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## NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURAL LOGIC OF LATE CAPITALISM

**Abstract:** *Starting from interconnected terms: globalization, postmodernism and neoliberalism, we will strive, relying on their theoretical overlaps, to present possible guidance of the argumentation that would clarify certain aspects of the currently globally present and very specific "New Age" spirituality. We will be interested in how this type of spirituality corresponds to the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism (which we understand to be global, postmodern, neoliberal, multicultural and multinational). We start with the assumption that the places of correspondence are numerous and that it is possible to develop a New Age genealogy that would clarify its place within the post-modern/neoliberal cultural dominants (but also create preconditions for the analysis of the transposition of countercultural heritage in neoliberal narratives), which would open up space for the role of spirituality as a mediator in this process and as a specific interpellation mechanism. In this vein, we will deal with the reproduction of ideological patterns and their role in the process of the constitution and the renewal of the dominant motives of modern spirituality.*

**Key words:** *capitalism, spirituality, postmodernism, neoliberalism, New Age*

### *The New Age*

New Age<sup>1</sup> spirituality emerges from the *milieu* of counterculture, in the sixties, relying on the then expansion of new religious movements. It is often described as "*spiritual but not religious*" or as a religion possessed by the self (*self-religion*).<sup>2</sup> At first, it appears as an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon that involves communitarian forms of organization, spiritual shelters, international societies and the Institute for Alternative Education (e.g. Esalen in Scotland and Findhorn in California). In the seventies, the term entered into general use and the new spiritual sensitivity replaced the countercultural quest for alternative forms of life. In its development, since the second half of the eighth decade until the 1990s, New Age went through a period of market expansion and manifested itself as a tendency, to a certain extent, globally aware of itself as a new form of opinion.<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of New Age spirituality are very different, both in terms of the cultural aspects they emphasize and the possibility and preference of the attempted definitions. The reason is primarily the vast eclecticism of<sup>4</sup> this cultural tendency

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes translated as *New Age*.

<sup>2</sup> Fuller, R. C. (2001) *Spiritual But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Lacroix, M. (2001) *New Age: the Ideology of the New Era*, Belgrade: Clio; Hanegraaff, W. (1996) *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden: Brill.

<sup>4</sup> New Age combines the elite of large (sub)cultural, metaphysical and philosophical traditions (e.g. romanticism, idealism, universalism, humanism, the hippie movement, neoplatonism, postmodernism, political theories, Marxism, futurism, all major world religions and mythology), pseudosciences (e.g. parapsychology, alternative medicine, neurolinguistic programming, conspiracy theories, UFO research, transpersonal psychology), science (e.g. physics outside the standard model, biology, [ethno] astronomy, cognitive sciences, psychology, ecology), ancient beliefs and new religious movements (e.g. astrology, shamanism, gnosticism, hermeticism, alchemy, occultism, Kabbalah, Indian traditions, transcendental meditation, old religion/rodnovery, scientology, the human potential movement, Western [Zen] Buddhism and Hinduism), and overlaps with them.

and its loose structural structure as a movement or a network. However, as underlined by Paul Heelas, it is precisely this specific *lingua franca*, which concerns the changing state of the human race and the planet that allows us to identify this confusing mixture of beliefs, activities and lifestyles as a unique phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> As summarized by Michel Lacroix, three closely linked motives: the theme of *epic change*, *holistic metaphysics* and the necessity of *personal transformation* constitute, "in a way, the hard core of the New Age ideology".<sup>6</sup> The millennialism of the great milestone i.e. the chiliastic understanding of the arrival of a new era, which will transform mankind and raise life on the planet to a higher spiritual level, is present in most of these beliefs. This can be a teleological belief in the astrological Age of Aquarius or an open and creative evolution. "The term 'holism' (from the Greek word *holos*, 'everything') implies that the physical and spiritual world is not the juxtaposition of separate parts, but a single whole."<sup>7</sup> The realization that all is One means that every man is part of the divine being that develops itself, so that self-development of each individual should result in the acceptance of this fact. The sum of these individual efforts will result in mankind's evolution and the arrival of a new era. As in every philosophy of history, here too we ask ourselves, what is the agent that drives history towards its teleological destination? It seems to us that it is a case of "fine dialectics of action and structure", i.e. individual spiritual efforts aimed at self-perfection and an inherent, cosmic aspiration towards self-realization.

