

The New Myth: Frederic Spiegelberg and the Rise of a Whole Earth, 1914-1968

Ahmed M. Kabil¹

Abstract: The present article provides, through the life and teachings of a little-known German scholar of religions named Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994), a novel account of some of the unique historical and intellectual developments that converged in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid twentieth century and subsequently informed and enabled many of the defining chapters of recent global history. Separately, these developments are known as the dissemination in the West of Asian religious perspectives and practices, the San Francisco Renaissance, the rise of the counterculture, the widespread blossoming of environmental awareness, and the information age revolution. Together, they comprise *The New Myth*: synchronous with and in reaction to the planetary spread of technology and the global experiential horizons such technology discloses, a constellation of holistic integral thought emerged in various domains in the West that was characterized above all by a spatiotemporal emphasis on the ‘*Here and Now*’ and the realization of unity through the recognition and transcendence of polarity. The origins, afterlives, and implications of this constellation of thought are only now being discerned. The story of Professor Frederick Spiegelberg’s life—little known and largely forgotten—functions as the conduit through which the New Myth’s historical and intellectual contours are traced and thereby rendered intelligible.

Keywords: Alan Watts; Counterculture Movement; Cybernetics, Frederick Spiegelberg; Haridas Chaudhuri; Martin Heidegger; Integralism, San Francisco Cultural Renaissance; Sri Aurobindo; Steward Brand; Whole Earth Catalog.

The following article presents a vignette of the life and teachings of a little-known and largely forgotten professor of comparative religions named Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994). My central contention is that the path of Spiegelberg’s life discloses a constellation of holistic, integral thought and the network of thinkers who disseminated it. The constellation of thought and the network of its promulgation reveal a history of the spiritual revitalization of the West, one undertaken through rediscovering and appropriating the West’s shared origins with the East. The goal was to discover a way of being suitable to the age of global technological modernity. I call the network the drive towards wholeness. I call the constellation of thought the New Myth.

Synchronous with and in reaction to the planetary spread of technology and the global experiential horizons such technology discloses, a ‘*New Myth*’ emerged in various domains in the West that was characterized above all by a spatiotemporal emphasis on the Here and Now and the realization of unity through the recognition and transcendence of polarity. These efforts

¹ **Ahmed M. Kabil** is a recent graduate of Reed College majoring in history. He wrote his senior thesis on Frederic Spiegelberg, with Dr. Benjamin Lazier serving as his advisor. His primary interests include the history of religious thought, Chinese and Greco-Roman humanities, and postwar and countercultural American intellectual history.
ahmedmkabil@gmail.com



culminated in a convergence of developments during the mid-twentieth century that have informed and in ways enabled many key developments in world history since—most notably the rise of environmentalism and the information age.

A theologian by training and a professor of comparative religions by vocation, Spiegelberg was in a sense an ideal albeit typical scholar, occupying a stable post at Stanford University for three decades with the odd publication here and there before retiring to a quiet life in his Bay Front apartment overlooking Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco.

But Spiegelberg was anything but conventional. His interests ranged far and wide, and East and West. As well versed in Greek and Latin as he was in Sanskrit, Spiegelberg administered Rorschach tests to Indian yogis, dabbled in the ‘dark and disreputable’ arts of alchemy and gnosticism, and exalted heresy and iconoclasm as paths to salvation. He possessed the largest collection of Tibetan ghost traps in the West, and grew convinced that an earlier encounter with the great Indian yogi, Sri Aurobindo, infused him with a divine energy he could summon and transmit in lectures. Spiegelberg warned his followers he was not a prophet, yet made prophecies nevertheless. He spoke of vast changes in store for the world, and believed his endeavors were to play a key part. And he was right.

Spiegelberg stood knee-deep in the currents of East and West at the crucial moment of their confluence. His actions were pivotal in transmitting the strains of Ch’an (Daoist/Zen) Buddhism, Hinduism and existentialism that would influence the Beats, 1960s counterculture, and the developments in technology and environmentalism that followed. Spiegelberg’s story tells of three overcomings; the first, of the spiritual crisis of Interwar Europe symbolized by world war; the second, of the mechanized outlook of postwar cold war American society symbolized by the mushroom cloud; and the third, of the widespread belief that technology was an antagonistic force in the aim of global unity, symbolized by the whole earth.

Many parts of the tale have been told before. But the whole, as history, has not. To be sure, the full breadth of the story, with all the origins, afterlives, and implications is outside the scope of this article. The goal here, then, is to point to key moments in a tale that stretches across traditions, continents and eras. Part I, World War (1914-1945), traces Spiegelberg’s early years as an academic in Europe seeking alternative approaches to discuss the experience of Being, culminating in the crystallization of his seminal intellectual contribution, the *Religion of No-Religion*. In Interwar Europe he found himself drawn to the work of Martin Heidegger in philosophy and Carl Jung in psychology, and brought his unique understanding of both scholars to San Francisco when he was forced to flee Nazi Germany in 1937. Part II, Mushroom Cloud (1945-1957), follows Spiegelberg as a teacher at Stanford and the American Academy of Asian Studies as he becomes one of the principal transmitters of integral yoga, Chan Buddhism, Heideggerian existentialism, and Jungian psychology to the West.

Many of the students and colleagues influenced by his teachings and projects would go on to become key players of the San Francisco Renaissance, 1960s counterculture, and information age revolution. They include Alan Watts, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Michael Murphy and Dick Price (who co-founded the Esalen Institute in 1962), and ecologist/futurist Stewart Brand (who spearheaded modern environmentalism and ushered in the digital age through his Whole

Earth projects). Part III, *A Whole Earth* (1957-1968), examines a lecture Spiegelberg gave in 1958 comparing the ideas of Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo, and the “Beatniks of North Beach” concerning Being and global unity. From there, we see the influence of Spiegelberg’s thought on the Whole Earth projects of his student Stewart Brand. The article concludes by comparing two incarnations of the *Religion of No-Religion* in Heidegger, Spiegelberg’s teacher, and Brand, Spiegelberg’s student, concerning the role of technology in the global age.

