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Psychonauts and Seekers: West German Entanglements in the Spiritual Turn of the Global 1960s and 1970s

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This essay focuses on West Germany as exemplary global-local intersection of the spiritual turn in the long 1960s. It shows how spirituality as practices and beliefs seeking a closer connection with the divine within or outside religious groups experienced a multifaceted renaissance in the countercultures of the long 1960s. In this spiritual quest contemporary explorations in the expansion of consciousness and the increasing interest in meditation were pivotal practices. The essay reflects the international exchange of knowledge about body-mind practices from Amazonia and Mexico to the United States, India and West Germany, showing how actors were influenced by international and national connections. Practitioners found the practices of spirituality neither in Christian contemplative traditions nor in Jewish versions, but in various forms of what seekers received and practised as Hinduism or Buddhism, etc., that gave contemporary followers and seekers a means of connecting to higher truths – to God – without God.

Paul Saltzman's photograph of the Beatles in white robes and marigold necklaces, sitting with their girlfriends and wives at the feet of their guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, is one of the earliest and most iconic images associated with the spiritual turn of the late 1960s and '70s. The group's 1968 visit to the Maharishi's ashram in Rishikesh was less idealistic than the smiles in the photo suggested, however. Saltzman remembered: Paul McCartney's unease with a vegetarian diet, the suitcase full of canned baked beans that helped Ringo Starr get over the culinary culture shock; the rumours of the guru sexually harassing Mia and Prudence Farrow; and the presence of Mike Love of the Beach Boys, known around the ashram as a resourceful purveyor of film reels, chocolate and dope.¹ The photo nevertheless captures the moment that meditation arrived in the popular imagination of the late 1960s. George Harrison praised the meditative high derived from the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM): 'we can have anything that money can buy. And all the fame we could dream of. And then what? It isn't love. It isn't health. It isn't peace inside . . . Meditation and the Maharishi have helped make the inner life rich for me. I get higher than I ever did with drugs'.² Whereas George Harrison was attracted by TM's turning away from the material world and a high without drugs, John Lennon seemed to be more intrigued by the religious openness of the TM teachings: 'you can make it with meditation if you're a Christian, a Mohammedan or a Jew. You just add meditation to whatever religion you've got'.³

Spirituality is a debated term, yet it has usually been taken as a signifier for practices and beliefs of people who were seeking a closer connection with the divine within or outside of religious groups.⁴

¹ Paul Saltzman, *The Beatles in Rishikesh* (New York: Viking Studio, 2000), 70, 117, 131f.

² *Ibid.*, 98.

³ Keith Badman, *The Beatles off the Record* (London: Omnibus, 2000), quoted in: Philip Goldberg, *American Veda. From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation. How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), 152.

⁴ For the definition of spirituality see Adam Possamai, 'New Spiritualities in Western Society', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.217>.

The spiritual turn with its emergence of new and unconventional spiritualities symbolised by the Beatles' embrace of TM was a key feature of the cultural upheaval of the 1960s, one that continued to blossom in the 1970s and '80s, long after the radicalism of student movements and urban countercultural insurgencies of 1968 had faded into the background. TM boomed in the 1970s with 300,000 followers globally.⁵ Other spiritual seekers became Hare Krishnas or 'Jesus Freaks'; primal screamers or devotees of EST (Erhard Seminars Training); adepts of Native American shamanism or the mysticism of the Kabala. Institutes like Esalen in California thrived, while utopian experiments in communal living with a spiritual emphasis thrived on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world. Everywhere in the 1960s and '70s, psychonauts and seekers sought new ways of living and being in the world.

This essay focuses on West Germany as an exemplary global-local intersection of the spiritual turn in the long 1960s. From a transnational history perspective it underlines the international exchange of knowledge about body-mind practices from Amazonia and Mexico to the United States, India and West Germany, showing how actors were influenced by international and national connections. West Germany offers a particularly fruitful example of the border-crossing manner in which the spiritualities of the 1960s and 1970s were constructed. Just as the West German student movement of the 1960s was strongly influenced by its relationship to the United States,⁶ the spiritual turn drew deeply on American countercultural sources.⁷ Simultaneously, the development of spirituality in West Germany, as elsewhere in the global 1960s, was fuelled by 'spiritual tourism' to India and other sources of ancient wisdom. West Germany offers a strongly pronounced example, thus, not only of the avid adoption of American countercultural influences characteristic of the European continent as a whole, but of the role of transnational exchanges in fuelling the adoption of spiritualities in the global 1960s which have been often overlooked in recent debates on the global 1960s.⁸

The 1960s saw a growing trend in a form of self-organised travel without a fixed itinerary labelled 'alternative travel': being on the road without travel guides while following an ideal of 'living on less' became increasingly popular in the second half of the twentieth century, especially among teenagers and young adults of the sub- and countercultures in Europe and the United States who sought to follow in the footsteps of the Beat poets.⁹ An increasing number of autobiographical texts and travel journals about the 1960s have been published in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany in the last twenty years, focusing on the trend of travelling overland to India from the mid-1960s until 1979, when the Soviet-Afghan war closed the overland route to travellers.¹⁰ This article exploits oral history interviews with veterans of the spiritual travel boom, autobiographical texts, contemporary magazines, newspaper articles, self-narratives of LSD users and introductions to meditation. Far from a decline of religion 'after the boom' of the 1960s,¹¹ the essay will show that spirituality and

⁵ Goldberg, *American Veda*, 168.

⁶ See Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), chapter 2, and Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷ See Brown, *West Germany*, 369.

⁸ For recent debates on the global 1960s see Klimke, *The Other Alliance* (2010), Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties* (2013); Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett, eds., *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Tamara Chaplin and Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, eds., *The Global 1960s: Convention, Contest, and Counterculture* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁹ See Eric Cohen, 'Drifter Tourism: Nomads from Affluence. Notes on the Phenomenon of Drifter Tourism', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* XIV (1973), 89–103. On backpacking as new travel culture in postwar history see also Richard Ivan Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹⁰ On the overland passage to India see Isabel Richter, 'Alternativer Tourismus in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren. Transkulturelle Flows und Resonanzen im 20. Jahrhundert', in Alexander Gallus, Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Zeitgeschichte transnational. Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 155–178 and Sharif Gemie and Brian Ireland, *The Hippie Trail: A History, 1957–1978* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

¹¹ On the decline of traditional, church-based religion in the 1960s see for instance Thomas Großbölting, *Losing Heaven: Religion in Germany since 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 106ff. See also Martin Greschat, 'Protestantismus und Evangelische Kirche in den 60er Jahren', in Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried and Karl Christian Lammers, eds.,

the search for sacred dimensions and the divine beyond traditional religious institutions experienced a multifaceted renaissance; and whatever the importance of local contexts, this renaissance was very much a transnational and a transcultural affair.

The Globalisation of Spirituality since the Nineteenth Century

Actors engaged in the West German countercultures and the spiritual quest of the global 1960s took up philosophical ideas and religious teachings, reinterpreted body-mind practices and rediscovered spiritual teachers and role models which have a longer history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Germany the notion of India as mystical, sublime and timeless can be traced back to late eighteenth-century linguistics, to German Romanticism and to discourses on orientalism in the nineteenth century.¹² Buddhism became fashionable among the educated German upper class in the late nineteenth century.¹³ Teachings from the Far East, Eastern religions and body-mind practices were widespread in the international theosophical as well as in the *Lebensreform* movement.¹⁴ Body techniques, religions and philosophy in a specific Western interpretation seemed to promise a way out of progressive technologisation and an efficiency-driven contemporary society.

