

SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS: ON THE COLLECTION OF SPIRITUALITY
AND THE CREATION OF SPIRITUAL NARRATIVE

By

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If you are a dreamer come in
If you are a dreamer a wisher a liar
A hoper a pray-er a magic-bean-buyer
If you're a pretender com sit by my fire
For we have some flax golden tales to spin
Come in!
Come in!"

Shel Silverstein, "Invitation"

For the dreamers, the wishers, the liars, the hoppers, the prayers, the magic-bean-buyers, and the pretenders. Let's spin a tale. Come in!

INTRODUCTION: WHO ARE THE 'SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS'?

Which part of speech is the word "spirituality"? It's not a noun, it's not a something. It's not even a nothing. Or a preposition, a relational plank bridging a this and a that. It's more like a verb, an action, a doing. It's something done. Yet what's done is the act of asking a question.

Thomas Tweed, "John Cage"

Sitting Down Near

What do a pagan, an agnostic, a seeker, a Christian, a Jew, and a philosopher all have in common? They are all 'spiritual but not religious.' What does it mean for someone to identify as 'spiritual but not religious' and how can it be that someone can identify as 'spiritual but not religious' and a Christian evangelist at the same time?

Take for example the twenty-something spoken word poet Jefferson Bethke who posted in January 2012 a YouTube video entitled "Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus." Bethke recites his poem in this four-minute viral video that earned seven million views in the first three days and has over 24.5 million views and 170,000 comments to date. He includes an explanation of his poem in the description section beneath the video:

A poem I wrote to highlight the difference between Jesus and false religion. In the scriptures Jesus received the most opposition from the most religious people of his day. At its core Jesus' gospel and the good news of the Cross is in pure opposition to self-righteousness/self-

justification. Religion is man-centered, Jesus is God-centered. This poem highlights my journey to discover this truth. Religion either ends in pride or despair. Pride because you make a list and can do it and act better than everyone, or despair because you can't do your own list of rules and feel not good enough for God. With Jesus, though, you have humble confident joy because He represents you, you don't represent yourself and His sacrifice is perfect, putting us in perfect standing with God!

Bethke certainly distinguishes himself from religion in lines such as the following: “So for religion, no I hate it, in fact I literally resent it / Because when Jesus said it is finished, I believe he meant it.” The overwhelming response to Bethke’s evocative poem (be it derogatory or supportive) demonstrates if nothing else that the individual’s interpretation of religion is a popular topic in today’s American society.

To my mind, the way to approach any concept, including the identity of ‘spiritual but not religious,’ is to encounter and listen. The initial disposition is silence and the silence is an invitation for the other to speak. I am here reminded of the phrase “sitting down beside” which is the approximate translation of the Sanskrit word *Upaniṣad* (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). Although I have only read a handful of excerpts from this collection of texts, I added the translation to my vocabulary because it helps me to make sense of the world. I applied the sentiment when I first became interested in the concept of ‘spiritual but not religious.’

As a first-year student at Hofstra University,¹ I heard the phrase for the first time when it was echoed by my peers. Prior to then, I had not considered that spirituality and religion could be separate and I began to wonder why some choose to distinguish between the two terms. What does spirituality look like apart from religion? In order to find out, I began to invite my ‘spiritual but not religious’ peers to share their narratives with me while I listened. Their stories helped me to realize that questions of religious or spiritual identity (particularly among those in their

¹ Hofstra University is a private school which identifies itself as nonsectarian or secular. That is, it is not affiliated with any religion.

twenties and thirties) are prevalent and on the rise. While some prefer to keep their identities private or even hidden, others like Jefferson Bethke seek to share their identities with anyone willing to sit down beside them.

Facts and Figures

Before I can hoist the subjective above the objective, I must first offer the objective. The statistics with which I start are only the beginning. While they represent the opening chapter in the guidebook for our trip, they do not wholly represent the places we will go and the people we will meet. While they tell us quick facts about who, when, and which basic phrases are commonly used, all travelers know that the guidebook is consulted with diminishing frequency as the trip unfolds.

In the past several decades² it has become increasingly common for individuals to identify with the term ‘spirituality’ above or in lieu of religion. According to the *PEW* findings of 2012, eighteen percent of United States adults are ‘spiritual but not religious.’ Of that eighteen percent, fifteen percent consider themselves to be ‘religiously affiliated’ (Catholic, Protestant, etc.) and thirty-seven percent consider themselves to be ‘religiously unaffiliated’ (atheist/agnostic or ‘nothing in particular’). Thus, although some reject religion in name, they do not necessarily reject the community, beliefs, or practices wedded to a denomination. Similarly, although some reject or deeply question belief in God, they embrace that which they refer to as ‘spirituality.’ The following pages include figures from the *PEW* survey with profiles of self-identity, religion, and demographics of the ‘spiritual but not religious.’

² Researchers often begin the discussion with the baby boom generation of the 1950s. See Bellah et al, 1985; Roof, 1993; and Wuthnow, 1998.

Self-Identity as Spiritual, Religious

*Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a **religious** person, or not?
 Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a **spiritual** person, or not?*

	Religious	Spiritual, not religious	Neither	DK
	%	%	%	%
U.S. general public	65	18	15	2 = 100
Unaffiliated	18	37	42	2 = 100
Atheist/Agnostic	7	34	57	2 = 100
Nothing in particular	23	39	36	2 = 100
Affiliated	75	15	8	1 = 100
Christian	77	14	8	1 = 100
Protestant	78	14	6	2 = 100
White evangelical	85	12	2	1 = 100
White mainline	68	18	13	1 = 100
Black Protestant	82	15	2	2 = 100
Catholic	73	15	12	1 = 100
White Catholic	70	17	12	1 = 100
Hispanic Catholic	77	11	12	1 = 100

Source: Pew Research Center survey, June 28-July 9, 2012. Combined Q97a-b. Figures show those who think of themselves as a religious person, as spiritual but not religious, and as neither a religious nor a spiritual person. DK includes those giving no answer to Q97a. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1: PEW, 2012

	<i>Among those who identify as...</i>		
	Spiritual, not religious	Religious	Neither
	%	%	%
<i>Religion</i>			
Protestant	39	60	21
Catholic	18	25	17
Unaffiliated	32	5	52
Other	9	8	8
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Worship attendance</i>			
Weekly or more	19	52	6
Monthly/yearly	34	35	30
Seldom/never	47	13	64
Don't know	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Importance of religion</i>			
Very important	31	78	7
Somewhat important	32	20	23
Not too/not at all important	36	2	69
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Frequency of prayer</i>			
Daily or more	44	73	11
Weekly/monthly	25	20	22
Seldom/never	31	5	66
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Do you believe in God?</i>			
Yes, believe in God	92	99	60
Absolutely certain	55	84	20
Fairly certain	26	13	26
Not too/not at all certain	10	1	13
Don't know how certain	1	1	2
Do not believe in God	7	1	33
Other/Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100	100
N	729	2,077	610

Pew Research Center survey, June 28-July 9, 2012. Combined Q97a-b, RELIG, ATTEND, Q50, Q52, Q53-54. Based on those who think of themselves as a religious person, as a spiritual but not a religious person, and as neither a religious nor a spiritual person. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 2: PEW, 2012

Demographic Profile

	<i>Among those who identify as...</i>		
	Spiritual, not religious	Religious	Neither
	%	%	%
Men	45	47	60
Women	<u>55</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>40</u>
	100	100	100
White, not Hispanic	70	66	72
Black, not Hispanic	11	14	3
Hispanic	11	14	16
Other or mixed race	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100
18-29	23	17	35
30-49	37	34	34
50-64	30	28	19
65 and older	<u>11</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100	100
College graduate or more	35	26	34
Some college	30	28	25
High school grad or less	<u>35</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>42</u>
	100	100	100
Married	44	54	41
Not married	56	46	59
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	22	21	14
Living with a partner	11	5	9
Never married	<u>24</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>36</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Family income</i>			
Under \$30,000	35	39	29
\$30,000 to \$74,999	33	33	35
\$75,000 or more	<u>32</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>36</u>
	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center survey, June 28-July 9, 2012. Combined Q97a-b, SEX, RACETHN, AGE, EDUC, MARITAL, INCOME. Figures are repercentaged to exclude those who did not give a response. Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Based on those who think of themselves as a religious person, as a spiritual but not a religious person, and as neither a religious nor a spiritual person.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 3: PEW, 2012

As the statistics suggest, the ‘spiritual but not religious’ represent an eclectic cross-section of the population and it is therefore challenging to characterize them as a group. With the occasional exception such as the online community SBNR.org (a forum for sharing news stories, personal stories, and comments), the ‘spiritual but not religious’ do not self-identify as a community with shared values, practices, etc. as might a population of Orthodox Jews or Roman Catholics. Hence the Executive Director of SBNR.org, Steve Frazee, explicitly states that “SBNR.org does not speak for SBNR people [because] SBNR people speak for themselves.”

Some of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ choose to join groups like the Center for Spiritual Living, the Unitarian Universalist Church, or the Ethical Humanist Society while others prefer not to belong to any particular group. Some adhere to a single faith while learning about others and some adhere to no one faith while learning about all they come across. Given the breadth of belief, community, and practice for the ‘spiritual but not religious,’ there are a number of terms scholars use to name and study them including: ‘irreligious’ (Stark, 2008), ‘unchurched spirituality’ (Fuller, 2001; Stark, 2008), ‘seekers’ (Wuthnow, 1998), ‘New Agers’ (Heelas, 1996; Stark, 2008), and more recently ‘Nones’ (PEW).

‘Spiritual but Not Religious’ and Popular Discourse

While these terms are derived from survey data and interviews, there are other terms used which arise from perceptions or reactions that appear in the media, op-eds, and blog posts. The ‘spiritual but not religious’ have made an impression on some authors, professors, and religious figures who are intrigued, annoyed, or bored by the growing number of Americans leaning toward spirituality and away from religion. In typifying the practice of spirituality, some of these outsiders ascribe identifying phrases such as the following: “supermarket spirituality”

(Gordon, “Finding Clarity”), “Burger King spirituality – have it your way” (Blake, “Are There Dangers”), and “salad bar spirituality” (Sipchen, “Boomers Graze”) to name a few. Authors such as Lillian Daniel, David Webster, and Kate Blanchard are frustrated and concerned regarding the ‘spiritual but not religious’ identity and the implications they consider it to carry. Often this frustration features in their work as sarcastic prefaces or one-liners.

Lillian Daniel (senior minister of the First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn) is tired of listening to the ‘spiritual but not religious.’ In her most recent book “*Spiritual but Not Religious*” *Is Not Enough*, Daniel expresses her frustrations about what she calls “self-styled spirituality” (2013, 11). According to Daniel, the ‘spiritual but not religious’ are “as boring and predictable as the rest of our self-centered consumer culture” and therefore anything but “original, daring, or edgy” (11). As a minister who is frequently asked to be a listener, Daniel justifies her claim with the numerous conversations she has been privy to over the years. In the opening pages of her book, Daniel recounts one such conversation with a man who was raised Catholic and eventually came to identify as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ The following is Daniel’s reaction to the story he sought to share:

I was not shocked by the man’s story. Naturally, I have heard it a billion times before, so often that I almost thought I could improvise the plotline along with him. Let me guess, you read *The New York Times* every Sunday, cover to cover, and you get more out of it than the sermon. Let me guess, you exercise and where do you find God? Nature. And the trees, it’s always the trees during a long hike, a long run, a walk on the beach. And don’t forget the sunset. These people always want to tell you that God is in the sunset” (5).

Although Daniel is entitled to her opinions, her caricature of all ‘spiritual but not religious’ individuals is marginalizing and precludes an understanding of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ narrative.

David Webster (Professor of Religion, Philosophy & Ethics at the University of Gloucestershire) explains in an interview regarding his most recent book *Dispirited: How*

Contemporary Spirituality is Destroying Our Ability to Think, Depoliticizing Society, and Making Us Miserable that the ‘spiritual but not religious’ are lazy, self-absorbed individuals who reject challenge in favor of superficial happiness. He opens the introduction with the following confession: “When someone tells me that they are not really religious, but that they are a very spiritual person, I want to punch their face. Hard” (2012, 1).

