1993 the founder of the group, Martin, gave sixteen of the twenty five meetings, with the others spread out between a further seven speakers.

Martin, who had founded the group through friends and by putting up notices in a central Nottingham alternative bookshop at the end of 1992, attempted to organise the group with some formality. A newsletter was started on the winter solstice of 1993 and a trip to Arbor Low stone circle in the Derbyshire Peak National Park was organised that summer. There had also been "celebration parties at significant times", such as Halloween. Martin's reports of these were that though they were organised under the auspices of the Study Group, the events were in fact attended by friends. The friendship aspect of the group was further reinforced by the time of the meetings: every other Friday evening, like the Essene Meditation, but lasting beyond eleven at night. The length of the meetings was a phenomenon experienced with no other group, but parallels fieldwork reports of pagan groups in the East Midlands as reported by Simes (1995), suggesting a different social context which may be explored through three key figures involved with the group, Martin, Peter and Leon.

Martin's interest in spiritual matters may be described as a concern with systems: principally, the Tarot, the Kabbalah and astrology. Pictorial representations were important in this. During interview, Martin displayed several Tarot packs which he had pasted onto boards with equivalent cards from the packs next to each other. One set was a reproduction of

Aleister Crowley's Egyptian Tarots and he also had a picture of the Kabbalah tree of life, which had influenced Crowley. This articulated Martin's spiritual seekership: pictures allowed a way of comparatively exploring the meanings of symbolic systems of knowledge by drawing attention to relations between elements. This system could be explicated by reference to texts on them - Martin had several shelves full of spiritual books to which he would frequently refer in order to clarify matters. The Study Group allowed Martin the opportunity to develop his thoughts on subjects, prompting him to research and formulate them, and also provided teaching by a number of more experienced seekers, such as Leon. Martin's rigorous establishment of the group was carried out, in part, for his own concerns. Rituals were not performed in the group, which was concerned only with speech. However, a questionnaire Martin circulated amongst its members asked if they would like, "more practice [sic.] activities" and gave a list of examples: "rituals, visualisation/pathworking, meditations, demonstrations of dowsing, tarot, etc., E.S.P. tests and methods of spiritual healing".

Another attender of the study group, Peter was also a member of a secret magical organisation, which focused on Aleister Crowley's writings and a witchcraft coven. Peter had a more limited range of spiritual interests than Martin; he was chiefly interested in Crowley and Wicca, reflecting his involvement with the other two groups. Further, he was frequently critical of the Study Group. Of the attenders there, he said, "they do not really want to get to grips with the things they look at", giving Anne as a particular example. His perspective centred more on experience through a progressive system that led to different levels of competence, such as he found in his other two groups.

Being in his forties and the leader of one of the two branches of the Magical Group to

which Peter belonged, Leon was held in high regard in the Occult Study Group. He also ran a Kabbalah Study Group. This paralleled an Astrology Study Group which had arisen from one of the Occult Study Group's meetings and was headed by two sisters, Mary and Susan, who were regular attenders at the latter. Leon was the most practised speaker at the Occult Study Group and acted to establish himself as an authority on spiritual matters. His dress, manner of speaking and content of speech were all very distinctive. Leon dressed in black leather with various symbolic silver jewellery such as pentagrams as rings and necklaces. He generally spoke whilst standing - a much more comfortable posture in tight leather trousers and jack boots - and it was difficult for people to interrupt him, either to ask questions or express their own opinions. Like leaders in the other groups attended, his speech was clear and precise, but unlike them he was less soft-spoken, speaking with a sharper intonation which emphasised the points he was making.

Leon was accompanied by his partner Clare, who spoke much less than he and usually directed the contents of what she said to him, such that he could expound his own views. It is important to note the differing material conditions of these figures: Leon and Clare were social workers and thus enjoyed a dual middle-class income. Neither Peter nor Martin had steady jobs, both being casual manual labourers in the past, but their partners, with whom they lived, were on postgraduate vocational Masters courses and so could be expected to earn a middle-class wage the following year. Martin, moreover, was taking Access courses at a local college in psychology and sociology and had applied for a university course in social sciences. These studies were reflected in his talks at the study group, for example he had given one on Abraham Maslow whilst preparing an essay on humanistic psychology.

The topics covered by the Study Group provide a clue to the way in which spirituality was explored there. Ancient traditions formed a staple: creation myths, Nostradamus, Theosophy, Egyptian pyramids, stone circles, Celts, and Toltecs all featured throughout 1993-1994. This demonstrates an academic perspective on spirituality, the attempt to consider the state of the present in terms of the past. In both personal interview and public speech, participants established a detached interest in the history of spirituality, becoming attached to it as they saw its relevance and presence in contemporary life. There was a second thrust to this academic perspective, employed particularly by Martin and Leon: psychological and sociological analysis.

Within the Occult Study Group there were differences in performance, which can be analysed by juxtaposing Leon's and Susan's other groups. Although these groups were not attended for fieldwork, discussions about them with those who did attend were illuminating. Whilst both were concerned with the systems orientation to spirituality that occupied Martin, Leon practised this in groups that studied topics such as Crowley and the Kabbalah more formally, with himself as teacher. Susan, however, was involved in running the Astrology Study Group in order to open up further vistas of spiritual concern, notably the psychology of personal development. As expected, from what was learnt of the magical and astrology groups, these spiritual attitudes were reflected in expectations of membership: the former was more formal, with a system of membership, initiations and leadership, whilst the latter was open to anyone and consisted of more personal practice that could be brought into group discussion if desired. Therefore, the Astrology and Occult Studies Groups could better be described as nonformative than could the Magical Group and Kabbalah Study Group. This was reflected in their greater numbers of attenders: Leon's branch of the Magical Group was usually attended by only six others, including Clare and

Peter, whereas the Astrology Group apparently had a habitual attendance of a dozen or more. The sort of membership at the Occult Study Group may now be considered through a closer examination of the evenings' events.

