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All people have bodies. Finite vessels of reason and desire, our bodies grow and wane, sicken and heal, age and finally die. We fear this decay, this death. When we sense our bodies weakening, we seek drugs, doctors, hospitals--all the machinery of modern institutional medicine--to keep us from our fate. And when the inevitable looms, we turn to religion as a final midwife, to usher us to the bodiless darkness that we can no longer flee.

This, at least, is how the medical and religious establishments would have us divide their labor: biomedicine to rule the body, religion to rule the soul. Yet neither really stays on its side of the line. As doctors are often accused of playing God, so God frequently plays doctor. People turn to religion not just to salve their emotional torment in the face of their end, but to heal their bodies and quench their physical suffering in a renewed fleshly life.

Is this blind hope, as conventional medicine would have us believe? Or is it effective, as the legions of spiritual healers, prayer-mongers, faith curers, televangelists and their followers claim? So far, religious healing has resisted scientific tests of its potency, not the least because we cannot control all of
the relevant variables. While we can perhaps measure some cures—and that is problematic—we cannot measure the means by which they are achieved. Theists note that even heart-felt prayer cannot compel God’s response; this makes hash of a science that rests on reproducible results. More technically minded spiritualists can find no measure for the inner attentiveness on which they believe their forms of healing depend.

The road to scientific proof seems thus to be blocked by the differing ideas with which science and religion approach the healing enterprise. The former treats bodies as if they were isolated machines: complex and primarily physical, though subject to some psychological forces. The latter treats bodies as if they were containers for souls, which are the real recipients of therapy. Each resists the other’s definition of the problem; neither can be proved or disproved except in terms of its own ideology. This conceptual gulf is not bridgeable, nor can it be wished away.

There are other gulfs, too, even among the spiritualists. Not all faith healers agree on the nature of the body, on their own task, nor on the forces effective in curing people. Various groups put forth conflicting interpretations of their own healing efforts, as well as diverse assessments of others’. Indeed, not all those within any one identifiable spiritual healing tradition agree on what they are doing.

Yet their differences are not just haphazard. As I shall try to show in this chapter, spiritual healing is mediated by culture: by the root notions of the universe that people share as a result of their participation in particular societies at particular times and places. People from different healing traditions have different ideas about health and illness, about the body, and so on. And people who share the same tradition may also see the body, illness, and healing in quite different ways.

In line with the theme of this volume, I shall explore the role culture plays in people’s ideas of spiritual healing and its relationship to the body.¹ I shall use my field research on a Japanese-American healing church to illustrate the ways in which culturally based ideas of therapy influence both people’s ideas and their actions. Then I shall briefly note some similarities I found in later fieldwork within the U.S. transpersonal healing movement. These examples should make the role of culture in spiritual healing clear.

I want, however, to go beyond this anthropological truism. What anthropologist, after all, will deny the importance of culture—that central intellectual category of our discipline? Yet there are some anomalies. Modern culture worships science, but spiritual healers usually reject the form of science on which modern medicine depends. This would make sense were they anti-modernist yahoos—cultural relics of ages past. Yet they are not. They are often fully involved in modern life: middle and upper-middle class urban and sub-urban professionals, whom science expects to “know better”. They are not anti-modern rustics; they live in modernity’s belly. Their cultural criticism of scientific medicine cannot be dismissed as out of step with their age.

I shall argue here that much spiritual healing does not reject modernity, but consummates it. The current proliferation of spiritual healing groups is driven precisely by their cultural modernism—by the fact that they are at the cutting edge of certain modern trends. What those trends are, and how spiritual healing groups fulfill them, will be clearer by the chapter’s end. To begin, I shall justify the importance of considering culture as a factor in spiritual healing by describing the beliefs and practices of the Japanese-American healing church that I investigated, and then showing those beliefs’ and practices’ underlying cultural content.

