



**Sidebar F: Participatory Samsara—The Green-Meme Approach to the Mystery of the Divine**

Joan Hazelton looked up and smiled.

“Boomeritis spirituality has a long shadow, touching everything from the New Age to New Paradigms, from transpersonal psychology to born-on-earth spirituality, from boomeritis Buddhism to altered states, from radical spirituality to divine egoism. A little bit later we will examine the actual contours of boomeritis spirituality in detail [see [Sidebar H](#)]. For the moment, we can look briefly at its academic flavor.”

“Ken, I was wondering. If a postmodern novel had endnotes, and...”

“Why on earth would a novel have endnotes?”

“I don’t know. Confused author, can’t shut up, has to weigh in on everything. Let me finish. If a postmodern novel had endnotes, and in the novel the characters were two-dimensional, doesn’t that mean that in the endnotes they would only be one-dimensional?”

“I guess so, I dunno. All I know is that I feel like I’m evaporating, sort of wasting away, going pale and anemic, and... Kim...? Kim?...”

“Look, it would be like this. Three-dimensional characters would be reduced to two-dimensional characters in any genuinely postmodern novel—flatland characters for flatland postmodernism—and then, I’ll bet, in endnotes, the two-dimensional characters would become one-dimensional, right?”

“I guess so.”

“So, what do you suppose that would make them?”

“Really cranky?”

“One of the most sophisticated statements of a green-meme spirituality (i.e., authentic spiritual events interpreted through the pluralistic green meme, which creates a resonant and legitimate spirituality insofar as it can be expressed within the morphic fields of the green wave of consciousness) can be found in the book *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*. Of course, just because it’s a green-meme approach doesn’t mean it is without value. As we saw, there are 50 million Americans lighting up the green wave, and these types of books speak directly to those dear souls.” She paused. “But, yes, as we were saying, certain consequences often dog these green-meme approaches, and they are already on display in this book and in a review of it carried in *JTP*. Let’s do this very briefly, what say?”

Hazelton began pacing. “The review is called ‘A New Birth in Freedom.’ It is unfortunately rather mean-spirited and vindictive; as with all green-meme statements, it has to create victims and oppressors, and so it proceeds immediately to convict several truly brilliant pioneers in the field—from Abraham Maslow to Stan Grof—of absolutely horrible crimes, such as wanting to suppress and oppress freedom.” Joan rolled her eyes up, shrugged, smiled. “At any rate, the author seems to be honestly trying to sort things out using a green-meme lens. Nonetheless, the entire piece very quickly slips into boomeritis, in my opinion. Because it does so, what do you imagine the review claims to have found?”

Joan looked calmly at the crowd, while several students shouted, “The new paradigm!”

“The *revolutionary* new paradigm. Yes, dear friends, I’m afraid so. You probably remember the main points from lecture 8—given by Margaret Carlton, Derek, Lesa, and others—about why claims to have ‘the new paradigm’ are one of the great strongholds of boomeritis [chap. 8, [The\\_New\\_Paradigm@WonderUs.org](mailto:The_New_Paradigm@WonderUs.org), *Boomeritis*]. You really won’t be

able to follow what I am about to say unless you grasped the basic points that they made, so make sure you are familiar with them before proceeding.

“Anyway, the reviewer claims that there is now a revolutionary new paradigm that will finally usher in the great psychological revolution that many have attempted throughout history but all have miserably failed. Until now. This new paradigm, which is ‘caring,’ ‘loving,’ ‘sharing,’ and ‘participatory,’ replaces the old paradigm, which was ‘uncaring,’ ‘marginalizing,’ ‘ranking,’ and ‘hierarchical.’ Oh dear. *The greatest psychological and spiritual paradigm ever invented!* Where have we heard that before?” So far the audience was still laughing good-naturedly; apparently none of them were involved in this particular display of grandiose claims; they could afford a lightness of listening.

“An essential claim of this book, and certainly of the review, is that the author of this revolutionary new paradigm finally understands the real meaning of postmodernism. As the reviewer asserts, ‘This book, by contrast [to all the previous approaches that have failed to really understand postmodernism], has absorbed the full meaning of the postmodern turn at its deepest, irreplaceable core: it has articulated a radically *participatory* and *pluralistic* understanding of spiritual realities, spiritual practices, and spiritual knowledge... a plurality of authentic spiritual ultimates.’