Speakers at the Study Group talked in quite different manners, on a broad range of topics. These differences in discourse and gestural speech did not, however, establish the tone of the evenings. Rather, that was achieved through the attitude of the participants, which was to engage in a lively way with the material with which they were presented. For example, the most didactic speech was given by Leon on occult influences on the Third Reich. He stood up to deliver this, which was unusual for an informal setting in somebody's small living-room, and expressed many opinions concerning the rise of Nazism in general. He drew from both psychological and sociological theories for this, explaining how groups can be easily led by people with enough gumption to take control of the leadership. However, of greater interest to his audience was his presentation of the facts concerning this topic: Adolf Hitler's involvement in occult topics, such as astrology, the occult theories that the Nazis tested, such as their search for Atlantis, and the history of the Aryan race as found in occult groups and ideas from the nineteenth century.

Like the other speakers, Leon was frequently interrupted as people asked him to expand on facts that interested them, or to provide their own information. This interest was in contrast to their more argumentative manner when speakers presented their own opinions concerning the facts. When Leon expressed the opinion that most people are inactive and will therefore give implicit consent to whoever rules them, Susan interrupted to ask how he knew most people were like that. She said that many people seemed to be working for change, often through different routes than the usual political ones. Unlike at the

Anthroposophical meetings, such confrontations did not lead to the subjugation of one speaker by the other, for no over-riding social or spiritual authority, such as group leaders or Steiner, existed. Rather, different opinions could be expressed openly without any of them being retracted, humiliated or silenced. Nor did there seem to be any bad feelings afterwards, in fact, such disagreements usually led to longer discussions during the socialising period, in which others would also participate. As such, the Study Group may be compared to the Essene Meditation.

Anne's presence at this group may also be used to explore these issues. She had begun attending the Occult Study Group after leaving the Anthroposophical Society and was of a different age-group and social background to most of the others, reflected in her more outspoken and confident manner. Whilst interested in the various speakers' topics, she would explicitly use their ideas as they shed light on her own spiritual concerns. In one meeting, Martin made reference to an esoteric tradition that had begun four hundred years ago - Anne interrupted to speak of a catastrophic flood that had also occurred at that time, remarking that it was going to happen again soon, as prophesied by David Icke. No-one responded to her, but neither was it contested. Whilst the feature of not responding to individuals' own views was prevalent in the Anthroposophical Society meetings, which led to growing frustration and eventual conflict with the group leaders as described in the last section, no such power relations were present at the Study Group. Anne appeared favourable to the Study Groups's ethos, which allowed her to develop her own thoughts and provided her with knowledge of traditions to do so. Anne was on friendly terms with many of the participants there, and they were tolerant of her spirituality and manner of using the meetings.

In contrast to Anne's friends, who included Martin, Peter was irritated by her presence and in interview gave a warning to take what she said "with a pinch of salt". He gave her as an example of why the Study Group had turned out as it had, rather than as a group that could deal properly with spiritual matters - in contrast, he said, to the Magical Group and coven he attended. Peter raised Anne's belief in "grays" in order to ridicule her, this being the term given by Icke to aliens who negatively influence people on Earth, and was mentioned by Anne at a meeting Martin led on this author. Peter's private dismissal of Icke as a spiritual authority and his annoyance at Anne's public discussion of his views, gave him grounds to belittle the Study Group in comparison with his other groups. His pride in the Magical Group and elevation of Leon as a spiritual leader contrasted with his attitude to the Study Group and its attenders.

The Anthroposophical Society and Occult Study Group provide an interesting comparative perspective by which to consider power relations in social context. The Anthroposophical Society meetings were authoritatively stronger than those of the latter, although Peter and Leon posed a threat to this. In contrast, Anne herself posed a threat to the authorities established in both groups, although this was tolerated by the Occult Study Group. This demonstrates the more nonformative character of authority in the Occult Study Group compared to the Anthroposophical Society. However, like the spiritualist movement, both existed in the dilemma between social formativeness and nonformativeness, which needs further theoretical exploration. The last part of this chapter compares the different traditions looked at above with the Nottinghamshire Network as a whole, in order to show the relations between the two. To do this, it draws on debates concerning how cults and sects arise.

PART III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORMATIVE AND NONFORMATIVE GROUP STRUCTURES

1. The Institutionalisation of Religious Groups

From one perspective, the formative/nonformative dual composition of groups may be seen in terms of their institutionalisation. But from another, this relationship is about the dynamic structures of social power, rather than changes that groups undergo. These two perspectives will be considered through some debates within the sociology of new religious movements.

The institutionalisation of religions has a long theoretical background in sociology, from Weber's analysis of charisma and bureaucracy to Bryan Wilson's analysis of theodicy within sects. These debates, concerning notions of church, denomination and sect, have often been reviewed in the sociology of religion, for example by Hill (1973:47-97), so there is little need to repeat them again. What is of greater interest for this Thesis is the increasing dissatisfaction with such a typology as certain of the British and American new religious movements were looked at, from the nineteen-seventies. This may be considered through Roy Wallis' analysis of Scientology, *The Road to Total Freedom* (1976).

By looking at issues of power and leadership, Wallis concluded that a process of sectarianization had occurred which transformed Dianetics into Scientology, similar to the emergence of Christian Science from the New Thought movement (1976:98-100). As a psychotherapeutic technique, Dianetics was created by L. Ron Hubbard in the late

nineteen-forties, spreading through his and others' writings on it in a sci-fi magazine and in books, most importantly his *Dianetics: the Modern Science of Mental Health*. The technique shared similarities with Freudian therapy, such as abreaction theory, but presented a model of the mind as a computer which was malfunctioning due to some keys being held down through habitual reactions to adverse situations (25-37). Hubbard coined the term engrams to describe the locks that kept keys held down and the purpose of Dianetics was to remove these through the technique of auditing, such that people could become "self-determined" (25-26). Wallis noted that spontaneous groups arose from the spread of publications on Dianetics, linked informally through correspondence (44). Meetings consisted of the most senior Dianeticists giving lectures on, and demonstrations of, the technique, before conducting auditing on the group or through pairs (44).

