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"SPIRITUALIT(IES)" AND "CRIES" FOR "MOTHER GAIA" IN THE 20TH-CENTURY AND IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

Abstract:

Monte Verità and Glastonbury are two representatives of the so called "alternative wave" developing in Europe from the beginning of the 20th century. Rooted in Romanticism, it nowadays survives within the New Age culture. The alternative community and sanatorium Monte Verità (Switzerland), founded in 1900, became a meeting point for naturism, occultism and theosophy, interreligious dialogue and psychology, anarchism and the avant-garde during the century. Just the same, the Christian pilgrim place Glastonbury (England) has gathered Hippies, mystics, New Pagans, Ley-Line and earth-energies Hunters and New Agers, especially since the 1970s.

In particular, both places have become "sacred" centers for those "new" spiritual currents sharing a common belief to the "Mother": the "divine" energy that, being the source of all creation, is identified as feminine. Based on this conception of "God/dess", several nature- (and "Mother"-) oriented healing businesses have been established in both places, amongst others through the support of various media channels. Furthermore, these "new" proposed ways of life mostly result from the integration of pre-Christian Celtic elements with Eastern imports (e.g. yoga and shiatsu). Finally, it is this eclectic mixture resulting in the belief to the "Mother" that constitutes their "alternativeness": first, with regard to the rather "Father-based" Christian tradition; second, with regard to the capitalized and industrialized Western world. For all these reasons, Monte Verità and Glastonbury are two interesting outstanding examples to start the discussion about the "revolution" in the European social and religious practices of the 20th and of the 21st century.

Keywords:

20th-century Counterculture; 21st- century New Age; "Back to Mother-Nature"; Holism (Body, Mind and Soul); Human Well-Being and Sustainability; Business of Illness; "New" old religions; Eastern Imports; "Alternative(s)" to Christianity

"Religion" has always been a moving concept within human history. Depending on the political and the social conditions, the basic paradigms and theorizing concepts of a certain "culture" have repeatedly undergone some radical changes, bringing about a transformation even to those long-established religious traditions. Revolution, transformation, and relocation of cultural patterns: these are the three basic steps of (every) history. Therefore, the research of cultural history consists in analysing and illustrating those multiple, and sometimes even contrasting developments of these basic historical dynamics in a specific time and place.

Within the Western context, this three-step process started anew at the beginning of the 20th-century – a period which is not casually defined as "turn of the century" (German "Jahrhundertwende"). As Heinrich Hart wrote in his paper *Die Moderne* (1890), this "turn" signed a change not only in date numbers, but rather a shift of perception within the Western conception of reality itself.[1] Again, this "turn" was rooted in the economic and social transformations of that time. Indeed, the great industrial production and the rapid technological improvement, pushed by the positivist euphoria, strongly accelerated that "crisis" that had already begun in the modern age. Actually, this state of "crisis" still survives in our contemporary cultural history, for instance in the several discourses about that "crisis of faith" and that "loss of values" caused by material improvement and secularization. However, (and this is what the paper will try to show) this "crisis" cannot be simply interpreted in terms of a "crisis of faith". Rather, it is a "crisis of belief", in the way of interpreting the placement of the human being on earth. From this point of view, even the decline of the traditional established religions that has become particularly evident in the last decades should be inscribed in the more general context of the three-steps historical process. In other words, the "crisis" in the participation to the long-established European Christianity belongs to those symptoms of a "paradigmatic turn" – of the relocation of the cognitive and collective structures of the West, amongst others in the realms of the "spiritual" and of the "religious".