### *Naturphilosophie*

As we can see, New Age is a kind of perennialism, i.e. understanding of religion that simultaneously rejects the Christian myth and Descartes' *ratio*, in favor of the notion about the eternal source everything originates from and/or about an implicit order and universal interconnectedness of everything that exists. A typical New Age motto is "All-is-One, One-is-God, All-is-God".<sup>8</sup> This is why it seeks to create spirituality without boundaries and dogmas, which is inclusive and pluralistic<sup>9</sup> and implies ontological universalism, monism and/or connectivism, i.e. an understanding of the universe as an omnipotent universal consciousness (higher intelligence), a quantum vacuum, a flow of cosmic energy, life force, etc. Therefore, it is often described as an integral view of the world, which combines spirituality and science. As shown by Wouter Hanegraaff, this discourse essentially functions as *Naturphilosophie*, linking mystical concepts and (pseudo) scientific findings. In this sense, it is possible to talk about spirituality that seeks scientific confirmation, but also about the New Age science, which in the scientific field tries to change the paradigm in the holistic direction.<sup>10</sup> New Age invokes, for example, the "Holographic Paradigm" (David Bohm, Karl Pribram), which proposes a model of the universe in which its entirety is implicit in each of its parts (but also a certain model of the human brain, according to which fragments of memory are not locally stored but distributed in a similar way). It also refers to the "Paradigm of Self-Organization" (Ilya Prigogine), a hypothesis of "Formative Causation" (Rupert Sheldrake), "the Gaia hypothesis (James

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<sup>5</sup> Heelas, P. (1996) *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Postmodernity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell.

<sup>6</sup> Lacroix, *ibid*, pp. 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Đorđević, J. *Nevidljiva religija, nužna promena, moda ili jeres* (The Invisible Religion, a Necessary Change, Fashion or Heresy), in: *Vere manjina i manjinske vere* (The Faith of Minorities and Minority Religions), edited by Đorđević, D. B. Todorović D. and Živković, J. (2001), Niš: Zograf, pp. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Nevill, D. (2004) *The New Age: Searching for the Spiritual Self*, London: Thames and Hudson.

<sup>10</sup> Hanegraaff, W. *said book*.

Lovelock), according to which the universe is moving, self-organized, from chaos towards order, living organisms inherit collective memory, and Planet Earth functions as a self-regulatory living organism. New Age expands these concepts in different ways, claiming for example, that subatomic physics confirms the findings of ancient wisdom about the nature of reality<sup>11</sup>, that Planet Earth possesses consciousness and intelligence, quantum mechanics<sup>12</sup> shows basically that at the core of reality is "pure consciousness", that our memory is "stored on the air" or, as Sergej Trifunovic said, in a magazine interview<sup>13</sup>, that our thoughts are buried somewhere in the universe and determine our destiny (law of attraction).

As a branchy, discursive formation, New Age often permeates other worldviews, even religious ones. Its characteristic monism "can be decomposed into pantheism or panentheism, which "deify the entire existence of the world", but it is also built of both political and spiritistic subsystems, i.e. "awareness" of "spiritual levels", reincarnation, the presence of various "elements" and beings of a higher level of self-awareness, as well as the animist beliefs that bind themselves "to concrete paths of seeking help in the daily matters of believers and possess in themselves a strong magical component."<sup>14</sup> Due to the connectedness of everything and/or immanence of consciousness, the human thought gets magical power – as "communication" with a higher intelligence – and it is believed that visualization, proper thinking, optimism and auto suggestion are the main tools in achieving success. Good thoughts gradually materialize (*thought creates*) and hence positive focus changes reality. A New Age blog, which is dedicated to "exploring the way in which consciousness interacts with the physical universe", informs us that changing reality is "at the core of synchronicity, alternative histories and spontaneous remissions," which often indicates that the "quantum leap of consciousness has already happened."<sup>15</sup> Deepak Chopra summed this up: "Meditate, happy thoughts make happy molecules".<sup>16</sup> Such spirituality is therefore permeated by a certain (psychiatric, medical, ecological, praying) "therapeutic ethos", which leads towards the psychologization of religion and the sacralization of psychology<sup>17</sup>, so that many describe it as a mixture of spirituality, popular psychology and motivational (*self-help*) activities. New Age claims that health is the natural condition of man (*mind-body-spirit*) and nature (*deep ecology*) and that disease is a result of energy imbalance and a natural balance disorder.<sup>18</sup> Individuals are responsible,

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. Capra, F. (1989) *Tao Fizike: Jedno istraživanje paralela između savremene fizike i istočnjačkog misticizma*, (The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism), Beograd: Opus.

<sup>12</sup> The EPR paradox is used, as well as the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, quantum entanglement, wave function collapse, parallel universes, quantum leap, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Trifunović, S. *Ovde je poslednjih 20 godina Dan mrmota* (It has been Groundhog Day here the last 20 years), *Kurir*, 01.01.2013, 02.12.2014., <http://www.kurir.rs/sergej-trifunovic-ovde-je-poslednih-20-godina-dan-mrmota-clanak-585177>.

<sup>14</sup> Đorđević, J. same book, pp. 52.

<sup>15</sup> Larson, C. S. Reality Shifters Monthly Ezine, *RealityShifters.com*, November 2014., 2nd December 2014., <http://www.realityshifters.com/pages/news.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Chopra, D. Happy Thoughts Make Happy Molecules. *DeepakChopra.com*, 19. December 2012., 2. December 2014., [https://www.deepakchopra.com/blog/view/849/happy\\_thoughts\\_make\\_happy\\_molecules](https://www.deepakchopra.com/blog/view/849/happy_thoughts_make_happy_molecules).

<sup>17</sup> cf. Đorđević, J. said book; Hanegraaff, W. said book.