Wallis considered these informal Dianetic groups as cults, the central characterisation of which is "epistemological individualism", such that, "the cult has no clear locus of final authority beyond the individual member" (1976:14). In cults, he wrote, power lies in the hands of consumers, not leaders, and charisma is dispersed towards the lower ranks (15-16). By establishing Dianetics, then, Wallis interpreted Hubbard's role as a "magical healer" to a small clientele and therefore open to challenges from other local leaders (248). By tracing the history of Dianetics, Wallis showed how Hubbard increasingly reacted to such challenges, which led, eventually, to the transformation of the cult to a sect, from Dianetics to Scientology (79-95). In contrast to cults, sects are characterised by "epistemological authoritarianism", in which power is centralised by leaders' claims to unique revelation and in which the cult's clientele becomes a following (17-18). Hubbard himself, wrote Wallis, was transformed into a mystagogue with charismatic authority and a monopoly on the means of revelation (249).

Two points of this transformation are relevant to a debate on nonformativeness. First, the nature of the beliefs and practices, especially concerning auditing, in Scientology. Second, the wider religious context in which Wallis believed cults exist, which will be looked at in the next section. Hubbard's early efforts to exert control on the practice of Dianetics led to the establishment of a Foundation in 1950 which offered full-time courses in auditing and therefore certified who was able to practise (Wallis, 1976:43-45). Such a move was viewed with suspicion by many of the informal groups, as it was contrary to their democratic agenda (48). However, this Foundation was poorly administered and controlled (49-50), leading to various factions which struggled for power, often through the law courts. Hubbard emerged from this with full control over his own organisation and the rights to his book *Dianetics* (95), then set about creating Scientology, both as a new technique and a new organisation. The content matter became more spiritual than psychological, as in the notion of people as thetans, immortal spirits with potentially limitless powers (Whitehead, 1987:194). Authority was achieved through the establishment of distinctions between orthodox and heretical beliefs; the term "Black Dianetics" was used to refer to disapproved variations (Wallis, 1976:88-89). According to Wallis,

"Scientology was a new revelation entirely transcending the limitations of Dianetics. While Dianetics had been a form of psychotherapy concerned with eradicating the limitations on the full human potential, Scientology was heralded as the 'Science of Certainty' concerned with rehabilitating the thetan to its full spiritual capacity" (91).

Scientology differed from Dianetics by standardising its practices and establishing a hierarchy of training (Wallis, 1976:123-125). So far as auditing was concerned, "Skill depended not on tacit professional knowledge of the auditor but on his ability precisely to

duplicate the auditing technique as established by Hubbard" (123). However, whilst this was true for use of the E-meter, by which auditors measured subjects' insights, Wallis' own portrayal of auditing showed it to be a dynamic social context which was often fiercely confrontational, especially during "bull baiting" sessions in which reactions were provoked to break down habitual responses (117-119). He gave the example of a mocking use of Yiddish by Scientologists attempting "to 'flatten' [...the] Jewish button" of one person being audited (119). Such confrontations were also attested by Whitehead (1987:136).

What such analyses show is that the transformation of Scientology from Dianetics - whether this was due to the consolidation of power, as Wallis held, or occurred through a fulfilment of the direction in which Dianetics pointed from its earliest days, as Whitehead (1987:69-72) contended - led to much greater definition and control of beliefs and practices. Also, much greater commitment to these was expected, not least because of the large sums of money needed to pay for courses (Wallis, 1976:179). This stands in sharp contrast to the groups encountered in the Network and may be seen as a mark of formativeness.

Such a distinction was also made by Preston in his analysis of Zen centres in the United States (1988). He contrasted commitment to the daily practice of Zen with the "new age movement": in the former, other interests and activities must take secondary place, unlike in the latter (1988:21). Again, expected focus on a single practice is accompanied by firmer structures of social power, such as the strict organisation of daily activities and the leadership of the Zen teacher, or *roshi*, who follows progress, for example through private interview, and who is seen as bearing the charisma of office (29-33). Further, meditation is monitored, with backs being smacked with a stick, and remarks shouted out, to encourage correct posture (39). This distinguishes practice and discourse in such formally organised

settings with that in informal groups, such as the sort of meditation at the Essene group, as shown in Chapter Three.

2. *The Cultic Milieu*

Attention is now turned to the second issue concerning the emergence of religious groups. Just as sects arise from cults, so, according to Wallis, cults precariously arise from a "cultic milieu", into which they always face reabsorption (1976:14-15). Wallis linked the cultic milieu both with sci-fi enthusiasm and "self-improvement movements", from which Dianetics drew its clientele (62-68). The milieu is populated by seekers after truth who occasionally and, usually, temporarily ally themselves to a tradition in searches for their right paths. This leads to rapid changes in the membership of cults and the unclear and ambiguous locus of authority within them (76). Wallis took the notion of the cultic milieu from Campbell, which was introduced through a discussion of Sutcliffe's work in Chapter Two, and which may now be examined in more depth.

The cultic milieu, wrote Campbell, is a constant feature of society, in contrast to individual cults, representing a deviant relation to "dominant cultural orthodoxies" (1972:121-122). This milieu is kept alive through media such as magazines, periodicals, pamphlets and books, and through direct contact with demonstrators and lecturers, all of which support each other by cross-referencing (123). "As a direct consequence of this", wrote Campbell, "individuals who 'enter' the cultic milieu at any one point frequently travel rapidly through a wide variety of movements and beliefs and by so doing constitute yet another unifying force within the milieu" (123). The milieu is therefore characterised by a "common ideology

of seekership" with "ecumenical, super-ecclesiastical, syncretistic, and tolerant" attitudes (123). Campbell recognised that this "society of seekers" may be contrasted with cults:

"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 milieu in general and this could possibly be one reason why it tends to have such a short lifespan" (127).