As it has already been mentioned, the paradigmatic turn in the West initiated between the 16th and the 17th century, with the introduction of the new economic and imperialistic structures, accompanied by the philosophical relativism of the new-born science. From this point of view, the so called "modern age" did not only bring a practical revolution in the way of life of the people, e.g. through the scientific discoveries. Rather, the modern age also signed the first step of a great historical change: the revolution in the way of conceptualizing the human-world relationship. This revolution in the way of "being in the world", as phenomenologists would say, continued to work underneath the surface in the following centuries, by deconstructing the "medieval" paradigm of the man as the centre of the universe. As a consequence of this deconstruction, the second step was then reached at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, from the perspective of cultural history, the 20th-century was a period strongly characterized by various impulses for "transformation". Several currents calling for "change" arose in this period, amongst others those calling for an innovation

[1] (Pytlik, 2005, p. 12)

in the conception of religion and spirituality themselves. As a matter of fact, this "turn of the century" between the 19th and the 20th witnessed the rise of "new" spiritual currents such as occultist groups practicing mysticism and séances, theosophy and anthroposophy, the naturist "life-reform" movements (German "Lebensreform"), earth-energies researchers, natural healers and homeopathy, as well as some "new" interpretation(s) of the long-established Christian religion, often through the integration of pre-Christian religions and of Eastern spiritual traditions. Such phenomena are still widespread in our contemporary society, for instance in the so called "New Age spirituality".

Mostly in collaboration with the currents of radical protest against the industrial and capitalistic society, these "spiritual" movements have been trying to "actualize" the cognitive structures of the "old" Christian rural Europe by integrating them with "new" ways of conceptualizing the human-world relationship and, as a consequence, the conception of the "super-human" and of the "super-natural".[2] Despite being radical, revolutionary and destructive to some extent, such phenomena are worth being discussed in the context of the cultural and religious history of the West. In particular, they should not be discussed as simply reaction against a secularized and materialized society, but rather as representatives of that substantial paradigmatic "relocation" of the Western post-modern age. Furthermore, such discussions could be significant even for the European Union, whose need for a more consolidated identity has strongly increased in the last decades. Of course, this is not to say that practical difficulties can be solved through academic and theoretical discourses. Nevertheless, such discussions could be helpful for the sake of creating a consciousness of what it means to be a "European" or, at a more general level, a "man of the West". If one considers that identity is fundamentally rooted in having a common history even before discussing about common values, the evaluation/analysis of the great changes in the shared history of ideas constitutes a step of advancement towards that self-consciousness that is requested in the case of political decisions. To this purpose, the reflection about the relocation of the concepts of "religion" and of "spirituality" within the Western structural paradigm, as well as about the changes in the paradigm of conceptualizing reality itself, is more than necessary to face the challenges of the globalized world.

Still, the analysis of more recent developments in the Western history of religion is not a simple task. As it has already been mentioned, at least the European panorama of religious traditions and spiritual enhancements of the last two centuries has been characterized by a sort of "eclecticism" – a colourful mixture of beliefs and practices in which geographical, historical, and symbolical boundaries, along with those between the individual "informal" and the collective "formal", are melted together, sometimes in rather confusing ways. This eclectic pluralism constitutes a great point of interest for cultural history on the one hand, but also one of the main hurdles for providing a systematic categorization.

[2] (Green, 2001, p. 205)

Actually, in the cases of the “spiritual” currents mentioned in the second paragraph, everyday language “brings order” by using the term “alternative”: “alternative healing”, “alternative spiritualties”, “alternative music”, etc. However, from a more analytical point of view, this term opens a series of difficulties, mainly because of its openness. First, it is open in the sense of “vague” and arbitrary, and therefore always undergoing the risk of simplification or accumulation of substantially different phenomena, e.g. belonging to different fields. For instance, the risk of using the term “alternative” without a conceptual argumentation behind it, is to throw the mystic-esoteric “New Agers” together with the rather politically rooted social criticism of the Hippies in one unique pot. Second, “alternative” is open in the sense of intrinsically “double”: one cannot speak of an “alternative” without sooner or later having to introduce the related “a priori object” (the alternative “to what”), in order to clarify the goals of the alternative proposals themselves. Nevertheless, this complicated and rather intertwined horizon must not discourage the academic discussion. Rather, it should promote a more accurate definition of these “alternative” phenomena, as well as a more attentive observation of their single characteristics. With this respect, this paper has to be inscribed within the context of research about the “alternative” spiritualities of the 20th- and of the 21st-century Europe. This is followed by a more theoretical reflection on the role of such movements for what has been defined as the post-modern paradigmatic turn.