These sentiments might resonate with concurring scholars and lay people, but they are also likely to turn away the very readers whose minds the authors are trying to change: the ‘spiritual but not religious.’ Even when the authors’ intention is far deeper than superficial critique, their criticisms limit the conversation and are counter-productive to their mission. Webster, for example, intends to educate and even alarm the ‘spiritual but not religious’ with information that might otherwise be unknown to them. He sets out to inform the ‘spiritual but not religious’ and others that contemporary spirituality is “exceptionally problematic” (2012, 3). In an email interview with Alex Caring-Lobel, Webster expressed the following fear regarding the ‘spiritual but not religious’ approach to spirituality:

When we put together a set of concerns from a buffet of beliefs, building our own spiritual platters, one of dangers is that we drop, or fail to select, those elements that challenge us. Most notably, we can choose to not select those elements that fail to fit our preexistent ethical outlook (“The Dangers of Spirituality”).

In other words, Webster believes that contemporary spirituality involving choice that excludes challenge encourages individuals to be complacent. This means that the ‘spiritual but not religious’ are vulnerable to forces which thrive on and therefore feed complacency. These are serious consequences to which the ‘spiritual but not religious’ should be exposed. However, it is unlikely they will listen after reading the opening of Webster’s book.

Scholars who identify on some level with the ‘spiritual but not religious’ are more likely to present palatable pieces for them to read. Kate Blanchard (Assistant Professor of Religious

Studies at Alma College) writes in an opinion piece for *Religion Dispatches* that ‘spiritual but not religious’ is her “bread and butter” because it is “the very thing that drives people into [her] classes” (“Spiritual But Not Religious? Come Talk to Me”). According to Blanchard, the ‘spiritual but not religious’ students are sometimes the most eager because they “work the hardest to figure out what they can believe in or sign on for.” Blanchard admits that “such an individualistic approach to spirituality often comes across to [her] as intolerable shallowness and lack of character.” However, when she sets aside her stereotypes, she comes to insights like this one: “But I also believe that for many formerly religious people, the act of *leaving* their religious traditions, of opting out of the human communities into which they were born or which no longer feel like home, could itself have been a tremendous act of courage. As someone who has admittedly “been estranged from the church in the past few years,” Blanchard tries to understand why “the act of *leaving*” can be a demonstration of courage or desire for connection without compromising her concerns about its correlation with self-interest and individualism.

A Political Critique of Spiritual Marketplace

Much of the discussion in popular discourse surrounds the decisions of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ as spiritual shoppers who think about ‘spirituality’ as they would think about a grocery list noting things like peace of mind or purposeful connections which they hope to acquire. Less often in the discourse is there mention of why some of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ write grocery lists in the first place. Why can ‘spirituality’ be listed and subsequently located in the “Metaphysical” section of the bookstore or the yoga studio at the gym?

Scholars Jeremy Carrette and Richard King bring to the forefront the reasons why spirituality is viewed by many as a commodity to be sold and purchased. In their co-authored

book entitled *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, Carrette and King acknowledge that there is a larger context in which the choices of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ should be placed: the capitalist ideology of neoliberalism.³ For now, we can think of this simply as “life determined by market forces alone” (2005, 17). Carrette and King suggest (and I too assume) that “members of society are conditioned...to see the world in a particular way” that has been fashioned by a long history spanning from the rise of colonialism to its persistence in the form of corporate capitalism (11). These ways of seeing can be challenged, say Carrette and King, “if we become aware of them, and of the possibility of alternatives” (12). In sum, Carrette and King characterize their project as such:

Rather, the book seeks to address the politics of knowledge surrounding the idea of spirituality and draw attention to the pernicious effects of neoliberalism and the corporate takeover of society that such shifts represent. The work is explicitly a political project in that it seeks to challenge the commodification of life as well as disrupt the domestication of diverse cultural traditions, practices, and communities in terms of an increasingly homogenized, sanitized, and socially pacifying conception of spirituality. In writing such a book, we hope to raise awareness of the ways in which popular discourses about ‘spirituality’ tend to displace questions of social justice, being increasingly framed by the individualist and corporatist values of a consumer society (ix).

Although Carrette and King do not victimize the ‘spiritual but not religious,’ they warn them of complacency as does Webster. Carrette and King do not condone the choices of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ or relieve them from their responsibility to question, challenge assumptions, and take political action.

The ‘spiritual but not religious’ have a right to exist within the neoliberal market. In fact, Carrette and King suggest that the ‘spiritual but not religious’ are a side effect of humanistic

³ Carrette and King quote McChesney (1999) who defines neoliberalism as follows: “Neoliberalism is the defining political economic paradigm of our time – it refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit. Associated initially with Reagan and Thatcher, neoliberalism has for the past two decades been the dominant global political economic trend adopted by political parties of the center, much of the traditional left, and the right. These parties and the policies they enact represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and less than one thousand large corporations” (McChesney, 1999, 8, ctd. in Carrette and King, 2005, 2).

psychology and capitalism.⁴ However, in choosing the right to exist, they also choose the obligation to participate as per the market rules and demands. To do so, according to Carrette and King, is to choose a version of spirituality they call “individualist or consumerist” (19). Members of this group are defined by their tendency to “embrace capitalism, consumerism and individualism and interpret their religious or spiritual worldview in terms of these ideologies...with an emphasis upon eclecticism, individualist experimentation and a ‘pick and mix’ approach to religious traditions” (19). Carrette and King do not write to oppose the ‘spiritual but not religious’ so much as they write both to oppose the market forces which commodify spirituality and to compel the ‘spiritual but not religious’ to take a critical stance against those market forces. Specifically, they support a type of spirituality they refer to as “revolutionary” or “anti-capitalist” which is socially engaged⁵ and rejects neoliberalism (17). In this thesis I will first explore the ‘spiritual but not religious’ individual’s creation of a personal spiritual narrative and I will then consider the consequences that follow according to Carrette and King and other such scholars.

Methodology: Collecting Stories

The primary material for this thesis comes from interviews and research. Each of the fifteen interviews was personally conducted and transcribed. Participants were interviewed in person, via phone, or via web camera. I interviewed primarily Hofstra University students and two middle-aged women from New York and New Jersey to consider generational differences. The sample does not represent a random cross-section of the Hofstra University population, let

⁴ Carrette and King offer this summation: “In effect, the territorial takeover of religion by psychology (individualization) is the platform for the takeover of spirituality by capitalism (corporatism)” (2005, 79).

⁵Carrette and King talk about socially engaged spirituality in the following context: “Socially engaged forms of spirituality do not eradicate a concern for the individual, but rather reject the idea that the individual is a separate entity to be measured for the purposes of social control and consumption” (84).

alone that of the American population. Rather, the interviewees are those who responded to my email or personal requests to meet and speak with individuals who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ The resulting sample includes men and woman ranging in age (from eighteen to fifty-six); in religious, and ethnic backgrounds; in geographic location from New York to Japan; and in occupational pursuit.

The contextual research includes scholarly articles and books on the evolution of spirituality in the West, popular articles on the ‘spiritual but not religious’ and related terms of identification, and primary public opinion polls and surveys on religious and spiritual identity and practice. Additional research is comprised of journal articles and books on the concepts of the spiritual marketplace, collection, the material culture of religion, and the modern museum.

Together the interviews and research enrich the discussion of ‘lived spirituality.’⁶ Whereas the interviews offer personal narratives and experiences, the research offers a sense of the larger culture of spirituality within which the members of Hofstra University exist and allows for the consideration of trends and for speculation about the future.

Structure: Speaking Stories

This paper begins by recommending a new theoretical framework for thinking about the phenomenon of ‘spiritual but not religious.’ In the section entitled “Passivity and the Actions of Creation and Collection,” I assume and examine the subjective turn within the western world and specifically Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead’s theory of subjectivization presented in their

⁶ In his book *After Heaven* (1998), Robert Wuthnow demonstrates ‘lived’ spirituality in the following quote: “Spirituality consists not only of implicit assumptions about life but also of the things people talk about and the things they do: the stories they construct about their spiritual journeys, the prayers they offer, the inspirational books they read, the time they spend meditating, their participation in retreats and at worship services, the conversations they have about it with their friends, and the energy they spend thinking about it” (vii). For instances of ethnographic research that exemplify ‘lived’ or ‘embodied’ spirituality, see Freitas, 2008; Gilmore, 2010; and Roof, 1999.

book *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. I then introduce the concepts of collection and creation which I use as thematic lenses throughout the rest of the thesis. With subjectivity in mind, I propose to see the analogy of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ as spiritual collectors who develop and engage over time personal collections akin to “cabinets of curiosity.” In my work with my research subjects, I have developed and reflected upon three categories for thinking about what precisely it is that spiritual collectors collect: beliefs, places, and ways. In this thesis however, for reasons of time, I will confine my written presentation to the categories of belief and place.

I apply this lens of collection to the interviewees who self-identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’ in the following section entitled “Spiritual Stories and Landscapes.” In terms of collecting belief and place, I analyze the contents of the interviewees’ spiritual collections, their inspirations to collect, and their relationships to both their collections and to themselves.

In the final section, called “To Market, To Market: Remembering the Spiritual Marketplace,” these interviews are contextualized and challenged in terms of the spiritual marketplace. I revisit the criticisms offered by popular discourse paying particular attention to the non-derisive but direct critiques of Carrette and King which I assume. Focusing on individualism and consumerism, I explore how the relationship between collector and collected is manipulated by the silent but powerful market forces of corporate capitalism. On these grounds, I return to the subjectivization thesis and speculate that the voice of meaning, significance, and authority to which spiritual collectors lay claim is sought at the expense of the collections’ own voice. Thus, I recognize that subjectivization potentially leads to objectification.

I conclude the thesis the way I begin: emphasizing the worth of the story-teller and his or her audience. However, I defend the need to share and hear multiple perspectives such that the interviewee and the listener take turns informing one another. I fear that without this reciprocity the danger of the single story and the abuse of power easily align with market forces and reinscribe the dominant narrative.

PASSIVITY AND THE ACTIONS OF CREATION AND COLLECTION

For me, obsession is the start of everything and I invoke her as the most important muse for her energy is desire. I don't make too much of a distinction between creating and collecting. Both are directed by the principle of passion, and in both, I'm basically passive. The objects of my desire seek me out, not I them, and it's similar with the subjects and objects of my movies. I'm like a sea sponge. But when I'm soaking, then it's heavily: this is what my obsession actually entails.

Jan Švankmajer, "Cabinet of Wonders"

Subjective-Life Spirituality

This thesis assumes the 'subjective turn' of contemporary western culture and its influence on religion and spirituality. A subjectivization thesis is put forth by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead in their book *The Spiritual Revolution* which proposes reconciliation between the simultaneous decreased and increased prevalence of that which is deemed 'sacred' (secularization and sacralization, respectively). Broadly speaking, subjectivization marks a shift in significance from external communal authority to internal individual authority. Rather than emphasize "obeying, heeding, pursuing ways of life which stand over and above the individual self and bestow meaning on life," westerners increasingly emphasize "states of consciousness, states of mind, memories, emotions, passions, sensations, bodily experiences, dreams, feelings, inner conscience, and sentiments" (2005, 3). When the notion of subjectivization is applied to

religion and spirituality, two categories emerge: life-as religion and subjective-life spirituality. The former marks a commitment to a higher truth that exists beyond this world and the latter marks a commitment to a deeper truth that exists within this world.

The 'spiritual but not religious' identity can be understood as an instance of Heelas and Woodhead's subjective-life spirituality. While the particular variety of 'spirituality' differs according to the life of the 'spiritual but not religious' individual, spirituality often takes the form of 'the subjective.' Heelas and Woodhead describe the subjective pursuit as follows:

Here 'the good life' consists in living one's life in full awareness of one's states of being; in enriching one's experiences; in finding ways of handling negative emotions; in becoming sensitive enough to find out where and how the quality of one's life – alone or in relation – can be improved. The goal is not to defer to higher authority, but to have the courage to become one's own authority. Not to follow established paths, but to forge one's own inner-directed, as subjective, life. Not to become what others want one to be, but to 'become who I truly am.' Not to rely on the knowledge and wisdom of others ('To the other be true'), but to live out the Delphic 'know thyself' and the Shakespearean 'To thine own self be true' (2005, 4).

Interviewee Lucia Palazzo highlighted the difference between life-as religion and subjective-life spirituality when she spoke of her former Christian religious faith as a source of worry due to its perceived objectivity. From ages eight through fourteen, Lucia attended an Evangelical Christian camp. She recalled that the time spent at the camp heightened her sense of sinful behavior versus non-sinful behavior and her obsessive concern with whether she was committing the former. Lucia explains her relationship to the camp as follows:

I moved across the country [when I was fourteen], but I would still go [to the camp] because I was really really invested in Christianity and I was to the point where I think I had what I call scrupulosity where I was almost a little bit too serious about worrying that I was sinning...So I was out there [at the camp] and then finally I think I started asking questions.