Certainly, Campbell's description of the cultic milieu bears a strong resemblance to the Nottinghamshire Network and its groups. In the Network, information spread by word-of-mouth and leaflets, and there was much reliance on printed material, lectures and demonstrations or workshops for gaining knowledge of new practices and beliefs. However, as Campbell presents it, the milieu has little structure that might distinguish it as a phenomenon, other than its deviance towards orthodox culture, especially Christianity (1972:130-131). As such, the relationship of Campbell's discussion to analyses of the counterculture and of the New Age Movement is difficult to gauge. The phenomena considered by Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1970 [1968]) are marked by deviance and he clearly related this to religious phenomena in his later work (1975). Likewise, discussions on the New Age, which arose two decades after Campbell's work, deal with much the same phenomena, as Sutcliffe recognised (1997).

Given these ambiguities, three main problems may be discerned with Campbell's analysis as regards its application to the Network. First, deviance was not a distinguishing characteristic; in fact, it seemed as if many mainstream values were adopted in order to be reformed through an appreciation of wider, particularly spiritual, contexts. There was little

evidence of the antagonism towards Christianity that Campbell's feature of deviance may be seen as predicting. Second, seekership itself was varied, with people sometimes engaged with religious institutions and at other times engaged with a number of activities. However, it was generally found that people pursued activities with their own purposes in mind, interpreting these within a single framework.

The third problem was that different parts to the Network consisted of a structure of practices focused around channelling, each of these practices being related to spirit possession in some form. The cultic milieu, in contrast, has no structure and can therefore only be defined in terms of other phenomena. Campbell wrote, "the cultic milieu flourishes in relation to (a) the amount of 'alien' culture contact and (b) the disintegration of dominant indigenous culture" (1972:130). In fact, fieldwork suggested that the phenomena in the Network, and thus those often considered part of a cultic milieu, counterculture, or New Age Movement, drew from more established religious groups of cults and sects. This reverses Campbell's and Wallis' theory that cults arise from the cultic milieu. The cultic milieu, despite initial appearances, therefore cannot be equated with nonformative spirituality, which, despite its characteristic of lack of enduring structures of social power, can be distinguished on its own terms from other phenomena. To this end, the Network is compared to the three traditions considered in this chapter, spiritualism, the Anthroposophical Society and the Occult Study Group, in terms of formative/nonformative structures, especially the interplay between these two elements within each context.

3. Formative/Nonformative Structures

Spiritualism may properly be called a movement, indicating the interlocking structures of social power across various facets of practice of mediumship. Despite difficulties in establishing such structures, they were formed early on in the history of this practice and have endured up to the present day. Thus, although their maintenance has not been without problems, the movement has been able to demonstrate a continuing formativeness. However, as fieldwork with spiritualist healers showed, some people exist on the edge of that movement, participating in a limited way in its power structures whilst they are engaged with other phenomena. This is particularly shown in their use of clairvoyance and fortune-telling, which the movement has a long history of campaigning against in order to establish the authenticity of mediumship. As such, the spiritualist movement may be conceived as a distinct phenomenon with porous, but stable, social boundaries. Around this movement exists nonformative spiritualities which draw heavily from involvement with its practices and beliefs. This situation was most clearly recognised through consideration of people's biographies, in which spiritualism prominently figured.

Relating to this issue is the greater charisma and bureaucracy within the spiritualist movement compared to the nonformative context outside. Charisma, in Weber's terms, was virtually absent from the nonformative groups, but has been seen to exist at a local level within spiritualism. Drawing on the discussion of charisma in the last chapter, the increase in charismatic authority may be understood to involve an increase in bureaucratic authority as well. Thus, even concerted efforts to formally establish groups failed in the nonformative context. The Lovells failed to maintain the Meditation group along lines of the Essene lifestyle they espoused. Likewise, it is possible to view the continued existence

of the Spiritual Fair in terms of the lack of bureaucracy developed by Michael. This seemingly paradoxical statement may be explained by the fact that increased bureaucracy could have involved an increase in charismatic leadership, such that the Fair might have been oriented to a spiritual theme. Such a move would have alienated many attenders. As it was, spiritualism featured strongly at the Fair, reflecting Michael's background and those of many within the Nottinghamshire Network, but there was also a wide variety of other producers.

In contrast to both spiritualism and the Network, the Anthroposophical Society maintained more control over its social boundaries despite its dual attitude of participants. Although people with viewpoints other than Anthroposophical ones were allowed to attend meetings, the authority that existed within these meant that their opinions could not be freely discussed. Inevitably, this led to a high rate of changes in membership as people became dissatisfied with this situation, whilst a core group remained. The reasons for this situation need to be understood in terms of the origins of the Society, from the spiritualist movement and the Theosophical Society. The latter arose from the former through the creation of a cult, in Wallis' terms, around centralised charismatic leadership. The Theosophical Society appears to have controlled its boundaries to a greater extent than did the spiritualist movement. The Anthroposophical Society achieved this to an even greater extent, by centralising authority in Steiner and his writings rather than a number of Lodge leaders. His writings have thus become much more important to his Society than Blavatsky's have for her's. As Anne attested when discussing her experiences of these two societies, Theosophy is more open to learning about other practices and beliefs. This dual membership at the Anthroposophical Society differed from nonformative groups, which did not establish a focus on a single tradition within their practices and discourse.