**Sekai Kyusei-Kyo**

The Church of World Messianity (Sekai Kyusei-kyo in Japanese) is one of some 700 new religions founded in Japan in the last two centuries.² Scholars locate it in the Omoto group: a family of churches
originating in the early 1900s. All are syncretic, incorporating elements of Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity. Most emphasize healing, and several focus on world transformation. Mahikari, an off-shoot of World Messianity, is probably the best known to the English-speaking public. Besides being prominent in Japan, World Messianity has missionized Brazil and Thailand, where there are large Japanese immigrant populations. And it has established branch churches in the United States, where it appeals to a mixed Japanese-American and Anglo-American population. I studied its branch church in San Francisco, California for nearly two years in the mid-1970s, and have updated my information periodically since then.

First, let's learn something about the religion. Mokichi Okada, World Messianity's founder, claimed in 1926 to have received a revelation from Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Beauty. Among other things, he was told that the world was about to undergo a spiritual transformation, which would involve great suffering but would bring about great redemption. In essence, God was going to purify the world of the sins and darkness accumulated during the last 2000 years of the "Age of Night". The messiah for that epoch--Jesus Christ--had brought people the tools they needed to survive God's eclipse during that era. Now the "Age of Day" was dawning. God's fire was clearing away the spiritual clouds that had prevented His light from reaching the Earth. People needed to be prepared for the coming purification, and Okada claimed to have been given the tools to help them.

One of these tools was "The Church That Will Save The World"--Sekai Kyusei-kyo's literal translation. Okada taught that his church would combine the best aspects of East and West into a movement that would transform the world and save its peoples. But the primary tool of this salvation was a ritual practice, johrei. First, Okada discovered that he could channel invisible "light" out of the palms of his hands, projecting it over people's bodies. Like God's light, he taught that this "light" dissolved the clouds on people's spiritual bodies (souls). These clouds not only separated people from God; they were also the source of disease and misfortune. After repeated johrei, people got over their illnesses and led happier and more productive lives. With training, they learned to give johrei themselves, becoming channels for God's purification of the world.

In the mid-1930s, after several more revelations, Okada began giving his followers silk bags to wear around their necks, each containing a slip of paper with the Japanese characters for johrei written on them. At the time of my fieldwork 40 years later, these bags were being replaced with small lockets. Visitors to the church would receive johrei, either one-on-one from a member or en masse during a church service. If they wanted to join, they would take a series of classes on church history and theology, then would be given a bag or locket and told to give johrei to others.

Understanding the church history and theology didn't seem to matter much to one's ability to give johrei. During my fieldwork I took some of the introductory classes in Japanese, of which I understand nothing; after receiving my silk bag, I still found that I could give johrei effectively. Not that I or any church member was the source of this "light"; the church taught that we were merely "channels" for God's light, which held the real power. Any member could "channel" johrei to another individual, but only a minister could give mass-johrei to a group. The strength of one's johrei was said to depend on one's spiritual clarity: the more clouds one had on one's own spiritual body, the less johrei got through to the recipients. As an uncommitted anthropological observer, my own johrei was weak; that channeled by Okada's daughter, who was the spiritual head of the church at the time of my fieldwork, felt much stronger. The ministers that I experienced were somewhere in between.

In a one-on-one johrei session, the channeler and recipient sit facing each other about two feet apart, if the latter is well enough to do so. Both close their eyes and try to reach a point of inner stillness. Then the channeler raises her or his hand, and points its palm toward the recipient's head. The channeler then slowly moves this hand downward, all the while visualizing light flowing through her or
his body and emerging from the palm. One is supposed to take about 10 minutes to cover the front half of the body, after which time the recipient turns around and another 10 minutes is taken with the back. When one is done, the recipient turns around, both bow, and the session is over.