“Well, the reviewer’s claim that they alone have finally understood the full meaning of postmodern spirituality is true, in a sense, for the book is basically a robust, energetic green-meme statement, and the core of postmodernism is the green-meme value system. But it seems to be a bit of fractured green, I’m sorry to say, disconnected from any truly integral constructions, and therefore it actually fails to plum the real depths of postmodernism, because the author and the reviewer still do not appear to have come to adequate terms with the deep dimension of *intersubjectivity* and its *genealogies*—outlined by the greatest of the constructive postmodernists. The author and reviewer fail to enter into the hermeneutic unfolding of horizons that postmodern genealogy has brought forth—the understanding that waves of consciousness bring forth and enact co-created worldviews, worldviews that

themselves *enact judgments* on their less deep, less encompassing, less inclusive views. Carla Fuentes went into this in great detail in her last lecture (see **Sidebar A**: ‘Who Ate Captain Cook?’), and you might want to review those central points.

“Every first-tier worldview claims to be ‘an authentic spiritual ultimate’—even the Nazis claimed as much, as do the KKK, and every first-tier meme in existence, not to mention the reviewer and author of this book. Merely *asserting* that their approach has escaped the Cartesian subject—of course, these folks claim to have transcended the Cartesian Monological Eyeball, whereas, as Mark shows, they simply magnify it (see **Sidebar E**: ‘Descartes’)—anyway, merely asserting that this approach has escaped the Cartesian subject, has gone beyond intra-personal empiricism, has escaped a (straw-man) scientific straightjacket, and has opened the horizon to a fully liberating participatory spirituality is not enough to hide its deficiencies and internal ruptures: the reviewer can only keep declaring, in Ptolemaic epicycles, how liberating all of this is, since now, finally, ‘*Nobody can tell me what to do!*’—hence ‘*the new birth in freedom*’—and a boomeritis shout of ‘you’ and ‘free’ again rings through the rafters of faded dreams.

“The fact, dear souls, is that the *intersubjective background* (the LL quadrant)—the crux of the great insights of constructive postmodernism—is actually much, much more pervasive than the author or reviewer seem to realize. As you know, a deep genealogical intersubjectivity ‘all the way down’ is what the integral or four-quadrant model was designed to incorporate. But instead of coming to terms with that genealogical intersubjectivity—the most sophisticated lesson of postmodernism, whose unfolding hermeneutic horizons pass judgments on less integral states [see **Sidebar A**]*—the author and reviewer merely assert that they have fully and totally assimilated the lessons of postmodernity and thus are free of the philosophy of the subject, whereas—as Lesa Powell demonstrated in her lecture—these authors have dramatically exemplified it [see lecture 9, especially note 4, Boomeritis]. They both still fall into variations of flatland reductionism—they acknowledge the Lower Left but*

flatten its unfolding waves—and thus they reduce genealogical intersubjectivity to what amounts to pluralistic freedom of the ego to do as it pleases.

“Well, dear souls, if you want to see a fine critique of this type of flatland postmodernism, based on a more thorough grasp of genealogical intersubjectivity, you might check ‘Sean Hargens deconstructs Christian de Quincey’ [posted on this site]. The basic idea is that the postmodern approach evidenced in the review and the book are only half way to the full dimensions of the postmodern emergence, and thus only half way over the fundamental Enlightenment paradigm that they claim to have fully, utterly deconstructed and exploded, and thus they claim to overcome that which both their approaches subtly exemplify. As we said, Carla Fuentes has spoken extensively on the two paths through the postmodern world—pluralistic postmodernism and genealogical postmodernism (or, from a slightly different angle, ethnocentric pluralism and worldcentric pluralism)—and you can check her insights as well and see if they make any sense to you [see [Sidebar A](#)].

“The performative self-contradictions of their green-meme approach—which too often veers into the mean green meme and all its implicit condemnatory rhetoric—are therefore everywhere apparent. The reviewer explicitly claims that there is a ‘plurality of authentic spiritual ultimates’—so that none of them can be judged or condemned according to external standards—and then proceeds to energetically condemn all those expressions that the reviewer and the author dislike. The condemned approaches are basically those that the reviewer asserts deny the ‘diverse plurality’ of possible perspectives—which is unfortunately exactly what the author and the reviewer themselves do in page after page, where those approaches they disapprove of are not given the same loving, sharing, caring embrace that their own personal values are, but instead are everywhere met with a barely concealed volcanic contempt.”