Part I. World War (1914-1945)

Born on May 24, 1897 in Hamburg-Harvestehude, Germany to liberal-minded Lutheran parents, Spiegelberg had a fairly leisurely and aristocratic upbringing. He displayed voracity for learning early on, and his father prudently allowed him an unusual amount of freedom in pursuing his interests. The defining moment of Spiegelberg’s life occurred when he was a 20 year-old Latin theology student at the University of Holland in 1917. After reading some verses of Rilke, Spiegelberg went on a walk through wheat fields dotted with flowers and had his first spiritual experience. It came as the edifice of his Christian faith was crumbling under the weight of philosophy and the steady pounding of academic rational inquiry.

Staring out on the fields, he perceived holiness as existing everywhere and in everything around him. Past and future receded into the present moment, and the young Spiegelberg’s normal categories of ego-bound experience dissolved into “an eternal bliss of the all-penetrating holiness” (Spiegelberg, 1948, p.18). Spiegelberg (1960) called this experience the *miracle of being*. “The moment,” he wrote of the miracle of being:

... that I get over the narrow limitations of my reasoning and feel driven instead to experience the bewildering, monstrous miracle of this our being here and now, in this moment on earth, [...] When, instead of raising my eyes to nowhere beyond in order finally to hallucinate some Life Power there; if, instead of doing anything like that, I am puzzled, stimulated, enthused by the hardness of metal, by the clicking of time, by the warmth of your breath, by the sound of my own voice and the movement of my own fingers – the moment that I touch this bewildering, surprising, unexplainable, perfectly miraculous reality itself as an astounding mystery,—*that* is the miracle of being. (p. 53)

He brought this understanding of being and the spiritual experience that informed it with him to the German Academy. He arrived there at a unique time in modern European history. World War I eroded faith in the liberal ideal—an ideal that was supposed to deliver modern man from the dark ages and religious superstitions with its vaunting of the liberal trappings of the rule of law, a constitution, individual liberties, property rights, and a market society. Yet here we were, having marched headlong down the long bloody path from the French revolution in 1789 to the upheavals of 1848 to the aftermath of the bloodiest moment in human history. If this was the path to Enlightenment, it appeared as if the final nirvanic insight would all but confirm Hobbes’ words spoken three centuries earlier in *Leviathan* that, rather than promises of life, liberty and property, man’s lot was a life “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

The result was crisis. “The liberal project,” writes Benjamin Lazier (2008) in a study on theology in Interwar Europe,

... had derived much of its impetus from a confidence in the capacity for human progress, and could not help but falter as the trust proved folly. The war in particular dealt a deathblow to a faith in the progressive moral perfection of man, and in its wake came a post-liberal ethos more at home in crisis than in calm. (p. 5)

In theological circles this ethos manifested as crisis theology. Age-old debates about man, god and world were revived as many of Europe's greatest thinkers broached the crisis of the West through resurrecting the heretical traditions of gnosticism and pantheism to ask whether and why God had forsaken them.

Spiegelberg saw it differently. God had not forsaken us, we in our abstract rationalizing had simply forgotten that he was as near to us as the present moment. "It is," Spiegelberg (1961) later wrote "the instantaneous experience of the Being of Being in all its transcendence in and as this most immediate Here and Now" (p. 22). Through identifying with the fundamental aspect of Being rather than the constricted ego, we experience a world transformed.

The problem, then, was to develop modes of thought that reacquainted us with this fundamental component of our experience since forgotten in the modern age. To do this Spiegelberg turned east. "Today," he wrote in a set of notes from the period, "we realize [the divine reality] has to come from within and beyond. Yet maybe the direction from where to get the stimulation could still be East".²

These first inklings of East-West synthesis led Spiegelberg to taking full advantage of the German academy's offerings on windows to the East that at the time were rather extensive. Yet Spiegelberg recognized that one could not turn Eastward and assimilate its beliefs and practices wholesale, and so he found in his Western teachers similar attempts to discuss the fundamental experience of being, here and now, that he experienced in the wheat fields.

Martin Heidegger's thought would ultimately prove the most influential for Spiegelberg, though more so in later years than as his teacher in Marburg. "No other philosopher," he reflected, "seemed to me so immediately related to my own search for the essential answer to the ultimate questions of existence" (Mukowsky, 1976, p.1). In Heidegger he found a true revolutionary, a thinker whose ideas on being (*Dasein*) and the here and now (*hic et nunc*) resonated deeply with Spiegelberg's own experience and were unlike anything he had ever read by a Western philosopher. He immediately drew connections between Heidegger's insights and those of the East, despite Heidegger's apparent fidelity to his Greek and German intellectual heritage. "It was too obvious, to too many of his students," Spiegelberg put it (1960), "that a certain amount of parallels were there" (p. 51).

Spiegelberg started teaching at Dresden in 1927, and it was there that he met Carl Jung. Through Jung's pioneering work on myth, symbols, and the relationship between self and world, Spiegelberg found an interpretive model for comparative religions far surpassing contemporary approaches. Jung determined through his confrontations with the unconscious that the

² Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives. Note: about Eighty percent of Spiegelberg archival sources are held at Stanford University Archives, and the remaining are held at the California Institute of Integral Studies archives.

experiences disclosed to him were not random permutations of neurosis rooted in sexual trauma as Freud proposed, but rather transmitted symbols from the unconscious to the conscious mind. These symbols pointed to the perennial experience of man's attempts to balance the complementary facets of consciousness and unconsciousness. As Sharpe (1975) notes, the "recognition, acknowledgement and control of the unconscious by the conscious" is called by Jung the process of individuation, the "process by which a person becomes a psychological 'individual', that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole,' the process of coming to selfhood" (p. 206).

The purpose of myth has always been to tell this story of individuation. That is, Jung found that the symbols expressed in his personal experiments and in the dreams and psychoses of his patients shared striking parallels with the myths of myriad spiritual traditions, past and present. He concluded that the symbols disclosed an archetype—"a symbol of the unity of conscious and unconscious and a link between the individual and the cosmos of which he is part" (Sharpe, 1975, p. 207). A Tibetan mandala, for example, is an archetypal symbol signifying the wholeness of the individuated self as a microcosm of the macrocosm of which the self is part.

