

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Ojai: the Crucible of Southern California's Cultic Milieu

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For the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology

By

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## Abstract

### Ojai: the Crucible of Southern California's Cultic Milieu

By

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

While Southern California is home to a cultic milieu of alternative spirituality there appears to be a particular concentration of these beliefs and practice within the Ojai Valley. For decades, the Ojai Valley has been the setting of a rather bohemian and idyllic environment, a place to which significant people (mostly artists and actors) have gravitated. Yet, it has also become a home or retreat to many spiritual teachers and seekers, including Jiddu Krishnamurti, the Theosophical Society, Beatrice Wood, and Aldous Huxley. My research broadly asks how alternative spirituality has infiltrated and influenced mainstream culture in Southern California to form a regional cultic milieu. I am specifically exploring why the Ojai Valley has a concentration of these beliefs and practices, and is so magnetic in drawing these groups and individuals. I rely upon Colin Campbell's concept of the cultic milieu as my primary theoretical orientation, aided by Primiano's concept of vernacular religion and Ellwood's notion of frontier

experimentation. For my methodology I use an ethnohistorical analysis of both semi-structured interviews and archival materials (periodical articles, photographs, letters, official documents, etc.) I have found that a combination of environmental and cultural factors have made the Ojai Valley an attractive location for practitioners of alternative spirituality.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

*We arrived at Meditation Mount around 6:45 PM, several people were already present. For about a half hour classical music was performed on a piano in the auditorium where the full moon meditation for Leo was to be soon conducted; in the meantime guests either chatted with each other, browsed the shelves of the reading room, or were in the International Garden of Peace overlooking the Ojai Valley with the sun setting in the west. The demographic of participants appeared to be mostly middle-aged with some elders and young adults, there were about 40 of us in attendance. The event began at 7:35 PM with a synopsis of the service we were to conduct together. This was followed by a brief lecture on the individual consciousness associated with the constellation of Leo; of finding the individual's true vocation; and of the spiritual evolution from the mass consciousness of Cancer, to the individual consciousness of Leo, to the group consciousness of Aquarius.*

*Another member from the group then led us into a guided meditation; which first involved relaxing our physical bodies, filling our emotional bodies with loving-kindness, clearing our mental bodies of its daily baggage, and connecting to our soul or Higher Self. We were then told to remove the boundaries in our outer and inner lives which separated these four bodies; once done we formed a group thought-form which was composed of our built-up energies, encompassing first the room, then the valley, and then the world and cosmos. A bridge was formed between our earth energies with the divine and angelic energies from the higher realms. We silently focused on these energies, and*

*after a while thrice chanted a deeply resounding OM. We were then told to focus back to our physical bodies in order to silently walk outside to the terrace overlooking the valley and transmit the healing energy to humanity and the world. The view of the valley by this point seemed magical with the twilight glow of pink, purple, and orange at the horizon beyond the dark blue and green of the wooded valley. The energy was focused through our palms and fingertips as we chanted the following invocation: LOVE to all beings; North, South, East, West, Above, Below; LOVE to all beings. The chant was repeated using the words compassion, joy, and harmony. After which we were then dismissed, ending around 8:30 PM.*

*This was the first time I participated in a full moon meditation, I wasn't sure what to expect. By that point I had an essential intellectual comprehension of the general belief system associated with Alice Bailey's teachings, which in certain regards is similar to my own eclectic belief system, allowing me greater empathy with the beliefs and practices of my co-creators of the healing energy we transmitted to humanity. During this time I dabbled in meditation and was still going through the stumbling blocks all beginners face. With that said, during this particular group meditation I experienced a sense of tranquility and peace I rarely experience on my own attempts. Perhaps we did contact higher realities and build up healing energy, or that we called up the energy from within ourselves in conformity with our expectations, ultimately I'm not certain one way or the other. What I am sure is that by the time it was over I felt tranquil and felt good for what we did that night.*

*(Author's journal entry, August 9, 2014).*

Southern California is associated with many iconic images in the popular imagination: Disneyland, surfing in Malibu, film studios in Hollywood, affluent Beverly Hills, the American Riviera of Santa Barbara. Related to these settings are notions of different kinds of people who inhabit them: actors and celebrities, surfers, hipsters, tourists, and those who practice alternative spiritualities: New Agers, Rosicrucians, contemporary Pagans, ceremonial magicians, Theosophists, those who follow gurus from the East or shamans from the Third World, those engaged with mind-body sciences such as yoga and tai chi, and so on. It might not be surprising that in Southern California there is an underground subculture which co-exists with mainstream culture and serves as a repository of alternative religions and sciences, while it is at best left alone by mainstream orthodoxy, is actually accessible to the mainstream and in turn influences it. The region has a long history of being home to alternative spiritualities which have influenced or impacted the mainstream culture of the region. Exotic words such as karma, chakras, astral plane, reiki, and Namaste are well known, having virtually become a part of mainstream culture's vernacular. Perhaps this is the reason for the corny joke about California being the granola state: full of nuts and flakes. While examples of alternative spiritualities occur throughout California as a whole, one community that exemplifies this aspect of California culture is Ojai, which has earned itself the nickname of the Shangri-La of Southern California.

The Ojai Valley is located in Ventura County, just north of the county seat of San Buenaventura, and a few miles from the coast. The small rural town of Ojai is well known for being an oasis amidst an industrial sprawl; a haven for bohemians, activists, environmentalists, seekers of health and recreation, and Hollywood thespians. Yet more

than that, it is internationally recognized as a mecca for the New Age and related alternative spiritualities. Go to virtually any bulletin board inside or just outside the shops and public meeting spaces in town, and it will be covered in posters, flyers, business cards, and other advertisements for upcoming workshops, lectures from a visiting spiritual teacher, reiki work, light-based healing therapies, tarot sessions, as well as stacks of free New Age periodicals with advertisements for events and services both within Ojai and in the broader cultic milieu of Southern California. There is a diversity of alternative spiritualities present in Ojai, including Theosophists, New Agers, practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, Zen Buddhists, Christian Scientists, practitioners of indigenous traditions, devotees of avatars and gurus, Scientologists, and so many more; though I would have to say that the overall orientation of Ojai's corner of the cultic milieu is of a predominantly Theosophical and New Age character. In addition, an interesting element of local folklore has developed about the Ojai Valley: the claim that the Valley is somehow a nexus of metaphysical or spiritual energies, with a stronger concentration than what might be considered typical elsewhere. Why has this particular lore emerged, and what roles does it serve?

### Outline of my Thesis

With that in mind, while this subculture is certainly present throughout Southern California there are few places in the region that have such a concentration of alternative spiritual beliefs and practices, and the place is generating such an explicit awareness in the popular imagination; in other words, many people both within and beyond Southern California are aware of Ojai's status as a New Age mecca. The first and foremost question which drove the research for this thesis was: why Ojai? What is so unique about

this valley that, of all the places in the region, this concentration occurs there? In order to tackle these questions, I reformulated them in the form of three research queries: 1) how has alternative spirituality influenced and become a part of mainstream culture in Southern California? 2) How have the alternative spiritual communities developed in this location? 3) Why was the Ojai Valley chosen in particular, and 4) what qualities or factors make Ojai a suitable location for alternative spirituality and contribute to the folkloric belief that the Ojai Valley is a nexus of psychic, occult, and other spiritual energies?

In this thesis I will argue that the Ojai Valley gradually became a magnetic concentration of alternative spiritual belief and practice because of a combination of geographic, historical, and cultural factors. That the early healing culture based on Ojai's springs and climate made it fertile ground for new forms of spiritual practice. In addition, with Theosophy serving as a hub fostering a diversity of alternative spirituality. Also, that Ojai's landscape and artistic culture has contributed to the perception of Ojai as a real-life Shangri-La. In the second chapter I will describe the methodologies that I employ, including ethnohistory, and the interrelated theories used, foremost being Colin Campbell's theory of the cultic milieu. In the third chapter I present both the history of the broader underground culture of alternative spirituality in Southern California along with the history of the Ojai Valley and its own history of esotericism. Then in the fourth chapter I will describe in detail the particular elements that together enable this magnetic concentration to occur in the Ojai Valley. Finally, in the last chapter I will summarize my findings and conclusions.

Ultimately, this research will contribute to both sociocultural anthropology and the anthropology of religion through its exploration of non-mainstream spiritual beliefs as a part of a regional sociocultural identity. While my thesis investigates Eastern, Theosophical, and New Age groups within Ojai, it has broader implications. The examination of alternative spirituality in general along with other elements of marginal or underground subcultures and their cultic milieu, will provide a relatively more holistic portrayal of both Southern Californian society in particular and American society in general, of which an examination of merely the mainstream culture(s) can only give us a partial comprehension. Also, observing how alternative beliefs and practices become a part of the mainstream will contribute to this portrayal. In the end, this research will aid anthropology in understanding how particular beliefs, worldviews and practices deemed alternative are a part of a larger culture.

#### Notes

First and foremost, any and all feedback along with constructive criticism I receive from the academic community, the informants I interviewed, and any other interested parties from Ojai would be very much appreciated, and I would give all due consideration to their responses and incorporate them into these next steps as best I can. Any errors or inaccuracies are entirely my own. Informants who wished to use an alias will have their chosen identity within quotation marks (e.g. "John Smith").

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Theory and Methodology**

The purpose of my research was to understand how Ojai came to be considered a mecca for esoteric new religious movements in Southern California. More broadly, I sought to identify what made Ojai unique in the larger Southern Californian cultural matrix which has historically drawn the creative, artistic and esoterically-inclined. Colin Campbell's idea of the "cultic milieu" (Campbell 1972: 14) provides a useful framework through which to understand Ojai's emergence as a crucible for esoteric movements in Southern California.

The mode for analyzing the data gathered for this research is predominantly interpretive in its approach; however, a more refined theoretical orientation is needed in order to gather meaningful information from the raw data. I decided that I needed to use several complementary theoretical orientations in order to accomplish this objective. One of my main theoretical orientations is ethnohistory, defined by Barber and Berdan as "an interdisciplinary field that studies past human behavior and is characterized by a primary reliance on documents, the use of input from other sources when available, a methodology that incorporates historiography and cultural relativism, and a focus on cultural interaction" (Barber and Berdan 1998: 12).

#### Methodology

In order to collect the data on which this thesis is based, I used a variety of methods. I conducted eleven semistructured interviews, consisting of eight open-ended questions lasting anywhere from 20 to about 90 minutes in length, with representatives from major esoteric groups in Ojai, including the Krotona Institute of Theosophy and

Meditation Mount. Interviews centered on my informants' views on the Ojai Valley as a concentration of alternative spirituality, the folkloric belief of the place as a nexus of metaphysical energies, and Ojai's impact or influence on the broader Southern California culture. I chose the semi-structured form of interviewing, both in order to give myself enough structure to gather the desired information, and to give my informants enough freedom to provide as much detail as they were willing and able. This also gave some of my informants the opportunity to provide more information than I expected. When I felt it was necessary, I also asked them to elaborate or clarify their points. These open-ended questions are included in Appendix A.

I recorded these interviews on a digital audio recorder in order to transcribe them for analysis. My informants were all adults, and while some were members of particular alternative spiritual groups, others were not or did not necessarily identify with these groups. The means of recruitment included participant-observation at events, chain-referral sampling, and asking organizations for permission to interview members who volunteered. I also conducted participant-observation at various lectures, meditations, festivals, and discussion groups, either organized by particular organizations or taking place at various public locations throughout the Ojai Valley. In addition, I used archival materials (e.g. periodical articles, photographs, emic historiographies, microfiche, blog posts, newsletters, flyers, information packets, and published letters and correspondences) from the research library of the Ojai Valley Museum, the archive at Meditation Mount, the microfilm collection at the Ojai Library, and the Krotona Archives series of books compiled by former Ojai resident and historian Joseph Ross. I recorded my informants' views on the history and development of alternative spirituality in the

Ojai Valley, and compared the data from those interviews with the data collected from the archival materials.

My interviews and opportunities for participant-observation took place in several places throughout the Ojai Valley. For the most part my meetings with Theosophists took place at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, two of these informants live at Krotona as members of the Esoteric Section and have their individual living quarters. Many of my other interviews took place in my informants' residences, each of which reflected their personal beliefs, on two separate occasions I had the additional honor of viewing two of my informants' shrine rooms. My interview with "Sue Hart" took place at Meditation Mount; while with Julie Lynn Tumamait-Stenslie my first interview took place at Libby Park during the Ojai Day festival, on the second interview I was taken around the valley having been shown various sites held as sacred to the Chumash, or otherwise held as being special. I conducted two separate events at Meditation Mount, a full moon meditation service as mentioned in the last chapter, and an interfaith Christmas Eve service held by representatives of seven faith communities in the Ojai Valley. I once attended a monthly discussion group at the Krishnamurti Foundation; along with attending the Ojai Day festival, where I noticed several alternative spiritual groups advertising or else providing information on their beliefs and practices to the public. On the day before Easter Sunday of 2015 I participated in the second half of the workshop "Cosmic Sacrifice of Christ" held at the Krotona Institute, in which the Passion of Christ was interpreted through (East) Indian mysticism.