What does such johrei feel like? The church describes it as an invisible "light", which neither I nor anyone I encountered claimed to be able to see. One could, however, feel it, particularly after repeated johrei sessions. Givers reported feeling a heat in the center of their palms, which varied in strength depending on the occasion. Recipients reported feeling a heat or pressure just under their skins, moving downward across the body in time with the channeler's hand. Some people's foreheads were sensitive, and some reported seeing flashes of light behind their closed eyes when facing directly into the channeler's hand. Many reported standing taller after the back treatment--"spiritual chiroprac-

try" some members called it. Though not every visitor sensed johrei physically, members who did de-
scribed a single phenomenon.

I can neither confirm nor deny johrei’s curative power, though all or nearly all church members believed that it could heal. Monthly church meetings always included testimonies of how God had helped people's lives, and these often included reports of restored health. Many were clearly second-

hand miracle stories, passed-down accounts of cures in the church's early days or of recent healing events at the Sacred Grounds in Japan. Reports of major cures must be balanced against the belief that johrei could cause minor illnesses. As God’s light dissolved the clouds from one’s spiritual body, these clouds emerged from the physical body as head colds, diarrhea, and other emissions. If one came to church with a cold, one could expect to be congratulated on having "successful purification". I did ob-
serve, however, the spontaneous draining of a spinal cyst during one johrei session. The member in question had been in severe pain for weeks, and had received no help from standard medicine. Her cyst burst while she was receiving johrei--at the precise point at which the channeler's hand was pointing at the cyst's location. The event was talked about for weeks in the local church as an example of God's abil-

ity to work miracles. The drained puss was exhibited as "dissolved clouds". The whole event was seen as proof of the power of the spiritual over the physical.

Members Interpret Johrei

Yet the reality or unreality of johrei does not concern me here; I am pursuing another issue. Though all church members practiced johrei, and all agreed on the general outlines of church theology, the various cultural subgroups that made up the San Francisco branch of the church interpreted both johrei and that theology quite differently from one another. On examination, johrei is not one phenomenon, but three, because each of the church's cultural subgroups constituted it differently. I shall describe the contrasting theologies and johreis of Japanese-American members, older Caucasian members, and younger counter-
cultural members in turn.

Like many immigrant churches, World Messianity originally sought out transplanted natives in its efforts to missionize North America. At the time of my research, the church was strongest in Hawaii and on the West Coast, where the Japanese-American population is concentrated. It had established major centers in Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Vancouver, with branches in other locales. More than half of its active members were second-generation Japanese-Americans. This generation had largely Americanized, but it had not lost all of its Japanese roots. Many members had not, for example, fully adopted the Western medical model of healing, though they no longer practiced their parents' folk medicine. Similar cultural mixtures abound. Having overcome the poverty of the first-generation immi-
grants, they saw themselves as a bridge between East and West. Japanese values plus American flexibil-
ity combined the best of both in their eyes.
Theologically, Japanese-American church members saw themselves as the embodiment of World Messianity's stated desire to combine the strengths of East and West into a world-saving movement. The church's isunome principle—which sought to unify Japanese hierarchy (shojo) with American equality (daio)—reinforced and valued their bi-cultural identity. Indeed, it proclaimed that identity to be of world-historical significance. It seems natural that this church would appeal ideologically to Japanese-Americans who found themselves as part of two cultures, yet wholly in neither.

Yet the church's main appeal to these members was not ideological; instead it was johrei. Rather than focusing on church theology, Japanese-American members were remarkably practical about the source of their adherence: johrei gave them physical well-being. More than any other members, they bragged about not needing doctors and not needing either Eastern or Western medicine. "We rely on God to keep us healthy," they said. They would describe in great detail the physical ailments johrei had prevented and the sicknesses it had saved them from. As one member put it, "johrei is like God's vitamin pill: a little dose everyday keeps you going for a long time."