For Lucia, her decision to ask questions and claim a spiritual identity was a way to become her own authority. Lucia's response to Christianity is similar to the majority of other interviewees (thirteen of whom were raised in the context of the Christian faith).

Of those raised Christian however, three interviewees still positively identify with their given religion. Some combine religious faith and spirituality such as the "religiously affiliated" and some ascribe truth to their beliefs. However, the truth grows out of subjectivity. Interviewee Amelia Watt senses that she will always be a Catholic. She contends, "I don't think I would ever let go of my Catholic religion because of all the traditions. It's something my family and I can do together. While spirituality is more of a personal thing, Catholicism lets us practice together and keeps us on the same page." Like her Hofstra peer, Danielle Montanaro still identifies with the Christian religion and with something she calls "faithful spirituality." According to Danielle, religion is "manmade" whereas spirituality is that which "you feel in your heart before you believe it in your head." Therefore she is not "glued to any one religion," but she does believe in God and that "Jesus is [her] personal Lord and savior." Danielle appreciates and finds necessary the sense of structure and fellowship organized religion provides, but she says she would never claim that her religion is the correct one. For her, Christianity is about a sense of inner peace that comes from believing that Jesus is with her.

As is characteristic of subjective-life spirituality, the 'spiritual but not religious' are more likely concerned with the present world as a source of truth or energy that they personally experience. This does not mean that the 'spiritual but not religious' are not drawn mentally back to the past or into the future. However, they make an effort to remain oriented in the present and their spirituality serves as a way to keep them grounded. For example, interviewee Kayla Engeman believes that certain energy can be found in the inhabitants of *this life* including herself

(her body), other people, other things, and nature. Regarding the difference between religion and spirituality, Kayla describes religion as being “much more about tradition and how you will apply the past to the future,” whereas she says spirituality is “about right now” and it is similar to “looking left to right.” Like his Hofstra peer, Christopher Tenerio depicts spirituality as something one feels all around him or her self. The idea that Kayla is the one looking left to right or that Christopher is the one feeling, demonstrates the importance they both place on self-awareness.

Since the ‘spiritual but not religious’ locate spirituality in the present world and they continually experience life in relation to the present world, they tend to be regularly reminded of that which is deemed spiritual. Heelas and Woodhead describe this experience of the sacred as “integral to, inseparable from and flowing through one’s own subjective life” (2005, 6). Interviewee Taiyo Francis claims that on a daily basis he researches topics related to science and religion and he discusses his ideas and questions in classes (Taiyo’s co-major is religious studies) or with his friends and family. He refers to these practices as “rituals for [his] kind of spirituality.” Each day Taiyo generates new theories and new questions and he claims that his sense that there is “a great mystery to what lies beyond us is what makes everything so spiritual.” Thus, Taiyo claims to experience the sacred every time he contemplates the mysteries of life.

Although Lucia believes in reincarnation and that she has been reincarnated, her focus remains on this world. In her experience as a Christian, Lucia felt that there was an emphasis on that which Heelas and Woodhead characterize as “something which is and remains external to and higher than the self” (2005, 5). She offers the following distinction between life as a pagan and life as a Christian:

Since I came to terms with being pagan, I think the world’s become more vibrant because I feel like in Christianity you go to church and everything’s in the church and you leave

the church [and] now it's the world...for Christians there's another world – there's a world beyond. Everything you're doing is for the world to come.

Just as Taiyo claims to be confronted by the sacred whenever he questions his beliefs, Lucia claims to be confronted by the sacred when she is conscious of her surroundings. Once again she illustrates the unifying sense paganism provides her that Christianity did not:

But with paganism, it's more like, well this is a part of God or this is a part of spirituality. It's not just somewhere else that you're going so we need to take care of it, we need to. We can feel the energy all around us (not just in church) and [pagans] say anywhere can be sacred space and anywhere can be a temple....more like acknowledging the magic in everyday things.

As she describes it, Lucia's subjective spirituality lends her potential to encounter the sacred at any moment because the encounter is to do with her direct experience.

Given that personal experience and spirituality are so intimately coupled, a 'spiritual but not religious' individual is (or aspires to be) connected to him or herself. Heelas and Woodhead refer to this condition as "living one's life in full awareness of one's state of being" and "finding ways of handling negative emotions" (2005, 4). States of being are best described as one's "subjective experiences" including feelings and emotions (2). In order to connect with herself, Kayla listens to guided meditations on YouTube and attends yoga class to "get in touch with [her] body and the energy that comes from [her] and other people." Kayla explains that these practices not only allow her to "get in touch," but also to alleviate stress. She acknowledges that it is often challenging to gain self-awareness because of her fixation on her mental to-do list. In terms of meditation practice, Kayla says, "a lot of times I'm kinda awake in the moment and I'm still holding onto things I have to do that day or places I have to go, and I just want to be able to completely shut down and let that all go and truly, truly meditate." In addition to meditation and yoga, Kayla hikes or walks to clear her head and "get as much energy [as possible] from other people and other places" including nature and "all things around."

Subjective experiences such as Kayla's are perceived by some as fickle and superficial. Alan Miller writes in a *CNN* blog post that "the trouble is that 'spiritual but not religious' offers no positive exposition or understanding or explanation of a body of belief or set of principles of any kind" ("My Take"). Miller's comment reveals his position that belief is cognitive. As such, belief can be "positively" expressed and communicated from person to person as opposed to feeling that refuses formulaic articulation or transmission from one to another.

These competing sentiments are illustrated in a response post and associated comments on SBNR.org entitled "The Right Way of Thinking." Steve Frazee received an email from a Texas pastor named Jason who was bothered by the SBNR organization's statement which appears on the homepage of their website. The following is an excerpt from Steve's reply post to pastor Jason:

In response to your question, SBNR.org isn't telling you or anyone else how to think. This is not our organization's mission. Our mission is to provide information, education, and inspiration from a variety of spiritual perspectives, many of which conflict with each other.

Our statement, "The staff at SBNR.org believes that all religions and philosophies contain some truth, but that no one religion or philosophy contains all truth," is a statement about our organization but not a statement about SBNR people, you or anyone else. Please understand that SBNR.org does not speak for SBNR people; SBNR people speak for themselves.

To use your language, we are telling you about how we understand religion and philosophy. It's a statement about us, not about you. You are welcome to disagree with our perspective and, if you do, that's fine; you are free to have your own perspective. Another of SBNR.org's core values is the belief that every individual has the right to hold his or her individual beliefs as part of his or her unique spiritual journey.

Later Jason requested that his email and comments be deleted from the site. However, the comments from site members remain. From these comments it is evident that multiplicity of belief and shared truth is essential to many 'spiritual but not religious' individuals.

Sometimes the ‘spiritual but not religious’ find solace in a number of religious beliefs by claiming that all of those beliefs represent different paths to the same end. In part, this is what Heelas and Woodhead mean when they suggest that the goal is to “become one’s own authority” and “not to follow established paths” (2005, 4). For example, commenter Wendy writes that after struggling with religion for decades, she came upon the belief that “all roads lead to one.” Wendy offers this meditation regarding her feelings of relief regarding her decision to direct beliefs:

That makes so much more sense to me. We are created so differently, though equally. Why then must we all worship the same Name and in the same manner? I learned about free will from Wicca. I learned the Golden Rule from Pentecostals. I learned to take people as they come from Disciples of Christ. I learned about finding God in me from Buddhist’s. I learned I don’t need help to speak to the “Higher Power” from my Grandma, a dyed in the wool Baptist (“The Right Way of Thinking,” comment).

Wendy’s beliefs are positive and she can profess them to another as a Christian might profess the Apostle’s Creed. However, her beliefs are probably not what Miller has in mind when he calls for exposition, understanding, and explanation. Although Wendy’s beliefs were handed down, they were extracted from other traditions according to Wendy’s own experiences. Only Wendy knows what it means to “take people as they come” or to “find God in [herself].”

Whereas Wendy and others like her find truth within religion, some of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ find truth without religion. They perceive religion to be a distortion of the same truth it claims to endorse. Mark W. posts a comment in response to Frazee’s “The Right Way of Thinking” stating that for him “all religion is a waste of time [because] none contain anything but an attempt for man to earn his way into God’s grace.” Mark goes on to say that he disagrees with Steve and the SBNR.org team when they say that all religions and philosophies contain some truth. However, Mark admits that Steve and the team are still “SBNR” just as he is. Mark mentions one overarching belief with which he identifies (“I cannot do one thing to make God

love me more and I cannot do one thing to make God love me less”), but he does not deny others their own interpretations of spirituality. Particulars aside, it is (as Heelas and Woodhead claim) the appeal to individual experience and authority which describe subjective-life spirituality and the ‘spiritual but not religious.’

The Collection Metaphor

With Heelas and Woodhead’s theory of subjectivization and the spectrum of meaning ascribed to modern ‘spirituality’ in mind, I explore through metaphor and the themes of art and literature the contemporary use of the phrase ‘spiritual but not religious.’ The central comparison is between the individual who identifies him or her self as ‘spiritual but not religious’ and s/he who collects objects. Particularly, I am interested in the relationship between the person I will call the spiritual collector⁷ and his or her spiritual collection. What does it mean to be a collector of spirituality? What does a spiritual collection do for the collector? What does a spiritual collection look like? Is a collector responsible for his or her collection? These questions are investigated in this thesis.

According to Werner Muensterberger, collecting can be defined as “the selecting, gathering, and keeping of objects of subjective value” (1994, 4). In the first chapter of his book *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*, Muensterberger uses words which connote *appetite* to describe the motivation to collect including hunger, unquenchable thirst, and craving. He argues that, when the pursuit of collection becomes an infatuation (as it sometimes does with “habitual collectors”), the collector is consumed by his or her passion. This breed of the single-minded collector is at risk because his or her passions are of binding necessity as opposed to liberating possibility.

⁷ Hereafter I refer to the ‘spiritual but not religious’ as spiritual collectors.

The spiritual collectors therefore differ from Muensterberger's collectors in that spiritual collectors are not ultimately collecting objects in the traditional sense. While a spiritual collector may identify with a pouch of rosary beads, a prayer stone, or deck of tarot cards, s/he does not collect these things because of a desire to *own* them. Collectors seek subjective experiences and not objective goals. They collect beliefs, places, and ways because they want to use them as a means of expression. Therefore, when I use the term *object*, I do so in reference to spiritual objects categorized as beliefs, places, or ways.

Through the acts of collection and creation, spiritual collectors hope to reject government via higher authority in favor of autonomy. According to Heelas and Woodhead, this autonomy is a claim to significance, meaning, and authority (2005, 11). I imagine these claims to be artistic ones. Once collected, the spiritual objects are arranged and acquire new connotations at the discretion of the collector. As artists, spiritual collectors challenge the conventional enunciation of spirituality by collaging together a number of objects, often from unique sources including their own imaginations. I am reminded of the term bricolage from the French bricoer meaning "to put about" (*OED*). Just as bricolage art is the product of that which is "at hand," including "junk" or trash, spiritual collections are the product of that which the spiritual collectors encounter along their spiritual journeys (*OED*).

In the opening pages of his book, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, Robert Wuthnow refers to the grouping of spiritual objects as an "eclectic" means by which Americans "struggle to invent new languages to describe their faith" (1998, 1). The notion of language (including more than spoken or written language) is important here because it is the way by which one communicates with him or her self and with others. Using the language of artistic collection, spiritual collectors construct the story of their spiritual identities. When

collection is motivated by spiritual search, the individual gathers together feelings, places, and practices that speak to him or her somehow. These feelings, places, and practices represent new vocabularies which the individual then translates in anticipation of later use.

As Thomas Tweed suggests in the quote that begins the introduction to this thesis, spirituality is “something done” and, more specifically, it is “the act of asking a question.” What sorts of questions do the ‘spiritual but not religious’ ask? They ask questions about identity and respond to these questions through the acts of collection and creation of the identity in question. The telling of one’s spiritual identity lends itself to story because the spiritual identity is a story about oneself that is composed over time. With each new experience, an individual revisits his or her story and raises questions in order to create meaning for him or her self. Thus, the process of collecting is also a process of speaking and learning one’s spiritual identity. Each time a feeling or place or practice is added to a collection, it becomes part of the collector’s personal spiritual narrative. Since feelings, places, and practices have voices of their own, the narrative identity is a living world a collector inhabits whenever s/he is conscious of the spiritual collection.