The Occult Study Group was a more ambiguous phenomenon as regards formative/nonformative structures. This group appeared to be much closer to nonformative spirituality than either the spiritualist movement or the Anthroposophical Society. Like the nonformative groups and practices, the topics for debate were wide-ranging and there was minimal central authority, either charismatic or bureaucratic. Thus, there was no dual membership because there were no core practices or beliefs upon which a formative section could focus.

However, unlike at the nonformative groups, there was a presence of people who regularly practised in formative religious traditions, although, with the partial exception of Peter and Leon, they suspended their exercise of formative authority for the duration of the Study Group's meetings. Tendencies towards this were found at the Essene Meditation as regards the Lovells and, to a lesser extent, the Spencers, although the variety of groups and traditions with which each of these couples was involved served to limit any formativeness they expressed. What especially distinguished some people at the Study Group was their preoccupation with pagan traditions, such as Susan's interest in astrology, but, more significantly, Peter's practice of Wicca and magic, Clare's practice of magic and Leon's practice of magic and the Kabbalah. Each of these reflected their involvement with more formative groups.

Contemporary British paganism is a diverse and widespread phenomenon, which there is not space to explore in detail. The topic is important to mention, for paganism has often been linked to the New Age Movement, especially by York (1991; 1994) and Heelas (1996), but also by Bowman as regards the appropriation of historical and non-western cultures (1995) and Greer concerning theologies (1995:152). Many analysts would therefore

interpret paganism as related to phenomena in the Nottinghamshire Network. However, fieldwork studies have shown the distinction between the two, for example Simes' ethnography in the East Midlands (1995:490-499).

If paganism is to be distinguished from nonformative spirituality, then it needs to be rather differently conceptualised in comparison, for example, to spiritualism as a movement. Simes dismissed the characterisation of paganism as a movement, due to its emphasis on individual authority (1995:331-332, 366-394), and focused on the practice of hedgewitchcraft, in which individuals draw on different traditions to invent and practice their own rituals (440-441). However, although it may be the case that paganism does not even loosely cohere together as a single movement, it is clear that a number of related pagan traditions exist with much more formative structure than the groups and practices found in the Network. These traditions are Wicca, Druidry, magical practice based around Crowley's writings, and study of knowledge systems such as astrology, the Kabbalah and the Tarot, as reflected in some very popular British authors such as Vivianne Crowley for Wicca (1989) and Caitlin and John Matthews for the Western Way (1985 and 1986).

Despite the existence of various and separate groups within each tradition, they are united through focusing on common texts and standardised practices to a far greater extent than was found in, for example, channelling. According to Simes, the prevalence of some pagan writings meant they had "quasi-sacred status" and would be adapted and continually rewritten (1995:221-222), thus emphasising a textual focus. Also, although doctrine was vague, it existed in identifiable form, such as the "credo" of the Wiccan Rede: "An it harm none, do as thou will" (234). Further, there was much greater establishment of common meaning for symbols and discourse in these groups compared to those in the Network.

Simes pointed to pagan conceptions of time, performed in seasonal and monthly rituals and reflected in notions of evil and salvation (351-355). Pagan groups also shared common concerns with social issues such as ecology (Hardman, 1996; Simes, 1995:442). This situation is reflected, for example, in the existence of a Pagan Federation, which emphasises the roots of paganism as a whole in pre-Christian religion (Hardman, 1996:x).

Thus, even though nonformative aspects of pagan groups and practices existed, pagans would identify themselves with particular traditions (Simes, 1995:365-369, 393-399), such that "a broad Pagan identity is established" (149). This marked a clear difference from those in the Network, who would define themselves generically in terms of their various practices, such as meditators, channellers or healers, not in terms of the groups to which they belonged. Not even the Lovells called themselves Essene meditators. Likewise, there was no evidence of a New Age identity. Although some people would at times talk of the new age, even when pressed in interview they would not class themselves as New Agers. Such a term held no meaning for them.

Although not a movement, paganism may be seen as a much more closely integrated network than nonformative networks. Formative authority is prevalent throughout different areas of the pagan network, through the existence of particular religious traditions. Like the spiritualist movement, many nonformative spiritualists exist on the edge of paganism, as Simes showed, but, unlike spiritualism, they may also exist in more central positions. This mix between formative and nonformative spiritualists marks paganism from groups such as the Anthroposophical Society, which existed with an unmixing, dual membership.

Through the engagement with paganism of many attenders, the Occult Study Group was therefore influenced by formative practices to a greater extent than were nonformative groups. As such it may be compared to the sort of social organisation exhibited by paganism, rather than that by spiritualism or Anthroposophy. This was reflected in its concern with occult topics which, although interpreted in a broad manner to include David Icke's writings for example, tended to focus on pagan traditions and to be expounded by those who regularly practised and led groups in such traditions. Nonformative spiritualists, such as Anne, were welcome at the Study Group and their participation was generally valued, allowing a large degree of social mixing.

It is possible to view the Study Group as the more visible face of these pagan traditions, which presented them as topics for presentation and discussion. As such, the goal was different from the nonformative groups, which allowed ritual practise. As seen in previous chapters, nonformative groups did not exist through social control of ritual experience or discourse, in contrast to pagan groups. Although these latter may have a mixed formative/nonformative membership, the traditions which they practise means that rituals are more socially controlled, even if they are liable to alteration as group membership changes. As such, nonformative practitioners in pagan groups are more aware of participating in a common group context and with an established tradition, than in nonformative groups.