In fact, these members defined johrei as a source of physical healing—and as that alone. Though they acknowledged church doctrines about the coming Age of Day and the role that johrei was to play in its advent, in practice they paid such doctrines little heed. They imaged johrei as a supernatural medical tool, by which God reached directly into their bodies. This emphasis on the body and physical healing fits Japanese religious culture better than it does American. An early Japanese missionary described the difficulties she had talking to Americans, whom she found prudish. She would talk about how johrei improves one's ability to excrete and they would blush and ask her to clarify an arcane point about Okada's revelations. Japanese-Americans were much better attuned to her corporeal emphasis, so she quickly learned to talk about different parts of church teachings to different audiences. (Hearing her describe church teachings to various groups of members first suggested to me the different cultural emphases I am describing here.)

World Messianity described johrei to Japanese-Americans in a biological idiom; it was as a physical cure that Japanese-American members responded to it. They used it to heal the sick and to protect the well, just as mainstream Americans use doctors and medicines. The above-quoted member's vitamin image aptly describes this group's approach.

Yet not all Japanese-Americans were attracted to this religion. Of those who were, most were the American-born daughters and sons of immigrants. Their parents' generation was still "too Japanese" to accept the church's innovations. World Messianity was, after all, a new Japanese religion; it borrowed elements of Shinto and Buddhism but transformed them thoroughly. Those Japanese-Americans who wanted ties to the old country were more apt to follow traditional Japanese religions; those who did not follow the old ways often Americanized completely. World Messianity only appealed to those in the second generation that wanted to combine a tie to the old with an openness to the new.

A second major group of church members was made up of older Caucasians. Somewhat less than one-third of the total membership, this group was less tied to the church than were the Japanese-Americans. Indeed, they were often active participants in other religions and mystical groups, dividing their time between World Messianity and other religious organizations. Most had come to the church later in life, after a period of religious seeking. Most had experimented with groups making up what Campbell has called "the cultic milieu" groups like anthroposophists and theosophists, who taught the unity of all "wisdom traditions" and the importance of seeing to the esoteric heart of any religion one espoused.
These members looked at Japan as outsiders, but as appreciative ones. They valued the age and depth of her religious culture, which they contrasted favorably with that of the United States. They believed that Japan had much to teach Americans in spiritual matters. Yet they were not simply attracted by the exotic, by World Messianity "Japaneseness". Rather, they sought the "eternal essence of religion" that they perceived within the church, and which they believed was the culmination of centuries of world religious evolution. Church leaders spoke of World Messianity as fulfilling the promise of previous religions; this resonated with these members. They believed that American Christianity had lost sight of religion's spiritual universality and had become parochial, divisive, and materialistic. Though they recognized certain Christians as "great teachers", they were put off by Christian exclusivism. Only a religion that recognized the validity of other paths could bring about the New Age.

Unlike the Japanese-Americans, these older White members defined johrei spiritually: as "prayer in action". For them, it was religious, not physical. Johrei is no mere medical technique, they said. It cleans spiritual clouds, not just physical illnesses. It demands purity of heart and thought to work; with such inner purity, the channeler can become a clear conduit for God's light streaming into the world.

In line with their spirituality and with the Western identification of spirituality with generosity, they believed that "it is better to give than to receive", and thus emphasized the giving of johrei to others more than receiving it themselves. These members focused their "miracle" stories less on physical than on attitudinal cures. Rather than attributing someone's better health to johrei, they would tell tales of spiritual breakthroughs, inner realizations that made people more open, more peaceful, more willing to accept the unity of the world. Physical cure was possible, and they believed that johrei sometimes could bring this about. But they attributed the world's problems to people's materialism and closed-mindedness. This was the "disease" against which they sought to use johrei as a cure.

As a result, these members did not think that their church was the only one working to bring about the "Age of Day", nor did they think that their path was the only honorable one. A story about a johrei-induced inner transformation that had led someone to affirm a spiritually open Christianity was just as valid to them as a story about a miracle cure that brought in a new adherent. To many, it was more valid. In their eyes, inner cures mattered more than outer ones. They defined johrei as God's light reaching into the soul.