Inevitably, elements of the collection speak with and question one another just as one’s ‘spiritual but not religious’ and Christian evangelical identity might do so. Not to mention, elements of one’s spiritual identity converse with one’s other identities such as his or her race and gender. Thus, there is a tension in collection. Since collectors constantly experience anew and an experience has the potential to undermine or enhance an existing belief, collectors and their beliefs are subject to reorientation and their collections are subject to reflective reorganization. Sometimes experiences confirm or present competing ideas. For example, a collection of belief containing the one conviction that the divine is singular and the conviction that the divine is many is a collection which harbors inherent questions and resistance.

Interviewee Rose Becker identifies herself as a “practical mystic” based on a book she recently read entitled *Abraham Lincoln; The Practical Mystic*. Rose believes that God is “[Divine] providence” and therefore “a governing force” separate from the individual such that “he can’t work in any part of your life [and he] can’t make something happen.” However, Rose also feels that God “is in you but he’s not a God within.” Although she laughs and admits it is challenging to explain, Rose is not bothered by her layered interpretation of the Divine. Rose’s narrative is the common bond among the facets of her identity.

Spiritual collections are the means by which collectors think and speak about themselves. The physical dimension of collection (visualized and tangible) affords collectors the opportunity to participate in this process of narration. Martin Heidegger writes that “Language is the house of Being [and] in its home man dwells” (2008, 217). To dwell in a spiritual collection is to experience it and discover oneself in relation to it. In order to envision what a spiritual collection looks like, picture the tangible manifestation of interviewee Lisa O’Connor’s spiritual collection and world. Referred to by Lisa as her “Zen Den,” this cozy carpeted room is located in the basement of her home includes a futon couch and a chair where Lisa can work, think, read, meditate, or pray. On the walls hang images such as a photograph she took in Sedona, Arizona; a painted likeness of Buddha wall hanging; and a wall medallion inscribed with the written representation of the Sanskrit sound “om” (Image 1).

Beneath the only window in the Zen Den sits a wall-length bookcase laden with books,



Image 1: Courtesy of Kyle Odowd

objects, and photographs. In addition to the Cabbage Patch and other doll from childhood seated in the top left (visible in Image 1), the center shelves hold most of Lisa's personal affects. As if



Image 2: Courtesy of Kyle Odowd

to accentuate the importance she places on this life, the two shelves in the center which contains the photographs and gifts from her loved ones are the focal point of the room (Image 2). Perusal of the surrounding shelves reveals homemade candles; statues representative of Buddha, Egyptian pyramids, Hindu gods, witches, and angels; crucifixes; prayer stones; incense and oils; and seashells to name a few (Images 3 and 4). Finally, the books represent a variety of religious and spiritual traditions ranging from Christianity to Wiccan to New Age. Of particular intrigue was the "Calvin and Hobbes" comic book shelved only three book beneath *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism* (visible in Image 4). When asked about the relationship between the things in her collection, Lisa produced a postcard-sized image depicting Jesus Christ in a state of meditation demonstrating her combination of her given faith (Catholicism) and one of her found faiths (Buddhism)

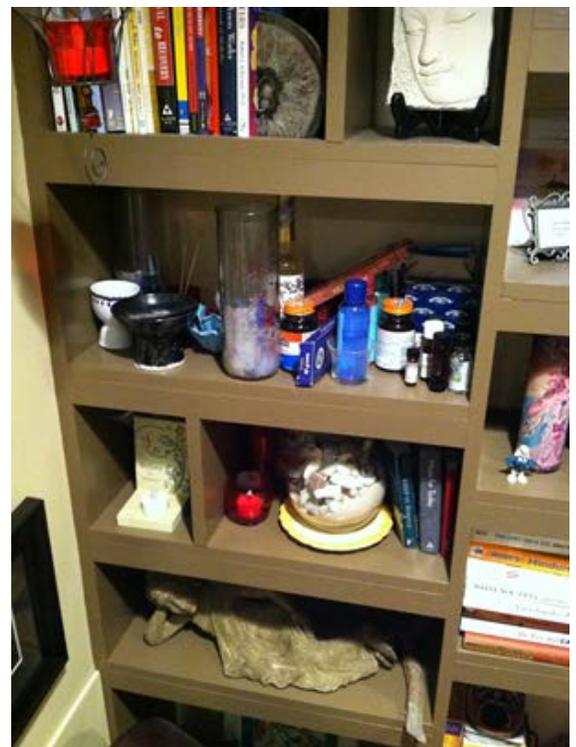


Image 3: Courtesy of Kyle Odowd

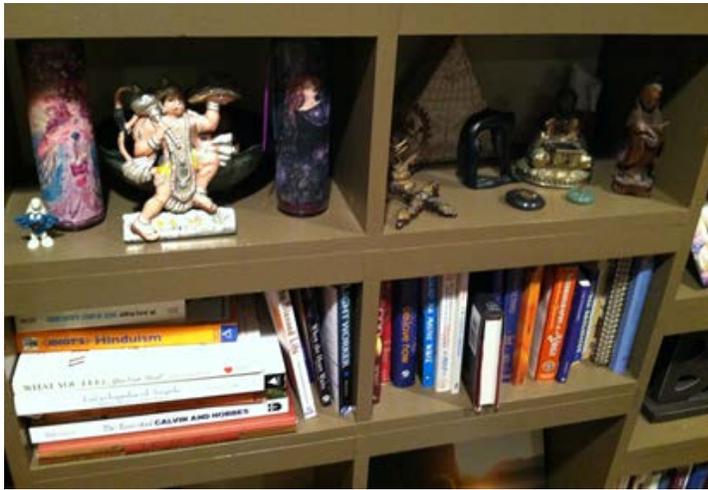


Image 5: Courtesy of Kyle Odowd

(Image 5). As far as Lisa is concerned, her interaction with different faiths does not limit or confuse her; rather, it challenges and inspires her to be open to other perspectives.

A room of collected objects such as Lisa's is reminiscent of mid-sixteenth century

European collections known as *Wunderkammers* or "cabinets of curiosity." Assembled by apothecaries, physicians, and botanists, these rooms, chests, or cabinets were filled with objects of fascination and future study. In the press release for their exhibition, "Rooms of Wonder: From *Wunderkammer* to Museum, 1599-1899," curators at the Grolier Club introduce the *Wunderkammers* with this description:

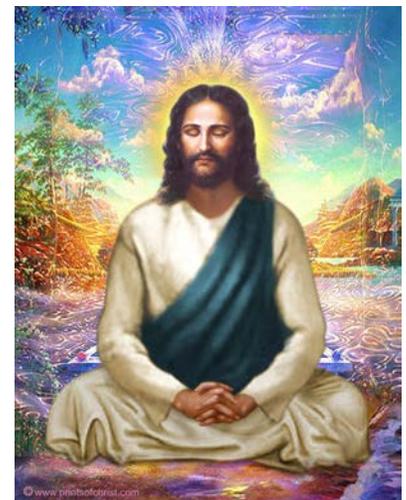


Image 4: "Jesus Christ in Meditation"

In the 16th century, European collectors filled special rooms or cabinets with miscellaneous conglomerations of items, including paintings and drawings; plant specimens (especially those with medicinal properties); animals (including monstrosities); shells and coral; fossils (no one knew what to make of dinosaur bones at the time); coins and medals; ancient sculpture and tools (hopefully antique); gold and silver art objects (the Cellini Cup is a famous example); musical and scientific instruments and automata; minerals and gem; stones with possible magical properties (think philosopher's stones); items of ethnographical interest from the New World, Africa, and East Asia; the occasional Egyptian mummy and two-headed calf; and other rare and curious artifacts.

One could interpret the *Wunderkammer* as a means to elevate and appreciate the instances of the exotic gathered by way of trade and travel. However, to use this interpretation would be to disregard the political implications of the *Wunderkammer*. Objects in the cabinets were grouped

and organized for the purpose of cataloging the unknown, be it part of nature or a foreign culture. Maria Zytaruk writes that Wunderkammern “shed important light on the encyclopedic impulses and the drive to classify the ever-expanding natural world in the early modern period” (“Cabinet of Curiosities” 2). In addition to symbols of wealth and status, Wunderkammern boasted the “intellectual power of their owners” (“Rooms of Wonder”). In Image 6, for example, apothecary

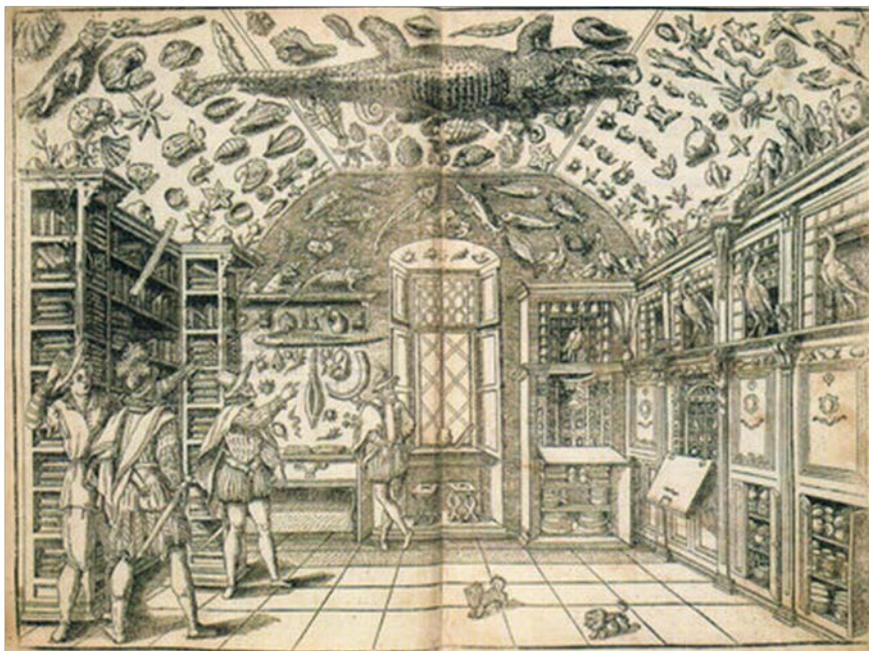


Image 6: *Dell'Historia Naturale (Natural History) 1599*

Ferrante Imperato is depicted alongside several other men of Naples who survey the contents of the cabinet while Imperato voices his observations. Although Imperato is an apothecary and not say an anthropologist, this image represents the rise of colonial

expansion and the desire-driven power to own, name, and speak on behalf of the other (even when the other is nature).

The comparison between Lisa’s twenty-first century Zen Den and Imperato’s late sixteenth century Wunderkammer may at first seem forced. Could Lisa and other spiritual collectors be exerting power over their spiritual collections? Collections are informed by the experience of search. It is the contact with ‘the other’ (be it familiar or unknown) which inspires the collector to see the other as part of his or her collection. Once the decision is made to collect, the role of the collector is transformed. As the funnel through which all experiences are accumulated, the collector is also the translator. In the multi-faceted process of collection, the

individual is risks affirming the self and silencing the other (that which is experienced, translated, and collected) in the much the same way that Imperato silences affirms his identity as an apothecary and silences the animals and plants by removing them from their natural settings. Thus, the significance, meaning, and authority to which spiritual collectors hope to lay claim are necessarily met with responsibility to the other.

Whereas Imperato lived at a time when colonialism was gaining momentum, spiritual collectors live in the aftermath of that initial momentum. This is not to say that colonialism has disappeared. Rather, it has disappeared from sight. Today colonialism masquerades as corporate capitalism.⁸ Carrette and King summarize this vanishing act as follows:

The ‘brilliance’ of the capitalist move is found in the way in which it builds upon older colonial legacies and yet manages to portray itself as ‘inevitable’ and not a form of colonialism at all...In our contemporary context, the new rationale for colonialism is the conversion of entire communities and societies into individualized ‘consumers’ and compliant workers. With the rise of neoliberalism in the late twentieth century, the primary ideological rationale for maintaining domination has become the mythology of the ‘free market’ and the spread of democracy. This rhetoric hides the reliance of the capitalistic enterprise upon these older colonial legacies (2005, 25).