The two outlooks of Jung and Heidegger informed Spiegelberg's seminal intellectual contribution, the *Religion of No Religion* (Spiegelberg, 1948), first published as a lecture in 1938 at the London Buddhist lodge. Spiegelberg was a refugee at the time, having fled Nazi Germany in 1937 after being dismissed from Dresden for going to a conference banned by the Nazis.

While in London, he serendipitously wandered into "the only Zen Buddhist specialist in England," a brilliant 21-year old named Alan Watts (1915-1973). Watts would go on to become the principal popularizer of Zen Buddhism to American audiences in the 1950s and 60s, as well as the central teacher of Zen to the Beats. In 1937, he was simply a prodigy hanging around the London Buddhist Lodge. He had already written a book on D.T. Suzuki's interpretations on Zen Buddhism, and Spiegelberg found him "an almost superhuman being, a young lad with eyes of an angel".³

Spiegelberg begins the *Religion of No Religion* by asserting that the spiritual experience of Being Here and Now is the ground for the forms, symbols and rituals of religions to emerge. These symbols, if they are to be successful, must point to that fundamental experience of the miracle of being as well as to the unity of man and cosmos. Inevitably, the time will come when these symbols become meaningless because they fail to adequately convey the experience to which they point. What results is an iconoclastic reaction in which the symbols are thrown off as illegitimate, because they do not accurately express the miracle of being. But the cycle is ever to repeat itself. Indeed, it is the repetition of this cycle of the change and renewal of the miracle of being that is the history of religions.

The process begins with the *astonishment* or *miracle of being*, in which the individual realizes that God or Being is in all and everything. Following the astonishment is a feeling of *pantheistic mysticism*, "which means here that the limits between the ego and its opposites, such as the cosmos or God, are wiped out, and one all-combining feeling of community spreads over the entire universe" (Spiegelberg, 1948, p. 22). All symbols of God must be abolished, for they can

³ Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

only mean a separation from him. This pantheistic moment results in a *psychological inversion* where that which stands before man becomes an inner reality of what Spiegelberg calls the “all penetrating holiness.” Inevitably, the process repeats itself, as the astonishment of being always culminates in new attempts to reify it through names and symbols: “The paradox of a ‘religion of no-religion’ is produced by the fact that the human mind cannot grasp and realize any feeling or fact without giving it a name” (Spiegelberg, 1948, p. 55). Spiegelberg mentions Zen Buddhism, the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis, and the teachings of Martin Heidegger as three incarnations of the *Religion of No-Religion*.

The *Religion of No-Religion* was the fruit borne by Spiegelberg’s experience as a refugee, of being forced down to the barest essentials, of holding on to only that which is wholly necessary for survival. It was at once a dialectical theology, a mode of being-in-the-world, and an explanatory tool for the historical trajectory of religious traditions. Spiegelberg saw it more as a passport, a belief of universal currency necessary for safe passage through the coming turbulent Atomic age—an age, he feared, where many would wander futilely in search of home amidst the ruins of the world’s spiritual traditions as visions of mushroom clouds dotted the skies and obscured the divine light. “We are rapidly moving away from traditions and former ways of life that, in a few years, will be no more than distant memories,” he wrote:

The sudden developments of technology are changing our life beyond recognition. We are passing into an era of unknown experiences, call it the atomic age, or what you will. All that we can carry with us from the past is essential, the things without which men cannot live. And to cross the border safely, we will need some sort of passport that all men will recognize, some belief that has a universal currency. (Spiegelberg, 1968, pp. 18-19)

And so, Spiegelberg made his way to America, bouncing around on the East Coast for a few years before winding up at Stanford University in 1941. He carried little with him but his own ideas. But as we shall soon see, that was more than enough.

Part II. Mushroom Cloud (1945-1957)

At Stanford Spiegelberg grew entranced by the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the 20th century Indian freedom fighter, poet, and sage whose spiritual practice is known as integral yoga. He traveled in India in 1949 on a Rockefeller grant and eventually received *darshan* from Sri Aurobindo. Upon his return, he helped found the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco—a pioneering independent academic institution the likes of which had never existed before. “There was at that time not yet any competition in the way of live Asian studies in America, not even in the Bay Area,” Spiegelberg reflected later. “We did not have at that time any ashrams or Zen monasteries, of which we have so many today” (quoted in Mukowsky, 1976, p. 5).

Indeed, in a *New York Times* book review of D.T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism* written the year before the Academy’s founding, Gerald Heard (1950) reacts positively to the promise of Zen Buddhism for American society, yet notes the unsuccessful reception the Eastern faiths typically elicit out of American audiences. He attributes the lukewarm response to the West

having “outgrown its medieval regard for contemplation as a high or even respectable vocation” (p. 19).

In the article, Heard singles out the Eastern interpretations offered by Alan Watts, now a 36 year-old Episcopal chaplain at Northwestern, as having “roused little more than a faint esthetic curiosity” (Heard, 1950, p.19). Watts left Europe in 1938 not long after Spiegelberg and went to New York to study Zen. Dissatisfied with his teacher yet still committed to spiritual pursuits, Watts decided to enter the priesthood in 1945 and moved to Evanston, Illinois. And in the priesthood he may well have stayed had not a fortuitous string of events taken place in short succession in 1950. The first was an extramarital affair; the second, his young wife annulling their marriage; the third, getting expelled from the ministry; the last, a letter he received from Frederic Spiegelberg who was charged with starting a graduate institute to open in 1951 geared towards a wide-scale spiritual transformation of the consciousness of the West through the teachings of psychology, Zen Buddhism, and the integral ideas of Sri Aurobindo. Would he like to join him in San Francisco? “Happily,” Alan Watts replied, “Circumstances are so arranged at present that I could come out to San Francisco this winter”.⁴