The third major group of members was made up of younger Caucasians, most of whom had been involved in the San Francisco "hippie" movement of the late 1960s. They had typically been more influenced by that movement's cultural rebellion than by its politics, though they shared its anti-establishment leanings. Several were current or former communards. Some were former drug users, though not heavy ones; unlike reports of some converts to other new religions, these members did not seem to be using World Messianity to "go straight". Like the two previous groups, these younger members were primarily attracted to the church by johrei. They first encountered the church through it, they joined in order to learn to give it, and they stayed members because it was, for them, the best source of this kind of "energy". Yet they, too, interpreted johrei and its workings within their own cultural context.

More than the other groups, these members focused on Okada's doctrine of the coming "new age". The San Francisco counter-culture of their era was the heartland of the "Age of Aquarius": the "consciousness revolution" that adherents believed would create a new Eden and a renewed Earth. These members saw the church as teaching the same thing--and giving them a concrete tool for bringing that age to fruition.

These members defined johrei as a universal tool for spiritual cleansing--but of groups and of the world, not just of individuals. Their uses of it say much about how they saw it, especially because they used it differently than either of the two other types of members. Convinced of its practical utility,
they took it into everyday life: to their homes and families, to their friends, to street corners, and to counter-cultural fairs. They would use it openly when they could, covertly when they could not; several members told of "zapping" their bosses surreptitiously to clear up "bad karma" in the workplace. Some gave *johrei* in hospitals; others focused it on garbage dumps and pesticide-strewn fields. They justified their ecological cloud-clearing with Japanese examples: Okada, after all, had advocated "nature farming", which eliminated all fertilizers in favor of water and "God's Light" to purify crops. Environmental degradation was like sickness to these members: the result of spiritual clouds. The more *johrei* they channeled, the better, no matter what its object.

Like the other two groups, these counter-cultural members focused on spiritual healing--but their notion of what needed healing was different. They used *johrei* against bodily illness, yet thought that curing such illness was epiphenomenal to bringing about the Age of Day. They agreed that *johrei* raised individuals' "spiritual vibrations", but thought that individual spiritual growth was a side-effect of changing the world. They focused, in short, on the world-transformative elements of World Messianity's theology. And they saw *johrei* as giving them a role in that transformation. For them, it was the world as a whole that needed cure.

**Culture and Healing**

Thus World Messianity's central healing practice attracted an assortment of adherents. Each of these groups of converts defined *johrei* somewhat differently, interpreting it through the lenses of their previous cultural dispositions. Each group drew on official church theology to support its views, emphasizing those elements that fit with its cultural predispositions while playing down others. In another publication, I have described the splits that developed along these cultural fault lines during World Messianity's "Reunification Movement" of the mid-1970s. That movement transformed the church, largely by making it more difficult for members to interpret *johrei* in non-institutionally approved ways. The loose interpretive detente that existed at the beginning of the 1970s had vanished by the end of it, suppressed by the Japanese hierarchy's attempt to enforce their party line. Significantly, most members chose their culture over their church membership; an estimated 85% left during the Reunification years.

I do not intend to recount these events again here. Instead, I wish to explore what we can learn from this case about the relationship between spiritual healing and culture.

Clearly, people can engage in "the same" healing practice without agreeing about its meaning or about its extended attributes -- the constellation of related phenomena that people think are connected to it. Japanese-American church members used *johrei* to maintain disease-free bodies, "cultic milieu"-identified members used *johrei* for personal spiritual growth, and counter-cultural members used *johrei* to transform their social and physical world. Each was "healing" what she or he thought was important; that importance was specified by pre-existing cultural allegiances, rather than by the healing practice itself or by any unified church doctrine. This is true despite the fact that church members agreed about *johrei* phenomenologically, and acknowledged that others were also "doing *johrei*". But if one asked members what "doing *johrei*" meant, one would get radically different answers.