As marketplace inhabitants, spiritual collectors are accountable with varying degrees of complicity. In pursuit of subjective-life spirituality, collectors search for spiritual objects which resonate somehow with the collectors’ emerging spiritual identities. Unlike Jan Švankmajer (quoted beneath the heading of this section) who chooses passivity and submission to the muse of obsession in his acts of creation and collection, spiritual collectors choose agency and individual authority when they reject (in part or outright) a higher external authority. Most collectors probably do not realize that their inner-directed authority is compromised given that it is actually directed by the puppet strings of market forces. Carrette and King therefore suggest

⁸ In addition to Carrette and King whose claims are assumed in the critique of this thesis, see Bhogal, “Decolonizations;” Dirlik, “Global Modernity?”; Dussel, “Eurocentrism;” and Mignolo, 2002 for a more comprehensive construction of the postcolonial lens including discussion of such themes as decolonization, modernity, and geopolitics.

that, under the direction of corporate capitalism, the spiritual marketplace “creates a greater demand and need for some kind of ‘real,’ ‘pure,’ or ‘authentic’ spiritual experience, always just out of reach” (83). In other words, it could be that something like spirituality can only be preserved when the market forces (and therefore colonialism) are continually rejected in favor of an anti-capitalist, socially-engaged spirituality.

The purpose of this thesis is not to charge my interviewees and spiritual collectors with blame. As a marketplace inhabitant myself, I am neither in a position to deliver verdicts, nor would I opt for such a task. My purpose is twofold: to listen to the stories of a handful of spiritual collectors and to tell them the story of the marketplace in a way that might compel them to question their decisions to collect and create in the ways that they do.

SPIRITUAL STORIES AND LANDSCAPES

When we are children, we invent these detailed imaginary worlds that the child psychologists call “paracosms.” These landscapes, beasts, heroes, and laws, help us orient ourselves in reality. They are structured mental communities that help us understand the wider world. We carry this need for paracosms into adulthood.

David Brooks, “The Power of the Particular”

Just as my interviewees collect new spiritual elements, I too collect ways of listening to and mapping these collections. In order to make sense of these arrangements (these stories), I have collected three categories: belief, place, and way. Beliefs are words or explanations by which collectors choose to live. Place is the special context in which collectors seek. Although not examined here, one’s preferred way is his or her practice. Each of these categories tries to garner one dimension of the stories I heard. There are other dimensions to these stories just as there are other maps.

Collecting Beliefs

In part a collector creates his or her spiritual world using beliefs. The beliefs are experienced over again each time the collector visits his or her spiritual world. However, the belief building blocks do not become accessible to the collector in the first place until s/he “lives” them. This notion of experiential belief is captured by poet John Keats when he writes that “nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced – even a proved is no proverb until your life has illustrated it” (2005, 305). The beliefs that spiritual collectors use to create their worlds are demonstrated by their experiences.

Over the course of its etymological evolution, the term *belief* has undergone a transformation I wish to highlight before continuing to use it in the context of spiritual collecting. The first incarnation of term is a combination of the prefix “ga” and “leubh” which together mean “to care, desire, like, love” (*OED*). In the late twelfth century, *bileave* replaced the Old English *geleafa* defined now as “belief, faith.” However, prior to the fourteenth century, the meanings of belief and faith were mutually exclusive. Whereas belief meant “trust in God,” faith meant “loyalty to a person based on promise or duty” and was not therefore associated with the concept of divinity. By the late fourteenth century people began to use faith in a theological sense to mean “trust, faith, confidence, reliance, credence, belief” and, by the sixteenth century, belief was restricted to a “mental acceptance of something as true [as a matter of religious doctrine].” In short, belief evolved from a *feeling* as in caring, desiring, liking, and loving to *knowing* as in mentally accepting some doctrine as true. When I write about collecting belief, I do so with the first etymological incarnation of belief in mind.

In order to begin to see the distinction between knowing and feeling, consider interviewee Lisa O’Connor. Lisa is a middle-aged wife, mother, and entrepreneur living in

Manhasset, New York. Throughout the interview Lisa uses the term belief to describe the tenets of her Catholic education and the term feeling to describe the spiritual experiences she collected throughout her life. Thus, she uses the term feeling the way I use the term belief. For example, Lisa says that as a child in a Catholic grammar school she “believed in Adam and Eve.” Regarding the class lessons and the teachers she said, “I believed everything. Everything they said was true.” She remembers drawing a picture (one that her grandmother mounted on a plaque) of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with an angry God peering over a cloud. With an air of disappointment Lisa remembers, “That was my God.” At the same time Lisa recalls feeling contrary to those beliefs. In eighth grade Lisa argued with a pastor because she identified with the idea of reincarnation in lieu of heaven and hell. Similarly, at least as early as age five or six, Lisa felt there was “something spiritual” about witches. As a child walking with her mother on the beach in Greenpoint, New York Lisa saw a group of hooded women in the distance. Immediately Lisa identified them as witches even though her mother told her they were nuns. Slowly Lisa began to accumulate experiences and paint the beginnings of a spiritual world apart from the belief in an angry God amid the clouds.

As a spiritual collector, Lisa does not approach her beliefs in a systematic or formulaic manner. Her God is (among other things) the energy that makes the trees grow and the flowers bloom. It is a presence that is felt rather than explained. This sentiment can be contrasted with the Christian who recites the Apostle’s Creed when s/he is asked to share his or her beliefs. This creed is a profession of faith spoken in unison every Sunday by some Christians in the presence of their congregation. Over again parishioners state their testimony in lines like “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth” and “We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” At the conclusion the believer states “Amen” meaning “so

be it” or “truly.” That is, the contents of the Creed are not simply felt, but they are thought to be true.

A set of beliefs that claims to know something potentially separates those who share them from those who do not. When Christians state “We believe” as they do when they recite the Creed, they draw ideological boundaries between themselves and non-believers. Whether this message is implied or not, non-community members sometimes feel as though a community claims to have exclusive rights to truth when that community professes a system of belief and suggest that others can access that truth only if they too adopt the same beliefs. Exclusive access to truth is one of the reasons spiritual collectors distinguish themselves from religion. Collectors are bothered and confused by the notion that one set of beliefs are true and the rest are by comparison untrue or incomplete.

Now that she has attended churches, temples, discussion groups, and the like of all different faiths and denominations, Lisa feels (as did Wendy who we met earlier) that “there are many paths to the same destination.” She considers herself to be a woman on a spiritual journey and along the way she has incorporated elements of Christianity, Eastern religions including Buddhism and Hinduism, Egyptian spirituality, shamanism, and New Thought (all of which reside in her Zen Den). For a time she visited a temple operated by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) (also known as Hare Krishnas). Lisa says that she enjoyed attending until she mentioned to one of the devotees that she takes comfort in knowing that she can potentially “fall off the beam” and still regain her way. Given the number of roles she fills, Lisa’s life is hectic. Thus, by this comment she meant that if her other obligations were to prevent her from continuing her practice at the temple, she believed other spiritual opportunities would manifest. In response, the devotee discouraged Lisa from looking beyond the Hare

Krishna teachings because it was unnecessary to do so. Although Lisa thinks the devotee simply misinterpreted her sentiment, she also thinks that the universe may have caused the devotee to hear and respond in the way that he did for some reason unknown. After this occurrence, Lisa stopped attending the temple because she was reminded of the aspects of fundamentalist Christianity which had prompted her to begin searching for “spirituality” in the first place.

Not only do spiritual collectors question the exclusive rights to truth, they also question the assumed objectivity of truth that accompanies mentally accepting and knowing a belief. In place of certainty and acceptance, some collectors claim their right to doubt and possibility. For collectors such as twenty-year-old Hofstra student Taiyo Francis (introduced earlier in the thesis), this doubt is the motivation for spiritual search. Taiyo says that “as much as you want to believe in something, there’s always that single doubt.” This “great mystery to what’s beyond us” is this ignition that fuels Taiyo’s burning spiritual questions and encourages him participate in discussions with his friends and family, attend a Unitarian church with his grandmother, take courses in religious studies, and connect with “Japanese spiritualities” he identifies as Buddhism, Shintoism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Taiyo characterizes his “spiritual feeling” as follows: “It’s knowledge about all different religions. It’s not necessarily about believing in one, but in the possibility that maybe there’s a combination of religions that make up what the world is and the possibility that none of them are true.” Taiyo’s commitment to openness is a feature of his identity that helps furnish his spiritual world.

In his world of possibility, Taiyo acts as though “there is always a different course one can take” (a sentiment he shares with Lisa). Taiyo’s world is therefore something that is “flowing” and “ever-changing” according to his choices. As confirmed by past experiences, Taiyo describes his beliefs in the following manner:

I believe that your daily decisions alter and make that course better or worse for you. Making those decisions for yourself and not having a God or anyone else judge you, that's really the challenge. It's really about your own judgment and what you want. I know I made some poor decisions in the past, but it's what I'm doing now that I have the ability to change. And I don't have to look at a solid higher power to determine if I'm doing something wrong. It's really an internal view and that I have different paths I can go on.

Each time Taiyo considers his possible paths or later assesses his decisions, he takes his own spiritual pulse and imagines himself as a ghost writer who determines how his past decisions should be judged. That is, Taiyo creates the laws and reserves the right to make changes because he says "you're always learning and you don't know everything." Taiyo's paracosm of sorts was set in motion by the "open setting" in which his parents and grandmother raised him. His hope that he will someday be in an "influential position" such that he can promote openness among members of different faith communities is an invitation into Taiyo's evolving paracosm.

As part of this description of "lived religion," Wade Clark Roof writes that "scripts" (equivalent to my version of belief) "are sets of symbols that imaginatively explain what the world and life are about" (1993, 41). Symbolized by flux and "different courses," Taiyo's world is *about* doubt, possibility, and openness. However, not all worlds include commitment to uncertainty. Twenty-two-year-old Hofstra student and interviewee Nicole Uhr believes "there's always that one [guardian angel] who helps you through each stage in your life," particularly in trying circumstances. When asked about the origin of this belief, Nicole provided two answers. First she explained that she was introduced to the concept by watching the television show *Charmed*. Next Nicole relayed a story about a time in her sophomore year of college when she was taken to the hospital because her blood-alcohol content was dangerously high. She remembers asking the doctors and nurses if she was going to die to which they responded that they did not know. Nicole lived through the experience and concluded her story with the

following remark: “I feel like there was someone with me that made sure I woke up the next morning.” Whether they manifest metaphorical courses or angels, beliefs are rooted in feeling.

Once a collector experiences a belief as feeling and chooses to add it to his or her spiritual narrative, the belief becomes a feature of his or her spiritual world *and* an expression of his or her spiritual identity. Among her spiritual childhood experiences, Lisa mentions at least one that remains a part of her today. On one shelf in her Zen Den, Lisa keeps a wordless picture book entitled *The Attic Witch*. Since the book has no written text, Lisa relayed the story to me according to her own image-to-story translation:

It’s a little girl who’s outside stomping in the rain and then her mom yells at her to come in because she’s all wet. She comes inside and she goes up to the attic and she’s looking around at all these boxes. There’s a mirror – it’s kind of a tall standing mirror –and as she’s looking in the mirror on the other side of where her reflection should be a little witch is there and pulls her into this magical world.

As a five-year-old girl Lisa liked the book so much that she never returned it to the public library’s collection and kept it instead for her private collection. Although Lisa does not identify as Wiccan, her younger self gravitated toward the story and her older self read about Wiccan beliefs. Lisa therefore incorporates both the younger and older versions of herself in her spiritual narrative identity.

The experiences which evolve into beliefs are accumulated throughout a collector’s life and his or her paracosm evolves accordingly. As such, spiritual worlds are necessarily mediated by the society-defined elements a collector can access. Sometimes collectors’ feelings confirm their encounters such as Taiyo with his family upbringing, Nicole with *Charmed*, and Lisa with her library book. Other times collectors’ feelings deny their encounters as with Lisa and her experience in Catholic grammar school or at ISKCON. Once beliefs are illustrated by the collector’s life, s/he then uses them to illustrate the feeling of his or her spiritual world and these

feelings are enhanced by the collector's sense of place including the inhabitants that possibly reside in the spiritual world.

Collecting Places

In addition to beliefs, spiritual collectors define their worlds with places. Spiritual collectors are travelers (or perhaps more accurately wanderers because they do not necessarily set out with their destinations in mind). Where or to whom might their wandering lead? I will borrow the terminology used by Eric Weiner in his *New York Times* article "Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer" and say that spiritual collectors wander to "thin places." According to Weiner, thin places are "the locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and we're able to catch a glimpse of the divine, or the transcendent." Although they tend to be "sacred spaces" such as churches and temples, they are not limited to these archetypal places. For example, Weiner cites the Hong Kong International airport; a bar in Shinjuku, Tokyo; and Powell's bookstore in Portland, Oregon among his personal thin places. I will also suggest that sometimes the inhabitants of those thin places also contribute to and constitute the place itself.