Spiegelberg then set about calling “a first-rate man” from Aurobindo’s ashram to join him and spread Aurobindo’s message to the West. After some correspondence, the Bengali integral philosopher Haridas Chaudhuri was recommended, who at the time was the head of the Philosophy Department at Krishnagar College in Bengal. “The question was brought to Sri Aurobindo himself,” Spiegelberg recalled. “He approved of Chaudhuri’s coming with us with the word ‘*acha*’ (‘Of course!’).”⁵

Two months later, in December of 1950, Sri Aurobindo left his body. In his letter to Chaudhuri inviting him to join him at the Academy, Spiegelberg wrote that Sri Aurobindo “is the guiding light of this earth and the prophet of our age. I believe that the last most important contribution that Sri Aurobindo made before passing was to send you here” (<http://www.mysterium.com/aaas.html>, p. 4). And just like that, the man who would become the most popular Western interpreter of Zen Buddhism (in Watts) and Sri Aurobindo’s vision (through Chaudhuri) were brought to San Francisco. And here Watts and Chaudhuri would remain until their deaths in 1973 and 1975, respectively.

The Academy was a brazen attempt to expand the consciousness of the West so that the world did not end in a nuclear holocaust. Initially, the institute [Academy] had all the expected struggles, namely, difficulties in acquiring funding and credibility. “Clearly,” recalled Watts (1972):

We were just another California cult trying to assume the mask of a respectable educational institution. But then—only twenty years ago—it was not as easy to see as it is today that when you make a powerful technology available to human beings with the normal form of egocentric consciousness, planetary disaster is inevitable. Moreover, the point had to be made that the egocentric predicament was not a moral fault to be corrected

⁴ Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

⁵ See <http://www.mysterium.com/aaas.html> for more information.

by willpower, but a conceptual hallucination requiring some basic alterations of common sense; a task comparable to persuading people that the earth is round rather than flat. This was very largely the subject of discussion at the weekly colloquium of the Academy's faculty, at which Spiegelberg was the invariably provocative moderator, and which became an event increasingly attractive to San Francisco artists and intellectuals. (pp. 286-7)

The Academy functioned as a hub around which ideas on Being influenced by the East and the interwar scene were promulgated to the Beat Generation. Like their interwar counterparts, the postwar Beats were disillusioned by the mechanized ideals of cold war American society, the "valueless abyss of modern life" (Holmes, 1952, p.10). After World War II, Allen Ginsberg recalled:

There was a definitive shrinkage of sensation, of sensory experience, and a definite mechanical disorder of mentality that led to the cold war....the desensitization had begun, the compartmentalization of the mind and heart, the cutting off of the head from the rest of the body, the robotization of mentality. (quoted in Connors, 2010, p. 62)

And like Frederic Spiegelberg, they were after "the ragged ecstatic joy of pure being," as they put it, in which "existence itself was God" (Kerouac, 1957, p.195). Through the American Academy of Asian Studies, the Beats saw that the East could provide paths to the experiences they sought.

Here's Michael Murphy, a student of Spiegelberg's at Stanford and the Academy whose life was changed by Spiegelberg's courses on Sri Aurobindo, on what the Academy was like in the early days:

The electricity then was really enormous. There were some hundreds of students who started to gather around that Academy. In those early days there were a number of poets who contributed later to the San Francisco Renaissance: Gary Snyder used to come to those colloquia, and occasionally Allen Ginsberg. Most people forget this, but a considerable amount of the inspiration for the poetry of the Beat Generation came right through that Academy of Asian Studies. Michael McClure and David Meltzer, Phil Whalen, Ginsberg and Snyder...I would say all of them either directly or indirectly were influenced by Haridas Chaudhuri, Alan Watts and Frederic Spiegelberg, either directly or indirectly, and some of them would be in the audiences of those early colloquia and in those classes. (<http://www.mysterium.com/aaas.html>, pp. 6-7)

The Academy collapsed by the mid-1960s but its progeny live on today. Michael Murphy established the Esalen Institute in 1962 in the spirit of the American Academy, Spiegelberg's *Religion of No-Religion*, and Aldous Huxley's ideas on human potential; the California Institute of Asian Studies (later renamed the California Institute of Integral Studies) was established by Spiegelberg's colleague Haridas Chaudhuri in 1968; and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, where Spiegelberg served on the Board of Advisers, was founded by his colleagues and friends Robert Frager, Jim Fadiman and David J. Hall in 1975.

Assessing its legacy shortly before his death in 1973, Alan Watts wrote:

The American Academy of Asian Studies was one of the principal roots of what later came to be known, in the early sixties, as the San Francisco Renaissance, of which one must say, like Saint Augustine when asked about the nature of time, "I know what it is, but when you ask me, I don't." I am too close to what has happened to see it in proper perspective. I know only that between, say, 1958 and 1970 a huge tide of spiritual energy in the form of poetry, music, philosophy, painting, religion, communications techniques in radio, television, and cinema, dancing, theater, and general life-style swept out of this city and its environs to affect America and the whole world. (Watts, 1972, p. 284)

Spiegelberg maintained his post at Stanford during his tenure at the American Academy of Asian Studies, where he could oscillate between the roles of spiritual teacher and professor depending on the situation. If an impressed student in one of his introductory courses to comparative religions at Stanford stayed after class asking for more, Spiegelberg directed him or her to the "Beatniks of North Beach."

Such was the case in 1957 when a young student from his comparative religions class approached him asking where he could find people who thought this way.

"Oh, well you'll find none of that in Stanford," Spiegelberg chuckled. "When I want the news, I don't look for it in the paper. I go to the poets."

"What do you mean," the student asked.

"North Beach," Spiegelberg said after a pause. "Go to North Beach."