Due to its continuing nonformative structures of social power, the Nottinghamshire Network may therefore be seen as related to, but distinguished from, each of these other religious traditions. In contrast to spiritualism, no central activity was able to form the basis of federal organisations; compared with the Anthroposophical Society, membership of

groups and practice of activities in the Network did not involve a core constituency focused solely on one tradition; and unlike the Occult Study Group, there were not a significant number of participants involved with identifiable religious traditions. Whenever tendencies to each of these different forms of social organisation did occur, factors characteristic of nonformativeness facilitated against their development. Thus, if people did become involved with formative groups, such as Michelle's participation in a number of Christian churches, their attendance of nonformative groups would temporarily lapse. The two did not appear to be compatible. Nonformativeness tended to exclude formativeness, although formativeness often included nonformativeness. This helps explain why the Network was an enduring social phenomenon, for it drew upon formative traditions in order to maintain its own lack of organisation. Thus, the Network did not appear to fit into sociological patterns of religious transformation, from cultic milieu to cult to sect. Rather, it appeared to arise from cults and sects. Although much more research would need to be carried out in order to explain this phenomenon, it is possible to offer some suggestions by looking at the structure of practices discovered in the Network.

The Nottinghamshire Network could not be clearly conceptualised as a phenomenon were it not for the common pattern relating to the practice of channelling, meditation, divination and holistic health therapies, looked at in Chapter Two. There, it was seen that these relate to different aspects of humans and their environments, which shows why spirit possession, in the form of channelling, was central. It may be suggested that this structure was established and maintained by drawing on a variety of religious traditions, such as those discussed above. Because of their greater formative nature, these spiritualities tended to focus on particular practices and beliefs which perhaps emphasised certain aspects of human existence and neglected others.

Although the following remarks are tentative, spiritualism, for example, may be described as having an over-riding concern with healing, although this should be interpreted in a broad manner as relating to psychological health as well as physical. Likewise, Anthroposophy concentrated on meditation and the morality that issued from such practice, and the Occult Study Group focused on divinatory techniques, and so knowledge and the mind. In each of these groups and many of their participants, there seemed to be a lack of integration of these various aspects, compared to that found at the Essene Meditation and Spiritual Fair or in the biographies and private practices of participants. Perhaps it was the case that nonformative spirituality integrates the concerns of other religious traditions in order to articulate and deal with a broad picture of human existence, in which the body, mind and soul are integrated as a person. Such a view would correspond with the emphasis on humanistic psychologies found within such spirituality, which developed through a broadening approach to people's lives than that articulated in Freudian theory.

In purporting this interpretation of nonformative spirituality, it is suggested that the lack of authority structures which characterises the phenomenon arises through its constant engagement with various aspects of human existence as developed through more focused religious traditions. In order to bring these together, a nonformative attitude is adopted by people and groups. Thus, despite this lack, the phenomenon is distinguishable in terms of the open use that is made of groups, practices and beliefs. It is not surprising, then, that nonformative religious networks exist as much through workshops and lectures than through groups, for the Network is built up largely from groups existing on its fringe. Whilst not exceptional, the Essene Meditation was not the norm of social organisation in the Network. The three religious traditions looked at in this chapter are groups providing

the formative element from which nonformativeness was established.

This chapter has sought to explore the concept of nonformativeness through a comparison of the Nottinghamshire Network with other religious traditions with which networkers were involved. Through this, it has reconsidered sociological accounts of the transition between different sorts of religious phenomena and suggested how the Network is to be understood in terms of these. Some issues have also been raised concerning the relationship of nonformative spirituality to wider society, for example the issue of who became interested in spiritualism and Theosophy. Some ideas about this are discussed in the Conclusion, as the class and kinship identities of networkers are considered. This helps an understanding of the seemingly broad existence and long persistence of nonformative spirituality, such that some comments may be drawn on its likely fate.

CONCLUSION

1. Kinship and Class Identities

The concern of this Thesis has been to delineate structures of power in the Nottinghamshire Network and thereby suggest how a category of contemporary religious phenomena, named nonformative, is to be understood. Various contexts were explored ethnographically, with attention paid to their performances and the way in which discourse was socially contextualised. The variety of authorities within these was understood in terms of the exercise of seekership by participants, such that their biographies were important for understanding interactions. In this way, ritual meaning was seen to be idiosyncratic. However, a number of practices were seen to exist in relation to channelling, emphasising the centrality of spirit possession to the Network and pointing to a structure which could be used to understand the various groups in terms of a common phenomenon. Nonformative spirituality poses a problem for sociological analysis, so needs to be carefully distinguished from other religious groups.

Comparison of the Network with three other religious traditions allowed a better identification of its social organisation. This Conclusion seeks to widen debate once more by tentatively considering the place of nonformative spirituality within British society. To do this, issues of kinship and class identities are looked at, before some comments are made on the likely fate of such spirituality.

The ethnography for this Thesis presents quite a different picture of the social status of

nonformative spiritualists than do many analyses of the New Age Movement or related phenomena. In her ethnography in London, Eileen Barker found that, "it is frequently those in occupations where job satisfaction and control over one's life would appear to be greater than average that one finds the most active adherents to New Age beliefs and practices" (1994:336). Thus she rejected the explanation that, "in a society in which people's lives are increasingly fragmented, where individuals are often cut from the ties of the family by geographical and social mobility, and where their work is oriented according to the material, rational goals of others, there is a need for a feeling of being 'at source'" (336).

Likewise, Beckford placed the success of new religious healing movements within their context of the urban, white, professional, scientifically-minded, educated middle-class (1984:266-267). His extension of this to a Filipino context (Beckford and Suzara, 1994:120-123, 127-128), suggests that his thesis uses a notion of contemporary global capitalism which requires an empowered middle-class to thrive. This may be compared to Westley's paper on Durkheim's prediction that, "modern individualized man would find expression in "the cult of man" - a cult in which the human individual (idealized) and his human rights would be held sacred" (Westley, 1978:137). The clientele of such a cult would come from a specialised class of workers who believed in their uniqueness and having nothing in common (137-138). Westley located this in the modern middle-class, who have no family or ethnic affiliation, are geographically mobile, and scientifically-minded (140). He applied such a scheme to two new religious movements (142-144), one of which, Silva Mind Control, frequently figures in New Age studies (as in Heelas, 1996:32, 63, 78).