The concept of travel is integral to the concept of collection because travel facilitates collection. That is, the experience of travel gives one the opportunity to collect something or, as I propose, someone or someplace to which s/he shares a psychological connection. Ritually, travelers bring souvenirs back from their destinations. A souvenir is literally "a remembrance or memory" (*OED*), but over time the word changed such that it colloquially signifies a piece of mass-produced merchandise purchased by a tourist whereby s/he commemorates a vacation. Souvenirs are therefore likely to include postcards, figurines, t-shirts, and the like. However, I will reclaim the original use of *souvenir* to signify a memento,

keepsake, or token that is physically or mentally garnered by a spiritual collector in his or her wanderings.

The souvenirs of spiritual collectors are places. I use the term place to refer to the context in which beliefs and ways are demonstrated. This context includes the place as a space and as a community of inhabitants that a collector chooses because they remind the collector of and potentially transport him or her to “thin places.” In other words, these places (as Weiner describes) are sources of disorientation, relaxation, and transformation. They are disorienting because, upon leaving that which is familiar, the collector is “jolted out of old ways of seeing the world” (“Where Heaven and Earth”). They are relaxing because, in the midst of disorientation, the collector is “unmasked” and almost paralyzed as one’s senses of time and self fall away. Finally, they are transformational because, “in thin places, [collectors] become [their] more essential selves” because they learn to see with new eyes.

In terms of place as space, a place may be physical or non-physical, manmade or natural, silent and motionless or full of sound and movement. Danielle Montenegro’s Methodist church is a physical and manmade space whereas Kayla Engeman’s setting for hiking and walking is outside in nature. In her practice of meditation and lucid dreaming, Lucia Palazzo enters a mental space. Unlike Danielle and Kayla who visit their places as a matter of volition, Lucia cannot fully control her subconscious “travel” to “another realm” or to “the spirit world.” In his article Weiner describes a number of places to which he has traveled including the Bangla Sahib gurdwara (a Sikh temple in New Delhi) which was full of people “lost in their solitary words together” and the Boudhanath (a Buddhist shrine in Katmandu, Nepal) which he recalls via the “clickety-click of prayer wheels, the murmur of mantras, the clanking or store shutters yanked open, [and] the chortle of spoken Tibetan” (“Where Heaven and Earth”).

When spiritual collectors collect places as people, the community may consist of the solitary individual or the gathering of two or more in fellowship of conviction, practice, or both. For example, interviewee Chris Tenerio meditates by himself in his room and he discusses his questions and realizations with his friends and with his peers and professors in the classroom. Sometimes the members of a collector's community know one another and sometimes they know only the collector. Danielle is a member of the Trinity United Methodist Church and, although the congregation is sizable, parishioners and pastors are familiar with each another on a personal level. Danielle explains that the fellowship is an important part of her faith. Contrastingly, interviewee Kayla considers her community to be all of the people she meets and connects with throughout her lifetime and many of these individuals will never meet one another. That is, they are a community Kayla has collected and they are connected by virtue of their relationship to Kayla.

In order to consider the construction of the spiritual narrative as it relates to place, imagine first the collection of twenty-year-old Hofstra student and interviewee Lucia Palazzo. As previously mentioned, is a pagan and experiences a deep connection to nature. Among the places she collects are the peaceful, wooded areas surrounding her home in rural New Jersey and the shade beneath a tree (both of which are conducive to Lucia's practices of journaling and meditation). Additionally, Lucia collects places in her subconscious. She claims that "there are places you can get to on another plane or outside of this realm." In order to visit these places, Lucia says she has found three possible courses:

Sometimes I can meditate before I go to bed and put myself in a state of mind where I actively fall into the dream so I'm aware of what I'm doing. There have also been times when I've put myself in a state of sleep-paralysis and lifted myself out of my body. It sounds odd, but basically it's the state between sleeping and wakefulness and the idea is that you can then go somewhere else. Other times it happens by accident when I realize

I'm in a dream and I use that as a lifting-off point sort because, once you're in a lucid dream and you're aware of it, you can control your surroundings in a way.

When asked about how she distinguishes these places from her regular dreams, Lucia says that she generally has “really vivid dreams” and that when she travels, “it’s separate.” Specifically she says, “I know I’ve gone from the dream world to something else in my own brain because it’s just so intricate – like the people or things that I meet or the way it’s laid out.” In short, places are “like a second reality.”

The places and things Lucia encounters are as real to her as those she encounters in this world. However, in Lucia’s navigation of this second reality, her identity often morphs along the way. In her past travel experiences, Lucia has shape-shifted, seen herself in a past life, and possibly seen her “true form.” She is aware of these occurrences because in the other world she looks and the mirror to find that she has red hair or appears as a “sort of goblin.” While Lucia exists in these places in her transformed state, she meets spirits, fairies, and other mythical creatures. Sometimes these creatures have developed cultures (she references one fairy culture whose members practice a religion). Combined, these experiences inspire Lucia’s personal spiritual narrative and the fiction that she shares as a creative writing major. Lucia admits that she is unable to confirm whether the places are in her mind or “somewhere else,” but she

Unlike Lucia who practices her spirituality in a number of places, Jody Quinn claims to have no practices that she rehearses in the context of place. Jody is twenty-year-old Hofstra student who was raised Catholic, but currently identifies as agnostic and spiritual. Though she does not call herself a Catholic, Jody is connected to the congregation of her local Catholic church because of her work as a singer and her father’s practices. Growing up Jody attended mass and sang in the church choir every Sunday. Today she attends general mass, weddings, and funerals because she is compensated for her services as a singer. Jody does not feel at home in

the church, but she acknowledges that the community can be a gift for those who believe. Jody supports her notion with an anecdote about her father who has suffered six heart attacks in his life:

He's forty-eight and he's okay, but every time he would get sick and go to the hospital the community would pray for him and it made him feel really good...I think that not having a community isn't a bad thing, but I think that having it is a great thing if you're in it so long as it's a positive community.

Thus, Jody appreciates the religious community on behalf of her father, but she does not feel the sense of belonging within that community.

When Jody delivers vocal performances in church, she participates as though she were a community member by reciting parts of the mass and receiving communion. Every time the priest invites parishioners to think their own personal intentions as part of the intercession prayer, Jody says hello to her Nana who passed away when Jody was eleven. Regarding this response to the context of the Catholic mass, Jody says, "I don't know why I do this because I don't consider myself Catholic." Later it was revealed that Jody probably does this because her Nana is a living part of Jody's community. In answer to a question about religious experiences, Jody trailed off into a story about a time last March when she was sitting alone in the waiting room of St. Francis hospital (a Catholic hospital). While she sat quietly and tried to occupy her mind by reading a book, "a woman walked in who looked exactly like [Jody's] Nana who died" and the hospital was changed into a thin place.

The woman sat down next to Jody and before long the two were conversing about the woman's husband and Jody's father who were both in surgery for similar conditions. Not only did the woman look like her Nana, but she also carried a rosary that was "the same one" that Jody's Nana gave her to commemorate the sacrament of Jody's First Communion. Jody and the woman spoke from "eight in the morning to six at night." Jody marks this occasion as "one of

the most religious experiences” she has had. However, she quickly follows this admission with a hesitant remark which has to do in part with her identity as a spiritual agnostic: “Not that I feel like that woman in the waiting room was godsent to calm me down or make me feel better, but it was definitely a nice...I don’t know.” The woman was not a fabrication of Jody’s imagination (according to Jody, her mother was just as stunned to meet the woman who bore such a resemblance to Jody’s Nana). Jody’s stories about instances associated with her Nana convey the combined power of place and memory. A church, a hospital, a woman, and a string of rosary beads are enchanted when Jody recalls a member of her spiritual collection: her Nana.

Like Jody whose memory of her grandmother informs her reality, interviewee Lisa O’Connor has collected people and spaces that live largely in her imagination. As previously mentioned, Lisa is a mother of three children and there is a particular space and person that are intimately connected to Lisa’s identity as a mother. Over

the course of her interview, Lisa described “shifts” in her life that corresponded to shifts in her “spiritual consciousness.” Until recently, Lisa has flirted with the desire to drop everything (work, motherhood, marriage) and move to India to live in spiritual hermitage (practiced by some Hindus) in a place called an ashram. For Lisa, the ashram signified an escape from the occasional monotony of daily life. When Lisa pictured herself in the ashram, she pictured a woman who can practice spirituality in every facet of her life including obligations such as chores. Lisa’s perception changed after she began learning about a woman named Amma (meaning “mother”).



Image 7: Courtesy of Kyle Odowd

Amma, whose given name is Mātā Amṛtānandamayī Devī, is a Hindu guru known fondly by admirers like Lisa as “The Hugging Saint.” Lisa has only met Amma once (at a large-scale event in the Javits Convention Center) and she was easily taken someplace else by virtue of Amma’s “beautiful demeanor.” After meeting Amma, studying her teachings, and reading about her life according to some of her followers, Lisa experienced a shift in consciousness. In time, Lisa’s orientation toward motherhood began to blossom with the archetype of Amma in her thoughts. Today she feels as though “the pieces [of her identity] are coming together” in a way that makes especially motherhood “a whole different experience.” Now Lisa claims her home as her ashram because, she concedes, “we live in society.”

While her desire to travel to India remains, Lisa sees her daily routine and her responsibility to nurture her children not as a spiritual hermitage but as a unique form of spiritual

instruction. In order to preserve this newfound sense of self-as-mother, Lisa spends time at her bedroom altar each morning (Image 7). Situated beneath a small window, Lisa has arranged another collection (in addition to her Zen Den) which includes photographs of Amma, an Amma doll (given to her as a gift from her husband), a candle to burn in honor of Amma, and string of mantra beads. Above the red table, the collection continues with three suncatchers (including one depicting an angel and one depicting Amma) and a dreamcatcher that adorn the window (Image 8). After a morning meditation and a few recitations of the Amma



Image 8: Courtesy of Kyle Odowd

mantra, Lisa finds that her ability to stay grounded in compassion throughout the day is strengthened.

For spiritual collectors Lucia, Jody, and Lisa, the collection of spiritual places offer them the opportunity to travel to unseen places that disrupt a hackneyed view about the way life is. Initially, this break compels travelers to question their identities. Once the souvenir place is added to a collector's collection, the degree to which s/he questions likely diminishes. This is because the souvenir place is thereafter a part of the collector's spiritual world and narrative. Perhaps collectors require the consumption of memory in order to remember the feeling of being lost and uncertain about their identities. Is memory a substitute for the jolt out of old ways Weiner describes?

TO MARKET, TO MARKET:
REMEMBERING THE SPIRITUAL MARKETPLACE

To market, to market to buy a penny bun,
Home again, home again, market is done.
Nursery Rhyme

Spiritual Narratives in Context

The stories of the interviewees have thus far served as the primary source material for this thesis because one should listen to the stories of those being represented. After spending time alongside my subjects, I now take a few steps backward in order to envision some of the wider narratives of which their narratives are inextricably part. These wider narratives of colonialism and its continuation as corporate capitalism arguably affect every facet of one's life. Since the impact of this dilemma is shared by all members of western society, it would be

neglectful to dismiss its affect on the collection and creation of spiritual narratives. Hence, I write not to criticize but to complicate the vignettes considering their marketplace context.

According to the theory Jeremy Carrette and Richard King offer in their book, *Selling Spirituality*, modern-day ‘spirituality’ has been fashioned according to a particular global history. Rather than ask what religion and spirituality mean, Carrette and King ask why these terms have acquired the meanings they have and what has happened as a result. They claim that in the post-Enlightenment years, religion has been privatized. Initially this privatization was the result of “the rise of scientific rationalism, humanism, and modern liberal democratic models of the nation-state (a process often called secularization)” (2005, 13). However, in the past thirty years, the market has morphed due to the presence of global organizations such as the World Trade Organization and due to neoliberal ideology (4, 13). These recent changes have affected the privatization of religion in new ways. Unlike the sentiment suggested in the nursery rhyme verse in the opening of this section, the market is no longer a place to visit and from which to depart after a transaction is made. Rather, the market is a pervasive force that is inescapable for any member of a “consumer society” (x).

The beliefs, places, and ways that spiritual collectors choose are either selected because they have been made accessible via the market or because they are considered in terms of the market. Specifically Wade Clark Roof writes that “the language we opt for in describing the sacred bears a cultural imprint” and “storytelling and meaning-making inevitably become intertwined with marketing, technology, and consumption in a market economy” such as that which exists in the United States today (1993, 110). This claim can explain why Lucia communicates with fellow pagans via online forums of chatrooms, Nicole conceived of her guardian angel after watching the depiction of a guardian angel on the television show *Charmed*,

and Lisa uses the internet as a means to promote her class offerings and listens to mantras over the sound system in her car whenever she runs errands.