## Modes of Analysis

For my research I decided to use analysis of discourse within the framework of narrative analysis. The latter is concerned with regularities in the stories told, while the former involves taping interactions and coding them. Since I treated my interviews, participant-observation, and the archival data I incorporated into my analysis as narratives, I turned to Bruner for a theoretical understanding of ethnography as a form of narrative itself. He states that ethnography is informed by narrative, which has three elements: story (the systematic structure), discourse (the medium in which the story manifests), and telling (the action “that produces the story in discourse”) (Bruner 1986: 145). He asserts that ethnographies are tempered to fit in with the dominant narrative structure of mainstream culture, and that the ethnographer and the informants are subject to the dominant narrative that influences the interpretation of data. This has helped me to keep in mind how my interpretation of the data could be subtly influenced. As I searched for themes in my data I relied on Fernandez’s theory concerning tropes, where he explains how tropes are used within expressive culture to create identity by a mutual appropriation of quality space or a matrix of shared experiences and ideas. He advocates participant-observation within these quality spaces to gain “an awareness of the many different domains of experience in a culture to which expressive events may [...] be making a linkage” (Fernandez 1986: 60).

In my analysis of discourse I identified three primary themes or tropes (marked as A, B, C), three secondary themes where two primary themes overlap (marked AB, AC, BC), and a singular tertiary theme which combines all three primary themes (marked

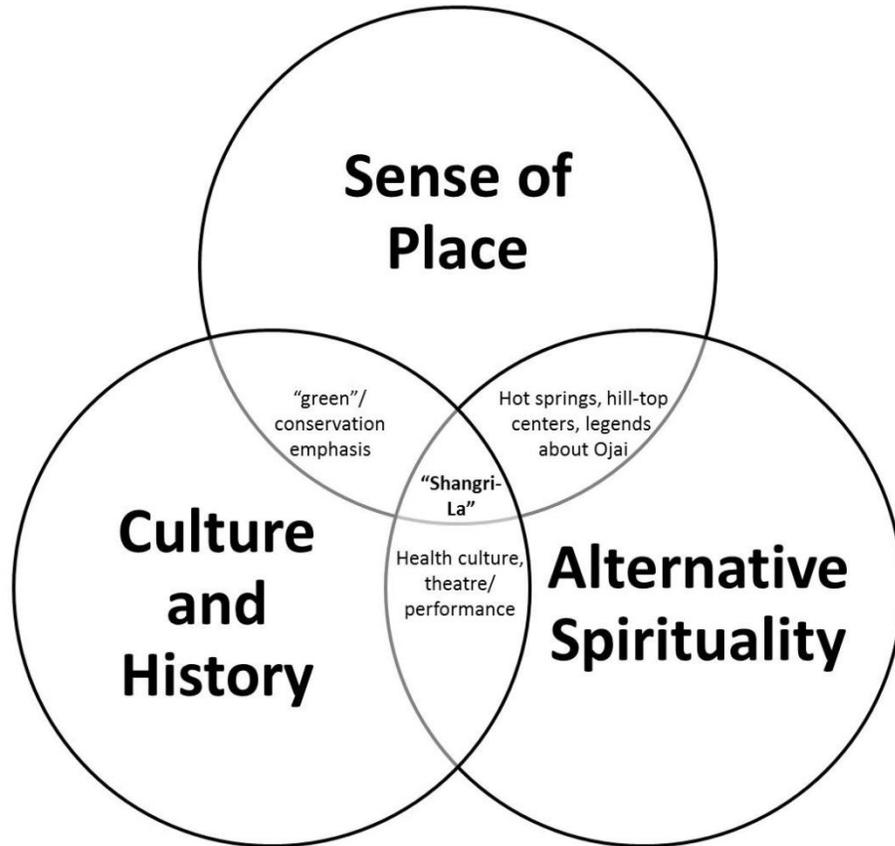


Figure 1.1 Intersecting Themes and Concepts

ABC). Each of these themes were arranged to cover various though related sub-themes. The first primary trope is concerned with sense of place (A), and contains these sub-themes: east-west orientation of the Valley, remoteness, rural/low industrialization, and Mediterranean climate. The second primary theme is alternative spirituality (B); the sub-themes contained are: famous teachers, community of Theosophical “allied” groups, and diversity of belief systems. The final primary theme is the culture and history of Ojai (C) with the sub-themes: artistic community, thespian community/residents, various festivals, small business community, emphasis on Mission-style architecture, and recreational pursuits.

The secondary and tertiary themes are not named, but relate to their lettered coding to designate which combinations of primary themes are involved. The sub-themes of AB are: hot springs, hill-top centers, and New Age legends about Ojai. BC sub-themes concern: Ojai's health culture, theatre and performances, and emphasis on organic and natural foods. AC deals with Ojai's green/eco-friendly emphasis, and what I call the "dark side" of Ojai's history and folklore. Finally, ABC's subthemes are: "Shangri-La," Chumash folklore, the bohemian/hippie "vibe," and activism/charity outreach. If there was a significant piece of information that did not fit neatly within any of the sub-themes, then it was consolidated under the nearest approximate primary theme.

### Theory

First among the theories I used was Colin Campbell's theory concerning the cultic milieu, which was his attempt to offer a more satisfactory explanation for the nature, rise and fall of cults. Before continuing, it is necessary to define the words "cult" and "sect" as Campbell used them; because while these terms were of relatively neutral value in the early 1970's they have since become problematic in their usage, often with negative connotations. For Campbell, the distinctive feature of "cults" is that they possess a heterodox position in relation to mainstream culture, while mysticism is an important although not necessary element in cults within America and Britain. In addition, cults were seen as being individualistic and loosely structured, making few demands of members, and being generally tolerant towards other groups and traditions (Campbell 1972: 13). Meanwhile, the then current sociological literature on "sects" saw these units as having a "communal and cohesive organization," "specifically formulated

belief systems,” varying degrees of exclusivity, and “a tendency to persist over time” (Campbell 1972: 13-14).

For Campbell, the cultic milieu is a cultural underground of a society, containing all those beliefs, practices and other elements of heterodox religion, unorthodox science and medicine that are not accepted, or are at best tolerated by mainstream religion and science; along with all organizations, media outlets, and seekers which move, and live, and have their being within this milieu (Campbell 1972: 14). Some of the unifying factors which maintain the cultic milieu include: mutual support and tolerance offered by members to each other in the need to defend and justify their views to mainstream society, belief in the diversity and equal validity of paths leading to Truth, overlapping media outlets which review and advertises other groups within the milieu, and an ideology of seekership which encourages the search for a satisfactory interpretation or system of meaning (Campbell 1972: 14-15). According to Campbell, a key component of the cultural makeup of the cultic milieu is mysticism, which he characterizes as a religious response “concentrating solely on the individual’s relationship with the divine and through an emphasis on first-hand experience,” the individualistic nature of which serves as an antithesis to the sect’s fellowship. In addition, mysticism co-inhabits the cultic milieu with esotericism, modern Paganism, and alternative sciences, medicines, and technologies (Campbell 1972: 16-17).

In his Essay “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu, and Secularization” (1972), Campbell observes that up until the mid-1970’s the available sociological theories of cults placed their emphasis on either the cults’ “mystical” nature, deviant or heterodox beliefs, or their individualistic and loose structures; in essence, using the model of the sect in order to

define cultic nature (Campbell 1972: 12-13). However, he argues that due to the ephemeral, fluid beliefs and practices and undefined boundaries of cults, he advocates instead for a model of milieu which “if not conducive to the maintenance of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general,” whereby new alternative spiritual movements or groups assimilate elements of defunct movements and groups, with the recognition that while these movements and groups are transient the cultic milieu itself is a permanent feature of society (Campbell 1972: 14).<sup>1</sup>

The organizational format of institutions within the cultic milieu is various, but is usually united by an ideology of seekership, which has been “defined as ‘searching for some satisfactory system of religious meaning to interpret and resolve [the seekers’] discontents’” (Campbell 1972: 15) and the format is based on the nomenclature of the cultural traditions the organizations derive from (Campbell 1972: 17); for example, organizations focused on heterodox science tend to form as colleges and institutes offering courses, lectures and outreach facilities, an example of which might include the World University in Ojai whose degree programs include consciousness psychology and thanatology.<sup>2</sup> Those groups with heterodox religion or alternative spirituality as their focus will tend to form as orders and fellowships; an example of this would be the

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<sup>1</sup> I should perhaps point out that while I will use the term cultic milieu to describe the sociocultural matrix of alternative spirituality, I will attempt to avoid using the word “cult” to describe the groups and movements within it due to the negative connotation associated with the word. At least once I have had to explain the meaning of the cultic milieu to an informant who was concerned with the word “cultic” used in the description of my thesis.

<sup>2</sup> <http://worldu.edu/> (accessed June 18, 2015)

Bhagavad Gita As It Is Fellowship of Ojai.<sup>3</sup> Two additional forms of groups within this milieu are the revelatory cult which claims an exclusive monopoly on truth, and personal service institutions of some alternative technology such as faith healers, astrologers, diviners and so on (Campbell 1972: 18). Campbell observes with regard to these personal service outlets, that “[i]t is probably at this point that the cultic milieu comes most directly into contact with the larger society as a consequence of a general demand for the unorthodox services which it offers” (Campbell 1972: 18). He also notes that alongside the seeker-based society there is also a substantial commercial subculture present within the cultic milieu, consisting of those passive consumers who merely have a mild interest in the alternative and purchase the periodicals and personal services the milieu offers; and this subculture is one of the principal reasons that the cultic milieu continues to survive” (Campbell 1972: 19). While Campbell makes a clear distinction between the active seekers and the passive consumers it is quite probable that some seekers begin their path within the cultic milieu by launching from their role as passive consumers.

Campbell also looks at the relationship between the cultic milieu and the broader society of which it is a part, along with the religious and scientific orthodoxy which dominates that society. He does this by using the historical process of secularization as a rationale to examine the cultic milieu’s continued existence. Structural changes have occurred in the broader society which have reduced orthodox religion’s (i.e. Christian churches in Western societies) power, influence, and perceived monopoly on truth; and while some forms of orthodox religion still condemns alternative spiritual beliefs and

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.meetup.com/Bhagavad-Gita-As-It-Is-Fellowship-Discussion-Meetup/> (accessed June 18, 2015)

practices, “these condemnations remain unsupported by secular sanction and [are] unnoticed by the general public in general.” The relativism, tolerance, and cultural pluralism of the secularization process has caused the beliefs and practices found within the cultic milieu to be perceived as merely variant as opposed to deviant (Campbell 1972: 20-21). Meanwhile, the theory of secularization would seem to suggest that scientific orthodoxy would become the new rationale by which the cultic milieu would be condemned; however, that assumption is based on the narrow presumption that science and religion are incompatible, and in practice this is not always the case. In addition (Campbell 1972: 21-22), he argues that it would be difficult for scientific orthodoxy to be enforced beyond the scientific community due to its democratic ethos, and that in the cases of applied science and medicine, any “secular sanctions against those who practice a ‘false’ art or science of healing are not very severe or all-embracing and the trend is, if anything, toward greater tolerance of such heterodox systems” (Campbell 1972: 21). Ergo, this makes scientific orthodoxy less effective as a means of enforcing cultural conformity, as opposed to religious orthodoxy.

Here it is perhaps appropriate to briefly discuss the epistemological foundation of my theoretical orientation. This begins with Primiano’s concept of vernacular religion, an inductive approach which “generates a theory of and method for the study of religion based on criteria of religious validity established by the inner experience and perception of the believer” (Primiano 1995: 40). That is to say that I have attempted to embrace an empathic understanding of my informants’ worldviews to produce an interpretation which is acceptable to both them and to academia. Primiano observes that in the formation of religious beliefs in a specific environment, both ecology

and culture influence individuals. This method gives me an analytical tool to examine how the vernacular religious lives of both my informants and of the voices recorded in documentary evidence have been influenced by the Ojai Valley's cultural and ecological environments. In addition, through an empathic understanding, this method will allow me to gain a better comprehension of these vernacular religions and how they contribute to the form and essence of the cultic milieu of both this particular place and the region.

In addition, I used phenomenology as part of my conceptual foundation, particularly after reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of this method observed by Knibbe and Versteeg. Reviewing the role phenomenology has played in the changes that have happened within the field of the anthropology of religion, they noted that this method allows anthropologists to engage as capable actors within the lived, intersubjective life-worlds of their informants. Ultimately, Knibbe and Versteeg found that phenomenology "enabled us to clarify our subjection and our resistance to a partly shared religious embodiment" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008: 55), thus making them able to shift between serious researcher and believer. Yet, they noted that in the end anthropologists describe not what the people they're studying experience, but what they themselves experience, and that is what they present in their research; this makes a self-reflective critique necessary in the analysis stage. For my thesis, I needed to become a capable actor in these life-worlds in order to participate in similar experiences so I could empathize with my informants' experiences, while also recognizing that what I experienced during participant-observation was my unique experience related to but separate from my informants' experience.