The middle-class location of spiritualities this Thesis considers nonformative, is taken to reflect new religious movements in general, as well as the counterculture, as in Harris

(1977:178-185), Preston (1988:21), Wallis (1976:5, 56, 163-165) and Whitehead (1987:40).

However, of more interest to this Thesis are Nelson's remarks concerning spiritualism.

Although he held that the movement was not limited to one class and therefore not a religion of the oppressed (1969:24, 220-221), Nelson pointed out that its main constituency came from the upper working-class and the lower middle-class (143, 264-265). The reasons for this, he explained, lay in the social mobility prevalent in American and British society during the decades of the movement's rise, characterised by rapid industrialisation and increased education, which served to disrupt social ties and social order (59-73, 259-260).

The similarities between spiritualism and nonformative spirituality, attested in the last chapter, suggests that Nelson's analysis may be relevant for the latter. Like spiritualism, nonformative spirituality has, at its centre, a form of spirit possession, channelling. But, despite the many links between the two phenomena discovered through fieldwork and textual study, spiritualism had a tendency to greater social authority through its concentration on mediumship. The similarity, however, is worth pursuing through the notion of social mobility.

In spite of the predictions of the above analysts regarding the New Age, those in the Nottinghamshire Network were found not to be middle-class, but were predominantly lower middle-class mobile professionals. Thus, many people, such as Chris Lovell, Andrew Spencer, Bob, Michael and Charles, could be described as middle managers. Others held jobs which existed within career structures of professionalisation, such as police constable, personal assistant, civil service secretary, accountant and social worker. Despite the variety of these occupations, it was notable that the manual working-class, small business owners, the middle-class and the upper-class were under-represented. Thus, for examples, no

unskilled labourers, cashiers, teachers, lecturers or lawyers were met during fieldwork. The constituency was also almost exclusively white, despite a large presence of other ethnic groups in the area. However, at the spiritualist healings and Occult Study Group, there were many more people from the working-class. Alvin worked as a hospital porter, Irene as a house cleaner, Martin and Peter as casual labourers, and Susan as a home-help for a care agency. This corresponds with Simes' discovery of the prevalence of working-class occupations amongst pagans in the East Midlands (1995).

The lower middle-class status of people in the Network suggests a social condition whereby they were caught between working-class insecurity and middle-class aspirations of professionalism, the effects of which are now considered. The importance of mobility to new forms of religion was recognised by Cox in his essay on secularisation (1968:64-66). Akin to this, in an early article, Luckmann and Berger described the effects of social mobility on the relationship individuals have with society, applying this to the skilled labour classes of North America and Europe (1964). They argued that the resulting "*uncertainty of status*" (1964:334) throws them back onto their private lives, "to discover a presumed "*essential identity*"" (337). This highlights the context of the lower middle-class, who, in the nineteen-nineties, may be identified with the earlier skilled labour class and who aim for, but usually do not attain, middle-class status. Self-identity is clearly important here, but its analysis must not be dislocated from the material conditions in which it is formulated.

These issues of social mobility, where career and geographical changes must be considered alongside Luckmann and Berger's focus on class-climbing, or *embourgeoisement* (1964:332), are all factors that establish a context whereby seekership may be regularly employed, allowing for the experience of dissonance. However, as previous chapters have sought to show, the

recourse to self that is often taken as the characteristic of nonformative spirituality rests largely on a textual analysis. In contrast to this formulation, fieldwork suggested that it is new social locations that participants seek. This could explain why it was particularly the lower middle-class who may become nonformative spiritualists. Social mobility has disrupted their social location in structures of authority, which is reflected in participation with groups which lack established social power. This may be contrasted to the working-class and middle-class who, by existing within more formative social conditions of employment, engage with more formative spiritualities, such as spiritualism or paganism. However, social mobility does not affect only work relations.

Although more research is needed to clarify the issue further, it seemed as if the main area in which this process was carried out was that of kin relations, which are a major casualty of social mobility. Several people in the Network had begun their spiritual seekership with difficult relationships with partners or parents. The Spencers' spiritualities had flourished at a time when they were experiencing severe problems with their spouses, eventually leading to divorces. Michelle's spiritual experiences may also be compared to her relationships, with her mother and husband. Although very close to her mother, their relationship was ambiguous, with her mother warning her against involvement in the Anglican Church. It is significant that very soon after her mother's death, Michelle sought to contact her through spiritualism, and succeeded in meeting her on the astral plane. Spiritualism often allowed a way into dealing with relatives' deaths, as seen for Alvin, which could lead to nonformative involvement. People were able to use these spiritualities to reconstruct normative ties with kin.

The importance of kinship for understanding nonformative spirituality may be considered

by three different foci, which, however, are not peculiar to nonformative spirituality. These are sexual partners, parents, and motifs in beliefs and rituals. First, the importance of the other partner in someone's involvement with nonformative spiritualities was not just a matter of domestic convenience. In the groups studied, roughly a quarter of all participants were couples and once their life histories were investigated, there was found to be a recurring pattern of development of partnership alongside development of spirituality, as, for examples, for the Lovells and the Spencers. Second, there was evidence of shared spirituality between parents and children: the Lovells' children attended a Steiner school, Christine's children were christened in a special ceremony led by the Lovells, and both Michelle, her daughter and Alvin followed their parents' or grandparents' involvement with spiritualism, believing that the gift of sensitivity to the spirit world had been handed down to them.