This is normal: culture governs healing practices, and determines "what happens" in healing situations. I do not mean that it determines outcomes in any physical sense--though it may well do so. I mean that spiritual healing does not happen in the abstract; it happens in the midst of a universe of cultural interpretation, which tells participants what is going on. Culture gives healing acts meaning; it tells participants (and us) what those acts are.

This is true, by the way, for all the cultural participants in the case--including ourselves. Though we might want to find out what is "really going on" with *johrei*, we cannot do so. There is in principle no way to demonstrate whether *johrei* is "really" curing the body as the Japanese-American members...
claim, or whether its physical symptoms are side-effects of increased spiritual awareness, as the "cultic-milieu" members avow, or of an impending world transformation to the "Age of Aquarius".

That is, there is no culturally independent way to discover this; any attempt to specify johrei's "reality" is as culture-laden as any of the three interpretations I have described. It is no more possible for us to privilege an outsider's view than it is to privilege World Messianity's Japanese-American, occultists, or hippies. Johrei-as-done-by-us might well see itself as a universal physical energy that can bring about healing. But johrei-as-done-by-them sees itself as purifying the spiritual body, or the spirit, or the Earth. Each interpretation is cultural. Each interpretation tells its practitioners--both us and them--what is going on.

The influence of culture is just as clear in the transpersonal healing movement--a neo-academic network of modern psychological professionals trying to use "ancient wisdom" to cure modern ills. Several years ago I spent some time at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology in Menlo Park, California, teaching social-scientific research methods and observing the "natives". Their chosen culture exposes them to an eclectic blend of therapies, each of which is believed to promote some form of physical, emotional/mental, and spiritual healing. (The three are not separated in transpersonalist philosophy.) Alongside the standard courses on Freudian, Jungian, and humanistic psychologies are those on Tarot, the Enneagram, the religions of "native peoples", "spiritual emergences", Tai-Chi, Aikido, acupressure, Reiki, healing touch, and so on. The annual meeting of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology adds workshops on storytelling-as-healing, inner and outer mysticism, Buddhism and Eastern religions, traditional Chinese medicine, crystals, and Gurdjieff work, just to name a few of the more easily recognized topics. Each of these is seen as a "path of transformation", which heals the "inner self" of life's wounds. Some of that healing is physical; some is psychological and social. All forms of healing are believed to move toward the same end--the creation of whole, autonomous, spiritual individuals, free from "superstition" and ready to greet whatever Life offers.

Transpersonalist healers do not recognize that their approach to the world is cultural. Instead, they think it corresponds to "the way things are". They see culture as an exterior shell, standing between people and truth. They believe that one has only to pierce that shell to get to the "essential wisdom" that they think all people share. The subject of that wisdom is healing, specifically how to heal souls--a task they believe psychology has inherited from religion. Rejecting body-mind dualism, they believe that healing souls equals healing bodies; thus massage therapy (for example) is a psychological as well as a physical tool. Healing "the spirit" is part and parcel of what they do.

Transpersonalists' essentialism informs their choices. In studying Japanese Buddhism, therefore, they study Zen, not Soko Gakai; they believe the latter to be trapped in belief and ritual, whereas Zen captures Buddhism's essence. Similarly, they study the Native American teachings of Black Elk, in which they see an "essence" that approaches the "essence" of Christianity stripped of what they believe to be 2000 years of churchly encrustations. (They do not realize that Black Elk's "white buffalo woman" imagery is influenced by his long-time association with the Catholic priests who were his translators.) Acupressure is separated from its origins in Chinese medicine, except in so far as the principles of that medicine are interpreted "essentially": as culturally limited glimpses of a truth that transpersonalists posit underlies all forms of healing.