Before describing the empirical objects of the research, one last point still needs to be clarified. As it has already been said, the kind of research that will be explained in this paper deals mostly with recent “religious” and “spiritual” alternatives. Again, as in the case of “alternative”, “religious” and “spiritual” are two critical terms. Their exhaustive analytical definition would deserve many pages. Nevertheless, for practical reasons, this paper will use them in a simplifying and simplified way. “Religious” is a conception or an attitude promoted by a religious community whose structures are long-established and officially recognized as integral parts of the “way of life” of a certain community (e.g. the ritual of the Christian baptism for babies, even if their families are not regular followers of the other rituals and principles). “Spiritual” is every conception or every attitude related to the realm of the “super-human” (e.g. the belief in a kind of immaterial presence in nature, whatever it is) as well as to the “super-natural”, independently of its social recognition, impact and function. In other words: “spiritual” is every enhancement, even though only initiated by an individual, that deals with the relation to another “reality” outside the “human being”, while “religion” includes a certain level of social and public recognition and organization, providing the “spiritual” enhancements with certain fixed structures. As a result, the “alternative” currents analyzed within the paper will be mainly referred to as “spiritual”, both for a practical and for a theoretical reason. First, most of them have not been officially recognized by any authority as “religions” (apart from the New Pagans). Second, most of them do not want to be considered as “religions” intentionally, since this would put a limit to the freedom of the “spiritual” enhancements of the individual, as it has happened with the traditional official churches of the previous centuries.

Within the context of "globalized" and "globalizing" transformation of the Western post-modern paradigm, one of the most interesting tendencies is represented by what can be defined as "spirituality of Mother Gaia". First, this term can be referred to those "spiritual" communities that, from the beginning of the 20th century until now, have been spreading the belief in a divinity which, as the source of all creation, is identified as feminine rather than as masculine. This is particularly the case of the New Age spiritualities such as the New Pagans, which have switched the belief to from the rather Christian-based "Father" to a "super-human" and "super-natural" energy of the "Mother". Furthermore, this conception of "God/dess" lies at the basis of that several "nature-based" and mostly even "East-oriented" healing practices (e.g. yoga and shiatsu) that have become extremely popular nowadays. Nevertheless, this tendency has been manifested also in several other movements, some of them being not explicitly "spiritual", at least in their rhetoric and goals. This is exactly the decisive point of this paper: to find a "unity" in the multiple horizon of the "alternative" enhancements (categorized as "tendencies" from cultural history) of the last two centuries. However, the best method to illustrate all the theoretical processes mentioned in the previous lines is through empirical work. For this reason, the research described by this paper has started from examples, or rather from two exemplary places, to develop the historical analysis. These places are Monte Verità and Glastonbury.

Monte Verità (literally "Mountain of Truth") is a hill in the Swiss canton Ticino. In the year 1900, a group of five people started a "countercultural" experiment there. Beginning as a "commune", a sanatorium (a place of recovering, or a healing center, to say it according to the current standard) was developed afterwards. Vegetarian diet, gardening, sun-and air baths, healing gymnastics, free meditation: these have all been practiced in the sanatorium as ways to heal the spiritual and health decline of the modern society.[3] What's more, during the first half of the century, Monte Verità became a meeting point for other "reformers" – for all those willing to establish "the paradigm of a different life in rupture with the social norms of this time",[4] as Kay Noschis writes in his book *Monte Verità. Ascona et le génie du lieu* (2009). So called "kohlrabi apostles and wandering preachers"[5] such as Gusto Gräser, artists of the Avantgarde (Dadaists and the expressionist dance school of Rudolph Laban), German and Russian anarchists, the occult order O.T.O., and the theosophical society "Eranos" (initiated by Carl Gustav Jung and by the theosophist and Eastern religions researcher Olga Froebe-Kopteyn) joined the initial "life-reform" experiment of the founders, gathering in and around this "healing isle". Nowadays, this "alternative" history of Monte Verità survives only in form of archives and published literature. In fact, the buildings of the original sanatorium have been rented by the ETH University Zürich for congresses and seminars.