Since they are immersed in the market, members of society customarily never learn or grow to forget its actions. Channeling the work of Noam Chomsky, Carrette and King explain this phenomenon as follows:

We are all predisposed to see the world according to a set of cultural habits, embodied practices and thought forms (what Bourdieu called 'habitus'). Patterns of thinking emerge in the social world that prevent people from seeing both the interconnections of culture and power and also the ability of ideas to disrupt and challenge the established order. Moreover, most of us, even if at times reluctantly and with considerable cynicism, tend to accept the picture of the social world presented to us by the mass media, the state apparatus and our educational systems, because we are simply trying to cope with the struggles of life (2005, 10-11).

Since these patterns of thinking are so engrained, even educated and aware individuals must remind themselves continuously if they entertain hope of resistance. If resistance is not at least attempted, Carrette and King explain that "powerful institutions are able to take the initiative in influencing and shaping the world and our social conception of it" (11).

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis when Carrette and King are first introduced, their work is intentionally political and calls into questions two overarching themes, namely "the commodification of life" and "the domestication of diverse cultural traditions, practices and communities in terms of an increasingly homogenized, sanitized and socially pacifying conception of spirituality" (2005, x). In the following two sections, I will consider more closely the subcategories of the privatization of religion (individualization and commodification) that Carrette and King attribute to the global spread of corporate capitalism so as to orient the earlier sections of this thesis from outside its previously subjective context.

Spiritual Individualism and the Consequence of Agency

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead explicitly state that the subjectivization which accompanies subjective-life spirituality and the inner-directed search “should not be confused with ‘individualization’” (2005, 11). In further accommodation of subjectivization, Heelas and Woodhead write that it need not be understood as “atomistic, discrete, or selfish” (11). Whereas Heelas and Woodhead raise no cause for alarm, Bellah et al. foreground their work with alarm regarding the same observed trend. In the preface to their oft-cited work *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985), Bellah et al. write that they are “concerned that this individualism [that Alexis de Tocqueville described in his book *Democracy in America*] may have grown cancerous – that it may be destroying those social integuments that Tocqueville saw as moderating its more destructive potentialities, that it may be threatening the survival of freedom itself” (viii). It is in their chapter about religion that Bellah et al. introduce the young nurse named Shelia who identifies her faith as “Sheliaism” or her “own little voice” and defines her beliefs as follows: “‘It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other’” (221).

Individuals such as Shelia and my interviewees spend time creating worlds that occupy their time thought processes. Consequently, these niches which seemingly offer sustainability actually promote loneliness. Some interviewees expressed feelings of isolation and a yearning for a community they had yet to discover in their spiritual collection process. For example, Lucia Palazzo would ideally like to find someone under whom she can study Wicca. For now however, Lucia finds it helpful to chat with others online about traveling and related practices because, “I have not met many people frankly in real life that do these kinds of things.” Perhaps there are other students like Lucia on Hofstra University’s campus who do not feel comfortable

sharing their identities in public because of that Enlightenment-inspired distinction that exists at an operational level. Meanwhile, the online setting affords one a sense of anonymity and an outlet for self-expression.

In addition to discussing the places to which they have subconsciously traveled or the spells they have tried, members of the online community also share photos of their altars such that the online forums of Tumblr, etc, become “almost like a sort of collective scrapbook.” Despite the tenuous sense of community Lucia feels, she also finds there to be many divisions within the “communities.” Regarding the divisions, Lucia offers this analysis:

When you say *pagan* there are so many different things. I talk to so many people online who don't even use the word *pagan* anymore. They use the words *polytheist* or *reconstructionist* and all these other things. And right now a lot of people are moving away from Wicca. There are just so many different branches and things. It's odd because just when I was thinking *I'll try to find someone*, I've met so many different people with so many different ideas it's almost overwhelming, all the different paths people take.

Perhaps as a result, Lucia hesitates to define herself. Currently she says she is an “eclectic” or “solitary witch” because she knowingly combines elements from a variety of sources and she has not been initiated into a coven. Paradoxically, the online communities have shown Lucia that she is not alone because “a lot of people have similar thoughts” and they have forced her to feel alone because she sees a fragmented group of individuals who share only the term *pagan* or *Wiccan*.

Like Lucia, Lisa also expressed a desire to find a community of like-minded individuals. When asked she said, “That's always the thing I've been missing.” Over the years she participated in a number of groups including meditation in college, a women's support group, a Unitarian Universalist church, and most recently the Center for Spiritual Living. Lisa admits that the women's group felt like a community, but she lost it when she moved from the area. Since

that time she began to practice alone until one of her girlfriends said she would happily practice with Lisa. Even though Lisa had been searching for a community, she explained that she never thought to ask her friends to join her. Eventually this small group grew into Lisa's present-day career. Lisa offers classes and programs she refers to as "SoulCollage® and Vision Board/Collage workshops and Healing Circles"⁹ wherein participants can "unplug from everyday life and reconnect with themselves" as Lisa phrases it on her website. Lisa conceives of and facilitates the communities in which she participates and yet she continues to search for a spiritual community.

When spiritual collectors turn outward and search for a community, they are faced with a reality they may or may not recognize: the only way to connect to others is via the market and that is precisely the market's intent. After molding a society of individuals, the market capitalized by manufacturing products that appeal to individual in pursuit of connection while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of the modern individual. Therefore, the continued search exhibited by Lisa and other interviewees is a consequence of the market that Carrette and King depict and specifically the result of capitalist spirituality existing within that marketplace. Carrette and King write that "salvation through the spirituality market covertly provides new resources for sustaining the materialistic culture that they are ostensibly seeking to resist" (2005, 83). In this way, Lisa's business is a microcosm of the larger spiritual marketplace. The atmosphere Lisa attempts to create serves as relief from the everyday or "an oasis for the soul" such that "participants 'check out' for a brief time and come back feeling renewed, refreshed and

⁹ The following are the descriptions of each practice as portrayed on Lisa's website: SoulCollages® occur when "few images are used to create 5x8 cards that focus on one aspect of the person, one card at a time. Popular themes include the Inner Child, the Wise One, the Mother or the Fool. The process is an uplifting way to express yourself and explore areas of your personality, life, fears, hopes and dreams;" a Vision Board "combines collage, imagination and intention to create representation of what they want in their life;" and a Healing Circle is "a safe space is created where I gently guide and encourage participants using tools and techniques including prayer, meditation, collage, ritual and ceremony."

ready to take on the world.” In short, Lisa offers services that hope to infuse one’s hectic life with meaning. By painting everyday life as a condition from which to escape, Lisa instills an imagined dependency on her services. There is therefore a notion that when someone feels trapped in life, s/he can contact Lisa to schedule an appointment.

Lisa’s business grew out of a desire to meet others with similar interests and to connect her passion for spirituality with her life’s work. Since Lisa continues to seek an “eclectic spirituality” according to her own encounters over the years, she offers the same type of practice to her participants. Rather than community, Lisa encourages individuality. Even Lisa’s Healing Circles which seem the most likely to foster a sense of community are described by Lisa as “relaxing and nonjudgmental environment[s], [in which] people are invited to go within and discover a brand of spirituality that works for them.” The goal is therefore to gain a better self-awareness and not a social or political awareness.

This mutual exclusion between concern for self and concern for others is one mark of capitalist spirituality according to Carrette and King. Specifically, they say that “a ‘spirituality’ that is separate from questions of social justice is a sedative for coping with an oppressive and difficult world” (2005, 85). Lisa does not hope to provide a sedative to her participants. However, in her attempt to treat the effects of longing and dissatisfaction, Lisa forgets to consider the cause of these illnesses: the market. Thus, Lisa’s business represents Carrette and King’s individualist/consumerist spirituality because it prescribes what they call “personalized packages of meaning and social accommodation rather than recipes for social change and identification with others” (83). This appeal to the individual is divisive because it reinforces a solitary narrative and, as Carrette and King propose, “undermines an awareness of interdependence and erodes our sense of solidarity with others” (41). Even Lucia who travels to

find herself “in the whole,” lives apart from a community in “the waking world” or the non-astral. This separation from others makes it easier for market forces to generate products that claim to fill the void and meet the needs of an individual. As a result, individuals become co-dependent on the market rather than co-dependent on each other.

As the market co-dependency evolves, individuals begin to internalize its voice. Lisa’s use of the phrase “brand of spirituality” suggests that she speaks from within the context of the market. Carrette and King warn individuals of this hidden process when they write that “we should be aware that the saturation of contemporary culture in the language of the market is such that it has a tendency to silence the articulation of difference, as our ability to ‘think otherwise’ becomes disabled by the colonization of our thought-processes” (2005, 162). That is, Lisa unknowingly speaks the language of the market and her services are a means to living within the market context without challenging it or questioning its legitimacy. In seeking methods of coping with the structure of the everyday or escaping from it temporarily, Lisa and her participants do not spend time trying to change it.

Spiritual collectors such as Lisa and Lucia are reactive as opposed to proactive. The market sets the pace and wields the power and spiritual collectors respond accordingly. Hence Carrette and King characterize the market as “vacuous” because it “creates a greater demand and need for some kind of ‘real,’ ‘pure,’ or ‘authentic’ spiritual experience, always just out of reach, like the inner contentment that consumerism promises but never fulfills” (2005, 83). This notion that the spiritual collector is without control and even powerless seemingly contradicts the earlier notion that collectors create their own spiritual narratives from a variety of sources (Lucia refers to herself as an “eclectic witch” and Lisa refers to her materials as her “eclectic toolbox”). Although they are the creators, they create according to the market.

Wunderkammer is to Museum as Collector is to Colonizer

The discussion surrounding the ‘spiritual but not religious’ individual and consumption is emphasized by the voices in popular discourse who criticize the ‘spiritual but not religious’ for picking and choosing the appealing aspects of different religions and spiritualities. In their criticisms however, the authors do not summon context that Carrette and King summon. In other words, authors such as Lillian Daniel who write to defend religion and undercut modern-day spirituality employ sarcasm at the expense of constructive cultural critique. And, while these authors address commoditization, they rarely if ever address “the domestication of diverse cultural traditions, practices, and communities” (Carrette and King, 2005, x). It could be that this second phase of Carrette and King’s critique has been wiped from the consciousness of authors like Daniel because (as Carrette and King suggest) the “rhetoric [used in the marketplace] hides the reliance of the capitalist enterprise upon these older colonial legacies” (2005, 25).

In order to see how it is that the colonial legacies are hidden from view over time, consider again the Wunderkammer of the sixteenth century. What began as an acquisition of wealth became an acquisition of power and what began as a means to study became a means to control. Starting in the sixteenth century, the European powers (including but not limited to Britain, France, and Spain) sent missionaries, scholars, and colonizers to inhabit and acquire Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Carrette and King, 2005, 25). Given its position of seized authority, “Europe could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, [and] colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself” (Dussel, “Eurocentrism and Modernity,” 66). Europe gave back an image of itself because it forced the inhabitants of the conquered territories to see themselves in terms of Europeans and forced Europeans to see themselves in

contrast to the inhabitants. For example, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel explains that Europe is the center of “development” and regions such as Africa and Latin America were “outside the East-West movement of World History” (71). Hegel writes the following about the relationship between Asia and Europe: “Asia is the part of the world where one can verify the origin as such...But Europe is absolutely the Center and the End (*das Zentrum und das Ende*) of the ancient world and of the West as such, Asia the absolute East” (Hegel, *Lectures*, 235. ctd. in Dussel, “Eurocentrism,” 66). As the source of power, Europe was also the source of enunciation as Hegel assumes.

Through the processes of collection and translation, Europeans came to classify and “understand” the inhabitants of other places. Initially these collections existed as personal cabinets of curiosity such as that of Ferrante Imperato. However, cabinets ceased to be personal when they were obtained by someone other than the collector. As is mentioned in the press release for “Rooms of Wonder,” “a thread of commercialism runs through the history of cabinets of curiosity” because “some owners passed on their collections to sons, or to municipal or state organizations; others were sold, either as a unit or one item at a time.” The Wunderkammer eventually evolved into the modern museum (this practice was led by Elias Ashmole whose collection became the “first truly public museum in Europe”) (“Rooms of Wonder”). Although the majority of today’s museum-goers probably do not consider the colonial history that produced the museum, some recall the past because it was their narrative that was silenced in the progression. Museums and Heritage Consultant Crispin Paine writes that museum “‘heritage managers,’ whether they are museum curators or archaeologists or planners, are seen as alien, dominant outsiders and are resented by local communities for illegitimately claiming rights over ‘our’ objects” (2013, 46). Paine also writes that, at times, “key objects or places become

symbols of independence or resistance” (46). Now that colonialism has shifted its form, a different sort of resistance is needed.