<sup>18</sup> Žižek, S. (1999) *Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London: Verso, pp. 132. As Slavoj Žižek insists, New Age is standing up to a *hubris* of cartesian subjectivism and its mechanistic dominant attitude towards nature. The violation of the fair balance of cosmic forces, sooner or later forces nature to re-establish this balance: today's ecological, social and mental crisis is interpreted as a justified response of the universe to human actions. The only solution therefore rests in the transformation of the global paradigm, in adopting a new holistic attitude in which we will claim our limited place in the global order of existence.

through self-development and spiritual awakening (in which they are helped by gurus, concentration, meditation and breathing techniques, holistic health, homeopathy, mediums [channeling], bioenergy, affirmation, new technologies, etc.), to heal themselves and the world.<sup>19</sup> Self-development is possible owing to a secret order, since the entire existence moves, in an evolving way, through some kind of mystical cooperation, towards an eschatological destination - or we are already there, but fail to realize it.<sup>20</sup> New Age therefore adopts psychological/psychoanalytical terms like self-actualization (Abraham Maslow) or Jung's synchronicity, as an acausal connectedness, relying on the collective unconscious, due to which coincidence has spiritual meaning and may serve as a lesson for those that are open enough to recognize it. As Žižek formulates it: "Our psychic energy participates in the energy of the universe, which secretly determines the course of things, accidental encounters always carry a message for us, our specific situation; they happen in response to our needs and questions."<sup>21</sup>

### *Cultural Hegemony and Logic of Late Capitalism*

A frequent objection to the concepts that consider New Age as historically a new phenomenon, concerns the fact that, in this spiritual tendency, there is very little "which has not been present and available during the 1920s and 1930s, in the Edwardian era, in the *fin-de-siècle* period, or even before."<sup>22</sup> In this sense, New Age has a long line of predecessors in Western esotericism.<sup>23</sup> Also legitimate are the warnings alleging that this category, in a certain sense, performs conceptual violence (the authors who claim that the term "gnosis" does not include a single historical tendency have a similar reasoning, claiming that it is about a signifying construction, according to which the dominant Christianity excluded from itself a heterogenic variety of inimitable tendencies). However, the permeating elements of the philosophical system, a certain global self-consciousness and the fact that in the last third of the XX century, there has been an enormous market spread of New Age merchandise and the industry of spiritual self-development<sup>24</sup>, justify the thesis of the distinct historical phenomenon. In this period, alternative forms of spirituality move from the margins of social life into its center and occupy an increasingly significant role in modern everyday life, which points to a specific socio-cultural dynamic. The inception of the New Age movement coincides with

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<sup>19</sup> Weldon, J. and Ankerberg, J. (1996) *Encyclopedia of New Age beliefs*, Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.

<sup>20</sup> New Age monism abolishes the future-present/subject-object relationship (*Eternal Now*) which, in combination with pragmatic self-help instructions, often appears as an insistence on conscious presence here and now. In a sense, everything already is "one", but we, with the *ego*, seem to fail to recognize that fact.

<sup>21</sup> Žižek, S. said book, pp. 384.

<sup>22</sup> Sutcliffe, S. J. and Bowman, M. Introduction, in: *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, eds. Sutcliffe, S. J. and Bowman, M. (2000), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 8.

<sup>23</sup> York, M. (1995) *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*, London: Rowman & Littlefield. For example, transcendentalism, theosophy, mesmerism, Swedenborgianism, spiritism, New Thought and personalities such as: Phineas Quimby, Helena Blavatsky, Swami Vivekananda, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Gurdjieff, Carlos Castaneda, Peter Ouspensk, Rudolf Steiner, Napoleon Hill, George Berkeley, Godfrey Higgins, Eliphas Levi.

<sup>24</sup> McGee, M. (2005) *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover culture in American Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Famous New Age authors include: James Redfield, Jane Roberts, Osho Rajneesh, Eckhart Tolle, Barbara Hubbard, Christopher Hills, Gary Zukav, Neale Donald Walsch, Paulo Coelho, Rhonda Byrne, Louise Hay, Scott Peck, Richard Bach, Esther Hicks and others. Literature is the dominant New Age medium, but it also includes props/artifacts such as the dreamcatcher, crystals, cards, jewelry, mandala, *feng shui* equipment, diets and *life coaching* programs, various courses such as: *The Silva* method, *EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques)*, the Art of Living, *EST (Erhard Seminars Training)*, holotropic breathing, color and sound therapy, etc.