In the German-speaking countries around 1900, the burgeoning interest in Asia also extended to Indian philosophy, Buddhism and Hinduism. Contemporaries interpreted this increasing interest as a reaction to a crisis-laden turn of the century and a loss of spiritual potential among the Christian churches. In the early twentieth century, which saw the beginnings of psychoanalysis, it was first and foremost Carl Gustav Jung who studied Indian philosophy and myths while developing his concept of the self.¹⁵

Meanwhile spiritual teachers from Japan and India had found a growing audience in the 'Western world' since the nineteenth century. The first World Parliament of Religions was held in 1893 in Chicago with the ambitious goal of establishing an interreligious dialogue. Among those who stepped onto the stage were the abbot of the Engakuji in Kyoto and his student, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966). D.T. Suzuki was to become one of the most prominent voices of the Zen movement in the United States. During the first half of the twentieth century he wrote numerous essays and books in English to introduce Zen ideals. Suzuki spent eleven years in the United States (1897–1908) as an assistant to Paul Carus (1852–1919), a German theologian and philosopher who had emigrated to America. During this period, Suzuki was influenced by contemporary intellectual currents, such as the ideas of the German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who had identified intuition and feeling as the essence of religion. Suzuki also studied the writings of the American philosopher William James (1842–1910), who assumed the possibility of nondualist knowledge via 'pure experience' as overcoming the dualism inherent in empiricism.¹⁶

Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften (Hamburg: Christians, 2000), 544–81, here 546ff; Karl Gabriel, 'Zwischen Aufbruch und Abstieg in die Moderne. Die katholische Kirche in den 1960er Jahren', in Schildt, Siegfried and Lammers, eds., *Dynamische Zeiten*, 528–43, here 537. Paul Harvey and Philipp Goff, eds., *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 74. For the expansion of the religious spectrum in the countercultures of the 1960s, also see Patrick Pasture, 'Dechristianization and the Changing Landscape in Europe and North America since the 1950s: Comparative, Transatlantic and Global Perspectives', in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianisation in North America and Western Europe 1945–2000* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 367–402, here 377.

¹² See Elija Horn, *Indien als Erzieher. Orientalismus in der deutschen Reformpädagogik und Jugendbewegung 1918–1933* (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 2018), 65ff.

¹³ See Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der 'neue Mensch'. Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 131.

¹⁴ Jan Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis und die Theosophie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), 47f.; Richter, 'Alternativer Tourismus', 162. Jared Poley, 'Rudolf Steiner and the Theosophy of Greed', in Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander Douglas and T. McGetchin, eds., *Transcultural Encounters Between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2016), 55–67.

¹⁵ See Richter, 'Alternativer Tourismus', 161f.

¹⁶ See James C. Dobbins, ed., *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki: Vol. II: Pure Land* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), XIV.

Swami Vivekananda also attended the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago as spiritual mediator of Hinduism, introducing yoga in his talks. He enjoyed a warm reception in both the United States and Europe.¹⁷ In the first third of the twentieth century Paramahansa Yogananda introduced European and American audiences to the tradition of Kriya yoga. His following grew steadily once he had established the first Self-Realization Fellowship Centres outside India, located in Los Angeles. Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) became an international post-war bestseller, combining autobiographical reflections with an introduction to Indian philosophical traditions.

It is well known that many writers of the 1950s and early 1960s such as Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder, just to mention a few examples, inspired the global countercultures. But for seekers and the spiritual quest of the long 1960s it is in particular the Swiss author Hermann Hesse who stood out as a writer trying to reconcile different religious traditions. Raised by parents who had served as Protestant missionaries in India, he grew up with a sense of Indian and Christian spirituality. In particular Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* (1922) was rediscovered by German and European readers in the 1950s and was also well received in the United States beginning in the late 1950s. The story of protagonist Siddhartha's lifelong quest for self and truth, leaving his family and his privileged life as a member of the Brahmin caste, was an important reference point for the counterculture in the global 1960s: the narrative could be read as a youthful revolt against the weight of tradition. But it certainly also made the counterculture more receptive to religious diversity and broadened the spiritual landscape beyond Judeo-Christianity.¹⁸

Self-Transformation as Emancipatory Practice in the 1960s

Inspired by Eastern philosophies, religions and spiritual practices, experiments exploring the body-mind saw a revival in the United States beginning in the late 1950s and also found practitioners in Western Europe in the 1960s.¹⁹ What was practised as the expansion of consciousness was perceived as a pivotal emancipatory practice of the cultural upheaval in the 1960 which also drew on spiritual body-mind practices from Amazonia, Mexico and India. It is notable that new approaches and practices in thinking and acting beyond the perceived rational Western self became fashionable in the alternative milieus and countercultures in the United States and West Germany in these years.²⁰ The personal that became political in the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements in the long 1960s was a common trend across the United States, France, Italy, Denmark and West Germany, to mention just a few countries. Some authors emphasise that different factions within the countercultural milieus and the student movement of the 1960s were fluid. Nevertheless, two distinct tendencies are prominent: activists who engaged in developing a critical-scientific analysis of late capitalism on the one hand and those who sought to find ways to live a meaningful life in what they perceived as the spiritually empty and boring world of consumer capitalism on the other – a movement that embraced hedonism and sought individual liberation.²¹

¹⁷ See Dorothea Lüddeckens, *Das Weltparlament der Religionen von 1893. Strukturen interreligiöser Begegnungen im 19. Jahrhundert* (New York, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 186–7; Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der 'neue Mensch'*, 141. For the reception in the United States see Goldberg, *American Veda*, 70f.

¹⁸ On Hesse's reception in the 1960s counterculture see Scott MacFarlane, *The Hippie Narrative: A Literary Perspective on the Counterculture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007), 85f.

¹⁹ On the cultural import from the United States to Germany see Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebzigern und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 829.

²⁰ For the notion of countercultures, see Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, 'Introduction. Historicizing the American Counterculture in the 1960s and 70s', in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5–14; Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Das alternative Milieu. Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik und Europa 1968–1983* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); Detlef Siegfried, 1968. *Protest, Revolte, Gegenkultur* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2018).

²¹ See Joachim C. Häberlen, *The Emotional Politics of the Alternative Left: West Germany, 1968–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7f. Detlef Siegfried, 'Protest am Markt. Gegenkultur in der Konsumgesellschaft um

The promise of individual happiness and freedom resonated with many young people rather than obeying the moral laws of the Judeo-Christian traditions – which had lost their credibility for many young people in both West Germany and the United States after the Second World War and Vietnam. Many contemporaries perceived the United States as the epicentre of 1960s transnational counterculture, and West Germany was one of the countries that most eagerly embraced the American counterculture.

The expansion of consciousness in the long 1960s was characterised by two distinct aspects: firstly, its connection to self-transformation in the context of socio-political aspirations of emancipation. Emotional as well as body-mind experiences played a crucial role for these new forms of subjectivation.²² It was part of a different quest for interiority, which links the search for an integral life to the critique of a materialistically determined world. Psychoanalytic and Marxist authors were popular among German student activists in the late 1960s. They were important references for notions of a repressed sexuality in capitalism, of consumerism, notions of social criticism, and coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). Practices of emancipation shifted in the 1970s: scholars with a Foucauldian background have interpreted these shifts in terms of emerging ‘regimes of subjectification turning self-shaping into life politics’ in the 1970s.²³ Others, however, highlight the move from ‘radical egalitarianism’ in the 1960s to the struggle against all forms of authority, and in particular the authority of rationality, in the 1970s.²⁴ For many activists, emancipatory practices based on 1970s ideals such as ‘authenticity’, ‘spontaneity’, ‘creativity’ and an ‘integral life’ contained the aim of acting and experiencing beyond a perceived rational self. And the expansion of consciousness in the long 1960s had encouraged practitioners to experience beyond and to question the notion of a rational, autonomous *Western* self.