And with that, young Stewart Brand made his way to North Beach. And in a sense, he never left. (Steward. Brand, personal communication, December 13, 2010)

Part III. Whole Earth (1958-1975)

How to describe those strange things that happened in the decade we call the sixties? To say nothing of the unprecedented global upheavals, wars, crises, movements, and protests, how to describe the sequence of events that led to the technologies of the military industrial complex merging with the ideas of the counterculture to inaugurate the information age? How to describe the shift in the attitude towards the boogeyman of technology, long-seen as an instrument of government control and worldwide uprooting and annihilation, now seen as a tool of personal liberation and global unity? How do we account for the fact that, for the thinkers of the drive towards wholeness in the 1960s, technology, systems theory, integral yoga, Zen Buddhism, and psychedelic experiences all came to be seen as methods to bring about a consciousness of "the miracle of this, our being here and now"?

A Liberation of Earth and Being through Technology

In an essay based on a lecture given on August 21st, 1958, Frederic Spiegelberg used the example of the Beats to compare Martin Heidegger's thought with that of Sri Aurobindo. Speaking on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's centenary birthday, Spiegelberg's goal was to show that the ideas of Aurobindo and Heidegger were compatible and manifested in the example of the Beat Generation. Time was of the essence for the 'Beatniks of North Beach'—as Spiegelberg called them. They were no longer a secret now that Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (written in two

weeks in April 1951 but left unpublished until 1957) was a mainstream cultural phenomenon. In the essay, he groups Heidegger and the beatniks together by virtue of their shared central message: an emphasis on the 'here and now' and directly experiencing the present moment. Both Heidegger and the Beats hold that the rational mind is overemphasized, and here Spiegelberg feels they share the outlook of Vedanta and Aurobindo particularly. Spiegelberg also wanted to use the examples of Aurobindo and the Beats to broach Heidegger's new ideas on technology. Indeed, since Heidegger's (1927) publication of *Being and Time*, his writings took an increasingly mystical turn as he devoted more and more of his attention to what he called the question concerning technology. As he had before, Spiegelberg drew attention to the "Zen-like" quality of Heidegger's message, yet also found in him a global vision that strikingly called to mind Sri Aurobindo. Heidegger had not yet been translated to English, but Spiegelberg nevertheless engaged in a detailed exposition on the congruence of thought between Aurobindo, Heidegger, and the Beats using his own translations of Heidegger's (1977) work. In his essays in *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger, mysteriously speaks of a saving power in the essence of the danger of technology, and associates this saving power with the coming to presence of a god. "But where danger is," writes Heidegger quoting the poet Holderlin, "grows the saving power also" (p. 28). Only when we can reach the insight of how technology enframes us, how technology challenges us forth to order the world as standing-reserve, do we see how the truth of Being is hidden from us (Heidegger, 1977, p. 48). It is only once we can discern that "all mere willing and doing in the mode of ordering steadfastly persists in injurious neglect [of Being]" that we are free to "give utterance to insight into that which is"...When we give utterance into that which is, "it is the constellation of Being that is uttering itself to us" (p.48). "Will we correspond to that insight," asks Heidegger, "through a looking that looks into the essence of technology and becomes aware of Being itself within it?" (p. 49).

Esoteric remarks, to be sure. Spiegelberg understood Heidegger's ideas on the saving power as countenancing technology as a tool to achieve Being's task of liberating earth. In this Heidegger strongly echoes Aurobindo's ideas on global unity. Comparing the two, Spiegelberg believes they both share the same understanding of *Dasein* (being-there). Spiegelberg feels translating this term to Being in English is inaccurate. It is, rather, "the be-power itself" (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 53). In Aurobindo's schema, the equivalent term would be *sat* (pure or absolute Being) rather than *bhava* (existence/being).

"It is the essence and key word of Heidegger's existentialism," Spiegelberg writes. "Everything is *Sein*. And there cannot be anything that is not ultimately a part of that all-comprising Beingness. Even becoming is an expression of Being. This statement can be found in Aurobindo" (p. 53).

The limited personal subjectivity of the ego veils man from understanding the divine as Aurobindo's gnostic being. As such, the world's spiritual traditions have declined and the miracle of being is forgotten because of man's rationality. For both Heidegger and Aurobindo, writes Spiegelberg, there is only one hope. Here, they both quote Nietzsche's idea of the Superman:

When it comes to testify to a mentality that is greater than the degenerated mentality in which we find ourselves as a whole in this century, superman is called for, and to

characterize him we must say he will have true existentialist mentality, which looks for the direct experience rather than for the taming of reality by our mentality. This superman will have to be more daring than any man who ever walked. And therefore, because he is more daring, he will be able to say more. (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 54)

For too long we have cried for individual salvation, thinking only of ourselves in the constricted terms of our egos, when our task has been otherwise. “What is the task then, if it is not man?” asks Spiegelberg. “Aurobindo and Heidegger have the same answer: the earth.” For both Heidegger and Aurobindo, “Earth needs man to liberate her, maybe even Being itself. *Dasein* needs man” (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 55).

Heidegger and Aurobindo agree that because all is *sein*, because all is *sat-chit-ananda*, nothing is to be thrown out or rejected. Everything has meaning as expressions of *Dasein*. Spiegelberg then draws a link between the Vedantic understanding of the divine play of Brahman, *lila*, where the divine plays hide and seek by searching and finding itself through us (coming to consciousness of itself), with Heidegger’s notions that “*Dasein*—Being itself—comes to self consciousness in our own longing”(p. 58).

We do not need to escape technology to achieve Being’s task of liberating earth, Spiegelberg says of Heidegger:

The world of science and technique does not at all preclude a jump beyond itself, says Heidegger. We do not have to get away from civilization, to do away with all our gadgets and with the all-too-fast progress of technique and science. Rather, the more you go into science, the more you talk to the great men of science, the more you meet an awareness of the mystery, the more it becomes possible to take science itself as a jumping board. It does not any more today seem that science would drive us away from the opening of the greater gates toward higher realization. Aurobindo in his *Savitri* has said that many times. He agrees completely with the existentialist message as Heidegger presents it (Spiegelberg, 1960, pp. 58-9).