socio-political fluctuations at the end of the seventh decade and the coming wave of post-modernization and the period of its most powerful market expansion with the rise of neoliberal ideology and the global market. The correct conceptualization of modern spirituality therefore requires an approach where spirituality is seen from the standpoint of social changes.<sup>25</sup> It seems to us that the terms such as postmodernism, neoliberalism and globalization, which strive to describe a civilized stadium and the global cultural dominant, offer a suitable explanatory framework when it comes to the aforementioned approach. The theoretical tension that exists among them can cast new light on many, not only specific, but also Universalist aspects of this discursive formation. As Frederick Jameson used to say, only in light of a certain concept of the dominant logic or hegemonic norm, it is possible to truly measure and assess the difference. In this sense, although warnings on the impossibility of “boiling things down” is significant research wise, when it comes to a mullet of disparate religious forms present in the advanced post-modern society, “if we do not achieve a general sense of cultural dominance, we will return to the standpoint according to which the current history is a mere heterogeneity, a coexistence of an array of separate forces with unspecified effects”.<sup>26</sup> That is why, Gramsci’s very topical concept of cultural hegemony imposes itself as the implicit theoretical background of most critical discourses on the predominant cultural logic, i.e., as a place of politicization and intertwinedness, as well as of the mutual complementarity of the aforementioned terms.<sup>27</sup> Within the aforementioned issue of the cultural dominant, it is possible to discuss the relative mutual interchangeability of these terms and links between the New Age discourse with different aspects of social dynamics they refer to. In other words, it is possible to ask oneself how does New Age spirituality correspond to the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism?

### *Global market and multiculturalism*

"Modern materialism almost logically refers to the pagan spiritualization of matter and the materialization of the spiritual,"<sup>28</sup> or as an Anglican archbishop said, concerned about idolatry, Marx was right to assert that "capitalism becomes a kind of mythology, attributing reality, power and agency to lifeless things."<sup>29</sup> However, as with the fetishist character of merchandise, what we branded postmodern space "is not merely cultural ideology or fantasy, but has a genuine historical (and socio-economic) existence and reality as a third-stage original expansion of capitalism worldwide."<sup>30</sup> In the process of global expansion of communication networks and trade, the world market colonizes local cultural tissue, separating its elements from the organic context/functional connection with the generic social reality. Therefore, it is definitely right to understand New Age as a reified spiritual expression and the result of a gradual process of transforming religion into exotic spiritual merchandise. Such acceptance of elements from native and minority cultures, characteristic of the New Age lifestyles, takes

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<sup>25</sup> Đorđević, J. said book.

<sup>26</sup> Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, in: *Studije kulture: zbornik*, edited by Đorđević, J. (2008) Beograd: Official Gazette, pp. 514.

<sup>27</sup> So it is possible to talk about postmodernism as a cultural effect of globalization, about neoliberal cultural hegemony, about postmodernism as a cultural logic of late capitalism, about globalization in the neoliberal way, on postmodernism as a neoliberal logic, the neoliberal block of power, the postmodern cultural dominant, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Đorđević, J. *Nevidljiva religija, nužna promena, moda ili jeres* (The Invisible Religion, a Necessary Change, Fashion or Heresy), in: *Vere manjina i manjinske vere* (The Faith of Minorities and Minority Religions), edited by Đorđević, D. B. Todorović D. and Živković, J. (2001), Niš: Zograf, pp. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Gray, S. Archbishops attack profiteers and 'bank robbers' in City, *The Guardian*, 25th September 2008., 2nd December 2014., <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/25/religion.creditcrunch>.

<sup>30</sup> Jameson, F, said book pp. 514.

place in an old colonial framework, whose core structure is not disputed. The value judgment is different, but for New Age, modernity, science and reason are the prerogative of the bourgeois West, while the rest of the world is perceived as an undifferentiated sphere of spirituality and timelessness.<sup>31</sup> The dynamics of the universal and the particular in the New Age discourse is inseparable from the ideological dynamics of multicultural capitalism and the paradox of colonization in which only colonies exist. The colonizing force is no longer personified by the nation state, but by the world network of capital, whose multiculturalism is the ideal ideological form. Let's use Žižek's remarks once again:

“Multiculturalism is based on a disavowed and inverted self-referential form of racism, a ‘racism with a distance’ - it ‘respects’ the particularity of the Other, perceiving the Other as a closed, “authentic” community by its own will, towards which it keeps its distance, which allows for the *universality of the position it holds*.”<sup>32</sup> (Our italics)

### *A Boom of the Numinous*

The miraculous new expansion of multinational capital ends with the penetration in the "precapitalist enclaves of nature and the unconscious". The colonial power of the global market penetrates all areas of life, and the logic of late capitalism destroys the relative autonomy of the cultural sphere, eliminating the possibility to put the "cultural act beyond the massive creature of capital".<sup>33</sup> This, however, should not be understood as a dissociation of culture, but precisely the opposite, in terms of its explosion and spreading through society to such a extent, "that for everything in our social life – from economic values and state power, to practical action and the structure of our psyche – it may be said that, in some original and theoretical yet undetermined sense, it is 'cultural'".<sup>34</sup> It is precisely this general deletion of borders that is the defining characteristic of New Age spirituality and its endeavor of merging psychology, spirituality, ecology, science, religion, business, magic, in a nutshell – mainstream and popular, official and unofficial culture. In this sense, it seems to us that we have there a case of an explosion of a specific spiritual sensitivity; as if the weakening of the official religion entailed a massive expansion of religious opinion through the social tissue, to such an extent that it can be said that everything in our social life is, in an original and theoretical, yet undetermined sense, *numinous*. We thus find ourselves in a universe in which everything has a meaning, in a proto-psychotic universe in which this meaning is discernible in the very contingency of the Real.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps it is precisely due to this general presence that the mythical speech of spirituality seems to remain hidden<sup>36</sup>, permeates into “common sense” or shows itself in secular form. As Jelena Djordjevic emphasizes, New Age beliefs represent, for the most part, what Thomas Luckmann called "the invisible religion", because “these beliefs have been mostly hidden behind some other form of religion, or are, in one way or another, unconsciously