Joan Hazelton shook her head and again began pacing. “This condemnatory stance is confirmed when the reviewer gives what can only be called a hysterical history of the transpersonal psychology movement.” Joan looked up, smiled. “Well, it goes something

like this: the original transpersonal movement—exemplified, the reviewer says, by Abraham Maslow—was still under sway of the mean, nasty, brutal, western Enlightenment.” She looked up. “Come on, people, help me out: the western Enlightenment!” The audience screamed “Boooooooooo.” “There you go!” she said, laughing. “And this nasty, marginalizing, ranking theory just smushed the daylights out of all God’s children, don’t you know? But then a caring, sensitive, loving theorist came along, who replaced hierarchy with heterarchy, ranking with linking, stringent bivalent logic with pluralistic sharing, horrible universal truths with nice diversity celebrations,... people?!” The audience screamed “Yeaaaaayyyy!” “That’s more like it!” she laughed.

“Well, you get the picture. Abe Maslow, of course, was one of the half-dozen greatest psychologists this country has ever produced, and for that reviewer to claim that he and his chum have triumphed where Maslow failed... .” Joan shook her head. “Well, I tell you, dear souls, as long as I’ve been following boomeritis, the grandiosity of some ego claims still completely floors me. I’m sort of speechless. The sheer arrogance is...” She again shook her head.

“Well, to the point. One of the central claims of both the book and the review is that the Western Enlightenment paradigm—and the poor early TP movement, like Maslow, along with some theorists who apparently are so unspeakably horrible that the reviewer won’t even mention their names—had what the reviewer calls an ‘increasingly intense commitment to a single absolute universal truth.’ Never mind that I don’t know a single major theorist who actually believes that [see **Sidebar D**], including Maslow (who bowed to the Mystery of the Divine). Quite apart from such libel, the interesting point is that, performative contradiction in hands, both the reviewer and the author—these revolutionary, new-paradigm theorists, the first to fully bring the truths of postmodernism to spirituality—then set up their own meta-theory that implicitly claims to be the one, correct, absolute, universal way to understand and express spirituality, and this meta-theory is then used to confidently reject or affirm particular spiritual traditions and philosophical perspectives

according to specific abstract criteria—namely, those of the green-meme value system, verging here on the MGM as its authors wield it with brutal condemnatory force. This meta-value ranking system, which claims to be participatory and allowing, is implicitly asserted to be the only correct way to conceive and perceive the Mystery of the Divine.

“In other words, these authors do not actually believe that there is a plurality of ultimates; they do not really believe that there are many waves on this shore. Rather, they believe that participatory pluralism is the one, true, and only correct way to view spirituality. They do not believe that pluralism is true for those who believe it, and absolutism is equally true for those who believe it. They believe instead that pluralism is the only essentially correct stance, period. Thus, their view is the one and only way that it actually is for all people everywhere, whether those people know it or not, like it or not.

“That was the point of Lesa’s critique. The postmodern approach that denies strong universals (and instead postulates a plurality of equally valid ultimate truths) does so only by creating a *meta-language* and a series of strong *meta-claims*, and these meta-claims themselves are NOT culture-dependent, contextual, interpretive, and pluralistic, but are instead held to be absolutely and universally true for all people, in all cultures, at all times.

“For example, the typical postmodern pluralist maintains that there are few if any context-transcending truths that are universally and cross-culturally valid. Rather, all truth is actually intersubjectively constructed; it is not a series of facts but a series of interpretations; all truths are situated in cultural backgrounds that mold or even create the form of the truth at any given time; truth is therefore not a matter of objectively representing facts correctly (or a matter of representing a single, pregiven world), but is rather a matter of intersubjective mesh within a particular cultural hermeneutic and social practice; and that, finally, notions of truth that claim to be universal are therefore imposing their own particular values on everybody else, which results in oppressing and repressing the pluralistic richness of the Divine.

“But, you see, *all of those claims* are asserted to be true for all people, at all times, in all cultures. Those assertions are a series of literally dozens of truth-claims (such as the contextuality of all knowledge, the interpretive component of all knowledge, the intersubjectivity of all knowledge, etc.) that are claimed to be universally and absolutely true and binding on all people. These claims are not merely true for those who believe them. These claims are not merely interpretations that hold only for those who embrace them. These claims themselves have not an ounce of pluralism in them. They are instead an incredibly extensive, sophisticated, cognitively generated meta-theory about truth and knowledge that is claimed to be absolutely binding on all people, with no exceptions, whether those people believe it or not, like it or not.