In the essay, Spiegelberg provides his own translation of Heidegger’s quote of the poet Holderlin concerning Being’s task of liberating earth:

*Earth. Is not this what you long for?
To be resurrected invisibly in us.
Is it not your dream one day to become invisible?
Earth invisible.
What, if not transformation
Would be your urgent task?
Earth – O Beloved One,
I will*
(Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 55)

The Iconoclasm of Stewart Brand

Stewart Brand has dipped his finger in many jars. As Andrew Kirk (2007) notes:

[Brand] was present at, and instrumental in, the creation of the American counterculture, the birth of the personal computer, the rise of rock and roll, the back-to-the-land and commune movement, the environmental movement, and a crucial reorientation of western politics. He was an experienced LSD veteran before practically anyone had heard of the drug and advocated a new view of the earth that set a standard for how six billion people view their home world. (p. 31)

Indeed, it was his role in spearheading NASA to release images of the earth from space in 1968 that will stand as perhaps his greatest legacy. Poole (2008) has called the initial instance of man seeing the whole earth as the defining moment of the twentieth century (p. 198). The sight prompted a revolution in the global imagination, and furthermore, catalyzed an understanding of the interdependent relationship between man and his environment:

The sight of the whole Earth, small, alive, and alone, caused scientific and philosophical thought to shift away from the assumption that the Earth was a fixed environment, unalterably given to humankind, and towards a model of the Earth as an evolving environment, conditioned by life and altered by human activity. (Poole, 2008, p. 198)

For Brand, the whole earth was an icon, one he hoped would supplant the mushroom cloud as the dominant lens through which we saw the world. In this iconoclastic overcoming, Brand exemplifies Spiegelberg's *Religion of No-Religion*. As an icon, the whole earth symbolized two facets of Brand's philosophy: first, a holistic, integral, microcosm-macrocosm understanding of reality expressed through cybernetic whole systems theory that sought to overcome eternally troublesome distinctions between, among other things, man and his tools, organisms and artifacts, and self and world; second, the conviction that technology, when used appropriately, can function as a tool for personal liberation.

Brand took a course on comparative religions with Spiegelberg at Stanford in the fall of 1957 when he was 19 years old. It stands as his first exposure to the Eastern idea systems that, along with his ecological studies and the use of psychedelics, informed his cybernetic systems-based understanding of the world. In examining his notes from his course with Frederic Spiegelberg, Brand appears most struck by the paradox of unity within polarity and the various means to express that paradox, such as the symbol of the mandala and the Ch'an (Daoist/Buddhist) notions of *yin*, *yang*, and *Dao*. He quotes extensively from Carl Jung and Richard Wilhelm's (1931) *Secret of the Golden Flower*. The boxed exclamation points after the quoted passages appear to register the shock of influence. The trajectory of his later life and projects confirms it.

A noteworthy quote speaks of Jung's notion of "outgrowing," whereby an individual may outgrow an insoluble problem through "raising...the level of consciousness." From a wide view, the insoluble problem "lose[s] its urgency."⁶ For Jung, "[t]he greatest and most important

⁶ Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

problems of life are all fundamentally insoluble. They must be so, because they express the necessary polarity inherent in every self-regulating system. They can never be solved, but only outgrown.”⁷

Brand would seize upon this notion of the polarity inherent in every self-regulating system. Though here applied to the individual, the idea applies in the *Golden Flower* to the cosmos at large:

[The philosophy of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*] is built on the premise that the cosmos and man, in the last analysis, obey the same law; that man is a microcosm and is not separated from the macrocosm by any fixed barriers. The very same laws rule for the one as for the other, and from the one a way leads into the other. The psyche and the cosmos are to each other like the inner world and the outer world. Therefore man participates by nature in all cosmic events, and is inwardly as well as outwardly interwoven with them. (Jung & Wilhelm, 1999, p. 11)

Hence, the polarity inherent in the self-regulating system of man the individual is the same as that of the self-regulating system of the world at large. If this sounds familiar, it’s because it’s a hallmark insight of cybernetics and systems theory—the very approach Brand would later vaunt in his *Whole Earth Catalog* (1968).⁸ Here the cybernetic insight is expressed almost verbatim, but in a spiritual context. This spiritual expression of the polarity in every self-regulating system stands as Brand’s earliest known exposure to systems theory.

Embracing the potential of technology as a tool for personal liberation, Brand and Spiegelberg each collaborated with the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and Douglas Engelbart’s

⁷ Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

⁸ A word on cybernetics: In the early 20th century, the sciences came to grapple with the breakthroughs in quantum mechanics that tore asunder the Classical Newtonian paradigm of physical processes. From out of the wreckage emerged the field of thermodynamics unscathed, and with it the principles that gave birth to the whole system models of the ecosystem and biosphere. The whole system model eschews the traditional boundaries between organic and inorganic entities by centering them within the supraentity of the system, of which they are mutually formative. According to this line of thought, there’s no distinction between organism and artifact because both are self-organized and self-regulating, reflecting a certain systemic wholeness. Out of whole systems theory emerged cybernetics in the postwar era, and through its study of information, communication, and feedback reframed the ecosystem conceptual tool in techno-scientific terms. By focusing on behavior rather than structure, cybernetics founder Norbert Wiener placed organisms and self-directed machines in the same order on the basis of the “purposeful behavior” that both share. Wiener saw in information feedback the mechanism by which entities fight entropy. Systems use information feedback to maintain dynamic equilibrium, or homeostasis. Cybernetics demonstrated the potential for systems to go awry by way of positive feedback loops. The techno-scientific discourse of cybernetics reframed the debates of various fields in terms of information feedback. In the sciences, cybernetics met with ecosystem theory and redefined organisms as self-regulating machines. When applied to social systems, we begin to see the far-reaching implications of positive feedback: unless variables within systems respond to one another through communication, feedback, and circular causality within the set limits, system failure may result in the form of, say, an escalating nuclear arms race.

Augmentation Research Center (ARC) separately over the course of the 1960s.⁹ Spiegelberg's friendship with Stanford psychologist James Fadiman and SRI Research Engineer David J. Hall led to consulting opportunities and eventually to Spiegelberg serving on the Board of Advisors for their Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in the 1970s. Brand, for his part, hung out often with the community, and was videographer for Douglas Engelbart's infamous "Mother of All Demos" event in 1968 that showed off the framework of tools that would one day become the personal computer.