[3] (Voswinckel, 2009, p. 13 ff.)
[4] (Noschis, 2001, p.138)
[5] (Linse, 1983, p. 28)

Glastonbury is located in Somerset, in South-West England. First, in contrast with the Swiss community, the place has always been a major Christian pilgrimage center because of the great Abbey, whose cemetery keeps the relics and the tombs of several British saints and kings, amongst others of the legendary King Arthur (at least according to the Medieval sources). Apart from that, another important spot is the "special" hill called "Glastonbury Tor". Actually, the myths and the legends of the pre-Christian and the Christian religion get intertwined in this spot: the Tor is supposed to be the entrance of the "Underworld" for the Celtic tradition,[6] as well as the place where the first Christian community, guided by Joseph of Arimathea, settled down.[7] Even if there is little archaeological evidence for most of these legends, Glastonbury has risen its claim as the legendary "Isle of Avalon" within the European cultural history – a "holy island", both for the Christians and for the non-Christians. Afterwards, at the beginning of the 20th century, these ancient legends (particularly the Grail Quest) attracted some esoteric-inspired groups of researchers and mystics to the place, most knowingly the physician and mystic Dr. Goodchild and its colleague and architect Frederick Bligh Bond. Advertized through the publication of the novel *A Glastonbury Romance* by John Cowper Powys (1932), the research of these "Glastonbury Seekers",[8] as Patrick Benham calls them in his *The Avalonians* (1993), continued in the following decades within the activities of the still existing "Chalice Well Trust". Chalice Well is the third and last important spot of Glastonbury. Together with the Tor, it became an "energy spot" for those "Ley-Line Hunters" moving to the city since 1970s,[9] and it nowadays constitutes the meeting point for most of the New Age manifestations. Indeed, since the 1970s Glastonbury became the same sort of "bohème center"[10] like Monte Verità before the First World War: Hippies, anarchists and anti-capitalists began to flow through the place (especially on the occasion of the Glastonbury Festival in the nearby Pilton village),[11] getting mixed with the still-existing and partly new arriving variety of "new" spiritual currents. In fact, almost at the same time Glastonbury had attracted two New Pagan communities (the Glastonbury Order of Druids and the Goddess Movement) as well as other smaller "New Age" circles. Differently from Monte Verità, this "alternative" culture is now experiencing its "golden age" in Glastonbury. With its esoteric libraries, tarots and crystal shops, vegan cafés, "alternative" healing centers (mainly concentrated around Chalice Well), yoga communities and New Pagan temples, the city is one of the lively representatives of the 21st- century "spiritual" West.

For the sake of the analysis of the role of such currents within the post-modern "paradigmatic turn", it is first necessary to reflect on their "alternativeness". Actually, this is condensed in one of the terms that have already been used within cultural history: "naturism". However, apart from the "naturist" nudist practices performed on

[6] (Simek, 2012, p.142)
[7] (Capt, 2008, p. 14 ff.)
[8] (Benham, 1993, p. 53)
[9] (Michell, 1983, p. 182 ff.)
[10] (Kneubühler, 1978, p. 145)
[11] (Aubrey & Shearlaw, 2004, p. 23)

the Monte Verità at the beginning of the 20th century,[12] "naturism" can also be applied to the general context of the "alternatives" of the last two decades. In a broader sense, it can be referred to an approach in the human-world relationship, as it has been summarized by the "reformers" through their motto: "Back to Nature".[13] Indeed, the nudist practices (e.g. the sun- and air baths, or the dance performances of Rudolph Laban) of the Swiss community were actually meant to bring people in "closer" contact with "nature". Just the same, the contemporary New Pagan rituals performed in dedication to the "spirits" of nature have the same goal: to reach the freedom of the "self" through the contact with nature, the "place" where all "other-" and "super-human" forces of life flow. "Back to Nature – Back to Life": this is the first statement of the "naturism" in a broader sense characterizing the several "spiritual alternatives" developing from the German 20th-century "life reform" until the contemporary 21st-century "New Age" culture. "Back to Nature – Back to Life" is the idea of a human being who, by surpassing that alienating wall erected by the industrial artificial, rediscovers the immanent presence of the "immaterial" in nature and, as a consequence, in him-"self". At the same time, this recognition of the "other than material" in the self in and through nature, constitutes the response to the modern "crisis of belief" – the "way" to transformation, by healing humanity in and through the planet.