“And that is why, as Lesa pointed out, these pluralistic schemes are often the hidden ground of narcissism—of a personal set of values forced on others whether they want it or not. In these theorists, the *absolutist impulse* is removed from the explicit features of all knowledge (which are claimed to be local, context-dependent, and pluralistic) and are instead secreted in the implicit features of all knowledge (features which themselves are said to true for all peoples in all cultures—that is, the deep features of pluralism are themselves implicitly claimed to be context-transcending, cross-cultural, universal, and absolutely binding).

“In other words, the cognitive meta-theory in the minds of these pluralists is claimed to be the single meta-theory that should be in the minds of everybody else, since it is the one, true, correct way to view the world. Further, this absolutism is carried out in a way that allows the postmodernist to vehemently deny any absolutist claims—and to vilify those who happen to propose their own universal meta-claims in a conscious, open, and honest fashion.

“But Foucault already exhausted that meta-claim game, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and saw its utterly self-contradictory and arrogant nature—‘arrogant’ was his word for it. The only theorists still pursuing that hidden absolutism, which is used to brutally condemn all alternative schemes, are certain American writers, for reasons suggested in *Boomeritis*.

“Should those approaches, which heap so much contempt on others, be met with equal contempt and given a dose of their own medicine? I guess that’s for each of you to decide. The members of IC have gone back and forth on that issue many times. But notice one curiosity: those approaches, which are almost defined by the contempt that they heap upon alternatives, themselves view any tone of contempt in others as evidence of arrogance. Why do they not see that their own approach is contemptuous to the core? The reason seems to be that they have concealed their contempt (along with their absolutist stance) in their implicit meta-claims, where it hides from their own consciousness. Their surface pluralism hides a deep absolutism, just as their surface kindness hides deep contempt. Hence, what they most despise in others—their absolutism, their universalism, their contemptuous tone—is that which they are secretly doing themselves: the key to all shadow projections.

“Needless to say, simply pointing this out is taken to be the ultimate act of arrogance and contempt. Oh dear, oh dear.” Joan paused and looked up. “But that duplicity, or opaqueness as to one’s own deep motives, appears to be why, as Lesa pointed out, pluralism has so often become the home of boomeritis, the home of a narcissism that wishes to impose its own universal meta-beliefs on others while claiming to have no strong universals of any significant sort. Its arrogance, absolutism, and deep contempt hide out in a cognitive meta-theory foisted on the world at large, and on top of that whole mess is plastered a smiley-face button and a new birth in freedom—if, and only if, you agree with my meta-values.

“Thus, all explicit experiences around the world are accorded validity only if they conform to the implicit contours of my beliefs. This likely accounts for the intense exclusionary practices underlying a surface claim to inclusivity. That is, one of the marks of boomeritis spirituality is that, in the name of inclusion, it excludes so much. The actual marginalizing tendency of these theorists who claim to never marginalize can be seen in the long list of those whom they energetically condemn. We’ve already seen the sadly smug dismissal of Abraham Maslow. Here’s another quick example: Stan Grof’s work is also tossed onto the old-paradigm trash pile, along with poor Abe and the unspeakables. This is an

especially strange move for this particular reviewer, since both in and out of transpersonal circles he is widely viewed as Grof's lackey, but apparently he now has a new master"—and she laughed that easy, gentle laugh, suggesting she took little of this dust-up seriously. “Well, we needn't go over this ground again. We've seen it time and time again throughout this seminar on boomeritis. See especially Lesa's lecture where she carefully outlines the many ways in which this type of pluralism became the main home of theoretical narcissism [see lecture 9, especially endnote 4, *Boomeritis*].

“But the one good-news item here, I suppose, is that astrology can no longer be viewed as universally binding on all people, since a belief in its universal truth would be to deny a plurality of authentic ultimates. Astrology used to be viewed as an abstract schema universally applicable to all people, but we now realize that the very attempt to do astrology is driven by a type of hidden Enlightenment power drive that attempts to subsume all people under a universal absolute Truth that crushes all freedom and attempts to deny the Mystery of the Divine by categorizing it due to a deep fear of chaotic, spontaneous, divine Mystery. Since there is only a plurality of authentic ultimates, astrology still works, but apparently only for those who believe it, which is nice.”