Secondly, the expansion of consciousness in the 1960s was shaped and inspired by the practices of indigenous groups in whose religious rituals consciousness-altering plants played an important role. Religious ascetics in India using datura and cannabis to induce states of ecstasy and the connection between psychoactive substances and religiosity in native American cultures particularly resonated with 1960s countercultures.²⁵ Hallucinogens such as LSD or substances like marijuana became the deconditioning tools of choice for large parts of the counterculture. Not everyone sought liberation from authoritarian societal norms through ingesting psychedelics though, nor did drug use necessarily raise the consciousness of all users. While many contemporaries merely hoped to escape the cultural and social imperatives of a society obsessed with security and control, others pursued a broader spiritual quest.

Before forms of meditation such as TM, Zen meditation or dynamic meditation attracted increasing interest, members of the burgeoning counter- and alternative cultures in both the United States and West Germany had begun to explore the expansion of consciousness in the 1960s. It was a central concept and leitmotif of the psychedelic 1960s, which are very often associated with the hippie movement and its origins on the Californian West Coast. But they also had strongholds in Northern and Western Europe, Australia, Canada and Japan. Most hippies in the United States and West Germany had a white middle-class background. British historian Arthur Marwick describes them as a group favouring specific ideals and social practices such as a particular dress and hair style, music preferences, the ideals of sexual liberation and free love, questioning the affluent and materialistic

1968’, in Christina von Hodenberg and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Wo ‘1968’ liegt. Reform und Revolte in der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 48–78, here 65.

²² See Florian Schlecking, ‘Psychedelic Fears: Drug Use as an Emotional Practice in West Germany around 1970’, *Storicamente. Laboratorio di Storia* 11 (2015), 1–23; Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität*, especially chapter 9; Pascal Eitler, ‘“Alternative” Religion. Subjektivierungspraktiken und Politisierungsstrategien im “New Age” (Westdeutschland 1970–1990)’, in Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Das Alternative Milieu*, 335–52.

²³ See Reichardt, *Authentizität*, 68.

²⁴ See Häberlen, *Emotional Politics*, 121. Maik Tändler, *Das therapeutische Jahrzehnt. Der Psychoboom in den siebziger Jahren* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 14.

²⁵ Robert C. Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven: Drugs in American Religious History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 5 and 51.

Western society, the formation of rural communes, organic food and ‘pilgrimages to the Orient’ (mostly to India and Nepal) and dope consumption.²⁶ The hippie movement was a mixture of youth subculture, alternative and protest culture. From a history of everyday life perspectives, it is important to consider the actors’ self-image. The hippies and freaks were clear about the distinction between dope and drugs: marijuana, peyote, mescaline and LSD were dope. Drugs were cocaine and heroin.²⁷ By the end of the 1960s, around 200,000 teenagers and young adults had turned to this alternative lifestyle, and Marwick assumes a comparable number for all of Europe at this time.²⁸

Focusing on the expansion of consciousness in his life and writing, the Beat poet and author Allen Ginsberg was an important actor linking the American Beat generation of the 1950s and the hippie movement of the 1960s. Each of the American Beat protagonists had explored the expansion of consciousness in their own way: William Burroughs through his exploration of the psyche and the criminalised world, Jack Kerouac by exploring Buddhism, Gary Snyder in his studies of Zen and meditation and Ginsberg himself by turning to Tibetan Buddhism.²⁹

In the 1960s the entanglement of the expansion of consciousness and meditative practices was still not at all mainstream. Psychedelic drugs became a popular means to explore the ‘doors of perception’. When the British psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond and author Aldous Huxley tried mescaline together in the 1950s, the term ‘psychedelic’ emerged, usually referring to substances from mescaline and LSD to psilocybin mushrooms and ayahuasca, a psychoactive brew with a long tradition among indigenous communities in the Amazon region of Brazil, Bolivia and Peru. In 1957 the New York banker R. Gordon Wasson convinced *curandera* María Sabina to participate in a Mazatec ritual in Oaxaca, a ceremony with the sacred Mexican psilocybin mushrooms. Mushrooms had a long tradition as sacrament but by the 1950s many Mazatecs were pious Catholics who did not use mushrooms exclusively as sacrament but also for healing and to locate missing people and important items.³⁰ Wasson’s article introduced the ‘magic mushrooms’ to a broader international public including psychologist Timothy Leary. The first personal accounts of psychedelic experiences were published in the United States. In the early 1960s it was mainly Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert who were known for their research on the mind-expanding effects of LSD until Harvard University dismissed them in 1963. The participants in their studies (predominantly students) often reported religious experiences, even if LSD was taken in a neutral-secular, positive and supportive environment.³¹ Apart from these experiments, African-American jazz musicians and members of the Beat generation had popularised LSD (and other drugs) among their audiences since the 1950s.³²

Giving psychedelic experiences an aesthetic form was also a topic in different media, including art and architecture of the 1960s, interior design, urban spaces, graphics and posters. But of all art forms, it was popular music that was inspired most widely by psychedelic experiences.³³ The song ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ and the instrumental track ‘Flying’, both released in 1967 by the Beatles,

²⁶ See Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties*, 482ff; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections of the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1969), 124ff.; Philippe Theyre, *Les Années Psychédélicques. Hallucinantes, Euphoriques et Révolutionnaires* (Québec: HOMME, 2012), 48.

²⁷ See Russell Duncan, ‘Love and Protest: Transatlantic Countercultures in the 1960s’, in Grzegorz Kosć, Clara Juncker, Sharon Monteith and Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson, eds., *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 164.

²⁸ See Marwick, *The Sixties*, 480. See also Roszak, *The Making*, 124ff.

²⁹ See David Brown and Rebecca Novick, eds., *Mavericks of the Mind: Conversations for a New Millennium* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1993), 267.

³⁰ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954). See also the photo essay by R. Gordon Wasson: ‘Seeking the Magic Mushroom’, *Life Magazine*, 49, 19 (1957). On Wasson’s encounter with María Sabina see Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 205.

³¹ See Fuller, *Stairways*, 66.

³² See Harvey and Goff, eds., *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion*, 75; and Fuller, *Stairways*, 53.

³³ See Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Crash Pads, Hippie Communes, Infinity Machines, and Other Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008); Susanne White, *Psychedelic Collectibles of the 1960s & 1970s* (Radnor,

'Something Happened to Me Yesterday' (1967) by the Rolling Stones, the LP *Pet Sounds* (1966) by the Beach Boys, or *Fifth Dimension* (1966) by the Byrds are probably the best-known examples. Formative for the new style of psychedelic rock were groups such as Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, The Doors or Pink Floyd. In West Germany groups such as Amon Düül, Agitation Free or Kraftwerk experimented with psychedelic elements.³⁴

Apart from these forms of processing psychedelic experiences in music and art, many consumers of psychoactive substances started to express and publish their experiences in self-narratives. In the early 1960s users began to write about magical hallucinations, frenzy, feelings of synaesthesia and religious experiences, which they perceived as a dissolution of self and environment during an LSD trip. Adelle Davis, who had made her mark as the author of books about healthy cooking in the United States in the late 1950s, became one of the first women to publish her experiences with LSD under the pseudonym Jane Dunlap. In *Exploring the Inner Space* she describes an intense interreligious God experience: 'for a few short but forever unforgettable hours LSD gives one the love of God, the forgiveness of Christ, the humility of St. Francis, the intellect of Einstein, and the compassion of Allah, the All Compassionate'.³⁵ The fact that Dunlap refers to ideals of different religions in the same sentence is not the only remarkable aspect of her account. In her remembered experience, intellect, reason and emotions do not seem to exclude each other at all.

Recounting her personal story, professor of religious studies Elaine Pagels remembers that she expected a Christian vision when she took LSD in the summer after her marriage in 1969. But instead she sat for five hours gazing, 'ecstatic and speechless', at her apartment, seeing 'everything as alive as fire, gloriously intertwined'. Beloved persons who died and disappeared now 'seemed to resolve into a deeper unity of the whole', and Pagels commented: 'I guess that solves the dying problem'.³⁶ Remarkably, Pagels addresses death and dying as significant subjects – concerns that previously were considered the monopoly of traditional religions.