Consequently, at least at a general level, this broader naturist approach has also an own conception of health and illness. These two states of being are considered as the symptoms of a rupture in the harmony between the macrocosmic "world" and the microcosmic "human". Mostly in opposition to the methods of the Western science-based medicine, the naturist approach claims for a holistic (or "integrative") interpretation of those physical symptoms of "not-well-being": the suffering of the body depends on the inner balance. Furthermore, this formula is even applied at a macrocosmic level: the gravity of the disorder, e.g. in natural phenomena, depends on the gravity of disorder in its inner balance, which is largely determined by human action. As a result, the first way to come back to the pole of "health" from the other pole of "illness" is not to be achieved through chemical treatments, but rather through a "return" to "in-and-out" balance. This naturist conception of health and illness has been strongly supported by the 20th- century "life-reformers" and the 21st-century "New Agers", whose "spiritual" alternatives make large use of so called "nature-based" and "nature-oriented" treatments: holistic health resorts with air- and sunbaths, vegetarian vegan food, herbs therapy, body- and soul gymnastics and yoga schools, acupuncture and massages, meditation, crystal, minerals and music healing sessions.

Not only have such "alternative" healing practices become an integral part of several currents of the post-modern "spiritual" Western society, but they have become a great financial resource, particularly through the support of the media. For instance, both in the case of Monte Verità and Glastonbury, such "alternative businesses" constitute a great basis for local economy, since they attract more tourists to the place and feed

[12] (Schwab, 2003, p. 34 ff.)
[13] (Szeemann, 1978, p. 5)

the other local businesses. At the same time, this commercialization of the "alternatives", or rather their collaboration with the "enemy" (the capitalistic system), has become one of the major reasons for skepticism among a large part of the population. However, this paradox – a conflict of interests and methods, revolving around the basic question of how to reach the masses as an "outsider" – has not only been highlighted by the conservative "bourgeois", but even by the reformers themselves. For example, as Andreas Schwab reports in his book *"Monte Verità – Sanatorium der Sehnsucht"* (2003), three of the five founders of the commune left after a short-time as a reaction to its conversion into a sanatorium for external people paying for the treatments.[14] Just the same, the decisions of the Chalice Well Trust to limit the access to the "spirit of the place" on the basis of financial reasons have brought to discussion among the "alternative" scholars and leaders.[15]

At this point, the "alternative" motto "Back to Nature" introduces two fundamental questions. The first one regards the conception of "nature" itself. As it has already been mentioned, the "alternative spiritual" currents that have been analyzed so far conceive "nature" not only as a beautiful matter of creation. Rather, for them, "nature" is "Nature", (written with capital letter). Instead of being a mechanical, physically-regulated combination of matter and motion (along with the mainstream of the modern scientific revolution), the 20th-century reformers and the 21st-century New Agers look at it as a body-rooted manifestation of the non-mechanical, mysterious life-force. This statement does not intend to expel God or any spiritual enhancements from the realm of modern science. Still, it is important to underline that pantheistic element that makes out the "alternativeness" of the most recent "alternative spiritualities", distinguishing them both from the approach of Western science and from the traditional modern Christian religion. In fact, to the transcendental divinity of the "old" modern Christian Europe, the "Father in Heaven", the "new" spiritualities oppose the conception of a divine force which is "hierophanical" in nature,[16] as the religion historian Mircea Eliade claims: God is not beyond nature, as its creator and regulator; rather, he (or she, depending on the movement) is within nature, in which he/she gets "implaced". For this reason, the "nature apostle" Wilhelm von Diefenbach achieved the inner illumination, or rather came back to "Life" during a sun-bath on the peak of a mountain.[17] In the same way, the Ley-Line Hunters of Glastonbury are trained to get in touch with the "powers" of "Life" flowing through nature,[18] not to speak of the nature-celebrating rituals of the New Pagans.