Like Campbell, Wouter Hanegraaff also looks at how the secularization process has reinterpreted alternative spirituality. In his article “How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World” (2003), he applies this specifically to Hermeticism’s tradition of magic; his choice in using Hermeticism as his contextual example is in part due to its emic terminology coinciding with academic etic terminology, and also because the practices of Hermetic magic rely explicitly on particular worldviews or theoretical orientations (Hanegraaff 2003: 360). Like Campbell, Hanegraaff uses secularization not as a theory of religion’s gradual disappearance or marginalization, but as a historical fact about “a profound transformation of religion” in society (Hanegraaff 2003: 358). He recognizes magic as “dynamic, diverse, and subject to continuous historical change,” and more importantly that the magic appearing after this disenchantment process “will no longer be the same magic” found in previous periods (Hanegraaff 2003: 359-360). Hanegraaff turns to Levy-Bruhl’s work on participation: that as instrumental causality became the dominant cultural force some people sought a validation of participation through magical practices. He uses Tambiah’s succinct summary of participation, which says that it:

signified the association between persons and things in primitive thought to the point of identity and consubstantiality. What western thought would think to be logically distinct aspects of reality, the primitive may fuse into one mystic unity. ... This sense of participation is not merely a (metaphorical) representation for it implies a physical and mystical union. The primitive mind, said Levy-Bruhl, is indifferent to ‘secondary’ causes (or intervening mechanisms): the connection between cause and effect is immediate and intermediate links are not recognized (Hanegraaff 2003: 373).

Hanegraaff also suggests that participation “should be recognized quite simply as a spontaneous tendency of the human mind. As such, it is an immediate and irreducible datum of human experience, which neither permits nor requires further explanation but

has to be noted simply as fact” (Hanegraaff 2003: 374). When instrumental causality became in itself a worldview, some sought out the Hermetic magic of the occultist as one set of means to legitimize participation within a disenchanted worldview (Hanegraaff 2003: 378). An application of this in my thesis includes recognizing that many come to Ojai believing it is an overall sacred place, seeking the “sacred feeling” which occurs there; thus Ojai serves as a place of participation in a disenchanted society.

I would further agree with Campbell that the nature of the cultic milieu as a sociocultural underground “is clearly a product of the form of orthodoxy itself” (Campbell 1972: 20), so in our examination of Southern California’s cultic milieu we must look at its relationship with the dominant culture of the region and how the later shapes it. To do so I had to examine how California’s mainstream regional culture has enabled alternative spirituality to flourish in the Golden State, in particular in its southern portion. In his essay “California Civilization: Beyond the United States of America?” (2006) Josef Chytry argues that California’s unique biodiversity, its “island” ecosystem protected by an ocean, a mountain range, and a desert, and its Mediterranean climate rich with various vegetation, has influenced settlers’ perception of the region as a sort of terrestrial paradise. He asserts that part of California’s reason for being a major civilization is that it still fulfills a symbolic role as a paradisiacal “island,” it is “the ultimate object of that endless quest to the West” (Chytry 2010: 28), set up as a challenge for Californians and the rest of the globalized world to achieve. Chytry’s analysis of the development of California’s regional culture and its cultic milieu will be further discussed in a later chapter.

Reducing my scope even further down to Southern California I have turned to Wade Clark Roof's article "Pluralism as Culture: Religion and Civility in Southern California" (2007), in which he asks, "what historical conditions for the region gave rise to this culture of religious pluralism, and in what ways does this pluralism today intersect with more recent religious and ideological trends?" (Roof 2007: 84). He begins to address this question by explaining that Southern California never had a strong religious establishment, and that Southern California's idyllic physical environment also played a role in the development of its culture of pluralism, which had an eroding effect on any imported puritanical temperaments and made them more willing to experiment. The strengths in Roof's argument include his recognition that the rapid pace of social changes in California's history and in its environment had an impact on its social solidarity, which had no strong religious establishment to determine the nature of Southern California's spiritual landscape.

A detour through New Zealand has proven fruitful in examining the late nineteenth century settler society of California and the conditions it had which encouraged this pioneer experimentation in alternative spirituality. It involves looking at an observation made in the concluding chapter of Robert S. Ellwood's tome *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand*, where he draws parallels in the accommodation of alternative spirituality among the former "white" British colonies of New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States, in addition to their "mother country," the United Kingdom. Ellwood's research is based on the arguments of both Stark and Bainbridge, who argue that alternative spiritual traditions appear more frequently in places where traditional religion has a weak hold, making Europe more

receptive to these new religions than the US; and Wallis' argument that "British settler societies, particularly New Zealand, lead among comparable first-world societies in receptivity to new religious movements" and that "although cult activity may increase with declining church attendance, it is also particularly high in Anglo-Saxon, Protestant-dominated, immigrant-based societies, despite continuing high rates of church attendance as in the United States" (Ellwood 1993: 185). While Ellwood examines New Zealand's long-standing alternative spiritual traditions (e.g. Spiritualism, Theosophy, the Golden Dawn, and derived or related groups) and the historical/sociocultural development of the nation, I'm more interested in his comparisons between New Zealand and the American West (particularly California) as spaces of frontier experimentalism.

Both the US and New Zealand, along with their sister nations in the Commonwealth, have inherited Britain's pluralistic, denominational society as the spiritual foundations of their nations, where if there is no single denomination responsible for the overall spiritual welfare of the national community, then "it should be supplemented by some sort of supra-denominational national spiritual identity and purpose" (Ellwood 1993: 187-188). Ellwood points out that not only are these five nations the best examples of the denominational society, but also that their religious pluralism "and the capacity for tolerance they have perforce developed, have made them relatively accessible to new religious movements seeking ... their own slice of the multidominational pie" (Ellwood 1993: 189). He then illustrates the difference between New Zealand and the American West vs. the United States which was already present as the former lands were being formed: the US was the product of the Enlightenment with its "rational, individualistic, Lockean, and Jeffersonian"

characteristics, while these new frontiers were formed in the mid-Victorian world of Romanticism, and thus were exposed to “utopianism, reformism, and spiritual experimentation” (Ellwood 1993: 189-190).

In addition, while both the US and New Zealand share Britain’s sect-forming disposition; the role of religion played out differently between the two nations. The Atlantic colonies which formed the early US were built by sects seeking freedom from the sectarian violence they experienced during the English Civil War, while the Victorian-era Kiwis didn’t come to their new home for religious reasons, many were of the working class who felt alienated by religious institutions back home (Ellwood 1993: 190). In this regard, the long journeys to settle in California or New Zealand seemed to give these immigrants the “permission” to experiment with new lifestyles they couldn’t practice before (e-mail correspondence with R. Ellwood August 17, 2013); as in the case of some American immigrants coming from strict religious backgrounds, who found themselves drawn across the desert “to magnets of renewed life, and of the esoteric, like San Francisco and Los Angeles” (Ellwood 1993: 191). Yet, unlike their Kiwi counterparts, Americans maintain a strong sense of the importance of religion, whatever its form, to their lives; this is due to the virtually apotheosized religiosity of the first settlers and the supposed religiosity of the founding fathers (Ellwood 1993: 191-192). Ellwood concludes by examining the common elements of British and Western American settler societies that have made them fertile grounds for new religious movements to take root. Some of these elements include: originally few churches and clergy ill-adapted to colonial settings, “utopian dreams that promise to justify all the hardships they have undergone in making a new home in a new land” along with a commitment to progress

and modernity that rejected religious authority of the past, the pragmatic mentality of immigrants favoring the empirical phenomena of NRMs, gender and democratic egalitarianism, isolated pioneers responsible for their own subjectivity, relative closeness to Asia and its spiritual traditions, and interaction with indigenous religious traditions (Ellwood 1993: 198-199).

Ellwood's argument actually works in conjunction with Roof's in making the case that mass immigration to a new region during an era when ideas of progress and modernity were abuzz, caused a sort of sea change in individuals' religiosity, thus establishing a personalized quest for spiritual fulfillment with their fresh start.

In my research I examined how the Ojai Valley's landscape, climate, and other natural features have been perceived to influence the milieu of alternative spirituality found there. To this end, I have relied on Sarah McFarland Taylor's proposal that there is an interdependent relationship between natural environments and religions. In her essay "What if Religions had Ecologies?: The Case for Reinhabiting Religious Studies" (2007) she recognizes that people's worlds are not only shaped by the natural environments they find themselves in but they also have an impact on those environments, and that the recognition of interaction between people and environments "have the potential to revolutionize the very ways in which we think about religion, nature, culture, and human experience" (Taylor 2007: 130). She sees potential in engaging religious studies with ecocriticism, an important aspect of which is that it sees the natural world as not merely a stage where humanity is acted upon nature, but that nature is indeed an actor within those stories as well. She would like scholars to not only ask how places impact religious imaginations, but also addition "how does an environment in crisis give birth to

imaginative responses, and how are these responses ascribed meaning” (Taylor 2007: 131). She also makes the argument that religions, like cultures in general, are not static things but living and evolving entities. The concept of religion as something that is unchanging is due to the framework of doctrinal orthodoxy and the revelatory nature of Western religion, specifically Christianity, which shapes the academic study of religion. Therefore, Taylor advocates that scholars adopt an organic conceptual framework which sees religion as both living and lived (Taylor 2007: 134). In my research I have considered the interrelationship between environment and religion, as I examined how the Ojai Valley’s culture and ecology have influenced alternative spiritual beliefs and practices. In addition, I adopted the organic conceptual framework in order to better examine how these alternative spiritual traditions have adapted to and in turn impacted the changing conditions within the Ojai Valley.

As I examined the influence of environment and culture on alternative spirituality and vernacular religion and vice versa, and as I was determining the particular method of this examination, I decided to reflect on a more famous example of a place well-known for being a magnetic concentration of alternative spiritualities where they reside relatively peacefully alongside more mainstream creeds, a place believed to be particularly sacred: Glastonbury in the United Kingdom. Folklorist Marion Bowman attempts to depict how differing religious groups in Glastonbury promote their own ideas about the past and the future by creating a tradition through the performance of processions (Catholic, Anglican, and Goddess-worship). This gave me a context of performance analysis to reflect upon my own analysis of the festivals, group meditations, discussion forums and workshops where I conducted participant-observation. In her article “Arthur and Bridget in Avalon:

Celtic Myth, Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spirituality in Glastonbury” (2007), Bowman explores the interplay among Celtic myth, belief story (an informal story that validates beliefs and experiences of a community), vernacular religion (the geographical and cultural contexts of beliefs and practices), and contemporary spirituality taking place within the environment of Glastonbury. One of the great strengths of this article was that Bowman collected her data from both collective and personal narratives, performances, and material culture in order to track how these narrative figures are re-invoked and reworked to fulfill particular roles in different spiritual realities. Also, the recognition that vernacular religion, belief stories, and contemporary spirituality can serve as a lingua franca among various groups is an important consideration. Based on my fieldwork I found such a vernacular religion in the Ojai Valley, which I would classify as being predominantly, but not exclusively Theosophical, New Age, and Eastern in orientation.

I also reviewed Martin Marty’s theory of the occult establishment as part of my examination of Ojai’s milieu of alternative spirituality. Marty’s article “The Occult Establishment” was published in 1970, and in it he writes about what could be considered a sub-milieu within Campbell’s cultic milieu, where he focuses on the “respectable and established public versions” of interest in occultism and metaphysics (Marty 1970: 213). He defines the occult establishment as “a safe and often sane ‘aboveground’ expression [of the occult underground], whose literature gives every sign of being beamed at what is now usually called ‘middle America,’ ‘the silent majority,’ or ‘consensus-U.S.A.’”; he contrasts this with the elements of the milieu associated with the “Turned-On Generation” which involve drugs, sex, and sensationalism (Marty 1970: 216-217). My research does observe and examine alternative spiritual groups that to some

degree or another have at least attempted to embody the status of relative respectability as “occult establishments,” such as the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, Meditation Mount, and the Krishnamurti Foundation of America. The groups I’m studying are long lived (they’ve been in Ojai between nearly half a century to nearly a century), have for the most part membership from the middle class, and are multigenerational.

Ultimately I have used multiple theories in my research, which serve complementary roles in laying its theoretical foundation. The overarching theory which drove and united it was Campbell’s cultic milieu, the sociocultural underground phenomenon which sustains groups and activities dedicated to alternative spirituality and heterodox science and medicine. The works of Ellwood, Chytry, and Roof provided the historical and cultural background needed to understand the development of Southern California’s cultic milieu since the Golden State’s incorporation into the United States and rapid growth as a regional power. Both Campbell and Hanegraaff examine how the historical process of secularization has allowed the cultic milieu to gain relatively more acceptance by mainstream culture, and how participation through the spiritual technologies of this milieu has altered and accommodated the phenomenon of participation within these worldviews. Taylor’s recognition of the relationship between environment and religion, along with the examination of religion as a dynamic, organic entity, guided me in examining the Ojai Valley’s influence on the shaping of this spiritual community and the groups composing it. Bowman provided an additional means of examining the vernacular religion, rather than the “official” religion, of such a hotbed of alternative spirituality and its relationship with the local environment. Martin’s theory

provided an additional model on the function of the groups within Ojai's own explicit cultic milieu.