The British philosopher and writer Alan Watts, whose talks and writings introduced a broader audience in the United States to Zen Buddhism in the 1960s and 1970s, picked up on the attraction expressed by many Western users who often highlighted the experience of a complete union with God – according to Watts, a pattern of description unknown in the Judeo-Christian tradition:

if, however, in the context of Christian or Jewish tradition an individual declares himself to be one with God, he must be dubbed blasphemous (subversive) or insane. Such a mystical experience is a clear threat to traditional religious concepts. The Judeo-Christian tradition has a monarchical image of God, and monarchs, who rule by force, fear nothing more than insubordination . . . In most Asian cultures, however, such a man will be congratulated as having penetrated the true secret of life.³⁷

PA: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1990); Jim DeRogatis, *Turn on Your Mind: Four Decades of Great Psychedelic Rock* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2003).

³⁴ On the relationship between the group of German bands labeled Krautrock and the revolt of 1968 see Timothy Scott Brown, 'In Search of Space: The Trope of Escape in German Electronic Music around 1968', *Contemporary European History*, 26, 2 (2017), 339–52.

³⁵ Jane Dunlap, *Exploring Inner Space: Personal Experiences under LSD-25* (New York: Ishi Press, 1961), 196. For further published reports, also see Sidney Cohen, *The Beyond Within: The LSD Story* (New York: Atheneum, 1964); with clear religious connotations: Lisa Biberman, *Phanerothyme: A Western Approach to the Religious Use of Psychochemicals* (Cambridge, MA: Psychedelic Information Center, 1968); see also Rudolf Gelpke, *Vom Rausch im Orient und Okzident* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1966). For reports with strong religious and spiritual dimensions after LSD consumption, see also the study on British LSD users by Paul E. Willis, 'The Cultural Meaning of Drug Use', in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 106–25.

³⁶ Elaine Pagels, *Why Religion? A Personal Story* (New York: Ecco, 2018), 40f.

³⁷ Alan Watts, 'Psychedelics and Religious Experience' (1968), reprint in Alan Watts, *Does It Matter? Essays on Man's Relation to Materiality* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007), 79–97, here 89f. For the union of body and mind

This link between the expansion of consciousness and spirituality expressed in many reports of the 1960s is not at all self-evident. For when Richard Alpert and Timothy Leary started their research on LSD and other mind-expanding substances in the early 1960s, they were interested in general effects and experiences and in their application in psychotherapies. They advocated the use of LSD beyond a therapeutic setting and evaluated psychoactive substances as facilitators of potential social and political change – an appeal which found resonance not only in US countercultures but also in alternative milieus in West Germany.

Most of the Americans who experimented with consciousness-altering substances discovered them in the 1960s; in mid-1960s West Germany, members of the alternative student scenes in cities such as Berlin, Hamburg and Munich now openly consumed cannabis, mescaline and LSD.³⁸ Because LSD could come in the form of turquoise pinhead pills, they were sometimes also referred to as the ‘blue Gods’.³⁹ In an article published in *konkret*, an influential magazine on the West German political left in the 1960s, German journalist Stefan Aust wrote in 1967 that LSD consumption spread among teenagers like wildfire. To quote Aust, everybody who did not exactly look like a police officer could ‘buy LSD in every other Beat club or hippie pub’.⁴⁰

Considering the most likely exaggerated metaphor of a ‘wildfire’, official statements seemed relaxed. Aust quoted the Federal Ministry of Health, which in 1967 could not confirm the assertions made in the contemporary press about rampant drug abuse of LSD among young people.⁴¹ Asked about the special attraction of LSD, a user replied in 1967 that he took LSD

for purely therapeutic reasons. Under the influence of LSD, you have the opportunity to trace control features of consciousness, which is also possible through yoga. But with LSD it is much easier. You can control your reactions in a playful way in order to be more in control of your actions under normal conditions. On LSD you get insights into the most different contexts which you are able to relate to later. I don’t take this stuff just for fun, for instance as a substitute for alcohol, but as a medium for the expansion of consciousness.⁴²

Considering the link between yoga, LSD and the expansion of consciousness suggested in this statement, it comes as no surprise that one of the most popular prints on the LSD-soaked blotters was the Om sign. When the German magazine *Stern* in 1971 commented on the LSD frenzy with the slogan ‘Heim ins Himmelreich’, it obviously used an ambivalent metaphor. The phrase does not only allude to the original Nazi propaganda slogan ‘Heim ins Reich’ (Back Home to the Reich) but also hints at the uncritical devotion to a drug and the religiously associated transgression. Young people who just ‘spearheaded the fashionable godlessness rediscovered’ the divine: ‘there is a heaven, God is not dead’.⁴³

In the long 1960s, in addition to praising the mind-expanding potential of LSD, some voices also highlighted its ability to intensify affection. Stefan Aust noted that LSD did by no means enhance virility but, as an aphrodisiac, intensified sexual sensitivity.⁴⁴ Following the development in the United States of LSD as a role model until the early 1970s, consumers in West Germany seem to have viewed LSD in contrast to other drugs as a means to explore the self and new forms of subjectivity.⁴⁵ Yet

and of the material and the spiritual world in reflections and practices of Zen Buddhism, also see Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (New York: New World Library, 1962).

³⁸ See Klaus Weinhauer, ‘Heroinenszenen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in Großbritannien der siebziger Jahre’, in Reichardt and Siegfried, eds., *Das alternative Milieu*, 244–264, here 248f.

³⁹ See ‘LSD. Die Blauen Götter’, *Der Spiegel*, 25 Apr. 1966.

⁴⁰ Stefan Aust, ‘LSD in Deutschland’, *konkret*, 19 Dec. 1967.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴² Quoted in Aust, ‘LSD in Deutschland’, 19; unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁴³ *Stern* no. 46 (1971), quoted in Ulli Olvedi, *LSD-Report* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 160.

⁴⁴ Stefan Aust, ‘Liebe unter LSD’, *konkret*, Jan. 1968, 9f.

⁴⁵ See Schleking, *Psychedelic Fears*, 4.

spiritual and sexual experiences did not play a major role for all users. The West Berlin Central Committee of the Wandering Hash Rebels (*Westberliner Zentralrat der umherschweifenden Haschrebellen*), mostly members of Berlin's notorious Wieland commune, considered regular LSD consumption an act of revolutionary disobedience.⁴⁶ Michael 'Bommi' Baumann, co-founder of the West Berlin-based anarchist terrorist group the June 2nd Movement, noted in his autobiographical report on psychedelic drugs in Berlin in the late 1960s:

even if the political activists did not like us, we liked to join their demonstrations. We were militant, in a way the black block of the '68 generation. Before joining demonstrations which we thought might turn violent, we used to listen to aggressive music, we loved MC5 or some Jimi Hendrix songs. Meanwhile we smoked ad nauseam and sometimes shot up mescaline so that it hit straight away and you got a total high on colours and hardly recognized anybody at the demonstrations. The world dissolved in colours. And then the whole gang ran screaming towards the police.⁴⁷