As it has already been mentioned in the introductory part, particularly the New Pagan Movements have insisted on a further "new" aspect deriving from the refusal of the immaterial God/Father "beyond" nature. On the basis of the local "natural religions", their members have focused on the immanent life-creating "Mother" energy that is "implaced" in nature, developing "feminine" theologies. In this context, a great example

[14] (Schwab, 2003, p.13)
[15] (Mann, 2001, p. 156)
[16] (Eliade, 1985, p. 175)
[17] (Müller, 2010, p.13 ff)
[18] (Heinsch, 1993, p. 45 ff)

is offered by the various communities unified under the “Goddess Movement”, one of them having a temple in Glastonbury. Founded in the 1970s, this ensemble of women groups has collected several natural feminine divinities from the pre-Christian Pagan Europe (e.g. the goddesses of the woods, or of springs) to the Far East as a way to establish the belief in a pantheistic and creative divine “feminine”. Actually, because of their radical critic against the male-oriented predominant religions, this movement has often been interpreted (especially by academics) as one of the several expressions of the 20th-century feminist wave. Indeed, no other “alternative” spiritual movement has provided such a strong and explicit focus on the “divine Mother”. Still, the focus on the “feminine” (in the sense of generating, and life-giving) of “Nature” has been relevant also for the early 20th-century experience on the Monte Verità, particularly for the symposia and congresses organized by the more recent Eranos group.[19]

Apart from being a point of differentiation with regard to the “old” modern Christianity, this feminine-based “spirituality” has to be interpreted on a larger scale as an element of transformation in the conception of the human-world relationship. Indeed, a similar shift of attention from “the heavens to the earth” has been manifested in other recent movements, rising outside the realm of the “spiritual”. This is the case of that “cry for Gaia” that has been crossing the Western cultural history from the “turn” of the century, commonly referred to as the “green revolution”.[20] Despite their secular and political connotation, the concern for the “cure” of the planet supported by the early 20th- century “garden city movement” until the contemporary green parties and ecological discourses are rooted in the same focus on the life-giving earth. From this point of view, the “spiritual alternatives” that have been analyzed so far, can be seen as the “mystic” expression of a more general “cry” for transformation that has been shaking the West from the beginning of the modern “revolution”: to “reconnect with the earth, with the elements, with the spiritual or sacred aspects of all things Green”,[21] as one of the event advertisements for the 1992 Glastonbury Festivals announced.

Actually, the explicit criticism against the modern science and religion based on the rather “spiritual” and “pantheistic” motto “Back to Nature – Back to Life” draws the attention to another significant aspect of the “new” alternative spiritualities. Again, this is condensed in the motto itself, exactly in the word “back”. As for the term “alternative”, “back” automatically implies another entity or, in this case, another place in space or time. In this context, it is interesting to observe how the pantheistic naturist approach has not only been used as a weapon to fight against the present, but also as a refuge for the nostalgia of a “golden past”. Indeed, as Mircea Eliade reports in *Das Heilige und das Profane* (1985), such an approach is typical for the so called “archaic civilizations”, amongst others the Germanic and the Celtic tribes in Europe and the ancient oriental cultures like the Indian Vedic tradition and the Chinese traditional religions (e.g. Taoism).[22] According to this post-modern conception of the “Back”, the ability of the pre-modern societies to live in “unity” with the “cosmos” was manifested

[19] (Noschis, 2012, p. 132)
[20] (McKay, 2000, p.174)
[21] (Aubrey & Shearlaw, 2004, p. 142)
[22] (Eliade, 1985, p. 19)

in their capacity of orienting both the "spiritual" and the "religious" to the "hierophanical natural". For this reason, the conceptions and the practices of several 20th-century and 21st- century "spiritual alternatives" usually refer to one of those ancient, and partly "mythicized") "pasts". Contemporary New Paganism, for instance, understands itself as a revival of the pre-Christian Celtic religion; just the same, the guidelines of yoga are a constitutional part of the several "New Age" healing practices. Finally, not only do these "pasts" get in dialogue with each other, but they often get intertwined in "new" beliefs, which are often practiced on a rather/mainly individual level or in small groups.[23] On the one hand, this creative mixture of beliefs is one of the more "natural" developments caused by improvements in technology, which has opened the doors to several worlds and cultures that were previously accessible only to the few. On the other hand, this eclectic tendency to integrate even the secret knowledge of the long-existing Western esoteric with the mythical "past" traditions, is fully in line with the 20th-century typical theosophical attitude to see "the One in the Many", or rather to find the synthesis between apparently contrasting worlds.[24]