In the next chapter, following a brief vignette of a an event at the Krotona Institute I participated in, I provide a historical review of Southern California's cultic milieu, how the Golden State's early rapid economic and demographic growth created a culture of reformist and utopian experimentation which was conducive to the experimentation of alternative spirituality. I then delve into the early history of the Ojai Valley, Chumash traditions concerning the landscape of the Valley, the early health culture which put Ojai on the map, and how the Krotona Institute's relocation to Ojai made this esoteric school the avant-garde of the cultic milieu to establish itself in the Valley. It will conclude with a description of major groups that have developed in Ojai, and the impact they have made.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Esoteric History of Southern California and the Ojai Valley**

*It's mid-morning of Holy Saturday, April 4<sup>th</sup>; we arrived at the Krotona Institute to attend the second half of the "Cosmic Sacrifice of Christ" workshop led by philosopher and physicist professor emeritus Ravi Ravindra and Priscilla Murray PhD. The workshop was held in the hall adjacent to the library, it is a large and impressive meeting space which like much of the complex is saturated with that lovely musty odor that tells you the building is relatively very old, and that it must have seen a lot in its time. The banner depicting the seal of the Theosophical Society hangs on a wall at the interior entrance between the Masonic pillars Boaz and Jachin, perhaps this hall serves as a lodge of Co-Masonry based on the history between the two groups.*

*The demographic of those in attendance was predominantly but not exclusively European-American, and middle-aged to elderly; I noticed two others in my age group. After a brief synopsis of the first half of the workshop from the previous night for the rest of the four hour workshop the leaders discuss the Gospel According to St. John as interpreted through the lenses of Indian mysticism and Theosophy. Some of the themes included: how the physical Crucifixion was a reflection of a spiritual reality which preceded it, how the Passion narrative is a sacred drama of the inner trials we face, letting go of our lower desires to align with a High Reality, and how we are called to be Mary (matter) birthing the Logos (spirit). At various points of the analysis of the Passion narrative, different participants played the roles of Peter, Judas Iscariot, a member of the Sanhedrin, and Mary Magdalene.*

*For a long time I looked forward to attending this event for a number of reasons, in part it was because I had an opportunity to participate in an event at Krotona, but also because the theme of the workshop dovetailed with my own spiritual studies and exploration. Being a practicing Christian whose personal beliefs have been influenced by the broader Theosophical movement I was of course interested in taking part in it. Already having common elements of belief with my fellow participants, assuming most to be at least sympathetic with Theosophy, I understand how people of shared interests in alternative spirituality and alternative interpretations of mainstream religions would seek to form spaces where they can freely meet to discuss and foster new ideas and practices in such a conducive milieu.*

*(based on Author's field notes and journal: April 4, 2015).*

### Southern California's Cultic Milieu

There are a number of factors, including geographical, but predominately cultural, that come together to create a climate conducive to the development and maintenance of a cultic milieu in Southern California, with the Ojai Valley as one of its more visible or well-known epicenters. California as a region has been and still is perceived variously from the edenic and utopian, to the dreamy and flakey; either way, the Golden State seems to occupy a position within the general perception as a place of fresh beginnings and dreams fulfilled. In part this is due to California's unique geographical and ecological diversity; compared to the rest of the United States, it is an "island of biodiversity" with a Mediterranean climate, which is matched by its multicultural society (Chytry 2005: 10-11). Even its name has its roots within epic romanticism: California,

along with its southern neighbor Baja California, was christened in 1535 by Hernán Cortéz after a legendary island mentioned in the fiction of Garcí Rodríguez Ordóñez, wherein he depicts a terrestrial paradise inhabited by black Amazons ruled by the Queen Califia (Chytry 2005: 12). Yet it was not until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century's Gold Rush, that a new frontier was forged where both entrepreneurial opportunity and utopian and reformist experimentation could be conducted. These progressive experiments will be examined briefly, with a particular focus on Southern California (Chytry 2005: 17-19). According to Chytry, this "'utopian' instinct to create new forms of individual and social life... originally reflected respect for the unmatched diversity of the Californian ecosystem: "aggressive agribusiness first exploited the diversity of soil and climate to produce vast amounts of fruit, then portrayed California through its aesthetic advertising as the natural place for joyful and healthy living" (Chytry 2005: 19).

In his book *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden*, Douglas Cazaux Sackman examines how the citrus industry not only transformed California's economy, but also through advertising created a mythic and glamorous reality of the Golden State as an agricultural Eden. One example of this was the commissioned mural painting *Allegory of California* by Diego Rivera, depicting California as an Earth Mother with her gifts of gold, petroleum, and fruits. As typical of fruit advertisements using Pomonaesque imagery she is presented with "Grecian features," suggesting California as a second Mediterranean (Sackman 2005: 1-4). In addition, he describes how California was advertised as a natural sanitarium due to its Mediterranean climate; those with failing health, such as growers, could come to California to be miraculously cured, and become productive members of society and industry (Sackman 2005: 40). Sackman even refers to

a resident of Ojai whose “brain work” related maladies had gone away due to his participation in Ojai’s orange production (Sackman 2005: 41). This “orange culture,” with its idyllic depictions of California’s climate and natural landscape, thus made the state a nurturing environment for those looking for a place that left them free to explore novel concepts, both social and spiritual.

By the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, California had established a regional culture whose edenic pursuit of pleasure and freedom of expression soon provided a home to those experimenting with esoteric and otherwise religiously heterodox beliefs and practices (Chytry 2005: 21). One such individual was the Canadian born writer and occult-philosopher Manly P. Hall (1901-1990), who moved to Southern California as a young man. Initially living at the Rosicrucian Fellowship in Oceanside before moving off on his own to Los Angeles, affiliating with various seekers and discussion groups and then becoming a minister in a liberal evangelical congregation called the Church of the People, where he addressed topics on the metaphysical and the wisdom of the ancients (Horowitz 2010: 151). In 1928, he wrote, self-published, and self-financed his magnum opus *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, a compendium of religion, mythology, philosophy, and occultism “compiled on an Alexandrian scale,” which is quite impressive considering his lack of formal higher education (Horowitz 2010: 149). In 1934 he established his Philosophical Research Society (PRS) near Griffith Park, which was modeled on the Pythagorean mystery school, containing an extensive library of 50,000 tomes and artefacts, a bookstore, and an auditorium where Hall would deliver his many lectures. The PRS campus, with its unique architectural synthesis of Mayan, Egyptian, and Art Deco, remains to this day a popular destination for spiritual seekers in Southern

California (Horowitz 2010: 155). While Hall didn't seek to rub shoulders with Hollywood celebrities, as many would-be-gurus had, he still had connections in the entertainment industry. One such relationship was with his friend the folk-singer and fellow Freemason Burl Ives; another with cinema star Bela Lugosi, who was supposedly hypnotized by Hall for the film *Black Friday* (1940) (Horowitz 2010: 157-158). Hall even made a brief appearance in the introduction of the astrology themed murder-mystery film *When Were You Born?* (1938), in which he explains to audience members the signs of the zodiac (Horowitz 2010: 157).<sup>4</sup>

Other influential esotericists who chose to reside in Southern California can be found working in the region's science and technology industries. An example is the astronomer George Ellery Hale (1868-1938), who with Edwin Hubble confirmed that the universe is endlessly expanding, while at the same time "Hale and his followers took themselves equally seriously as members of a scientific brotherhood committed to meditation and ritual redolent of ancient Egyptian and Zoroastrian circles" (Chytry 2005: 21-22). Another occultist and scientist was rocket engineer and Thelemite John W. (Jack) Parsons (1914-1952), who worked at the California Institute of Technology and lead the Agape Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) in Pasadena; he also supposedly conducted magical workings with science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard before the latter founded Scientology (Melton 2009: 818).

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<sup>4</sup> Part of Hall's Hollywood appearance can also be seen in the trailer for the film, <http://www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/313905/When-Were-You-Born-Original-Trailer-.html> (accessed June 4, 2015).

## Early History of the Ojai Valley

I will begin by briefly examining the landscape and ecology of the Ojai Valley and its contribution to Ojai's sense of place. The city of Ojai lies within Ventura County, 14 miles directly north of the county seat of Ventura, its 80 miles northwest of Los Angeles and 30 miles east of Santa Barbara. The Valley is located within the Transverse Range Province, one of two valleys in the U.S. that run in an east-west orientation, and its limited access through two small roads make it an isolated area (Jones 1998: 80-81). The Valley is ten miles long, three miles wide, and encompasses 90 square miles (Fry 1999: xviii). It is this particular geographic orientation and spatial isolation which serve as significant contributors to Ojai's sense of place. For example, the Ojai Valley's east-west orientation allows a longer duration of sunlight to enter the Valley, which gives locals a unique phenomenon to experience called the "pink moment," when the sunset bathes the Topa Topa range in a brilliant pink light.(Fry 1999: 318). Some of the places in the Valley are named after Chumash villages, or else the names come from their language. For example, the name Ojai is derived from the village of "Awhay," which means "moon." An alternative folk belief has emerged among some Euro-Americans that due to the close, high surrounding mountains which seem to protect the Valley's inhabitants, the word Ojai means "nest" (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015).

The latest indigenous human inhabitants of the Ojai Valley are the Chumash; the peoples of this language family have resided in the surrounding portion of Southern California since 1000 CE, and lived a relatively peaceful existence there for about 500 years. Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo made contact with the Chumash in 1542, after which intermittent visits and later colonization from Spanish explorers who disrupted their

earlier existence (Fry 1999: 4). A popular piece of folklore about the Chumash that I heard from my Euro-American participants is that the Chumash held the Ojai Valley to be an especially sacred space, where warfare never occurred, and peace treaties were established. I asked Julie Lynn Tumamait-Stenslie of the Barbareño-Ventureño band of Chumash whether there was any validity to this romantic legend, and she responded that, “I’m not sure if that was true, but I love the idea” (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014). She went on to describe the highly probable reality that during times of drought and famine people from neighboring areas would naturally come to the Valley and take food by “unscrupulous” means, and the reaction from those living in the Ojai Valley would be, according to Julie, “the men are going to retaliate and protect by having warfare, it’s human nature.”

Oppressive times eventually fell upon the Chumash during the Mission Period, when Father Junipero Serra established Mission San Buenaventura in 1805, the goal of which was to “civilize” the Chumash in part by converting them to Christianity, with the intent that the “civilized” neophytes would work the land which would be divided up amongst them (Fry 1999: 14). Julie told me that a lot of native people in the Valley, and the Chumash community in general, are still trying to figure out their people’s spirituality and recreate it as best they can, since “[w]e lost a lot of our spirituality through the Catholic religion, through the missionization and the colonization of the... Catholic priests” (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014). During this time, some of the Chumash would periodically escape the mission and head into the Ojai Valley, but then the Spanish would drive them out again. Julie told me about one account from the mid-1800’s, which recounts that the Spanish drove the Chumash people from

the Ojai village of Mat'ilha out to the Cañada Larga river between the Valley and Mission San Buenaventura, “[b]ut at night, when they saw the native peoples singing and chanting around their campfires they got scared because they knew they were being cursed for kicking them out of their village” (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014). Julie later showed me the approximate site of where this “voodoo,” as she termed it, took place, near the Santa Gertrudis Chapel (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). In 1832, ten years after Mexico gained independence from Spain, the new government removed all non-spiritual duties from the Missions, and confiscated their lands meant for the Chumash (Fry 1999: 14). While little is known about the Chumash life during this time, they worked as cowboys, ranch hands, picked fruit in the orchards, and were “lent” out among ranches.<sup>5</sup>

There are particular mountains in the Ojai Valley, such as Topa Topa, which are of significance to its inhabitants: to the Chumash some of them are shrine-hills and power spots (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). Topa Topa comes from the Chumash “sitop topo” meaning “much cane;” the cane was used for arrows, for filling two inch tubes with tobacco, and then piercing through ear lobes.<sup>6</sup> According to Julie, the tobacco was chewed as a pick-me-up, to quench hunger and give an extra shot of energy, and crystals may also have been gathered from Topa Topa, which were worn as jewelry for healing purposes (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). Topa Topa would later become an important feature to folks from the alternative spiritual milieu. Theosophists regard one of its knobs as the “Guardian Deva’s Seat” (Ross 2009:102). Another shrine-mountain in the upper valley is Kahus, or the Bear, called that

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<sup>5</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/my-chumash-ancestral-legacy/> (accessed June 1, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/my-chumash-ancestral-legacy/> (accessed June 1, 2015)

because it was a place where the Bear-Medicine was conducted (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). Julie describes Bear-Medicine as a means of using one's intuition to engage with the power of the Bear, who is a gentle protector, and thus learn to live with oneself (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014). There is also Chief Peak, just northeast of Ojai, so named because it resembles the face of a Native American looking skyward in profile (Fry 1999: 308). There is a creation narrative in Chumash oral tradition, Julie told me, in which the First People were very large animals and people who were destroyed in a great deluge; when the waters receded they turned to stone and became the mountains and hills, serving as protectors (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014). Chief Peak's resemblance to a human face may be a part of this narrative.