Within the countercultures the notion of tripping and experiences beyond the perceived rational Western self were contested. British philosopher and former Anglican priest Alan Watts, who had experimented with LSD, had popularised Eastern spirituality for a mainly Western audience since the 1960s. In his introduction to meditation he recommended to 'go out of your mind at least once a day . . . because by going out of your mind you come to your senses'. He compares an overly rational existence to 'a very rigid bridge which because it has no give, no craziness in it, is going to be blown down in the first hurricane'.⁴⁸ To Watts meditation meant to get in touch with a reality beyond the world of symbols and representations and to connect with the joy of being radically present. Others interpreted this kind of intellectual and emotional flexibility as just 'nesting in the cracks of power', as SDS member Werner Olles put it. Olles, who was a member of the Socialist German Student Union's Frankfurt branch and later became close to the *K-Gruppe* KPD-ML, was critical of the Hash Rebels' emphasis on the revolutionary power represented by drugs. He considered members of Berlin's Kommune 1 'dream dancers' and argued that 'where pot is smoked, where flower power is practised, Marx's *Das Kapital* and Guevara's *Guerrilla – Theory and Method* are probably seldom read, and it has likewise been shown that the radicalism of the potheads and the members of hippie-like subcultures never go beyond a non-committal pacifism containing thoroughly bourgeois elements'.⁴⁹ The Hash Rebels responded that 'a socialist must not look like a square', and emphasised that 'we also do not "nest" in the "cracks of power" and we do not live in "gaps". We live in communes, wander about, and fight together against state power in the street'.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See Klaus Weinbauer, 'Drug Consumption and Youth Delinquency in West Germany', in Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Between Marx and Coca Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies 1960–1980* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 376–97, here 384. In contrast to LSD consumption as an act of 'revolutionary disobedience', intelligent services had experimented with the mind controlling potential of LSD. On the CIA's experiments with LSD as a chemical warfare incapacitating agent in the 1950s see Jakob Tanner, "'Doors of Perception" versus "Mind Control": Experimente mit Drogen zwischen kaltem Krieg und 1968', in Birgit Griesecke et al., eds., *Kulturgeschichte des Menschenversuchs im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2009), 340–72. On LSD in psychotherapy and psychiatry in the 1950s in the United States and in Canada see Pollan, *How to Change your Mind* (New York, 2018), chapter III. On the 1960s discussion about LSD as a substance empowering political actors, as healing in a therapeutical setting and contemporary performance-enhancing substance also see Kristoff Kerl, 'Turn on, Tune in, Work Hard: LSD auf dem Weg von den Gegenkulturen ins Silicon Valley', in *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (2018), available at <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/turn-on-tune-in-work-hard-ld-auf-dem-weg-von-den-gegenkulturen-ins-silicon-valley> (last visited 8 Sep. 2020).

⁴⁷ Bommi Baumann with Christof Meueler, *Rausch und Terror. Ein politischer Erlebnisbericht* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 2008), 63.

⁴⁸ Alan Watts, *Meditation: Introduction to a Contemplative Ritual* (NYC, 1971) available at https://drive.google.com/open?id=1aRHQq-IS5oX3nRGdTgQRpg_YIP7-otWj (last visited 29 Feb. 2020).

⁴⁹ Werner Olles, 'Kiff und Revolution', *Agit* 883, no 28 (21 Aug. 1969), quoted in Brown, *West Germany*, 258.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Brown, *West Germany*, 258. On the split between counterculture and hard political tendencies in the 1968 movement see also Timothy Scott Brown, *Sixties Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 197f.

Detailed descriptions of the negative side effects of psychedelic substances are rather rare in contemporary self-narratives. Michael Baumann's retrospective reflections include the dark side of psychedelics when he characterises LSD as a 'psychic explosive' which explodes the barriers that seal the unconscious: 'many swallowed LSD and completely freaked out or got schizophrenic . . . Only years later we noticed that those who had taken a lot of LSD in their adolescence could not communicate properly at all anymore'.⁵¹ Debates about the revolutionary potential of mind-altering substances and about their benefits and respective perils for coming to terms with the past might have been a West German peculiarity. Nevertheless, the project of self-transformation as emancipatory practice cannot be tackled without global 1960s countercultural dimensions.

Blueprints for Spiritual Transformation

The spiritual turn in the long 1960s is characterised by a spirituality which primarily relates to action, and above all, experience, as a mean of personal liberation to promote social progress and by an understanding of God as a cosmic force instead of a personal being. The psychedelic expansion of consciousness and meditation are both pivotal experiential practices. Yet models, patterns and instructions were important to prepare, support and inform these practices. In the early 1960s Castalia Foundation offered public workshops highlighting psychoactive substances as just one of a large number of other ways to expand the practitioners' consciousness. The workshops promoted 'particularly the Hindu and Buddhist yogic traditions', which 'have developed a sophisticated repertoire of non-chemical means of transcendence – meditation, visualizations, breathing, movement, sensory withdrawal'.⁵² Another seminal work to explore drug-free ways of expanding one's consciousness in these years was Richard Alpert's *Remember, Be Here Now*, which he published as Ram Dass. First published in English in 1971, it was followed by a German translation in 1976 and went into its fourth edition in 1979. In recent research literature this text is occasionally mentioned in studies on religious developments after 1945.⁵³ When Alpert (a former colleague of Timothy Leary) published his description of his personal transformation in 1971, the phase when he had considered LSD as a chemical key for exploring the expansion of consciousness already lay far behind him. The text focuses on the transformation of the American psychologist Richard Alpert into the yogi Ram Dass. Based on the author's experiences, his description of self-transformation served as pattern and model.

The book can also be read as an introduction to meditation and the transformation of consciousness. It gives an account of Alpert's journey to India in 1967, where he lived for a while with his guru, Neem Karoli Baba. After several stays in India he finally returned to the United States as a Hindu and yogi.⁵⁴ The report provided a blueprint for the much-copied undertaking to leave behind a 'Western' life with a middle-class identity, find one's guru in India and finally return to your native country, perhaps not always enlightened but clearly with more self-awareness. Ironically, this project is deeply influenced by the white, middle-class interpretation of the Western world, including the notion of creating and shaping your own life.

⁵¹ Baumann, *Rausch und Terror*, 39.

⁵² Castalia Foundation. Experimental Workshops, in: Timothy Leary Papers, New York Public Library. Manuscript and Archives Division, Box 58 MssCol 18400, folder 58.25.

⁵³ See F.X. Charet, 'Ram Dass: The Vicissitudes of Devotion and Ferocity of Grace', in Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson, eds., *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 15–40; Harvey, Goff, eds., *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion*, chapter. 2: Religion and Counterculture, 76; Goldberg, *American Veda*, 224ff; Christopher Key Chapple, 'Raja Yoga and the Guru: Gurani Anjali of Yoga Anand Ashram, Amityville, New York', in Thomas A. Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes, eds., *Gurus in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 15–36.

⁵⁴ See Arthur Versluis, *American Gurus: From American Transcendentalism to New Age Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196.

In the first of the book's four sections, Ram Dass provides insights into his biography. He describes his materially successful and academically unfulfilled life at Stanford and Harvard, which he compares to an isolated artificial room:

I experienced being caught in some kind of meaningless game in which the students were exquisite at playing the role of students and the faculty were exquisite at playing the role of faculty. I would get up and say what I had read in books and they'd all write it down and give it back as answers on exams but nothing was happening. I felt as if I were in a sound-proof room. Not enough was happening that mattered – that was real.⁵⁵

The second section includes mandalas, mantras, religious quotes and Buddhist and Hindu aphorisms. The third part, entitled *Cookbook for a Sacred Life*, introduces yoga and meditation practices. Part four suggests books to 'hang out with', for instance the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Bible or the *Upanishads*, books 'to visit now & then', including Arthur Avalon's texts on tantra or Hermann Hesse's writings, and books 'useful to have met', such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Theos Bernard's book on hatha yoga or Louis Fischer's biography of Mahatma Gandhi. *Remember, Be Here Now* appeals to a Western audience to lead a more conscious life with more independence from conventions and the requirements of a materialistic way of life. This worthwhile new freedom is never mapped exactly: a spiritual life, a life beyond the individual boundaries of a Western self, seeking enlightenment – all seem possible. Cooking is transformation. The metaphor of a cookbook suggests openness, avoiding fixed definitions. It also alludes to different dishes, to the individual combination of ingredients, but also to the only very rough notion of what preparing food means that a cookbook can provide. By contrast, the introduction to the expansion of consciousness through meditation is very concrete, including various meditation techniques such as mindfulness, mantras, physical yoga, body scanning or focusing on the flame of a candle.