In conclusion, the last paragraph has suggested a deeper interpretation of the "alternative" "Back". Indeed, this is not to be conceived only in spatial terms, as the physical return of the human being to a way of life which is not alienated, but integrated with the macrocosmic "other" of nature. Rather, this "back" also gains a temporal connotation, which is at the same time an expression of a nostalgia for the "Eden", or rather for that primordial "golden state" in which humanity lived in harmony with the "holy cosmos"[25]. As a matter of fact, this "Back to Eden" rhetoric strongly reminds of Jean Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage" as well as to Henry David Thoreau's "noble" life in the woods, in which the wisdom of "Life", normally threatened by "rational madness",[26] can be rediscovered. As Robert Kozljanic explains in his dissertation *Der Geist eines Ortes. Kulturgeschichte und Phänomenologie des Genius Loci* (2004), this "sacralization" of nature (as the incarnation of the "genii" of "Life") constitutes a fundamental element of the Romantic attitude, or rather one of the first ways to "romanticize the world".[27] For this reason, the British sociologist Paul Heelas has rooted the "alternatives" developing since the beginning of the 20th century in the Romantic period. According to his book *Spiritualities of Life. New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (2008), the most recent and contemporary "New Romantics" explicitly aim to react against the scientific rationalization of nature by replacing the dominating materialist conception with the "Romantic themes to do with union, [and through] the radicalities of „absolute" connection",[28] just as their "colleagues" of the 18th of the 19th century did.

Summing up, such "heterotopias" ("other" places where "different" utopias are realized, as Michel Foucault claims)[29] like Monte Verità and Glastonbury are

[23] (Heelas, 2008, p. 50)
[24] (Kugler, 1995, p. 47 ff.)
[25] (Eliade, 1985, p. 19)
[26] (Müller, 2010, *Gusto Gräser. TAO. Das heilende Geheimnis*, Chapter 2)
[27] (Uerlings, 2004, p. 230)
[28] (Heelas, 2008, p. 50)
[29] (Foucault, 2000, p. 178)

outstanding examples for the reflection about the process of transformation investing the Western society from the beginning of the 20th century until now. First of all, in the realms of the "spiritual" and the "religious", as it is expressed in the "alternative" program "Back to Nature – Back to Life – Back to Eden – Back to Gaia". Particularly this last step, the care for "Mother Gaia", constitutes one of the main tendencies of the Western culture, first of all in national and international politics. Again, as for the Romantics, such "alternative" discourses have two faces: on the one hand, they are a reaction to the scientific rationalization of nature of the previous centuries; on the other hand, they are an expression of transformation, challenging the "modern" paradigm of the industrial and capitalist economy to bring forth a relocation of conception of the human-world relationship. In other words, within the "high-technological" and "hypercultural"[30] post-modernity, the "alternative" spiritualities participate to the cry of those people ("spiritual" and/or not) whose attention has shifted towards the "spirit" of the life-giving Mother-Nature. This radical attempt of the relocation of the anthropological statements of modernity, that has dramatically increased with the question of nuclear power, mark a "turn" in the Western paradigm: the consciousness of the necessity of a "return", or rather of a "relocated" balance that should be a "win-to-win situation" both for humans and for nature.

To a Western society contaminated by the feeling of decline, resignation and stagnation, the outsiders of such "New Romantic heterotopias" like Monte Verità and Glastonbury, as well as the supporters of all the more secular utopias of sustainability, oppose a unique response for transformation: to "romanticize the world" anew. According to them, this has to be achieved first by considering the human-world relationship as a collaboration between two lively beings that need each other, rather than as a war for exploitation in which "the winner takes it all". Despite the radicalism of their ways of expression, such "alternatives" should be seriously taken into consideration within the discussion –both in the academic world and within the political European community, in order to "return" to see a common horizon of thought and action, or rather a common "history".

[30] (Han, 2005, p. 17)

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