In addition to shrine-mountains, the various springs within the Ojai Valley were also considered power spots by the Chumash. According to Julie, they used both hot and cold springs to promote healing, for medicine, and to pray for health and well-being (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). Two of these sites are the Matilija Hot Springs and Wheeler Hot Springs, both of which have contributed to Ojai's reputation as a place of healing.<sup>7</sup> Julie told me that the sulphur in the water makes it good for dealing with arthritis and rheumatism, as well as with various skin abrasions (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). She also told me that many people both within and beyond Ojai would bathe in the Matilija Hot Springs, but that their increasingly, disrespectful behavior polluted the site both literally and spiritually, also noting that this is a sacred medicine site that should be approached respectfully. In

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<sup>7</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/my-chumash-ancestral-legacy/> (accessed June 1, 2015)

recent years the property was bought by an organization called Ecotopia which forbade unpermitted access to the hot springs. This has allowed the water to cleanse at least ecologically, as well as spiritually, with the help of volunteer workers removing the excessive trash left behind by partyers (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). Ecotopia plans to create a stewardship relationship with the hot springs, where visitors can either make a donation or participate in a work-exchange. Another place with hot sulphur water that was formally open to the public was Wheeler Hot Springs, and according to Julie this site is believed to be cursed due to its history of deaths: murders, suicides, and accidents, as well as fires and floods (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). There is a legend associated with the springs and the surrounding land about Chief Matilija's curse that anyone who desires to use it for ill gain will perish.<sup>8</sup> Despite being a figure with no historical basis, his curse is an excellent case where a legend is employed to explain the tragic series of events that have occurred in this place. Julie went on to say that Wheeler Blumberg came across the hot springs after he shot a deer in the late 1880's, and decided to establish a high-priced spa there; thus an additional layer of the curse is that he was selfishly making a profit as a result of a death (interview to J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie February 1, 2015). Due to both its history of deaths and financial problems, Wheeler Hot Springs is closed to the public, serving as a local example of expecting retribution for sacred sites being disrespectfully disturbed.<sup>9</sup>

Another major feature of the Ojai Valley's landscape is its profusion of trees, which many of the locals are quite fond of preserving. Journalist Charles Nordhoff

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<sup>8</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/my-chumash-ancestral-legacy/> (accessed June 1, 2015)

<sup>9</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/my-chumash-ancestral-legacy/> (accessed June 1, 2015)

remarked in 1882 about “the abundance and loveliness of its woods of evergreen oaks” (VanHouten 2014: 14). In 1922 the Arbolada section of the Valley was designed as a means to preserve Ojai’s trees from destruction; the benefactor Edward Libbey arranged it so that none of the trees there would be removed, and brought in six boxcars filled with trees to plant in the 360-acre area (VanHouten 2014: 16). In addition, there are particular trees which are of historical significance to the residents of Ojai. The first example is the Sycamore of Libby Park: located near Libby Bowl, it is more than 200 years old, and may have been bent as a sapling by the Chumash in order “to mark the beginning of an important trail, campsite or meeting place” (VanHouten 2014: 17). This tree forms an arch, and among its informal names are the “Peace Tree” and the “Marriage Tree.” In a 1953 article, George T. Channing claimed that, “over 120 years ago the Indians called a peace conclave around the tree and agreed never to battle in the valley of the Ojai. As a marriage tree, the Indians believe that two lovers walking together through the arch are united by the Great Spirit” (VanHouten 2014: 17). Another tree of the same species, called the Sycamore of the Winds, which is located at the Ojai Valley’s southern entrance at Foster Park, also may have been incorporated into local Chumash tradition. Supposedly this tree was held as being sacred by the Chumash, where worship was conducted and offerings of skins and feathers were left (VanHouten 2014: 18). It earned its name from the belief that it was the source of the winds, perhaps because it is located where coastal winds first enter the Valley (VanHouten 2014: 18). More contemporary folklore about the Sycamore of the Winds has also emerged; that wishes made underneath its branches become realized, hence becoming the “Wishing Tree,” and also being dubbed the “Kissing Tree,” for “[l]overs who met in the shade of the great

sycamore would whisper vows together. Some have even gotten married beneath it” (VanHouten 2014: 18).

When the Mexican government confiscated the Mission’s lands, they divided and distributed them to those of political value. One such individual was Fernando Tico, whose civic responsibilities at Mission San Buenaventura included to managing the whipping post used to deal with troublesome neophytes (Fry 1999: 14-15). In 1837, Governor Juan B. Alvarado granted Rancho Ojai to Tico. In 1853, three years after California became a state, Tico sold his rancho to politician Henry Storrow Carnes; ownership of the Valley then changed hands several times before it was purchased in 1864 on behalf of Thomas A Scott who was looking for an oil strike (Fry 1999: 17). The first wave of Euro-American settlers to the Ojai Valley came looking to strike it rich in the “black gold” of petroleum, the tar-like substance oozing up out of the ground in some areas of the Golden State. Along with them came pioneers willing to make a home in Ojai’s then harsh environment (e.g. bears and cougars, flea infestation, and the dense forests making travel difficult) (Fry 1999: 19-22). The next wave of immigrants from the East Coast came to the Ojai Valley seeking improvement in their health. One Lorenzo Dow Roberts arrived there with severe bronchitis, which made him speak at a whisper, and weighed 124 pounds; in less than a year he gained 40 pounds and could be heard shouting. This seemingly miraculous recovery made such an impression on him that he desired to bring others to this “mecca of health restoration” (Fry 1999: 24-25). He made plans for developing a town (initially to be called Ojai) in the Valley and advertised Ojai’s benefits to local newspapers. Ventura businessman Royes Gaylord Surdam took interest and mailed brochures to East Coast doctors recommending that they send their

incurable patients to Ojai to become cured of their ailments (Fry 1999: 25-26). In 1871, journalist Charles Nordhoff toured Southern California, including Ventura County, and his descriptions were printed in *The New York Herald* and later compiled and published as *California for Health, Pleasure and residence: A Book for Travelers and Settlers* (Fry 1999: 31). Those back East who had read Nordhoff's book were enticed by his descriptions of California's health benefits and a place where the "summers are endless," and soon migrated there. One such immigrant was Catherine Blumberg, who initially moved from Iowa to Los Angeles with her husband Abram, and it was only within a year of relocating to Ojai that her health drastically improved. She was so impressed, that when the matter of naming the new town came up, she suggested naming it after Nordhoff who ultimately brought them to this miracle valley (Fry 1999: 26-27, 31). Although Nordhoff never mentioned the Ojai Valley in the first edition of his book he did so in the 1882 printing, wherein he stated that "[t]he valley is famous even in California for the abundance and loveliness of its woods of evergreen oaks. It presents the appearance, in fact of a magnificent old English park," as well as its miraculous healing climate (Fry 1999: 31). Yet during the First World War it was decided to change the name of the town to Ojai, principally because its former name was too Germanic sounding for many residents' comfort (Fry 1999: 206-207).

With more people moving to Ojai, the little one horse village was growing into a small town; but its major transformation would come about through the efforts of Edward Drummond Libby, who moved to Ojai from Ohio, and as the years passed, became more and more enraptured by the Valley's rustic charm, yet felt that "the village itself typified most western towns and it lacked distinction...He wanted to find a way to preserve the

rustic characteristics of Nordhoff while changing those features not in harmony with the lovely landscape” (Fry 1999: 196). Beginning in 1914, Libby had his improvement plans greenlighted by civic authorities. His designs included a Spanish style arcade for shopping, the land in front of the arcade to be cleared of everything but its oaks (later to become Libby Park), the iconic sixty-five foot post office tower, and tennis courts (Fry 1999: 197-198). The community wanted to show its gratitude to Libby by holding an event initially called Libby Day, but Mr. Libby would not have it; honor would go to the town itself, hence in 1917 the first annual Ojai Day celebration was held, which continues to this day (Fry 1999: 199).

### Becoming Shangri-La

Now I will turn to the series of events which initiated Ojai’s transformation into a mecca of alternative spiritual beliefs and practices. The esoteric movement which had probably the strongest impact on Southern California and Ojai is Theosophy. The Theosophical Society (TS) was founded in 1875 by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907). The mission of the TS can be summed up in its three objectives: “1) Brotherhood without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color. 2) Study of comparative religion, philosophy and sciences. 3) Investigation of unexplained laws of nature and powers latent in man” (Woolman 1956: 36). Yet, after Annie Besant became the international president of the TS, a schism occurred over who should succeed Blavatsky and Olcott, in addition to scandals involving Bishop C.W. Leadbeater and Jiddu Krishnamurti’s status as World Teacher, which divided the American branch into those who followed Besant’s leadership (the Theosophical Society of America), and those who saw William Q. Judge as the legitimate

head (the Theosophical Society in America). From this schism came various other Theosophical groups which can be found throughout Southern California, including Judge's TS under Katherine Tingley, which established a utopian colony at Point Loma, and Besant's TS through the Krotona Institute in Ojai (Melton 2009: 695-696, 711-712).

In 1909, Annie Besant, then the international president of the Theosophical Society, came across the 13 year old Jiddu Krishnamurti in India. She was so impressed with the young man - the Theosophist, Liberal Catholic bishop and clairvoyant Charles W. Leadbeater was able to see Krishnamurti's magnificent aura – and saw such potential in him, that she took young Krishnamurti under her wing, believing him to be the next World Teacher (Fry 1999: 287). The World Teacher was to be an avatar, a new Christ, ushering in the next stage of spiritual evolution (Melton 2009: 695). It was in 1922 that Krishnamurti first came to Ojai (Fry 1999: 288).<sup>10</sup> Uncomfortable with the messianic image he was expected to fulfill, he continually refused his status as World Teacher, saying that he only “found a way of living ‘intelligently, happily and without sorrow,’” and hoped others would achieve this themselves without relying on external teachers (Fry 1999: 288).

Around that same time as Krishnamurti's initial visit to Ojai, another group affiliated with the TS, specifically its Esoteric Section, was moving to the Valley. This was the Hollywood-based Krotona Institute of Theosophy. Originally, Theosophist and lawyer Albert Powell Warrington was inspired to create Krotona as a sanctuary of rest for both “cultivated people and overworked city folk” to enjoy; it was named after

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<sup>10</sup> This was when he accompanied his brother Nityananda, who suffered from tuberculosis. Local historian, Joseph Ross, told me that Ojai's dry climate, which was even drier before the Casitas Dam was built, was hoped to remedy Nityananda's tuberculosis (interview with Joseph Ross January 10, 2015).

Pythagoras' school and colony of philosophers, and the modern Krotona was originally planned to be established on the James River in Virginia (Fry 1999: 286). Annie Besant then asked Warrington to set up the esoteric school in California; he consented and in 1912 he purchased 15 acres of land in the foothills of Los Angeles (Fry 1999: 286). According to Joseph Ross, while it was in Old Hollywood, the Krotona community had a significant impact on the neighborhood: they founded both the Hollywood Bowl and the Pilgrimage Theater, in addition to producing plays such as *The Light of Asia* and *The Light of Christ* (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015). The music of the latter drama was composed by Dane Rudyhar, who also played the role of Christ in Cecil B. DeMille's silent version of *The Ten Commandments*, and became a foremost astrologer (Ross 2009: 65-66). However, their new neighbor was the film industry which soon made Hollywood world-renowned, and feeling that the new environment was unsuitable the TS moved Krotona to Ojai in 1924 (Fry 1999: 286). According to Steve Walker, a resident at the Krotona Institute, the movie industry brought in bad energies, which made the Theosophists uncomfortable with the area (interview to S. Walker December 29, 2014). The decision to relocate to Ojai was primarily influenced by their belief that the Ojai Valley was "impregnated with occult and psychic influences" (Fry 1999: 286). I was told by James Voirol, a member of the Krotona Institute, an apocryphal story of how Annie Besant and Krishnamurti were sailing off the coast when they saw a great angelic presence up by the Topa Topa mountain range and over the Ojai Valley, and based on this vision decided Ojai was a good place to set up shop (interview to J. Voirol July 9, 2014). However, in an April 1924 edition of the *American E.S.T. Bulletin* Warrington claims he initially suggested the Ojai Valley to Besant as the location for the new

Krotona (Ross 2009: 146). In 1924 Krotona's move from Hollywood to Ojai takes root with the construction of its library and music room accomplished.<sup>11</sup>

While Krotona was in Old Hollywood there was an internal dispute as to whether the school should benefit members of the TS or those of the Esoteric Section of Theosophy (Ross 2009: 7). The Esoteric Section (ES), since renamed the Esoteric School of Theosophy, was established in 1888 by Madame Blavatsky originally as a branch of the TS, and then as an independent organization, yet consisting only of members of the TS, designed "to encourage among its members the practice of the spiritual life based in Theosophical teachings, while at the same time protecting the nonsectarian quality of the TS as a whole."<sup>12</sup> With the relocation to Ojai it was decided that the new Krotona would be dedicated as a school and retreat of meditation and training for members of the ES (Ross 2009: 126, 147).