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<sup>31</sup> E.G. (2012) New Age Spirituality: A Study in Commodity Fetishism. *Communist Corresponding Society*, October 2012., 14. march 2014., <http://communistcorrespondingsociety.org/newage.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Žižek, S. (1999) *Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London: Verso, pp. 219.

<sup>33</sup> Jameson, F, said book, pp 523.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Žižek, S. said book, pp. 352.

<sup>36</sup> This would require a thorough analysis from the standpoint of Althusser's conception of ideology (most present where it is least visible) and/or Barthes' understanding of bribery and exnomination (second-degree parasitic speech and deletion of names from language).

expressed and permeate some habits and beliefs of people.<sup>37</sup> Following the psychoanalysis line, New Age's insistence on the primacy of the present moment and spiritual awakening can be linked to what Jacques Lacan and Jameson called the interruption of the signifying chain. As a feature of schizophrenia, such interruption reduces the subject to an experience of a series of pure material signifiers, i.e. pure and time unrelated presents.<sup>38</sup> A proverbial symptom of postmodernity is therefore the loss of radical past manifested as historicism, repetition, *bricolage*, a compilation and adding of the prefixes "neo", namely as eclecticism and the appropriation that are characteristic both to contemporary cultural/artistic production, and to the New Age discourse and its diverse market offer. As Jameson says, the postmodern subject was invited to somehow reach the level at which the perception of this radical distinction in itself is *per se* a new way of understanding what is commonly referred to as connectedness. A new form of connectedness through differences "takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new change in what can probably not be called conscience anymore."<sup>39</sup>

With the same reason, post-modern culture "effectively rejects every practical meaning of the future and every collective project".<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the explanation of the contrast between "vertical" religious focus on religion and spirituality as a "horizontal" (primarily individual) and practical knowledge, may precisely be sought in the specifics of the post-modern social moment. "Fear in front of the future, [...] the loss of confidence in science, disorder of environmental balance", the breakup of the coherent image of the world, etc. leads to "turning to different sources in which the individual seeks personal 'salvation' and meaning, as well as a means to confirm and extend this earthly, bodily life".<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the New Age (co)modification and (re)combination of various elements relies on market demand, which is nothing more than the result of adapting to special living conditions in industrial and post-industrial societies. It definitely includes a popular (people's) tendency to conceptualize existential problems in a non-systematic manner, through the process of *bricolage* of already available narratives and rituals.<sup>42</sup> New Age, consequently, reflects life situations and social relations, but also plays a role in their constitution, while at the same time pointing out to other possibilities, as an index of human desires and utopian projections.<sup>43</sup> This is a creative process,

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<sup>37</sup> Djordjevic, J. said book, pp. 54. "Often they are incorporated into the local traditions, or are completely hidden in small circles, medical clinics, cosmetic salons and intimate conversations," but also unnoticeably replicated by the media of mass communication and visual identities of the companies and consumer products, intertwining with business, managerial, multi-level practices, nutritionist and fitness, political discourse, activism, social (psychological) counseling, etc.

<sup>38</sup> Jameson, F. said book, pp. 507-508. "If the subject has indeed lost his active ability to spread through time and to organize his past and future in a coherent experience, it is really difficult to see how his creation can result in anything else other than a 'bunch of fragments' and practices whose main features are heterogeneity and fragmentedness."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pp. 511-512.

<sup>40</sup> Jameson, F, said book, pp 522.

<sup>41</sup> Đorđević, J. said book, pp. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Hammer, O. New Age Movement, in: *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Hanegraaff, W. (2006), Leiden: Brill.

<sup>43</sup> McKinnon, A. Opium as Dialectics of Religion: Metaphor, Expression and Protest, in: *Marx, Critical theory and Religion: A Critique of Rational choice*, ed. Goldstein, W. S. (2006), Leiden: Brill.

which also happens through spontaneous "emic repacking of Vernacular religion".<sup>44</sup> From there, it is possible to export a therapeutic ethos of modern spirituality, and show that the reason for the extraordinary market success of specific New Age merchandise in the concrete historical period hides precisely in the fact that it was popularized as an appropriate spiritual "survival tool" in the living conditions in late (neoliberal) capitalism, where the consensus is organized around the market and cultivated with the absence of other forms of social cohesion. As translated by Zeljko Tanjic into theological terminology, quoting Walter Benjamin, a human being that is not invited to "convert" itself, but one that is, instead, invited to invest in itself, is developed for market needs: that is exactly the ethos described by Nietzsche, the *Übermensch*, the first to have cognized the capitalistic religion and that began to achieve it.<sup>45</sup> This image, however, needs to be supplemented with the fact that in late consumerist capitalism, a significant number of baby boomers (and other generations, of course) share the feeling of rootlessness, despiritualization, the absence of the community and sense of belonging, and hence, as the reverse side of entrepreneurial spirituality emerges the New Age quest for meaning, or as Heidegger formulated it, an attempt to acquire the essence for existence.