The irony, of course, is that this essentialism is inherently Protestant. It corresponds to the Reformation's desire to overthrow "empty" Catholic ritual and "return to the essence" of Christianity. It, too, reflects a cultural outlook. To see the world through its eyes is to see a world interpreted by culture. It is not, as it claims, to see the world raw.
Like the members of World Messianity, transpersonal healers have a culturally particular philosophy which tells them what they are doing in their healing sessions. For them, body is closely tied with spirit, but the latter is usually interpreted as a form of universal energy. Physical therapy can help the body only if it helps free this energy, which practitioners believe must be kept in some kind of natural balance. The healing practices that transpersonalists favor work to restore this energy balance, either directly through the body or by means of psycho-emotional release. This can include spiritual healing, at least in so far as that healing denies any claim to exclusive truth. Most transpersonalists see Christian spiritual healing as culture-encrusted; if they work with it, they try to free it from what they see as its culturally particular form.

This willingness to work with many healing practices typifies transpersonalists' culture, but hides the degree to which they transform those practices as they use them. Specifically, they attempt to remove all healing practices from their cultures of origin, and graft them to a transpersonalist world view. This is no different from the efforts of the "cultic milieu" members of World Messianity to see their religion as expressing the essence of all the world's great traditions. Nor does it differ from the efforts of the "Age of Aquarius" members to see it as a tool for world renewal. Nor, in fact, is it any different from the efforts of the Japanese-American members to emphasize a johrei focused on bodily healing. All are cultural constructions. All interpret their healing practices in terms of their previously developed views of the world.

**Healing and Modernity**

Healing thus depends on culture—a traditional anthropological view. But can we say anything more than this? Can we make any generalizations about spiritual and other non-standard forms of in the West as we approach the 21st century? I think we can, and I want to sketch some of those generalizations here.

I have elsewhere argued that late-modern religious identity is different from the religious identity of previous eras. Modern people do not merely accept the identities passed down by church authorities. Instead, they construct their own senses of self out of bits and pieces of official and non-official cultural elements. They construct their religions and their identities simultaneously, coming to see themselves as religious in a way that gives meaning to their individual lives. James Beckford, on whose work many of my ideas are based, points out that religion today is more of a cultural resource than it is a social institution. It provides the images, symbols and meanings from which each individual can reflexively construct a religious identity. And it offers a sense of community (albeit not a society-wide monopolistic one) in which those meanings are articulated, supported, experientially confirmed, transformed, and expressed. My research on the identities of religious social activists confirms this view.

Anthony Giddens notes that this is true of most of modern culture. In a radical updating of Durkheim's Division of Labor, he proposes that the changed structure of modern social institutions requires a new pattern of self-identity based on greater reflexiveness and freedom of choice. Whereas members of traditional societies found their identities through their social roles, which were relatively stable, modern individuals are just that: individuals who must find their own ways and identities in a shifting world. Early modernity opened up the identity-creation process by dissolving the ties that bound people to place, to work and to kin. Late modernity has accelerated these changes. Marriage and family, ethnicity, and other important components of self-identity have become ever more open and malleable. One's gender roles, even one's biological sex, are now matters of individual decision. The consequences for the process of personal identity-formation are immense. Identities are no longer given; they are constructed.
What is true of culture in general is true of healing. Modern people do not just accept the healing practices and identities handed to them by our medical institutions; they actively construct themselves as alternative healers and as alternative clients. Transpersonalists clearly construct their identities as healers by picking and choosing from the vast menu of modern and traditional healing practices. That menu is more like a choice among Spanish tapas than it is like an American dinner; diners do not limit themselves to one dish, nor does trying one dish limit their future choices. Transpersonalists mix and match techniques, always seeking those that "work" in the framework of their underlying cultural philosophy. The transpersonal acupuncturist in my university town, for example, also practices healing touch, Indian meditation, emotional scream therapy, and dispenses vitamins and herbs. Her clients themselves visit many kinds of healers, generating therapeutic identities that are as individualized as hers. Standard and alternative physical healing, spiritual healing, and emotional/mental healing are all combined.