Joan smiled warmly, adjusted her blouse, and walked back to the podium. “Okay, enough playful banter, dear souls. Quite seriously, the integral claim is simply this: we accept ALL of that type of pluralistic approach, *as far as it goes*. Of course you start with a caring hermeneutic within the horizons of that which is acceptable to the Other. Of course you do not attempt to impose meta-narratives on the Other that the Other would not impose on itself [see **Sidebar A**]. Of course caring dialogue is the beginning of any sort of dialogical understanding. Of course there are a series of multifocal, heterogeneous discourses that cannot be meta-narrated. Of course hermeneutic enactments are grounded in participatory intersubjectivity and not intra-personal empiricism. In this academic day and age, *all of that truly goes without saying*—all of that has long ago become a series of pomo platitudes that have dominated academic discourse for three decades now, which doesn't deny their

importance, only their originality. It's a bit puzzling to see these authors stumble on these platitudes and then express astonished awe that they are the first to really understand all this....

“The point is that we accept all of the basics of the pluralistic approach—I'm very serious about that—but the integral approach goes one step further and adds second-tier understanding: with the dialogical cooperation of participatory subjects sharing the hermeneutic of their worldviews within the horizon of their own self-understanding (thus avoiding metanarratives), we follow these worldviews over time and space; we do a genealogy *from within* the unfolding waves. [See **Sidebar A.**] That helps all parties mutually trace a dialectic of historical unfolding, watching both the good news and the bad news of any unfolding wave of intersubjectivity, subjectivity, objectivity, and interobjectivity—which are simply the dimensions vibrating from within the horizon of enacted, co-created worldviews (for the *enactment* and *bringing forth* of worldviews, see SES, starting with notes for chap. 4, which includes an appreciation, and a critique, of Varela's inter-objectivist version of the enactive paradigm). Both new differentiations and new dissociations; both new integrations and new fusions; both new expanses of increasing care and compassion, and new ways to be mean and shallow, all unfold to the hermeneutic, dialogical eye once it is cut loose from a stagnant hermeneutic of de facto stationary pluralism and set free to roam the halls of history, time, genealogy, unfolding, temporality. Far from a static flatland horizon of fixed and rigid authentic ultimates, which does not honor the Other but cripples the Other in its temporality, the dialectical, dialogical, genealogical hermeneutic honors the Other as it sees itself unfolding over the ever-surprising new horizons of a flowering, flourishing, effervescent, historically anchored world.

“Unfortunately, this *hermeneutic genealogy from within intersubjective horizons*—the core of the deepest insights of postmodernism—is a stance that is marginalized, repressed, oppressed, and aggressively excluded from flatland pluralism, a violence we need not share.

“In short, pluralism plus history is genealogy. The greatest of the postmodernists all knew this, and whether they saw history as obscuring Being or releasing Being, they all intuited the basic fact that history passes judgments, from within, on its own self-enacted worldviews—how else could the postmodernists themselves (correctly!) condemn patriarchy, slavery, female oppression, and so on? Of course genealogy is capable of passing judgments! Of course slavery and freedom are not two equally valid spiritual ultimates! This genealogy can be—and has been—approached via both intersubjective and interobjective inquiries [see the book *Kosmic Karma*, forthcoming], but the conclusion is ultimately the same: History itself moves beyond pluralism, and therefore genealogy, in honoring history, moves beyond pluralism as well. As Carla said, those are indeed the two major roads—pluralistic and genealogical—through postmodernity, the latter of which transcends and includes the former. The choice accordingly is simple: integral-aperspectival or fragmented-aperspectival? You choose....

“Let me simply finish by saying that *Revisioning TP Theory* really is a brilliant book expressing the green-meme approach to spirituality, a type of participatory samsara equated with nirvana. The book occasionally dips into yellow constructions when it seeks to escape its own performative contradictions, but it returns as quickly as possible to safe green ground as the author vociferously shares and cares, which is very nice.” Joan smiled gently. “None of its postmodern tenets are original; none improve on, say, the work of Gadamer, and many are four-quadrant theory bereft of waves and streams. Still, never has spirituality itself been so energetically strained through the green meme. This book would have had a significant impact on *mainstream* spiritual studies—it would have been a truly breakthrough book—had it appeared 30 years ago. As it is, this book is coming now at a point where even the mainstream has grown so tired of the green meme that it is desperately looking for a more integral approach. The academic elite are now struggling toward something they cannot yet name; they don’t know exactly what it is they want, but they know exactly what it is they don’t want: a rehash of pomo irony now labeled absolute and Divine. Whether, and when,

they will stumble onto a more integral-aperspectival field is now the unfolding story of our time.”