### *Self-Help and the "end" of big narratives*

The crisis of meaning (inability to manage the social project rationally) appears as the crisis of big modern narratives (discourse on the "death of the subject") and is manifested in the language of human resources, sustainability and usefulness. The horizon of meaning disappears through universal pragmatism – the absence of a progressive project implies that usefulness has become the only source of meaning and the language of "resources" is universalized. Alienated rationality, enrolled in social machinery, eludes the control of the subject as the universal arbitrator, but keeps issuing requests. Therefore, individualism is boiled down to the "management of self" and the skills of spiritual management (*Self*) become the "foundation" of every social order. The logic of synchronicity and general connectedness (by the principle "nothing is bad without being good for something") acts as an appropriate conceptual map of social life, where the meaning of something arises from the usefulness for something else and where the market is imposed as a dominant source of political rationality. In this sense, the narrative of self-development and evolutionary progress of the hidden order, "metaphysically" strengthens the old liberal postulate according to which the personal interest is beneficial for the whole society.<sup>46</sup> At the most basic level, the belief in implicit order, characteristic of contemporary spirituality, is already present in the ideology of the free market. Due to the belief that *logos* is revealed in the operation of the market, the latter is always treated, to a certain extent, as sacred and with thinking capability, and each step towards further comparative analysis reveals new formal/functional matches in the structural characteristics that are attributed to the market/Universe. Neoliberal theoreticians (such as, for example

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<sup>44</sup> Sutcliffe, S. J. and Bowman, M. Introduction, in: *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, eds. Sutcliffe, S. J. and Bowman, M. (2000), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Tanjić, Ž. *Kapitalizam kao religija: izazov za kršćanstvo* (Capitalism as a Religion: A Challenge for Christianity) *Glas Koncila*, 21.03.2004, 02.12.2014, [http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php?option=com\\_php&Itemid=41&news\\_ID=814](http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php?option=com_php&Itemid=41&news_ID=814); Benjamin, W. "Capitalism as Religion", in: *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Mendieta, E. (2005) New York and London: Routledge, pp. 259-262.

<sup>46</sup> The basic idea (the famous metaphor by Adam Smith about the "invisible hand of the market") that the individuals who blindly follow their interests, through the law of offer and demand, enter into a harmonious relationship, which in turn leads to the best possible outcome for society as a whole.

Friedrich Hayek often understand the market as a superior processor of information, whose actions are not perceived from the standpoint of human rational abilities. It is generally understood as a mechanism of evolution – a spontaneous, complex and self-organizing order, which is the product of human actions, but not that of a plan. Neoliberals, therefore, largely ignore the problems that the market economy produces in favor of the idea that the evolution of spontaneous order leads society towards increasingly more complex states of self-realization. Consequentially, neoliberalism is prone to social Darwinism postulates and to identifying the market with the process of biological, as well as spiritual evolution. As explained by Philip Mirowski, neoliberal views penetrate the field of evolutionary psychology, sociology of networks, ecology, ethology, linguistics, cybernetics, and even *science studies*, which is why neoliberalism expands and becomes a comprehensive worldview.<sup>47</sup> The expanding market logic builds, therefore, in a capillary manner, countless discursive bridges, and hence, in certain interpretations, it is not possible to distinguish it from the New Age cosmic *Naturphilosophie*. The disharmony of the actual state and the sacralized vision of the market (which occupies the place of the “transcendental signified”) necessarily requires theodicy, i.e. the tactics of justifying evil from the standpoint of the unquestionable perfection of the hidden order. This is *par excellence* a political-theological problem (of *Guilt*), which in social terms results in market (self)racism, i.e. a (self)incriminating subjectivity that interprets the socio-material state of an entire class, determined by its place in the production relations, as the inertia of the faceless mass of spiritually inferior individuals – individuals who are themselves conditioned to believe "that laws governing political life have the same divine source as those governing the Universe."<sup>48</sup>

### *The Neo-Liberal Twist*

Jameson's cleanest form of "capitalism that has yet to be made" through "miraculous expansion of capital in areas that so far have not been subordinated to merchandise"<sup>49</sup> can also be described as a process of neoliberalization, supported by the logic of subordination of overall life to market mechanisms. The so-called "TINA" (*There is No Alternative*) that Margaret Thatcher had once proclaimed, has not lost much influence today in economic and social policy making, even in countries that openly oppose neoliberalism. Therefore, the issue of neoliberal cultural matrix is inseparable from the problems of the post-modern force within which New Age spirituality evolves, or how David Harvey formulates it, "as any victorious ideology, neoliberalism has a permeating effect on the way of thinking, until the point where it becomes incorporated in sound reflection with which many of us interpret, live and understand the world."<sup>50</sup> Michel Foucault outlines the genealogy<sup>51</sup> of neoliberalism as an organized project of

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<sup>47</sup> Mirowski, P. (2013) The Thirteen Commandments of Liberalism, *Le Monde diplomatique*, 27.08.2013, 27.04.2014., <http://lemondediplomatique.hr/trinaestzapovijedi-neoliberalizma/>. Mirowski underlines that this type of exchange is a two-way one and shows that the mere foundations of the neoclassic economy are inspired by natural sciences, more precisely physics.