But this individualism does not just go one way. Transpersonalists transform each item on their menu in accordance with their root philosophy—a key element of which allows this tapas-dining in the first place. Menu items are appropriated to the degree that they can be made to match the transpersonalist healing ideas outlined above. Exclusivist Christian exorcism does not fit, so it is not chosen (though there is probably somewhere a transpersonalist trying to transform that path). Transpersonalists pick healing practices that make sense in terms of their ethnopsychological culture, to use Thomas Csordas's term.¹⁵ In late modernity, all healers and clients do so.

The same processes are at work among the members of the Church of World Messianity. I have emphasized above the degree to which they interpret johrei in terms of their established culture. Yet they do more than this: they also construct their identities by melding that culture with church teachings. They all see themselves as spreading "God's Light", but interpret that differently and so create different identities—both from each other and from their cultural compatriots who have not joined the church.

The Japanese-American members, for example, emphasize only certain elements of church teachings that fit well with their dual heritage, but they also only emphasize those elements of their heritage that fit with elements of church teaching. Out of that mix, they construct identities—each of which is a little bit different from the others, though all conform to a general cultural pattern. Similarly, the older Caucasians have cobbled together identities out of church teachings, elements of occultism, loyalty to other religious groups, and a typically American belief in (spiritual) progress, all mixed with an essentialism quite like that of the transpersonalists. They define themselves as those people who practice "the spiritual wisdom of the ages", and use johrei as a concrete tool for doing so. Neither they nor the counter-cultural members accept all aspects of the American world view; just as surely, they do not accept all aspects of the church. They modify both, to create identities and communities of identity for themselves.

This process, I argue, is typical in the late modern world. Two requirements face us if we are to understand spiritual healing today.

First, we must see that it is grounded in culture. Like all healing practices, spiritual healing is interpreted culturally; we cannot separate what people do from the culture that gives it meaning. We must take that culture seriously, as it constructs the healing that we seek to investigate. People do not just choose "what cures"; cures do not happen in the abstract. Instead, they choose "what cures" as defined by their pre-existing cultural dispositions—and this may be a very different thing.
Second, we must recognize that healing today is part of a process through which people construct their own identities. Rather than simply accepting what their institutions tell them about therapies, standard or alternative, individuals explore their options. They choose those therapies that match their underlying root notions of the world, though some may revise those notions as their exposure to alternatives grows. Their choices also become a part of their sense of themselves—their ideas about who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going in a world that lacks secure signposts for such things. These, too, may change. By choosing to give or receive a particular therapy, however, people are defining themselves.

These two points undercut the project of seeking a unified "truth" underlying alternative therapies, that could be proved scientifically and widely accepted in the modern world. That project is itself culturally based, as much so as are the various kinds of johrei. Indeed, some people use it to construct identities for themselves: as "scientific spiritualists". They have a full right to do so, but we must not be taken in by their identity-constructions. They are simply illustrating the same modern social processes that I have explored here.

NOTES

1. I have reported aspects of this work in Spickard (1991).
3. On Mahikari see Winston Davis (1980), an anthropological study, and Tebecis (1982), a hagiographic insider's account.
4. After his death, the church summarized Okada's teachings in Okada (1967, 1968)
6. See for example Daner (1974); Levine (1984); Robbins and Anthony (1972); Tipton (1982). Very few of the World Messianity adherents I interviewed fit any of the patterns these authors claim to have found.
7. He was arrested and tried in 1950 for advocating what the Japanese government called a "nonsensical method of growing crops" (Hambrick 1979:p.552).
8. See Spickard (1991). The church apparently soon realized its mistake. By 1985, American church leaders were again playing down church exclusivity, and even sometimes its religious focus. Church centers in the eastern U.S. were called "Johrei Centers". Theological heterodoxy was rife.
9. They did not mistranslate him; their conversations with him led him to see his own society's traditions in an esoteric Christian way. (Vine Deloria, personal communication.)
10. Similar movements have occurred in other religions. For a theory proposing key social correlates for such movements, see Douglas (1970).
11. Arnold Mindell's "process-oriented psychology" is one such example. See Mindell (1982, 1992).
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