In 1925, Krotona's development in Ojai progressed under the management of George H. Hall, whose energy and efficiency brought forth the landscaping which has made Krotona an aesthetically attractive place, along with the construction of the roadway leading up to the hilltop nexus of the property (Ross 2009: 233). A year later, Dr. Besant planned to spend three months in America to advocate the cause of Universal Brotherhood; among her activities was the laying of the cornerstone ceremony for the TS American branch headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois (Ross 2009: 348, 381). During her stay in the United States, she initiated her special projects in Ojai, "where her intuition led her to start a new utopian colony and school for the children of the 'sixth sub-race'"

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ojaivalleymuseum.org/ovm/history.html> (accessed June 6, 2015)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine?id=2951> (accessed June 7, 2015)

(Ross 2009: 386).<sup>13</sup> One of these projects for developing these evolved children was the Happy Valley School, “a non-sectarian, co-educational senior high school” whose emphasis “is on teaching the students *how* to think not *what* to think through a flexible curriculum” (Fry 1999: 76). The essay “The Master’s Plan,” written by Theosophist and Ojai resident John A. Roine, reports on Dr. Besant’s visit to America and how she received inner guidance from one of the Masters from Theosophy’s cosmology on forming the school, and colony for the sixth sub-root race children (Ross 2009: 390-391). Later in 1946, the writer Aldous Huxley became one of the directors of this school.<sup>14</sup>

While in Ojai, both Dr. Besant and Krishnamurti addressed the 150-200 Theosophists present in the Valley’s remarkable environment (Ross 2009: 386-387). On the evening of celebrating Dr. Besant’s 80th birthday at Krotona, Krishnamurti delivered a speech on world peace; Dr. Besant was convinced that “at last the Lord [Maitreya/Christ Principle] had definitely come and spoken.” Two weeks later, shortly before Krishnamurti delivered another speech, a different presence was reported, this time of Lord Buddha (Ross 2009: 387).

In April of 1928 Krishnamurti returned to Ojai, and the Star Camp Congress was organized so that for a week or so a little over a thousand Theosophists from around the world could camp out in a tent city near Meiners Oaks, since neither Krotona nor the village of Ojai could accommodate so many, in order to listen to Krishnamurti’s lectures.

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<sup>13</sup> In the cosmology presented by Madame Blavatsky human evolution consists of seven Root Races, each made up of seven subraces. At present is the fifth Root Race, thus far only five of its subraces have appeared. Theosophists await the upcoming sixth subrace “[f]rom this point, humankind will evolve into spiritual adapts” (Melton 2009: 693).

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ojaivalleymuseum.org/ovm/history.html> (accessed June 8, 2015)

Among the 1,200 visitors twelve nationalities were represented at this event.<sup>15</sup> A tract of land near Krotona was purchased by George Hall, which became the Oak Grove, where a cafeteria and bath houses were constructed for the Star Camp Congress, and where Krishnamurti would later deliver his lectures every May.<sup>16</sup> A year later, Krishnamurti had become uncomfortable with the guru-devotion many Theosophists had toward him, so he publically walked away from his role as the vehicle for the World Teacher, and dissolved the Order of the Star of the East that was designed to facilitate the coming of the World Teacher (Fry 1999: 287). Historian Joseph Ross told me in an interview that Krishnamurti didn't walk away from Theosophy, but from the Theosophical Society which had become fossilized, or "crystallized" to use my informant's exact wording (interview with J. Ross January 9, 2015). While Krishnamurti's renouncement of his exalted status had shaken the TS, it still continues on to this day, though it "is no longer a progressive messianic movement" (Ross 2012: xxvi). The Krotona Institute still remains a popular place to visit for its lotus pond and gardens, along with its impressive bookstore and library, the latter of which is arguably "one of the largest occult libraries in the world" (Fry 1999: 287).

Krishnamurti continued to live in the Ojai Valley at his house called Arya Vihara at the east end of the Valley (Fry 1999: 287). The core of his teaching can be summed up by a statement in a lecture he gave in 1929, that "Truth is a pathless land," that the seeker cannot find Truth by following a teacher, nor by a prescribed creed or method, but that the seeker "has to find it through the mirror of relationship, through the understanding of

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<sup>15</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/star-camp-congress-1928/> (accessed June 8, 2015)

<sup>16</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/star-camp-congress-1928/> (accessed June 8, 2015)

the contents of his own mind, through observation and not through intellectual analysis or introspective dissection.”<sup>17</sup> Despite having a quiet life in the Ojai Valley, it has been suggested that he nonetheless had an indirect influence on Ojai’s intellectual and social milieu; people from all over the world came to listen to his annual talks held at the Oak Grove, including some well-known individuals, such as Aldous Huxley, Dr. David Bohm, Jackson Pollack, Christopher Isherwood, Ann Morrow Lindbergh, along with Hollywood stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Elsa Lanchester, Greta Garbo, and Charles Laughton.<sup>18</sup> Whereas esotericism is often treated as a marginal subculture in the US, numerous well-known authors and artists have been influenced by it, and Ojai’s history contains many examples of this pattern.

In 1969 Krishnamurti and some of his trustees founded the Krishnamurti Foundation of America, part of a group of Krishnamurti foundations throughout the world, all of which have been charged by him with a mission “of preserving, protecting, and disseminating Krishnamurti’s teachings. He asked that this new foundation and the existing foundations do nothing to interpret or explain the teachings.”<sup>19</sup> In 1975, he established the Oak Grove School, which is based on the ancient Indian educational concept of gurukul, where “students came to the home of a teacher to learn and participate in all activities of living;” so that at Oak Grove School students and parents

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.kfa.org/coreofteachings.php> (accessed June 8, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/krishnamurti-and-the-ojai-valley/> (accessed June 8, 2015)

<sup>19</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/krishnamurti-and-the-ojai-valley/> (accessed June 8, 2015)

work collaboratively to create a nurturing environment for the cultivation of both mind and heart.<sup>20</sup> Krishnamurti died at the age of 90 in Ojai on February 17, 1986.<sup>21</sup>

Another offshoot of Theosophy which has its origins with Krotona and maintains a presence in the Ojai Valley, can be termed the Alice Bailey movement (Melton 2009: 696) and the group being Meditation Mount. Alice A. Bailey, a member of the Theosophical Society, made her initial contact with the Tibetan Master, Djwhal Kuhl on a November day in 1919 (Moore 1990: 1).<sup>22</sup> This particular Master commissioned her to write down and publish the books he would dictate to her. Initially hesitant, Bailey accepted and wrote *Initiation, Human and Solar*, which would become the first of 19 books to be composed under the Tibetan Master's guidance (Moore 1990: 1). A year later, Alice Bailey and her husband Foster were dismissed from their positions within the Esoteric Section due to a conflict of interests, which left them available to continue their dedicated work with the Tibetan Master (Melton 2009: 696-697). Alice Bailey's teachings share elements with the broader Theosophical movement (e.g. a hierarchy of Masters, the Seven Rays, and the evolution of humanity toward higher levels of being) but also developed an eschatological orientation, that a new age would be ushered in by the "reappearance of the Christ [which] will be accomplished by the power of the divine hierarchy descending into this world and by service based on the love of humanity....To

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<sup>20</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/krishnamurti-and-the-ojai-valley/> (accessed June 8, 2015)

<sup>21</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/krishnamurti-and-the-ojai-valley/> (accessed June 8, 2015)

<sup>22</sup> A common element found in the broader Theosophical movement, including the Alice Bailey branch, Western esotericism, and the New Age movement is the belief that "the greatest help to human evolvment are the masters. These are spiritual giants, men and women who have progressed far beyond the human race, who no longer need to incarnate, but who do so in order to aid the struggling race. They form an intermediate hierarchy between man and" the Divine (Melton 2009: 693).

encourage the advent of the Christ, meditation groups were set up to help channel the energy from the hierarchy. Each group or person is seen as a point of light radiating the power of the world” (Melton 2009: 697).

Toward the end of Mrs. Bailey’s life, the Tibetan Master suggested forming a global group of meditators dedicated to promoting and fulfilling the Laws and Principles of the New Age, these being: the Law of Right Human Relations, the Principle of Goodwill, the Law of Group Endeavor, the Principle of Unanimity, the Law of Spiritual Approach, and the Principle of Divinity (Moore 1990: 1). Mrs. Bailey died on December 15, 1949, before this work could commence; seven years later the father of psychosynthesis Dr. Roberto Assagioli, took up the challenge of making this global meditation group a reality (Moore 1990: 2). Meditation Groups, Inc. is an umbrella organization for three separate meditation groups, in which Florance Garrigue served as President and Treasurer of the overall organization (Moore 1990: 5): 1) The Group for Creative Meditation focusing on “preparing the Way and the Climate for the ‘*Coming One*,’ [i.e. the Christ] for the externalizing of the Hierarchy, and for the establishment of the Kingdom of God;” 2) the Meditation Group of the New Age with the goals of “first, to impulse and energize the minds and hearts of those who were working for the betterment of human relations and an improved quality of life; and second, to express the deeper esoteric truths and disciplines in ordinary, everyday language;” and 3) the Specialized Group, working under the guidance of the Tibetan Master would gather “for the purpose of working together to form a nucleus of spiritual power and energy in order to lay the foundation for the group work to be done in the world in the coming years” (Moore 1990: 3-4). Originally Meditation Groups, Inc. distributed booklets on

meditation, but production stopped in the mid 1990's, and Meditation Mount has since become an educational center offering spiritual programs.<sup>23</sup>

Initial meetings of this endeavor occurred in continental Europe and Britain, and in May of 1968 the headquarters of what would become Meditation Groups, Inc. relocated to Ojai under Florence Garrigue's direction (Moore 1990: 3, 6). The first Ojai headquarters was in a redwood house on Elmer Friend's orange grove; that same year they purchased the current hilltop property at the east end of the upper valley (Moore 1990: 6). In 1970, Garrigue, Francis Moore, and Georgia Cooper traveled to Florence, Italy to meet with Dr. Assagioli to "plan the next cycle of the work" (i.e. the contents of the booklets for the meditation course work), and also to Munich, Germany to discuss the future of their work in Germany and the US (Moore 1990: 7-8). These discussions in Europe initiated the next stage of Meditation Mount's development into a physical center, with the complex completed by April 11, 1971, in time for both its formal dedication and for the Third Annual Transpersonal Conference (Moore 1990: 9)<sup>24</sup> From its beginning, Meditation Mount has offered public participation in its monthly full moon meditations, which since its move to the Mount have taken place within the Great Hall, and daily meditations toward energizing the work in the Meditation Room (Moore 1990: 9). Worrying that their work would become a mere social group, Garrigue always stressed the "Ashramic nature" of their meditation work and the lives the participants led, and saw

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<sup>23</sup> <https://meditationmount.org/history/> (accessed October 2, 2015)

<sup>24</sup> "A previous, informal dedication of the site to the work of the Tibetan, Djwhal Khul, had take place early one morning when Florence, Francis, Robert and Eleanor Moore, Georgia Cooper, and Grace Petitchleric had stood within the 'skeleton' pf the Great Hall and Grace had led a meditative dedication" (Moore 1990: 9).

“the future thrust of the work as the growth of understanding and responsibility in strengthening this Ashramic connection” (Moore 1990: 10).

The members of Meditation Mount had friendly, even reciprocal relations with their spiritual neighbors; speakers from both the Mount and Krotona would deliver talks at each other’s centers (Moore 1990: 23). The Mount soon became a beloved beauty spot in the local community, with both the “Ojai Chamber of Commerce and the Theosophical Society regularly [advising] visitors to visit Meditation Mount;” in addition, it gained an international reputation with visitors who were advised to not only experience its natural beauty but to explore their meditation work as well (Moore 1990: 11-12). One of the columnists for the *Ojai Valley News*, Kay Michael, later became a staff member at the Mount and worked on its publicity by “explaining the thrust of the work, the nature of the Three Annual Spring celebrations of Easter, Wesak, and the Festival of Humanity... as well as placing announcements of the monthly World Service meditation meetings for the public” (Moore 1990: 12).

Over the course of its existence, Meditation Mount has attracted not only spiritual seekers, but also has been visited by many prominent individuals within the milieu of alternative spirituality, “some briefly, some staying overnight, and others making longer stays” (Moore 1990: 14). These teachers include not only Dr. Assagioli, but also: David Spangler, formerly of the Findhorn community in Scotland and currently of The Lorian Association in Santa Barbara; Peter Caddy, also from Findhorn; Mary Bailey of the Arcane School and Lucis Trust; Frank Hilton and Jan van der Linden of the School for Esoteric Studies; New Zealand Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson; Manly P. Hall of the Philosophical Research Society, who visited the Mount on several occasions; and H.

Torkom Saraydarian of the Aquarian Educational Foundation in Agora, CA and Sedona, AZ (Moore 1990: 15-16).

I believe it is necessary to briefly mention an additional significant alternative spiritual group which helped define Ojai's cultic milieu: Meher Mount. Founded in the 1940's as a result of Avatar Meher Baba's request that a retreat center be established, the site chosen by devotees was on top of Sulphur Mount in the upper valley (Fry 1999: 289). Its website advertises it as "a 172-acre universal spiritual center dedicated to Avatar Meher Baba. Visitors come to Meher Mount for pilgrimage, for celebrating Divine Love and Oneness, for loving God through nature, and for service."<sup>25</sup> On August 2, 1956, Meher Baba visited the mount dedicated to him, saying "I love Meher Mount very much and feel happy here."<sup>26</sup> The presence of a site dedicated to Meher Baba along with Krishnamurti's residence could be seen as forerunners to the wave of interest in eastern gurus that would come to pass in the following decades.