Most interesting is a project Spiegelberg collaborated on with the Stanford Research Institute in 1969. Titled "Computer Processing and Bibliography of Literature Related to Voluntary Improvement of Individual Performance", the project had as its aim the production of a global network of research information exchange concerning literature on yoga, meditation, "physiological feedback training," "altered states of consciousness," and "other subjects related to voluntary improvement of individual performance."¹⁰ As a consultant to the project along with Haridas Chaudhuri, Spiegelberg was tasked with providing direction in assessing a literature that was global, ancient, immense and "poorly classified." The idea was to use the latest technologies of SRI and SRI's Augmentation Research Center both to create and catalogue the information service as well as to perform a series of experiments relating to that literature. SRI had just become one of the first four nodes on ARPANET, the forerunner of the Internet.

Why yoga and meditation? A few reasons: The first was, simply, to catalyze a mode of being suitable to the modern technological age, one that could lead to the "voluntary improvement of individual performance." Here, from the research proposal:

Improvement of human performance has for some time been one of the prime aims of our technology. This has been achieved, in our society, largely by providing the human with significant tools and automation procedures that, with proper training, augment his abilities to perform [...] The goals of our technological culture at this time are epitomized by our exploration into outer space, such as our landings on the moon and other technological feats requiring a high degree of skill and expertise in controlling our external environment... However, for the exploration of the inner man, our educational concepts, training methods, and research, seem less suitable¹¹

'Far out' is the only adequate term that could encompass the long-term goals of the project. Through cataloging, researching, and integrating all the data on yoga, meditation, and altered states into an information system, the engineers hoped that man would soon, through mastery of yoga, reach the ability to control computers directly through the voluntary use of brainwave signals.

Studies will undoubtedly soon be carried out using these physiological instruments in conjunction with computers, in the most advanced type of man/machine communication and human augmentation system we can imagine [...] Many years may pass before

⁹ ARC and SRI, along with centers on the East Coast, were hubs of innovation that ushered in the information age.

¹⁰ Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

¹¹ Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

significant progress and useful results can be produced in the control of computers directly from brainwave signals. In the meantime, it would seem prudent to explore the use of yoga, meditation, and other techniques as a means of developing the brainwave control that will be necessary for the direction of computers.¹²

While Spiegelberg was getting his computer kicks, his student Stewart Brand was becoming a celebrity. His “Why Haven’t We Seen a Photograph of the Whole Earth” campaign put him in the papers, and his *Whole Earth Catalog* (first released in November 1968) was a tremendous success. By 1971, at the height of the project’s success, Brand decided that the time had come to move on, “just to see what happens.” After all, he realized that his catalog would soon become an artifact of its own. As he would several times in his life, Brand presciently understood that he stood at the forefront of a constellation of changes to come, and wanted to describe what he saw there. After bumming around the computer programmers at SRI and MIT, Brand declared in a 1972 *Rolling Stone* article that Ready or not, computers are coming to the people.

Brand’s (1971) *Last Whole Catalog* was his most successful, winning the National Book Award in 1972 to the horror of book critics everywhere. He decided to throw what he called the “Whole Earth Demise Party,” to be held at the lavish and expansive Palace of Fine Arts on June 14th, 1971. Anyone who had anything to do with “making” the *Whole Earth Catalog* was invited. Expecting a raucous bash, thousands packed the auditorium with all the countercultural trappings, regalia, and contraband. Brand wandered around barefoot in a monk’s black Cossack meeting and greeting. But the reason for the party soon emerged.

At 10:15 pm, the director of the event, Scott Beach took the microphone and addressed the audience. He held up a thick wad of cash - \$20,000 in *Catalog* profits. “There is to be a consensus of opinion on what to do with the money,” Beach directed. “And then the money is to be signed over to one person, to do whatever is decided” (Lopez, 1971, p. 1).

With that, Stewart Brand stepped back and observed. He was aiming to make a point about the counterculture, that it “wasn’t ready to do much of anything”; and for most of the evening, and for some time after, it would appear Brand proved his point. “Burn it!” cried some. “Flush it down the toilet!” cried others. The sum was reduced to \$15,000 after a participant made off with the money. “Brand stood on the stage with a straight face,” an article at the time noted, “writing every suggestion on the blackboard” (Lopez, 1971, p. 1).

By dawn, Brand was asleep on the floor, “with the smile of a man at peace with himself, satisfied that his ploy had revealed more about the values of the counterculture than the contents of his magazine – the magazine that had become so much a part of it” (Lopez, 1971, p. 1).

Perhaps 100 people remained. The decision was finally made by vote: The remaining \$15,000 would be given to a young man nobody knew named Frederick L. Moore, Jr. “Most guests said they had not seen Moore before the party,” the article reported. “‘But we know him because he introduced himself,’ one girl explained. Moore gave his occupation as ‘human being’ and left in a van” (Lopez, 1971, p. 1). “Stewart Brand just shook his head,” Markoff (2005) reports. “It had

¹² Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

been an interesting experiment, but he never really expected to see Moore again. *Maybe he'll send a postcard from Mexico*, Brand thought as he left the Exploratorium" (p. 237).

Throughout the night, Moore made his way to the open microphone struggling to make his voice heard about the personal and collective empowerment that comes through sharing information:

If we are going to build a change—in a changing new world, or whatever we want to call it, 'new age,' then it's going to be because we are going to work together and we are going to help each other... We feel that the beginning of a union of people here tonight is more important than letting a sum of money divide us. (Markoff, 2005, pp. 236-7)

And with that, Frederick Moore and \$15,000 made off into the night—or early morning, to be exact. In the spring of 1975 he catalyzed what would become the personal computing revolution through cofounding the Homebrew Computer Club with the *Catalog* profits. The club, writes Isaacson (2011), "encapsulated the *Whole Earth* fusion between the counterculture and technology" (p.60). From the first flyer: "Are you building your own computer? Terminal, TV, typewriter? If so, you might like to come to a gathering of people with like-minded interests" (p. 60). Perhaps Brand was mistaken. Maybe the counterculture was ready to do something.