The increasing interest in meditation in the 1970s cannot be traced back to transcultural imports by well-known travellers to India like the Beatles or Ram Dass alone, however. Of course, the foundation of meditation centres connected to internationally travelling Indian gurus in the 1970s had a significant impact. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for instance, who introduced TM to 'the Western world', started his lecture tours in the United States in 1959 and visited West Germany in 1960. The first German TM centre was established in 1960 in Bonn, followed in 1967 by a second centre in Bremen.⁵⁶ When the Beatles listened to one of his talks in the United Kingdom in 1967, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was already a well-known lecturer. Paul Saltzman, the Canadian photographer who portrayed the Beatles in the ashram in Rishikesh, remembers his introduction to TM. His teacher Raghvendra had taught him to repeat a mantra, 'how to say the sounds silently, within, and just easily follow it, listen to it until it faded to silence. And how to repeat this until I experienced a transcending of normal waking consciousness. I closed my eyes and tried it for a few minutes and Raghvendra asked me to describe what I experienced, to make sure I was using the technique properly'.⁵⁷ On the one hand, this account underlines the importance of a guru in the late 1960s. On the other hand, it emphasises meditation as a practice based on experience. Saltzman's reports and photos of the Beatles in Rishikesh significantly contributed to the TM boom. In the 1970s TM had 300,000 followers worldwide.⁵⁸

In oral history interviews with travellers from West Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States on the overland route to India in the long 1960s, interviewees located and remembered various topics as central subjects of their journeys. Some were interested in intercultural exchange, in living on less, in hassle-free drug use and in experiencing a transnational and countercultural community of travellers. They were far from being on a spiritual quest. However, the interviews also reveal the seekers

⁵⁵ Ram Dass, *Remember, Be Here Now* (San Cristobal, NM: The Crown Publishing Group, 1971) section 1, unpaginated.

⁵⁶ See Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst e. V. – REMID Marburg, http://remid.de/info_tm (last visited 19 Feb. 2020).

⁵⁷ Saltzman, *The Beatles in Rishikesh*, 49.

⁵⁸ Goldberg, *American Veda*, 168.

who travelled to India in the 1960s and 1970s and who were inspired by Indian teachers. Sebastian was among those who were introduced to TM in the United States and travelled from the United States to Rishikesh in 1968 at the age of twenty to learn more. In an oral history interview he recalled that TM gave him ‘a profound sense of peace and a profound sense of expansiveness and clarity of mind . . . meditation did not make me weaker, it just gave me a sense of inner peace’.⁵⁹ He remembers resilience, strength and psychological calm as central experiences. How seekers made use of these perceived benefits was up to the practitioners.

In the 1970s the first introductions to TM were published and available in English and German.⁶⁰ The strong resonance of TM in particular can probably also be traced back to aspects which Peter Russell praised in his introduction: TM is suitable for everybody from physicians to policemen and housewives and requires only a commitment of twenty minutes twice a day without a long-term relationship with a guru.⁶¹

Zen meditation became popular after D.T. Suzuki’s arrival in the United States in the early twentieth century. Inken Prohl emphasises that his notion of Buddhism had little in common with Japanese Zen Buddhism in the first half of the century but was a product of transcultural flows: Suzuki’s readings of Western literature, his encounters with Western intellectuals and his work as a translator.⁶² Suzuki’s notion of Zen Buddhism included an unmediated, non-dualistic and highly individual religious experience. It is well known that the Beats who emerged in the greater San Francisco Bay area as well as Alan Watts were important catalysts for the development of Zen in the United States. When the Esalen Institute was founded in California in 1962 it became a crucial experimenting ground for the interpretation of Eastern philosophies and religious traditions, including psychedelics, meditation, yoga and gestalt therapy.⁶³ California Zen is described as the effect of transnational flows: it included Zen meditation and also served as a trademark for Japanese culture in the United States including Zen gardens, Zen art or Zen cooking. Having become a global brand, it was then exported back to Japan.⁶⁴

Dynamic meditation is very much associated with Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh’s meditation technique, which was especially suited to a Western audience. It reached the United States and West Germany in the late 1970s. Bhagwan’s devotees stood out not only because of their orange clothes; from Berlin to Wiesbaden they were popular for their hip discos, which provoked some journalists to speak of a veritable ‘red flood’.⁶⁵

Bhagwan’s meditation for ‘the West’ was very well received in West Germany. His interpretation of dynamic Kundalini meditation foregrounded physical activity: in four stages of fifteen minutes each, shaking is followed by dancing, meditation and stillness.⁶⁶ Bhagwan justified this method as developed especially for Western practitioners with a deeply neurotic basic constitution. He appreciated other meditation techniques such as Zen meditation or TM and admitted their benefits to a certain degree. In his version of dynamic or chaotic meditation, releasing, liberation, purification and transformation are key elements during the meditation process.⁶⁷ Beginning in 1974, dynamic meditation could be practised in Bhagwan’s ashram in Pune and later also in local meditation centres in West Germany.

Linda, who travelled from the United States to Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh’s ashram in 1979, stayed for four months and interpreted Bhagwan’s teachings in an oral history interview as ‘do anything you

⁵⁹ Interview with Sebastian, 1 Oct. 2014 (1:07 h), here 16:20 min and 18:00 min.

⁶⁰ See for example Harold Bloomfield, *Transzendente Meditation. Lebenskraft aus neuen Quellen* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1976); Bernhard Müller-Elmau, *Kräfte aus der Stille. Die transzendente Meditation* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1977); Peter Russell, *The TM Technique: An Introduction to Transcendental Meditation and the Teachings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi* (London, Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1976).

⁶¹ Russell, *The TM Technique*, 15.

⁶² Inken Prohl, ‘California “Zen”: Buddhist Spirituality Made in America’, *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 59, 2 (2014), 193–206.

⁶³ See Prohl, ‘California “Zen”’, 195–7; Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ See Prohl, ‘California “Zen”’, 201f.

⁶⁵ See ‘Bhagwan, Glaube und Mammon’, *Der Spiegel*, 2 June 1984.

⁶⁶ Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *Meditation: The Art of Ecstasy*, ed. Ma Satya Bharti (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976), 233f.

⁶⁷ See Bhagwan, *Meditation*, 26ff.

want but do it with awareness'.⁶⁸ While autobiographical sources are not factual accounts, they offer insights into memories and experiences and to the process of meaning production. They highlight how narrative selves are constructed. In particular, oral history interviews allow historians to learn more about remembered versions of the past and about voices which did not leave many traces in other sources. This is particularly the case when it comes to everyday people and to women. Linda's account contains within it a very optimistic hope for achieving freedom from authoritarian rules through conscious living. This hope might in turn have been fuelled by a 1960s optimism. At the same time, her memory of the ashram's spiritual context points to the paradox of a guru's authority versus your own presence, awareness and inner self as the only accepted ethics.

Contemporary witnesses remember the benefits and effects of meditation differently in retrospect but always connect meditation with a spiritual practice. Christine, a political activist in West Berlin in the 1970s, recalls that political activism was 'such a male domain. I wanted to change the world . . . and changing the world means to change yourself'. During her first trip to India in 1978 at the age of twenty, she visited the Dalai Lama, Auroville and various ashrams and described lectures on 'body, mind and soul' in Rishikesh as 'spiritual lectures'.⁶⁹ To explore and engage with different traditions such as Tibetan Buddhism, Integral Yoga and Transcendental Meditation was not uncommon. Peter, a student of Catholic theology in the early 1970s, looks back on his overland trip to India in 1974, recalling the Volkswagen bus he had prepared for weeks for the trip with two friends. The inscriptions on their van included Ahurat Mazda, a supreme god in ancient Iranian religion, and also the Muslim *Bismillah*.⁷⁰ The inscriptions were presented as naturally compatible with one another and point to the religious openness of a Catholic theological student in this spiritual quest.