The next historical stage of the cultic milieu in Ojai was initiated in the 1960's, perhaps as a localized expression of the explosion of interest in alternative spirituality that began with the counterculture of the 1960's, and has since become more mainstream. "Sue Hart" of Meditation Mount informed me that during this decade "there were lots of alternative spiritual teachers here coming and going, pretty non-stop for that period of time," and many gurus from India went through Ojai then (interview with S. Hart January 13, 2015). Historian Joseph Ross described that there was something going on in the Ojai Valley during the 1960's, "like an energy-field that was attracting multiple young

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.mehermount.org/a-gateway-to-the-divine/> (accessed October 12, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.mehermount.org/meher-babas-1956-visit-to-meher-mount/> (accessed October 12, 2015).

from all over the world, and they all seemed to gather here in the Ojai Valley for some reason” (interview with J. Ross January 9, 2015). He went on to describe how he was part of this mass migration to Ojai which eventually dissipated after the 1960’s:

so we had a health food store downtown, we had a book store, we rented a house, and we had an ashram where young persons could come in who had no place to stay you could stay there – you had to be vegetarian, we requested – and no smoking, no drinking. Uh, and that lasted for...gosh, I guess ten years. Um, and then of course everything changes as again as you come in if you’re 20 years old, I mean you get enthused with all these metaphysical, New Age... And then you meet your partner, your mate or partner, whatever, and then off you go to get married to have children, ta da da da, and then pretty soon everything mellows out again – and so today most of all of the ones that came here in those days have all gone, they’re all living their lives somewhere else; they’re just not in the Valley. There’s only three of us left, out of that same whole group that came, um that just stayed here (interview with J. Ross January 9, 2015).

While the Woodstock crowd and spiritual seekers came to Ojai at this time, a development was occurring within the Old Guard of alternative spirituality which eventually became part of Ojai’s more mainstream community. This was the Taromina community, a dream of Ruth Wilson that was designed to be a retirement community with a health center for all those people, not just the wealthy but workers as well, who have devoted their lives to working for the cause of Theosophy (interview with J. Ross January 9, 2015). Originally the plan was to have Taromina near the Krishnamurti Foundation, but in 1967 the ranch next to the Krotona Institute became available, and so little houses were built there with the intent that these would be exclusively for retired Theosophists. Since then this exclusivity was challenged and it became a private community for anyone to reside in; as Ross said in his Taromina home “the Theosophists that were here they’re almost gone now, there’s very few of Theosophists left from those early days; most of everybody in here is from outside” (interview with J. Ross January 9, 2015).

There are other examples of how during this period alternative spiritual groups made impacts both direct and indirect on the mainstream culture of the Ojai Valley. James Voirol told me that Frank Kilburn was appointed editor of the town's newspaper, owned by Annie Besant, in addition to being the founding rector of the Liberal Catholic parish there (interview with author July 9, 2014). Ross has recorded in his own research the ways in which the Krotona Institute and its unofficial and implicit network of like-minded groups in the Valley have made contributions. For example, a resident at Krotona named Catherine Mayes built the adobe houses on Signal Street, as well as the building that would eventually become the Monica Ros School. In addition, the Meiners Oaks community was originally designed in the late 1920's to be a colony for Theosophists (interview with author January 9, 2015). Fry offers an alternative account where Meiners Oaks was originally designed as a recreational resort before becoming incorporated as a residential area in the 50's (Fry 1999: 230-232). However, she does say that there "was an active Meiners Oaks Theosophical organization then which was considered just as much a part of the community as the garden club and the traditional church groups" (Fry 1999: 236).

At this point, I feel it is important to point out an interesting episode which has not only inspired folk narratives both locally and in underground culture, but also speaks of the bohemian quality of the Ojai Valley which helps foster the milieu of alternative spirituality there: a time when for at most three weeks John Lennon and Yoko Ono resided in Ojai. In 1972, John and Yoko travelled to Southern California from New York in a station wagon for a number of reasons, primarily because they were looking for Yoko's 8-year old daughter Kyoko, whose custody was being fought with Yoko's ex-

husband Tony Cox. Their team of private investigators reported that Tony was hiding with Kyoko in Granada Hills, outside of Los Angeles (Lewis 2015: 126-127). John and Yoko's lawyer found them a house to rent in Ojai to serve as a base camp for their search for Kyoko, and as a private setting offering sanctuary from the FBI after John and Yoko's anti-Nixon campaign (Lewis 2015: 127). After a few weeks in Ojai they received word that Tony was hiding in Sausalito, so John and Yoko left in a hurry leaving the house they stayed in a mess (Lewis 2015: 130).

John and Yoko's brief stay in Ojai, where they'd go into town for lunch and John would sing at a nearby bar in Ventura, sparked a number of legends, such as that they visited Krishnamurti, despite the fact that at the time the latter was away in Europe (nor is there evidence that they met anywhere else) (Lewis 2015: 129). Another related legend takes place several years earlier, in 1966 or 1967, that one evening after visiting Krishnamurti while John was "seeking enlightenment (allegedly with the help of LSD) he met a pretty young girl as the sun set over the Ojai Valley inspiring the lyrics to Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds."<sup>2728</sup> Despite the lack of evidence, these legends persist perhaps because the notion that these two giants in the counterculture pantheon may have met in such a special or sacred place as Ojai is a meaningful narrative to some.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <http://strahbarysfields.com/tag/ojai/> (accessed October 14, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> During the research stage of my thesis I found a more detailed version of this legend on an Ojai community website, although since then that resource has disappeared, because the website was hacked.

<sup>29</sup> It can be argued, though, that Krishnamurti and Lennon occupied the same space at different times, in the sense that several years previous to this episode the former would spend several evenings at the house John and Yoko stayed at when the previous owners had the house (Lewis 2015: 129).

In 1975, another significant mountaintop retreat center was established in the form of the Ojai Foundation, whose land has an interesting history. In 1927, Annie Besant purchased 450 acres of upper valley land in order “to provide for an eclectic community devoted to artistic, agricultural, and educational projects that would encourage a rich cross-cultural environment in a spiritual climate.”<sup>30</sup> Lack of water on the property changed those plans and now it is home to both the Happy Valley School and the Ojai Foundation, the latter using 40 acres of it (Fry 1999: 289). In 1979, anthropologist Joan Halifax became its director; she had an extensive background of personal study with various Mahayana Buddhist teachers and Native American elders, and her “wide-ranging ties with indigenous peoples and her Western academic connections helped to draw an extraordinary faculty to the rustic facility that came to be known informally as the “Wizard's Camp.”<sup>31</sup>

The following excerpt from the Ojai Foundation’s website shows how it has impacted the broader cultic milieu:

The faculty over these years included: Joseph Campbell, R.D. Lang, Jean Houston, Rupert Sheldrake, Jill Purce, Ralph Abraham, Terence McKenna, Ralph Metzner, Francis Huxley, Andrew Weil, Heymeyohsts Storm, Jose Arguelles, Pir Vilayat Khan, Joanna Macy, and many Native American, Tibetan, Zen and Judeo-Christian teachers.

The many "firsts" of the Wizard's Camp included: seminal Men's Gatherings with poet Robert Bly (author of Iron John); Women's Gatherings and conferences whose faculty included Mary Catherine Bateson, Naomi Newman, Deena Metzger, Tsultrim Allione, Vicki Noble, Riane Eisler, Terry Tempest Williams and Laura Simms. Conferences on cutting-edge topics such as chaos theory, hospice work, plant shamanism, ethnobotany, psycho-immunology, dream research and mind-body studies made for a rich stew. The Foundation was also one of the first institutions in North America to explore an ongoing dialogue between Tibetan and Native American spirituality (an exploration undertaken at the request of elders from both lineages). Several of the first American retreats for vets,

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ojaifoundation.org/about-us/our-history> (accessed October 12, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.ojaifoundation.org/about-us/our-history> (accessed October 12, 2015).

for children, for artists and for environmental leaders, led by noted peace activist, poet, and Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh were held at The Ojai Foundation.<sup>32</sup>

The Ojai Foundation's experimentation with methods of spiritual practice, holistic education, and communal living has influenced the mainstream culture as well. A particular practice which defines the Ojai Foundation is what they call Council, a means of communication adopted by indigenous peoples whereby "each person learns to offer their personal story from their heart, not their head, and to listen with full attention. In Council, there are no fixed leaders, but rather facilitators; the group's emerging spirit and the process itself are the primary guides and everyone in the circle shares responsibility and leadership for what evolves." In the past couple of decades increased demand for these Council-based programs have seen them expand beyond the Ojai Foundation's retreat-space and now are taught and practiced "in Southern California schools, in social service agencies, businesses and community based organizations, locally and around the world."

In this chapter I have given a detailed history of the cultic milieu in Southern California and on the development of the Ojai Valley and how it became a hotspot of alternative spirituality. I have described how as a result of the reformism and utopianism that shaped California in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the Golden State was fertile ground for people to experiment with new forms of spirituality and to form communities of like-minded seekers, and that it became home to spiritual giants such as Jiddu Krishnamurti and Manly P. Hall. In addition, the history of Ojai was depicted, as well as the waves of alternative spirituality it has experienced, from the indigenous traditions and

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.ojaifoundation.org/about-us/our-history> (accessed October 13, 2015).

early health culture, through the establishment of a theosophical hub, the explosion of the counterculture in the late sixties, to the contemporary period. In the following chapter, a deeper exploration of alternative spirituality's relationship with the Ojai Valley will be presented. Specifically, I will examine my findings about Ojai's sense of place, and compare it with past research on the matter; look at how Theosophy serves as an axial hub in Ojai's diverse corner of the cultic milieu; examine its dense networks of non-exclusive memberships; and review how Ojai's culture oriented toward the arts, health, and activism has contributed to make Ojai fertile ground for alternative spirituality.

## Chapter 4:

### The Particular Cultic Milieu of the Ojai Valley

*In the deep midwinter, on Christmas Eve, we drove after sunset through the darkness of the Ojai Valley's eastern portion where there is much agriculture and woodland, our destination was the summit of Meditation Mount. The Ojai branch of the Center for Spiritual Living was to perform its sixth annual Christmaka Celebration, in the hall room where we meditated in before. This was an interfaith service, and after a note of welcome followed by a candle lighting ceremony, we heard representatives from seven different religions talk about the beauty of their respective traditions, with music from each faith performed after each (including "Shalom My Friend" and "Lord of the Dance"). On the northeast corner of the room was an altar set for the ceremony, with candles lined upon it. Above it were the golden symbols of the faiths present: Native American, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, and New Thought. We concluded with an African chant: Ise O lu wa Kole Baje-O; which followed by the hymn Silent Night, with a benediction concluding the service.*

*On a phenomenological level, the fact that it was Christmas Eve, and to get to the event we drove through pitch black woodland was magical enough, especially when I'm used to seeing streetlights at night. What I gained from the event was a sense of community and peace, where members of various spiritual traditions came together at an axial time of the year, to share and celebrate what each tradition has to offer; the event was an example of the non-exclusive membership which occurs in Ojai, a refreshing relief from the religious divisions and conflict which plagues our modern world.*

*(From the Author's field notes and journal entry, December 24, 2014)*

We have seen how the period of reformism and utopian ideals made a quickly developing California fertile ground for a cultic milieu, and how the Ojai Valley in particular experienced waves of alternative spirituality. In this chapter, I will argue that as a result of these historical developments, the Ojai Valley came to possess a specific cultic milieu which has led to its identification as one of the premiere New Age centers in California, the United States, and indeed the world.

#### News about Ojai From Elsewhere

While Ojai is well known in Southern California as the region's Shangri-La, it has also received recognition in newspapers across the US and Canada. Toronto journalist Jim Kenzie has written about Ojai, un-charitably though when talking about the Valley's community of alternative spirituality; he refers to the joke about California as the granola state, full of nuts and flakes.<sup>33</sup> A headline for an article in *The Washington Post* describes Ojai as the anti-L.A.,<sup>34</sup> while a travelogue in Boston's *The Jewish Advocate* gives a favorable review of Ojai, though focusing more on recreation and resorts than the alternative spirituality.<sup>35</sup> What many of the news articles about Ojai that I found have in common are their coverage of the following: Frank Capra's use of Ojai as a setting for *The Lost Horizon*, the Pink Moment (i.e. when the Valley is bathed in the pink light of sunset), Bart's Books, Krishnamurti, Meditation Mount, the Mission-style architecture,

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<sup>33</sup> <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/1515289377?pq-origsite=summon> (accessed November 30, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/14/AR2005101400834.html> (accessed October 30, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/757375577?pq-origsite=summon> (accessed October 30, 2015).

the hiking trails, the “sleepy town” level of activity, and the “New Age” vibe about the place.

#### Ojai’s Sense of Place: Past Research

In the early 1990’s Kris Jones, a graduate student of geography at California State University Fullerton, conducted research for his thesis which attempted to discern what the Ojai Valley’s sense of place was, critical issues it faced, and concerns about its future; based on interviews, surveys, and his field observations. In his thesis, he notes that Ojai’s unique cultural distinctiveness is based in part on the diversity of its inhabitants and the social groups they form, which combined with its ethos of small town preservation has united them against their mutual adversary of growth and urbanization. In fact, Ojai has the strictest small growth policies in Southern California and has the smallest population growth in Ventura County (Jones 1998: 81). Jones also points out that “Ojai’s strong local identity and spatial isolation from the surrounding region make it a microcosm of community place-making dynamics in the face of change” (Jones 1998: 81).