An engineer at Hewlett Packard saw the flyer and showed up to the meetings in cofounder Gordon French's Menlo Park garage. He was incredibly shy and nervous, yet undeniably brilliant. His name was Steve Wozniak. Soon, he'd start bringing along his old friend from high school, a bearded and impetuous acidhead with a messianic complex, fresh from a trip to India motivated by Dr. Richard Alpert's (1971) *Remember, Be Here Now*. His name was Steve Jobs.

And the world would never be the same. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change it, are the ones who do!

Conclusion

I have said that Spiegelberg's is a story of three overcomings: of the spiritual crisis of Interwar Europe symbolized by world war; of the mechanized outlook of postwar cold war American society symbolized by the mushroom cloud; and of the widespread belief that technology was an antagonistic force in the aim of global unity, symbolized by the whole earth.

Through an emphasis on Being, the '*Here and Now*', and the realization of unity through the recognition and transcendence of polarity, the thinkers on the network of the drive towards wholeness sought to establish modes of being suitable to the technological age of global modernity that transcended the dominant approaches in the West that Martin Heidegger called calculative thinking.

Certainly, Spiegelberg's understanding of Heidegger was unique. Nihilism and pessimism are hallmarks of Heidegger's thinking, and the notion that technology could aid in man's task of liberating earth (and thereby Being itself) seems far out of line with most Heideggerian interpretations. Indeed, it seems plain far out. And if Heidegger were here I suspect he would

disagree with Spiegelberg's interpretation. Cybernetics, viewing the world as system, seeing technology as a tool—all of these epitomize for Heidegger the very apotheosis of calculative thinking in the modern age. But then, we're still left with those curious comments on the saving power in the very essence of technology. Here is not the place to go down such a rabbit hole (and it is a rabbit hole, be assured of that).¹³

Regardless, the contrasting yet complementary views of Brand and Heidegger live on in what Benjamin Lazier (2011) dubs the Earthrise Era—the age inaugurated by images of the Whole Earth taken from space that Brand in large part catalyzed. Cosgrove (2001) elucidates this nicely when he contrasts the two discourses that have framed the Apollo images since the 1970s, the “one-world” discourse, on the one hand, and the “whole earth” discourse, on the other:

A “one-world” discourse [...] concentrates on the global surface, on circulation, connectivity, and communication. It is a universalist, progressive, and mobile discourse in which the image of the globe signifies the potential, if not actual, equality of all locations networked across frictionless space. Consistently associated with technological advance, it yields an implicitly imperial spatiality, connecting the ends of the earth to privileged hubs and centers of control. (p. 263)

Here we see Heidegger's concerns well represented, echoing statements he made as early as the 1930s.¹⁴ But in the one world discourse we also see the cybernetic systems view of reality epitomized by Stewart Brand—a world viewed in terms of interconnected networks. Now, Consider Cosgrove's (2001) definition of the “whole earth” discourse:

A “Whole-Earth” discourse stresses the globe's organic unity and matters of life, dwelling, and rootedness. It emphasizes the fragility and vulnerability of a corporeal earth and responsibility for its care. It can generate apocalyptic anxiety about the end of life on this planet or warm sentiments of association, community, and attachment. (Cosgrove, 2001, pp. 262-3)

Here we see implications of rootedness associated with the images, rootedness of the sort Heidegger claims has been lost in modernity. This reciprocal interplay between the two discourses lies at the heart of our modern attitude towards technology. Spiegelberg allows us to

¹³ Recall, for example, Spiegelberg's lifelong comparisons of Heidegger and Eastern thought. Recent studies have conclusively demonstrated that many of Heidegger's central concepts—those that would establish him first as philosophy's secret king and then, after his ascension, as arguably the twentieth century's most important thinker—were lifted in secret and at times wholesale from German translations of East Asian texts. These include ideas on Being (*in-der-Welt-sein*, *Dasein*), nothing, emptiness, and the clearing, and the conceptual centerpiece of his arguments on technology, enframing (*gestell*). Heidegger displayed a systematic method for concealing East Asian concepts in Heideggerian garb until scarcely a trace of the original source material remained. Heidegger's appropriation allows us to understand how Spiegelberg could claim in 1976 that “no other philosopher [...] seemed to me so immediately related to my own search for the essential answer to the ultimate questions of existence” (Mukowksy, 1976, p.5). It renders understandable Spiegelberg's lifelong suspicion that Heidegger was influenced by some degree by the East. And it lends credence to Spiegelberg's unique interpretations of Heidegger's work.

¹⁴ See Heidegger (2000), p. 40.

see the interdependent nature of one world and whole earth, and how we came to live in both at once.

Heidegger reminds us of the dangers of technology. And they are real dangers. But the simple fact remains that, even if it's a whole earth disclosed by the very process he assails, it is one that can and has instilled the rootedness he feels has been lost in modernity. Where the danger is, grows the saving power also. Yes, we live in one world, with all the planetary imperial spatiality that goes along with it. But we also inhabit a whole earth.

Much ink gets spilled over Brand's remarks in the opening pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog* that "We are as gods." (Why 'gods', and not god? Is the statement alluding to the Greek deities? Perhaps the Zen conviction that we are all endowed with Buddha nature?); We would do well, however, to remember 'Genesis', specifically 'the Fall'. Adam and Eve, having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, became "as gods, knowing both good and evil."¹⁵

This has been the story of a peculiar tree of knowledge that bore some strange fruit. Certainly, few wound up taking a bigger bite than Steve Jobs. But the central seed sower was Frederic Spiegelberg, who experienced a miracle while walking in the fields that he spent the rest of his life trying to remember. Remembering that miracle is also what this story is about. Each of these thinkers did so in their own way, and each for their own reasons. "It's all the same, it's all the same," wrote Richard Alpert in 1971; "Any trip you want to take leads to the same place." The miracle is always the same, and so the lesson is always the same:

Remember, *Be Here Now*.

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¹⁵ Source: Papers of Stewart Brand—Stanford University Archives

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