Although these examples show the presence of family in people's spiritual developments, the importance of kinship identity was further attested by the many kin motifs that featured in beliefs and rituals. This is not surprising given the Christian cultures of the countries in which nonformative spirituality exists, which emphasises kin relations, as shown by Jack Goody (1990:194). This matched the spiritual developments of many of those in the network, who often had quite extensive contact with Christian churches earlier in their lives, had left those to pursue practices not countenanced by the churches, but did not reject many elements of Christian spirituality. A common theme during rituals was the imagined resolution of family and relationship troubles. This was articulated through symbols, for examples at the Essene Meditation regarding the "Earth Mother" and in Michelle's private practice of past-life visualisation. The manipulation of symbols of kin that therefore took place during ritual times of imagination, could be reflected in people's discourse afterwards,

thus allowing a shared construction of reality in which problems with kin, and their resolution, were seen as spiritually significant.

This discussion suggests that many nonformative spiritualists were marked by the dilemmas of contemporary capitalist mobility, which created severe interpersonal problems that needed to be addressed. Thus, although the Network should be distinguished from the reactions of peoples disempowered by colonialism, as investigated by Lanternari (1963) and Wilson (1975), there were some similarities with these, which may explain the centrality of spirit possession, in the form of channelling, as also in the recent uses of shamanism by the lower middle-class in South Korea (Kendall, 1996).

This debate may be concluded by suggesting that the heightened concern with kinship in nonformative spirituality has come about through the disestablishment of the family, due to increased social mobility in employment, caused by the flexibility that is increasingly demanded in contemporary capitalist economies (Kumar, 1995:59). But whilst increasing numbers of families may be broken up, links between them remain as potential sources of power which are regularly fed and occasionally utilised. Thus, Heelas was right to focus both on the importance of contradictions of capitalism for what he called the New Age movement (1996:135-152) and on the resources with which they provide people (1993). Like kin relations (Young and Willmott, 1976 [1957]), nonformative spirituality is built out of flexible networks to which individuals frequently turn during the course of their spiritual careers. These extensive webs of strongly meaningful human interactions, in which identities are founded and persons thereby formed, thereby come to address the problems which led to seekership in the first place.

2. The Fate of Nonformative Spirituality

In contrast to Melton (1988:51) and in agreement with York (1994:14) on the New Age Movement, there is little reason to believe that nonformative spirituality will soon disappear. As both Hanegraaff (1995) and Sutcliffe (1997:102-105) pointed out, the phenomena upon which this is built form a tradition that is at least a century old. However, in line with the above debate, it is not the continued prevalence of either western esotericism or a cultic milieu that leads to such a view, rather than the continued effect of capitalism to alienate people from each other (Marx, 1972:133-145 [from manuscripts written in 1844]). For reasons which require greater investigation, it is particularly in forms of spirit possession that reaction to such alienation appears to take place.

Although Marx perceived in capitalism the ground for the emergence of communism (Marx and Engels, 1967 [first published in German, 1872]:89-90), his view of alienation was entirely negative. However, the dilemmas which capitalism presents to people have become increasingly apparent since the mid-twentieth century, through the greater wealth attained by the skilled working-class and lower middle-class in America and western Europe. Alienation, as social mobility, offers the opportunity to benefit from capitalism, even if such benefit is sporadic, impermanent and often illusory. The recent rise of nonformative spirituality, as compared to formative spiritualities which draw from similar religious traditions, perhaps reflects this situation. The last decades of the twentieth century have been increasingly problematic for the lower middle-class, as the "Golden Age" of post-Second World War capitalism waned (Hobsbawm, 1994:285-286), thus making access to wealth even more difficult. One reflection of this, it may be said, was an increase in interest in nonformative spirituality by certain sectors of society. Regarding the discourse of this,

attention may be drawn again to Adorno's analysis of astrology, which he perceived as dealing with alienation in employment (1994:71-77), although no strict comparison can be made between his study and that of nonformative spiritualists. In such a situation, nonformative spirituality, paradoxically, perhaps has a better chance of survival than formative groups, for it is flexible and adaptable, and thus able to draw on varieties of religious traditions, including those of other cultures as they are appropriated by western cultural hegemony.

The fragmentation of contemporary society, commonly characterised as postmodern (Bauman, 1992), may be seen as facilitating against the institutionalisation of charisma for many groups. Thus, cults and sects do not appear to arise from nonformative spiritualities. This helps explain the absence of the rise of millenarian groups towards the year 2000 from within nonformative spiritual networks. As this Thesis has explained, the persistence of nonformative spirituality poses a particular problem for the sociology of religion, especially if it is not to be seen as a temporary manifestation. One way to investigate such phenomena has been to turn to postmodernist analysis (Lyon, 1993). However, the methodological problems with such an approach coupled with its neglect of a proper understanding of past sociologies (Gellner, 1992:23-35), means that, like traditional sociologies, the social contextualisation of power is not adequately appreciated. It is only by addressing this issue that analysis of nonformative spirituality can progress and this must, eventually, be tied in with a better understanding of power relations in modern capitalist society.

Nonformative spirituality does not continue to exist due to the presence of groups rather than the dynamic context caused by seekers, which leads to the emergence of tendencies

to organise groups, workshops and fairs. This continual flux of people and groups meant that such organisation did not result in formative settings. Although not found in fieldwork, it may be surmised that if such formation did occur, the clientele would change or a dual membership would exist, as at the Anthroposophical Society. In conclusion, it may be said that nonformative spirituality is unlikely to disappear until the broad social conditions in Britain change.

This Thesis has investigated three issues of particular importance to the sociology of religion, by drawing on both anthropological and sociological theory. First, the nature of nonformativeness as distinguished from the formative establishment of power. Second, the structure of spiritual practice in nonformative spirituality as regards channelling, meditation, divination and holistic health therapies. Third, methods for investigating such spirituality in terms of careers of seekership, networks and the establishment of social power through bodily performance. Through these issues, it is hoped that the Nottinghamshire Network has been presented in a manner which allows it to be sociologically appreciated, thereby beginning to redress the problems inherent in the characterisation of nonformative spirituality as a New Age Movement.

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