<sup>48</sup> Critchley, S. (2012) *The Faith of The Faithless: Experiments in political theology*, London: Verso, pp. 64.

<sup>49</sup> Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, in: *Studije kulture: zbornik*, edited by Đorđević, J. (2008) Beograd: Službeni glasnik, pp. 514-524.

<sup>50</sup> Harvi, D. (2012) *Short History of Neoliberalism*, Novi Sad: Mediterran Publishing, pp. 16.

<sup>51</sup> From Walter Lippmann colloquium, through the Mont Pelerin Society, to wider dissemination, following the evolution and synthesis of the new ideology through German ordoliberalism, the Austrian School, the anarcho-liberalism of Chicago, etc, analysing the contributions of an array of authors, including, for example, Alexander Rüstow, Wilhelm Röpke, Friedrich Hayek, Walter Eucken, Karl Popper, Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman, Michael Polanyi, etc.

a thorough reconceptualization of liberal economic principles in order to restore liberal policy and its opposition (primarily) to the Socialist project. Foucault singles out, as the main discontinuity, the new market concept as the perfect self-regulatory system. Contrary to previous concepts that considered, for example, that competition results in monopolies, the new understanding implies that the market always strives for a total equilibrium, not disturbed by external factors. This allowed the emergence of monopolies (and all other problems) to be understood as the effect of state intervention in the sphere of economics. In this way, the left-oriented policies has been broadly disqualified, opening the door to the dominance of the new sanctum - the market economy. This brings another "novelty" to the sphere of liberal policies – the active, interventionist role of the state. However, the subject of state intervention is no longer the economy, but solely society. In this way, neoliberalism emerges as a new form of sociological governance (the terms “sociological liberalism” and “positive liberalism” were even suggested). This new governmentality is aimed at reconstructing society by making the market possible. Foucault asks what it means to introduce market regulation as the basic regulatory principle of society and political rationality? Right here lies the difference that the critics of consumerism, the commodity effect, spectacle, simulacrum and the consumer society and mass culture fail to grasp, which, in turn, prevents them from detecting the rise of neoliberal ideology as radical discontinuity; we claim that, therefore, their critique of New Age spirituality, as "the religion of the consumer society", fails to completely illuminate this phenomenon. According to Foucault, in the neoliberal society, the regulatory principle is not reflected in the exchange of goods, but in competition mechanisms:

"These mechanisms should have the largest surface and depth and occupy as much place in society as they can. It is not required, hence, to have a society subordinated to the effect of merchandise, but one subordinated to the dynamics of competition. Not a supermarket society, but an entrepreneurial society. The *homo economicus* that is sought for is not a man of exchange or a consumer man, but a man of entrepreneurship and production."<sup>52</sup>

### *Governmentality and the return to nature*

The neoliberal culture (state) therefore seeks to establish competition as a driving force present in every part of society, and competition is possible only if the number of private companies constantly propagates, diversifies and dissociates. Here, Foucault recognizes the new technique of "governing governance", i.e. taking the mechanisms of governance down in the "body of society", and their internalization (*mentality*). The ideological fragmentation of entrepreneurship is passed down to the level of the individual, which is reconceptualized as human capital, which, in turn, is placed on the market. It seems to us that the market explosion of New Age and the self-help industry and its influence on social institutions, which coincides with the neoliberal expansion, confirms this ideological and socio-material dynamic. Not only do spiritualistic eclecticism and the theory of liberation from the ego (Western Buddhism) coincide with the reconceptualization of the subject as a discursive effect of arbitrary investments, but the New Age market occupies a central place in the field of management,

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<sup>52</sup>Foucault, M. (2005) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979*, Novi Sad: Svetovi, pp. 147, 149. According to Foucault, consumption theorists mistakenly criticize neoliberalism as a society that has been on the horizon of the management practices from the twenties to the sixties. The art of governance programmed by the “Ordoliberalists” in the thirties, and which in the seventies became part of the programs of most governments in the capitalist world, is absolutely not looking for the establishment of such a society. On the contrary, they are trying to build a society that is not oriented towards the uniformity of merchandise, but towards the multiplication and differentiation of companies.

business training and general-type psychological counseling. Furthermore, it is precisely alternative (ecological, libertarian, organic, socially responsible, anarcho-primitive, *fair-trade* and other) entrepreneurship<sup>53</sup>, which fits in Foucault's concept of the central ideological unit of the neoliberal cultural project, that is unimaginable without New Age ideation and, in many cases, it is based on it. Examples are many:

"Spiritual capitalism implies a global evolution in the way of doing business. Instead of greed and fear, we knowingly release the power of love, co-operation and integrity in business. People everywhere are starting to wake up and adopt this evolutionary progressive way of doing business."<sup>54</sup> The whole framework of socially responsible business is in the process of evolution. Welcome to conscious capitalism – an enlightened way of doing business. But first, what does it mean to be conscious?"<sup>55</sup> There is a spiritual element that is translatable and goes beyond the boundaries of specific religions. Entrepreneurs live in the place where this spirituality and business overlap."<sup>56</sup> The dictionary describes the entrepreneur as the one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risk of the company. What is a bigger company than organizing and managing your own life? Your passion, purpose and energy generate growth in love, game, but also in the company."<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, it is possible to demonstrate a number of correlation, including the connection between the New Age narrative about the nature and the neoliberal culture of *civil society*. Foucault shows that the neoliberal undertaking of reconstruction of society by market principles is legitimized precisely through the motive of civil society, which represents a cultural and ideological stronghold of neoliberalism. In this discourse, the multiplication of companies was presented, as Foucault said, in the form of "Rousseau's Return to Nature", embodied by terms such as life politics [Vitalpolitik] (Rüstow) and decentralization (Röpke).<sup>58</sup> The ideology of civil society materializes in different representations of the future, equally utopian-capitalist and spiritual, which can be traced through futuristic, popular genres, literature and media culture. In such visions, through the work of the market and the Internet, absolute connection happens – between pansyncretism and panpsychism, sometimes personified in a stateless future or the motive of a globally thinking organism. Entrepreneurial individualism in the libertarian ideological projections (for example, David Friedman), which openly promotes cyber-connectivistic utopia) results in some kind of organic collectivism. As

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<sup>53</sup> This is where the *Seasteading* projects should be mentioned.

<sup>54</sup> Murphy, O. What is Spiritual Capitalism?, *Octavius.com*, 21st June 2010, 08th December 2014, <http://www.octavius.com/spiritual-capitalism/>.

<sup>55</sup> Murphy, O. Conscious Capitalism, *Octavius.com*, 8th December 2014., <http://www.octavius.com/conscious-capitalism/>.

<sup>56</sup> Levine, D. J. When Spirituality and Entrepreneurship Overlap, *The Huffington Post*, 9th August 2014, 8th December 2014., [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deborah-j-levine/when-spirituality-and-ent\\_b\\_5777072.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deborah-j-levine/when-spirituality-and-ent_b_5777072.html).

<sup>57</sup> Enkin, P. Aware Entrepreneurs: Three Practices to Blend Spirituality With Meaningful Work, *Daily OM*, 8th December 2014., <http://www.dailyom.com/library/000/001/000001583.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, M, said book, 148. Which, according to these authors, implies the restoration of ownership and the fragmentation thereof (as an undertaking to establish the “non-proletarian” industry), lowering the "center of natural gravity" down, the organic building of society as a natural community starting with the family, decentralization of housing and production, i.e, a policy of life that is not oriented only towards increasing wages and reducing working hours, but one that recognizes the comprehensive life situation of the worker, the sense of ownership, social integration, material and moral hygiene, etc.

if it was a substitute, a hypertrophy of instrumental rationality in the irrational vision of the future world.<sup>59</sup> New Age builds on this vision with its concept of mother goddess, namely, the hypothesis of Gaia, whose awakening is recognized in the increasing market and communication networking of the planet, which is actually the formation of a planetary cerebral cortex – humans are the neurons of that cortex and their task is to solve the environmental crisis by collective action. As a romantic, techno-utopian Arcadia, this hypostasis is necessarily reminiscent of Karl Marx' old concept of gender communism. The neoliberal turnaround is not only based on taking over the ideas (and strategies) of the historical left, but it was precisely the legacy of humanist Marxism that is closely linked to the countercultural "revolution", which adopts the conception of alienation, despiritualization, technological rationalism, the critique of the manipulative cultural industry and conformism of mass consumption society, which we believe may also easily be found, in a modified form, in the neoliberal and New Age discourse.<sup>60</sup> Counterculture has brought an explosion of individualism, anti-bureaucratic sentiment and the booming of new social (grassroots) movements, a desire to renew organic spirituality and ties with nature. It is precisely from the ranks of these generations that the neoliberal actors of mainstream politics were recruited, so we assume that it is possible to show that neoliberalism is based, to a large extent, on incorporating countercultural critical views in its political agenda. The narrative about the conflict between society and the state, which has been constructed by neoliberalism, finds strong support in the anti-bureaucratic discourse of counterculture, so it is possible to claim that New Age spirituality has played, in this process, the role of a specific mediator and that of an interpellation mechanism giving the neoliberal project a subversive note.

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<sup>59</sup> cf. Gacevic, M. (2014) Romanticism and Dialectics: The Cryptoromanticism of Karel Kosik or How Dialectics Becomes Romanticism." [Unpublished study as a manuscript held by the author].

<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to note that Foucault is pointing the attention to the common social experience and the common theoretical assumptions of Max Weber and the Frankfurt and Freiburg School.

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