Present-day colonizers are far more subtle than the settlers and the missionaries of the past and they seek different “territories.” One such territory is that of religion and spirituality. In his TED talk entitled “Atheism 2.0,” Alain de Bottom offers the following remarks about his desire to gather components of religion and insert them into fields of secular society including but not limited to education, ritual celebration, public speaking, and community organization:

Whatever it may be, you know the kind of thing I'm talking about -- people who are attracted to the ritualistic side, the moralistic, communal side of religion, but can't bear the doctrine. Until now, these people have faced a rather unpleasant choice. It's almost as though either you accept the doctrine and then you can have all the nice stuff, or you reject the doctrine and you're living in some kind of spiritual wasteland under the guidance of CNN and Walmart. So that's a sort of tough choice. I don't think we have to make that choice. I think there is an alternative. I think there are ways -- and I'm being both very respectful and completely impious -- of stealing from religions. If you don't believe in a religion, there's nothing wrong with picking and mixing, with taking out the best sides of religion. And for me, atheism 2.0 is about both, as I say, a respectful and an impious way of going through religions and saying, “What here could we use?” The secular world is full of holes. We have secularized badly, I would argue. And a thorough study of religion could give us all sorts of insights into areas of life that are not going too well.

The primary message of his talk is that, although there is no God and mystical elements of religion are superfluous, religion has taught us things that can and should be preserved. De Bottom's sentiments represent the second form of religious privatization that Carrette and King describe: the commodification of religion. Rising alongside corporate capitalism, this phase is marked by a “plundering [of religion's] material and cultural resources, which are then repackaged, rebranded, and then sold in the marketplace of ideas” (2005, 15-6). Thus, these material and cultural resources are stripped of their historical context and separated from the so-called “doctrine” that westerners find unpalatable.

Unlike de Bottom's desire to rebrand religion as atheism, market forces desire to rebrand religion as 'spirituality.' Whereas de Bottom wants to leave the mystical behind, market forces want to adopt the mystical and insert it into a western context because (claim Carrette and King) "the sanitized religiosity of 'the spiritual' sells" (2005, 16). Sanitization occurs when non-western traditions are translated in a way that westerners can understand. For example, Carrette and King write that Asian religions and philosophies including Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism "have overwhelmingly been translated into introspective and otherworldly spiritualities concerned primarily with the achievement of individual enlightenment with little in the way of a social conscience or orientation to change the world in which that individual lives" (89).¹⁰ In this way, non-western cultures are Orientalized and appropriated by westerners who think the market-translated versions of these ancient wisdoms are whole or authentic. The market acts surreptitiously and aligns itself with western ideas such as psychology, individualism, and freedom even when the translation from one culture to the other is forced or misrepresentative. Since this repackaging of other religions and philosophies occurs hidden from their gaze, it is easy for westerners to forget the colonization process which makes the accessibility possible.

Take interviewee Kayla Engeman for example. Hanging in Kayla's college dorm room are prayer flags brought to her by her friend who acquired them on his visit to Bhutan. Perhaps Kayla's friend could be said to practice anti-capitalist spirituality because she claims that he started a non-for-profit environmental organization and that his sense of spirituality is deeply rooted in his concern for the environment. As of now, Kayla's spirituality is not so intimately tied to a political agenda as it is to an agenda of self-discovery and is therefore better classified

¹⁰ For specific examples of the translation of Asian traditions, see Chapter Three ("Spirituality and the Privatisation of Asian Wisdom Traditions") in Carrette and King's *Selling Spirituality* (2005).

as individualist/consumer spirituality. Kayla describes her relationship to the prayer flags in this way:

[My friend] went to Bhutan and came back and introduced me to incense and prayer flags and a lot of Buddhist concepts. Even though I don't identify with Buddhist principles, just the idea that there's energy coming from the prayer flags. He says that when the wind blows through them it spreads good energy. And I believe that. So I have them hanging in my dorm room hoping that good energy will come through.

Kayla's incorporation of the prayer flags is an example of the cultural appropriation the market encourages. Admittedly, Kayla does not "identify with Buddhist principles" and yet Kayla invests these prayer flags with meaning. Kayla does not consider that her disassociation between the prayer flags and Buddhist principles is that which Carrette and King call a "cultural translation that opens up the space of the space for the corporate takeover of religion" because it is the first step in privatization (2005, 122).

This practice of appropriation is committed by many westerners without their awareness. Although Kayla appropriates the prayer flags, she does not recognize the context of her act. However, she can sometimes recognize the act of appropriation when it is committed by others. After describing to Kayla the phenomenon that Carrette and King outline in *Selling Spirituality*, she offers what she believes is an example. She describes a dance studio near her home that has statues and images of Buddha. Kayla notes that she does not think any of the owners or dance instructors practice Buddhism but that the Buddhist symbols are used to convey to others that the studio "is a spiritual place." Kayla draws her own conclusion that the studio owners use the images as a means to attract customers and sell their product.

For some interviewees, the very concept of appropriation is unknown. When asked whether he finds it difficult to connect with cultural elements that are foreign to his own, interviewee Christopher Tenerio denied any such difficulty. According to Christopher, his

cultural identity is mixed since both of his parents are Columbian immigrants and he was raised in America. Given that sense of heterogeneous identity that already lives within him, Christopher claims to adopt the practice of meditation, Native American spirituality, and work with chakras and vibrations with a sense of continuity.

Although Carrette and King do not condemn the entire 'New Age' movement, they do contend that it is often aligned with individualist/consumerist spirituality. The phrase 'New Age' had different associations with different interviewees. For example, interviewee Lisa O'Connor embraces the 'New Age' or 'New Thought movement' in affiliation with the Science of Mind and the Center for Spiritual Living which she has recently begun attending. However, Lucia associates the 'New Age' with an unrealistic emphasis on happiness and also an unwarranted appropriation of ancient wisdom and figures such as shamans and gurus. Perhaps Lucia has in mind someone like Christopher who says, "I guess I don't have specific beliefs right now, but I just have a general belief there is goodness in the world and I would just call it positive." Lucia might refer to Christopher as a "Fluffy Bunny" or a "White Light-er" because of his tendency to emphasize the light and ignore the dark. Regarding cultural appropriation and Lucia's practice as an eclectic/pagan witch, Lucia demonstrates the following awareness:

I do like to be mindful. If I find something I think would be interesting like a certain meditation or ritual or something and if it's from a closed culture that I'm not a part of, then I don't necessarily feel comfortable doing it. For example, Native American rituals. It's so broad because there are so many different Native American tribes...I don't really like to do practices like Vodou or Hoodoo or Santería because it's from another culture that's not mine (unless someone teaches it to me).

In her attempt to avoid exploiting "ancient wisdom" to which she thinks she may not have a right, Lucia instead researches her own "ancestral roots." As a "European descendant," Lucia borrows from "folklore or myths from places [she] connect[s] with like Russia, Germany, Italy,

or Poland.” Lucia considers her practice to be an act of respect for other people and other traditions.

Conceivably unaware of its violent history, Lucia alludes to but does not name the historical context of colonialism. Her reservations and criticisms about the New Agers and the decontextualized changes they make to borrowed traditions suggest that Lucia possesses an intuitive appreciation for the incarnation of colonialism that currently exists. Of the fifteen interviewees, Lucia was the only one who voiced a concern about advertising and appropriating ‘spirituality’ in the West. However, Lucia did not express a desire to politicize her beliefs. Her motivation to practice as an eclectic witch is to see “the shape of her true spirit” and to “communicate with spirits, fairies, or things that you would not normally find in the waking world.” In other words, her ‘spirituality’ is not yet an example of Carrette and King’s revolutionary or anti-capitalist spirituality because she lacks the social engagement component required. Luca detects the presence of capitalism but she has not begun to comprehend its ubiquity and has not begun to reject it outside of private practice.

The marketplace context put forth in this thesis (informed primarily by Carrette and King) is not an answer to the problem of the spiritual marketplace. Even Carrette and King cannot offer an answer to this problem. Instead, they propose what they see as the first step toward an answer, namely alignment with the anti-capitalist (and therefore anti-colonialist) spiritualities of today. Using the Heelas and Woodhead’s subjectivization theory, the stories of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ interviewees, the metaphor of collection, and Carrette and King’s socio-political critique, this thesis aspires to be a fresh look at a long-standing and deep-rooted problem. If spirituality is (as Tweed surmises) the act of asking a question, what happens when

the ‘spiritual but not religious’ question spiritual collections from the perspectives of the beliefs, places, and ways they have collected?

CONCLUSION: UNLEARNING STEREOTYPES THROUGH STORY

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”

In order to hear the perspectives of their spiritual collections, the ‘spiritual but not religious’ can sit down beside their collections as opposed to sitting within and among their collections. Withdrawal from the collection breaks the collector’s hold and interrupts his or her sense of self. Although this redistribution of power does not erase the history of colonialism and its repercussions, it *subjectifies* those beliefs, places, and ways that had previously been objectified.¹¹ As a silent observer, the collector can look on while animated members of the collection speak to one another. At the discretion of the collected elements, the collector can also participate in the discussion and share his or her story.

¹¹ Scholars such as Balbinder Bhogal and Arvind Mandair might deny the act of sitting beside those whose positions of power have been compromised over centuries. That is, they might contend that the mere disposition to listen hardly levels the ground between the ‘spiritual but not religious’ individual and the beliefs, places, and ways s/he collected. In his introduction to the review of Mandair’s book *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (2009), Bhogal quotes the following passage from Mandair’s book:

As a way of resisting this leveling of difference [that could be a further method power uses to claim dominance], cultures and individuals have often adopted the paradoxical strategy of entering into discourse by first refusing dialogue. Such refusals are not necessarily to be understood as the eradication of dialogue, but rather signal ways of entering into dialogue under more conducive conditions. From this perspective the strategy of refusal can also be seen as a way of opening a dialogue between cultures and civilizations without repeated past imperialisms...of saying no as a way of affirming and keeping the possibility of dialogue open (Mandair, 2006, 1, qtd. in Bhogal, 2011, 136).

In light of this reading of dialogue, the ‘spiritual but not religious’ individual’s decision to sit down beside the collection could be conceived as an invitation and Mandair recommends that the subjugated reject invitations as a beginning.

Author Chimamanda Adichie delivered a TED talk in which she analyzed the danger of a single story. Adichie explained that stereotypes are most likely to marginalize their subjects when they are rehearsed and unchallenged. The stereotype that the ‘spiritual but not religious’ practice Burger King spirituality fails to capture their longing for connection and aptitude for artistic creation. The stereotype that colonialism has ended and the free market is free ignores the historical line that connects colonialism and corporate capitalism. The stereotype that Asian traditions are inner-directed misreads their ‘outer-directed’ focus (Carrette and King, 2005, 120). Whether through rejection or dialogue (or some combination of the two), the dominant narrative of a consumer-oriented spiritual marketplace must be challenged. Danger threatens the personal and communal narrative whenever one stops listening and asking questions.

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FIGURES AND IMAGES

"Demographic Profile." Figure 3. *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. Pew Research Center Survey, June 28-July 9, 2012, 9 Oct. 2012. Web.

Ferrante Imperato (1550-1625) Dell'istoria naturale. Image 6. *Observing, Thinking, Breathing: Inspirations for the Carleton Cabinet of Wonders*. Carleton College, 21 June 2007. Web. <http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/now/exhibits/cabinet/inspirations/?image_id=183598>.

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Odowd, Kyle. *Image 1*. 2013. Photograph. Lisa O'Connor's "Zen Den"

Odowd, Kyle. *Image 2*. 2013. Photograph. Lisa O'Connor's "Zen Den"

Odowd, Kyle. *Image 3*. 2013. Photograph. Lisa O'Connor's "Zen Den"

Odowd, Kyle. *Image 4*. 2013. Photograph. Lisa O'Connor's "Zen Den"

Odowd, Kyle. *Image 7*. 2013. Photograph. Lisa O'Connor's bedroom

Odowd, Kyle. *Image 8*. 2013. Photograph. Lisa O'Connor's bedroom

"Religious Profile." Figure 2. *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. Pew Research Center Survey, June 28-July 9, 2012, 9 Oct. 2012. Web.

"Self-Identity as Spiritual, Religious." Figure 1. *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. Pew Research Center Survey, June 28-July 9, 2012, 9 Oct. 2012. Web.

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(* Indicates that the name has been changed at the interviewee's request)

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