Joanne, who took her first trip to India in 1972 while studying art in the United Kingdom, later became one of the first female Kathakali make-up artists. Looking back, she interprets the spirit of her generation as 'this wave of optimism that came from the idea that we didn't need money, we didn't need anything but the life in our bodies, just to breathe was enough, that feeling of just going'.⁷¹

This appreciation for or perhaps new awareness of the present moment emphasised in Joanne's interview is often connected with the presence of a guru. John remembered in his interview that he was introduced to yoga in the United States in the early 1970s. He travelled to India to focus on Siddha yoga and stayed in an ashram from 1976 to 1978. His guru's *Shaktipat* (transmission of spiritual energy) was crucial for his 'direct experience of the inner connectedness of all things'. Asked about the significance of Siddha yoga, John mentioned in the interview that as a 'spiritual practice', it is 'mainly focused on the realisation of your own self through contemplation and meditation, selfless service' and 'seeing God in each other'.⁷² He links a spiritual practice to a conscious life. God is not presented as a personal being but as connection to something larger than an individual existence. John's concept of God explicitly includes the inner connectedness of all beings. In her ethnographic study of North American and Western European spiritual practitioners settled in the Sri Aurobindo's ashram in Puducherry in India, Tuhina Ganguly asserts that their notions of connectedness did not necessarily include egalitarian practices toward and perceptions of the locals.⁷³

Critical Voices

Christian theologians and therapists but also insiders and dropouts challenged the increasing interest in meditation. Their critical voices are essential for understanding the multifaceted renaissance that

⁶⁸ Interview with Linda, 28 Aug. 2014 (46 min), here 10:15 min.

⁶⁹ Interview with Christine, 16 Oct. 2016 (55:23 min), here 6:00 min and 10:50 min.

⁷⁰ Interview with Peter, 7 Aug. 2018 (1:07 h), here 19:27 min.

⁷¹ Interview with Joanne, 30 Aug. 2018 (51:57 min), here 6:28 min.

⁷² Interview with John, 8 Aug. 2014 (55 min), here 13:22 min, 30:10 min.

⁷³ Tahina Ganguly, 'Connecting Their Selves: The Discourse of Karma, Calling, and Surrendering among Western Spiritual Practitioners in India', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 86, 4 (2018), 1014–45, here 1041.

spirituality experienced in the 1970s but also to call attention to the process when the 1960s vision of meditation as emancipatory practice started to fade.

The growing genre of self-help literature offered an individual introduction or immersion. Many authors combined their introduction to forms of Eastern meditation with references to the equally long tradition of Christian contemplative practice. The psychiatrist Jürg Wunderli, for example, pointed out that 'within Christian cultural history there also is an extensive tradition of contemplation and meditation. But these were mainly practices in hermitages and monasteries and they lost even more of their importance once the spirit of science and secularization gained ground in the occident'.⁷⁴ At the same time he warned his readers about tantric sex and about this 'weird inclusion of the sexual' in new Eastern imported practices. He also advised against specific meditation techniques such as concentration on focus points and chakras, which he considered 'useless self-delusion' and nothing more than 'mere fakir tricks'.⁷⁵ Instead he describes a state of 'inner emptiness' and a 'clear awareness' as the ideal mindset for meditation. He praised Vivekananda, who had already taught at the beginning of the twentieth century that 'meditation means to let thoughts come and go, without attachment and without following them'. In this manner, 'practicing patiently and imperturbably, thoughts will', according to Wunderli, 'vanish more and more because they lack attachment'.⁷⁶

German theologian Ursula von Mangoldt offered a further orientation guide for the quickly expanding market by introducing yogic, tantric-Buddhist and Zen-Buddhist meditation techniques to readers along with Western forms of contemplation.⁷⁷ Wunderli and Mangoldt are examples for authors with a Christian religious background in West Germany of the 1970s. They grappled with Eastern wisdom and promoted at the same time Christian contemplative practices that had lost importance in the twentieth century. Other guides addressed the potential frustration Eastern meditation practices held for Western practitioners. For example, they discussed how much time professionals have to 'invest' regularly to cope with the pain that could come with seated meditation in Zen Buddhist *zazen* practice. Or having to face the erroneous assumption of being enlightened when actually you are not.⁷⁸

Critical voices had accompanied the meditation boom in West Germany since its beginning in the 1970s. While magazines and newspapers such as *Spiegel* and *Bild* identified Bhagwan as a 'sex guru' and head of a 'sex monastery' in Pune in the late 1970s and early 1980s, academic papers published later on mainly highlighted his pronounced business sense. He was said to be a yogi who knew how to blend his spiritual offers into late twentieth-century capitalism and who was able time and again to adapt his range of products and practices to changing customer preferences.⁷⁹

In retrospect, also drop-outs and meditation teachers who had left the scene were quite open in their criticism. Hugh Milne had lived in Bhagwan's entourage since 1973, worked as his bodyguard and, disillusioned, left Bhagwan in 1982; he writes that the guru's central goal since the late 1970s was economic success.⁸⁰ In the United States, yoga teachers Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad warned of authoritarian structures which they saw as an effect of unconditional devotion to a guru.⁸¹ Former TM teacher Joe Kellett raised the issue of taking advantage of people's psychological vulnerabilities in the TM movement. In recent years some former German TM teachers also reflected

⁷⁴ Wunderli, *Schritte nach innen*, 14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 92 and 72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁷ Ursula von Mangoldt, *Östliche und westliche Meditation. Einführung und Abgrenzung* (München: Kösel, 1977).

⁷⁸ Enomiya Lassalle and Hugo Makibi, *Zen – Weg zu Erleuchtung. Hilfe zum Verständnis. Einführung in die Meditation* (Wien, Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1969), 128 (first edition 1960). For a contemporary introduction also see Jürgen Linnewedel, *Mystik, Meditation, Yoga, Zen. Wie versteht man sie, wie übt man sie, wie helfen sie – heute?* (Stuttgart: Quell, 1975).

⁷⁹ See 'Die liebende Gabe, die mich durchdringt. Spiegel-Reporter Wilhelm Bittorf über den Ashram in Poona und die Suche nach östlicher Weisheit', *Der Spiegel*, 3 Feb. 1981; Hugh B. Urban, 'Osho, from Sex Guru to Guru of the Rich: The Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism', in Forsthoeffel and Humes, eds., *Gurus in America*, 169–192.

⁸⁰ See Hugh Milne, *Bhagwan: The God that Failed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 246.

⁸¹ See Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books/Frog, 1993).

critically on the meditation practice which they had begun in the 1970s. Therese Schulte mainly criticises the market structure of the TM movement. But she also finds totalitarian echoes in TM courses.⁸² Finally, some autobiographies and self-narratives highlight the ubiquitous sexism and sexual harassment within these spiritual communities: ‘it was typical of the group leaders that they would pick out which woman they wanted, then lock the door after the rest of the group left and get it on with whomever they wanted to’, says, for instance, ex-Rajneesh disciple Roselyn Smith. ‘Group leaders got lots of sex. In fact, the guys on the outside, who worked in other parts of the ashram, would call the group leaders the “pussy pool”. They were the guys who had all the fun. There was tremendous sexism going on there, yet they tried to make you believe that because Rajneesh was picking women to run all those departments he really believes in liberated women’.⁸³ Whereas Roselyn Smith remembers first and foremost sexuality and abuse of power, other contemporary witnesses recall their stay at Rajneesh’s ashram as a crucial turning point in their life. The philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, for instance, stayed in Bhagwan’s ashram in Pune in 1979. After four months he returned to West Germany and remarked that ‘after Poona I was psychologically not available anymore at my German address’. He characterised his generation as obsessed with the truth, with readjusting their ‘psychological screws’ and with the belief of ‘psychosis to be their best friend’. In Sloterdijk’s retrospection, Pune was one of the important moments of his life. The presence of a guru, sexuality as a tool for self-realisation, as well as thinking and acting beyond the perceived rational Western self are here definitely positively connoted.⁸⁴ Despite the disenchantment expressed by some critics and drop-outs since the early 1980s, meditation centres were still in the upswing in the 1970s. *Ulcus Molle*, an inventory which listed publications from the West German underground press between 1969 and 1974, provided contacts and addresses of various meditation centres, an overview which was still not easy to get in the mid-1970s. In the early 1990s self-help literature on meditation had increased so much in West Germany that special guides tried to provide nationwide orientation on meditation forms and locations.⁸⁵

Conclusion

My central goal has been to present West Germany as an exemplary global-local intersection of the spiritual turn in the long 1960s. The article argues that the expansion of consciousness as well as meditation were pivotal experiential practices which fuelled the spiritual turn and highlights the border-crossing manners in which spiritualities of the 1960s and 1970s were constructed. The proliferation of Eastern spiritual and meditation practices in the long 1960s can be attributed to several factors. Members of the *Lebensreform* movement and transnational theosophical circles had already gained experience with meditation from around 1900. In the 1960s, exchange students and Peace Corps volunteers encountered these practices when they worked in India. But the boom in the 1970s can essentially be traced back to the trend of travelling overland to India (and Nepal) in the 1960s, a trip which was inspired by the Beat poets and their journeys to India beginning in the late 1950s. For most of those travellers to India in the long 1960s, what was practised as the expansion of consciousness did not refer to grappling with the social and political situation of the postcolonial

⁸² See Joe Kellett, ‘Falling Down the TM Rabbitt Hole: How Transcendental Meditation Really Works’, available at <http://www.suggestibility.org> (last visited 29 Feb. 2020); Therese Schulte, *Transzendente Meditation und wohin sie führt. Abschiedsdisput einer TM-Lehrerin* (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 1980), 156; see also Ulrike Schrott, *Maharishi Good Bye* (Salzburg: Ed. Riedenburg, 2010); Claire Hoffman, *Greetings from Utopia Park: Surviving a Transcendental Childhood* (New York: Harper, 2016).

⁸³ Bhagwan’s Sexism’, in *The New Republic*, 12 Apr. 2018, available at <https://newrepublic.com/article/147871/bhagwans-sexism> (last visited 29 Feb. 2020).

⁸⁴ ‘Man denkt an mich, also bin ich’, Sven Michaelsen interviews the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, 45 (2014), 42–57, here 46.

⁸⁵ See Josef Wintjes and Jens Gehret, eds., *Ulcus Molle Info-Dienst, Jahrgänge 1969–1974* (Amsterdam: Azid Presse, 1979), 330–2; For the 1980s and 1990s see Susanne G. Seiler, *Oasen der Stille. Ein Führer zu achtzig Zentren der Meditation in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* (München: Goldmann, 1993).

India of the '60s and '70s. India was first and foremost a culture of reference for 'alternative' travellers and a projection screen: culturally close enough to create positive associations and 'exotic' enough to fully surrender to the fascination of the foreign. This Eastern turn is sometimes also interpreted as a reflection: travellers and 'visionaries' saw their own altered states reflected in the mythologies and mystical systems of Asia. According to Jeffrey Kripal, they might have missed the conservative orthodoxies of the ancient cultures but found the Asian countercultures and uncovered the wisdom of tantra.⁸⁶

In German contemporary history, the long 1960s are discussed as a period of deep transformation and erosion of the Christian churches due to the drastically increased number of people leaving the Catholic and Protestant churches.⁸⁷ In the United States, processes of religious transformation and erosion were crucial in the 1960s as well. Countercultural milieus very often considered traditional religious communities to be part of the establishment.⁸⁸ The religious diversity and pluralism that developed since the 1960s is usually credited to the 'Baby Boomer' generation, who grew up in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s and sparked a shift in meanings of everyday religious life.⁸⁹ Whether the fascination with spirituality in American culture represents an increasing diversity within the Christian-Judeo traditions or poses a threat to churches and synagogues is a much discussed question.⁹⁰

In the long 1960s, transnational youth and countercultures sparked the development of specific forms of spirituality: a vision which blended various religious and spiritual traditions beyond church membership and closed communities of faith; a religious bricolage that allowed practitioners to choose spiritual practices and communities without a prescribed set of religious traditions. Nevertheless, some disenchanted seekers had left the scene because the 1960s vision of meditation as an emancipatory practice and the search for an integral life linked to the critique of a materialistically determined world proved to be an illusion. Many scholars associate the expression 'spiritual but not religious' with do-it-yourself and pick-and-mix religion, a spiritual marketplace, believing without belonging, religion as long as it is personally useful and with the 'self technologies' that started the wellness industry.⁹¹ Others highlight the spread of post-Christian spirituality and a 'spiritual turn', or a 'religion of no-religion'. Be it Esalen as the epicentre of body-mind explorations since the 1960s, the spread of post-Christianity since the 1980s in Western European countries and the United States or the sacralisation of the self, there is no question of a religious decline 'after the boom'.⁹²

Spiritualities in the 1960s and 1970s are not a type of secularism in late modern Western societies. They speak to a specific spiritual turn in the long 1960s: when asked about the ultimate goal of the 1960s and '70s expansion of consciousness, seekers mention 'inner peace' and 'clarity of mind', 'the present moment', the 'inner connectedness of all things', a 'complete union with God', a 'more

⁸⁶ See Kripal, *Esalen*, 126.

⁸⁷ See Großbölting, *Losing Heaven*, 106ff. See also Greschat, 'Protestantismus und Evangelische Kirche', in Schildt, Siegfried and Lammers, eds., *Dynamische Zeiten*, 546ff; Gabriel, 'Zwischen Aufbruch und Absturz', in *Ibid.*, 537.

⁸⁸ See Harvey and Goff, eds., *The Columbia Documentary History*, 74. For the expansion of the religious spectrum in the countercultures of the 1960s, also see Pasture, 'Dechristianization and the Changing Landscape in Europe', in Christie and Gauvreau, eds., *The Sixties and Beyond*, 377f.

⁸⁹ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹⁰ Robert Wuthnow, *All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003) 24f.

⁹¹ See Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*; David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Adam Possamai, 'Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *Culture and Religion*, 4, 1 (2003), 31–45; Tändler, *Das therapeutische Jahrzehnt*, 360. For an overview of the recent literature on the phrase 'spiritual but not religious' see also Ganguly, 'Connecting Their Selves', 1015ff.

⁹² See Kripal, *Esalen*; for a statistical analysis since the 1980s including Germany and the United States see Houtman and Aupers, 'The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition', 305–20; Pascal Eitler, "'Selbstheilung". Zur Somatisierung und Sakralisierung von Selbstverhältnissen im New Age (Westdeutschland 1970–1990)', in Sabine Maassen, Jens Elberfeld, Pascal Eitler and Maik Tändler, eds., *Das beratene Selbst. Zur Genealogie der Therapeutisierung in den 'langen' Siebzigern* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), 161–81.

conscious life' or 'seeing God in each other'. This reflects several aspects of a non-traditional spiritual quest: it understands God as a cosmic force instead of a personal being; practitioners tend to adopt an individualistic ethic instead of finding moral authority in God and scripture; instead of Western religious authorities they looked for new and different spiritual authorities such as a guru. Spirituality can be group-oriented, but it is primarily mental and relates to action and, above all, experience; it is often interpreted as a means of personal liberation to promote social progress. For this reason, this new spirituality in the long 1960s is about rejecting as much as it is about rethinking God. It is important to emphasise that most of the contemporary practitioners considered themselves spiritual but not necessarily religious and that they found the practices of spirituality not in the Abrahamic traditions. That is, not in Christian contemplative traditions or mysticism, or in Jewish versions, but in various forms of what seekers received and practised as Hinduism or Buddhism, etc., that gave contemporary followers and seekers a means of connecting to higher truths – to God – without God.