Jones used a phenomenological-humanistic approach for the survey/questionnaire in order to better enable his informants to describe the Ojai community in their own words, without any theoretical filters; he then correlates this data set with government statistical data (Jones 1998: 85). He places the results of his surveys under three categories: topophilia, topophobia, and genius loci. For topophilia, or love of place, Jones notes the informants’ strong identification of Ojai as home for reasons that include small community, large number of family and friends in the area, climate, and so on; but

what interests me the most is what his informants have to say about Ojai's spiritual dimension:

A sizable majority (83%) of the respondents feel that Ojai is a spiritual place. However, they have differing interpretations as to the meaning of spiritual. These include: the power of Ojai as a New Age energy center; spirituality of nature and wilderness; the sunset; and the presence of Jesus and God everywhere. This overwhelmingly affirmative response to a question on spirituality marks its importance as a factor in the respondents' topophilia and Ojai's *genius loci* (Jones 1998: 86)

Jones continues by describing how Ojai's religious and spiritual diversity and concentration has contributed to the Valley's "culture attitude that views nature, spirituality, and preservation as being more important than development and materialism" (Jones 1998: 87). The Ojai Valley's physical setting and scenery also play strong roles, including its imposing mountains and valleys, plentiful citrus and oaks, Spanish architecture, and association with the film *The Lost Horizon*. A communal portrait of the imagination depicts the Valley as a beautiful and tranquil Shangri-La, or slice of heaven on earth (Jones 1998: 87). When asked the question, "Is there anything about Ojai which makes it a special (unique) place to live?" Jones's respondents gave mostly positive responses, the most common being "descriptions of the mountains, valley, and community; isolation from, yet proximity to, a city; mix of people; variety of activities; rough terrain which inhibits future development; social tolerance; and Ojai's artistic and spiritual atmosphere" (Jones 1998: 87).

In order to get an accurate portrayal of Ojai's sense of place, Jones also examined the topophobia, scorn of place, of its residents; the survey's results in this area were mostly concerned with "the growth issues of tourism, building, traffic, and the perceived amount of change taking place" (Jones 1998: 88). Some respondents saw economic

growth in Ojai as potentially positive if it is tightly controlled and is in a long-term context, and believe tourism to be a mixed blessing; while a significant source of income in Ojai, tourism makes boutique merchandise overpriced for residents and brings an air of artificialness to the place (Jones 1998: 89-90). Locals fear the looming “Carmelization” process, a local term for what befell Carmel, California, a small town “with strong growth policies, where most of the downtown consists of expensive boutiques catering to tourists” (Jones 1998: 90).

In order to determine Ojai’s *genius loci* Jones used the results “with the highest incidence of agreement” from both the topics of topophilia and topophobia (Jones 1998: 92). The highest common agreements were: “Ojai is a spiritual place (83%); the physical setting of Ojai is important (93%); Ojai is undergoing many changes (65%); and Ojai is not changing rapidly compared to the rest of southern California (91%).” Residents expected continued growth for the next 20 years, but hoped that little would change; and many were “fearful of continued change; development; environmental degradation; increase in trinket type tourism; and being overrun by problems from the outside” (Jones 1998: 92).

#### Ojai’s Sense of Place: Current Research

My own research has shown that in examining Ojai’s sense of place, the physical setting of the Valley plays a significant role in Ojai’s status as both a concentration of alternative spirituality and in the folkloric belief of the Valley as a nexus of metaphysical or spiritual energies. The surrounding mountain ranges, for instance, are tall and imposing, yet they surround the Valley in a sort of visible bowl formation, which gives the residents, both past and present, the impression that they are titanic sentinels

protecting the Ojai Valley and its inhabitants, much as they do in Chumash narrative. Ojai's spirituality is connected with its landscape, as evidenced by the legend mentioned in an earlier chapter of Annie Besant and Krishnamurti sailing up the coast of Ventura when they perceived an angelic presence over the Ojai Valley, specifically over the Topa Topa mountain range, which peaked their interest in the Valley (interview with J. Voirol July 9, 2014). When I first heard this account from one of my informants, he also told me about the belief that ley-lines run through the Valley, and that some of them run through the major mountaintop centers of alternative spirituality such as Meditation Mount and the Krotona Institute (interview with J. Voirol July 9, 2014). Many prominent and well-established centers of alternative spirituality in the Ojai Valley (e.g. the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, Meditation Mount, Meher Mount, the Ojai Foundation) are either located on some of these mountaintops, or at a high elevation; because of this they have been compared to other mountaintop temples and monasteries elsewhere, such as those of the Tibetan Buddhists in the Himalayas and those of the Greek Orthodox on Mount Athos (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015). When I asked historian Joseph Ross about these mountaintop centers he gave an explanation for why they are often to be found at these relatively high altitudes:

that's because of the spiritual energies that's up there, and goes through these mountains and the higher they are the more spiritual they consider it to be, so that's why they built these... temples and shrines and, if you go onto pilgrimage in Tibet and you go to up, you go onto these higher mountains to get to the higher spiritualities (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015).

In an earlier interview, he also told me a related interpretation that at these high places both the air and spiritual energies are "lighter" and more refined, whereas at the ground

level of the Valley the energies are more gross due to the “density” and concentration of negative thoughts and emotions (interview with J. Ross August 22, 2014).

Ross also mentioned a local legend or rumor of some Theosophical origin about the fault line connected to the San Andres fault that runs beneath the riverbed, where according to what he describes as the gossip, “if there’s this big, big earthquake that could come someday, the Valley, the Ojai Valley would become more like an island. Or it would be, it would break off from on the other side,... [at] the Ventura [River], that will all become water, and the water would be coming up this way, this would become beach front property. But this would be more like an island” (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015). He told me that according to this local legend, this new island would be the seedbed of a colony for the “new race” (i.e. the sixth sub-root race, the evolution and appearance of which is anticipated within much of the Theosophical movement). Ross thinks this particular legend/rumor could be a reference to Annie Besant’s prophecy that a Baja California cut off from the mainland would become the home continent for this new sub-root race of humanity (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015).

Another informant, Anne Kerry Ford, described the essence of the Ojai Valley to me as having a bucolic veneer:

it’s peaceful, complacent, there’s not a lot going on here at first sight, but then when someone actually engages or lives here, and engages with the energy that’s here, it starts to become extremely challenging... on a spiritual level. I think that spirituality by its very nature is challenging, it challenges who you are to expand or open up, uh, it’s an awakening process (interview with A.K. Ford, September 28, 2014)

When I interviewed her in her home office, we discussed her use of *feng shui* and that a Daoist master told her that the mountain range was a “dragon,” and the small office we

were sitting in was built over its eye (interview to A.K. Ford September 28, 2014).

Elaborating on what she learned about the spiritual properties of her home, she said:

I think that the valley has inherent spiritual energy, coming back from the indigenous people who lived here. And the prayers and practices that went on here, I have three pounding stones on my property that are huge they're as big as this table [knocks on table], uh where they ground the corn, and those were not moved here clearly, when you see them you know that they've been her forever, and one of my friends who has Native American heritage said, "You have to understand," he was saying this to me, "every time they grind the corn they put a prayer in the grind, everything they did had a prayer that went along with it." So these rocks that are even on my property are filled with thousands of prayers. How could you erase that energy, it's going to vibrate forever, you know, it's in the rock ..., where did that come from, why did it start like that I don't know ... but it's powerful, and if you're sensitive to it you can feel it, you can feel it and access it (interview with A.K. Ford September 28, 2014).

### Theosophy as the Hub of Alternative Spirituality in Ojai

Despite the vast diversity of forms of alternative spirituality that are present in the Ojai Valley, it would appear that the broader Theosophical movement, and the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in particular, serves as a visible focal point around which Ojai's milieu of alternative spirituality revolves. This was suggested by a handful of my informants, one of whom was Marcia Doty, a Buddhist and self-professed "Theosophical fundamentalist" who has resided in the Valley for at least 20 years (interview with Marcia Doty October 18, 2014). This seems highly plausible after looking at the historical chain of events: the Krotona Institute of Theosophy is the first known Western form of alternative spirituality to settle in the Ojai Valley in 1924, with organizations with shared memberships (i.e. the Liberal Catholic Church and the International Order of Co-Masonry, Le Droit Humain) moving in shortly thereafter; Krishnamurti branched off from the Theosophical Society and established a foundation for his teachings; former member of the Theosophical Society Alice Bailey received communication from the

Tibetan Master in 1919 on the premise of Krotona and initiated what can be called the Alice Bailey Movement, which practices her interpretation of Theosophy as dictated by the Tibetan Master (Ellwood 1993: 145); then in 1971 Florence Garrigue established Meditation Mount as a center of Alice Bailey's teachings; and in 1975 the Ojai Foundation was established on a site originally purchased in 1927 by Annie Besant "to provide for an eclectic community devoted to artistic, agricultural, and educational projects that would encourage a rich cross-cultural environment in a spiritual climate." In addition, the Theosophy Society's motto and affirmation that "There is no Religion Higher Than Truth" has quite probably helped foster an inclusive and welcoming environment for practitioners of various traditions, both orthodox and alternative, to pray, meditate, and work as they see fit.

#### The Diversity of Alternative Spirituality Within the Ojai Valley

Part of the Ojai Valley's cultural diversity lies in its religious and spiritual diversity. There are mainstream religions which have a presence in the Valley, as well as religious groups, such as the Latter-Day Saints and Christian Scientists, that originally began as new religious movements that have since become part of the denominational society.<sup>36</sup> And of course there is a plethora of alternative spiritual groups and practitioners to be found in Ojai; historian Joseph Ross told me that virtually every religious tradition is present within the Ojai Valley:

you've got: Buddhism, Hinduism, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant... they're all here, but they're in small groups, maybe a hundred [people], maybe smaller, maybe larger. But they're all here in the Valley somewhere, and they're usually

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<sup>36</sup> The website for the City of Ojai has a directory page for many of the houses of worship within the Valley, both mainstream and a handful of alternative worship spaces, [http://www.ci.ojai.ca.us/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC={7A5BB6E7-6933-4F63-B87C-22866469AAD8}](http://www.ci.ojai.ca.us/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={7A5BB6E7-6933-4F63-B87C-22866469AAD8}) (accessed July 4, 2015)

in homes, or they have little rentals where they meet once a month... you've got [Co]-Masonry, you've got masculine Masonry, you've got all these different Rosicrucians, there's hundreds of them, but they do meet (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015).

In short, not all of the available alternative spiritual groups can be found listed in the local Yellow Pages, or the Events section of the Ojai Valley News. Apparently some groups are more often known by word of mouth rather than public advertisement; for example, it was only through this same informant that I learned that recently a Scientology group has moved into the Valley. A quick internet search revealed a couple of local news articles describing that Social Betterment Properties International, a non-profit affiliated with and using the methods of The Church of Scientology, purchased a 32-acre property on Sulphur Mountain, which belonged to actor Larry Hagman.<sup>37</sup> The Church of Scientology transformed the former actor's home into an alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility, thus establishing the latest mountaintop center to become a part of the Valley, while further contributing to Ojai's status as both a place of alternative spirituality and of healing.<sup>38</sup>

In an e-mail correspondence with Ojai resident and Shinto priest Hiroji Sekiguchi, he gave me his categorization of the kinds of spiritual communities to be found within the Ojai Valley: Chumash elders, Aztec dancers, European-Americans influenced by Hinduism, European-Americans influenced by indigenous religious traditions, healers and "spiritual" people, and artists and musicians who work on "intuition" (e-mail

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.vcstar.com/business/scientology-linked-nonprofit-buys-larry-hagmans> (accessed July 6, 2015)

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.vcstar.com/business/real-estate/larry-hagmans-ojai-estate-to-become-a-scientology-rehab\\_61239216](http://www.vcstar.com/business/real-estate/larry-hagmans-ojai-estate-to-become-a-scientology-rehab_61239216) (accessed July 6, 2015)

correspondence with H. Sekiguchi December 18, 2014). The Ojai Valley has also become known for its spiritual teachers, those who have become residents, such as Krishnamurti and Tibetan Buddhist teacher Ösel Tendzin; those who have visited at least once, such as Meher Baba; and those who visit the Valley on a regular basis, such as Ecuadoran shaman Don Alverto, West African shaman Malidoma Patrice Some, and Most Rev. Stephan Hoeller of the Ecclesia Gnostica. It is worth reaffirming here that “Sue Hart” from Meditation Mount, notes that beginning in the sixties “there were lots of alternative, um spiritual teachers here coming and going, pretty non-stop for that period of time ... when there were a lot of Indian gurus, especially coming to the United States, there were lots of them coming through Ojai” (interview with S. Hart January 13, 2015).

One of the gems I found in my archival research was a newspaper supplement entitled “The Essene of Ojai,” from the August 1979 issue of the *Ojai Valley News*. What I find fascinating about this periodical piece is that it showcases and describes the various forms of alternative spirituality that were then, and in many ways still are available in the Ojai Valley. While it gives more detail for the “big name” organizations (i.e. Krotona Institute, Meditation Mount, Krishnamurti, World University, and the Liberal Catholic Church) it also gives sufficient details on some of smaller groups whose beliefs and practices have contributed to Ojai’s cultic milieu; including the Tzaddi School of Metaphysics, the Radix Institute, Church Universal and Triumphant, a branch of the Sufi Order founded by Hazrat Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan, Ojai Holistic Health Center, groups that have since become part of the denominational society (i.e. Unitarians and the Baha’i Faith), and others. It also provides a directory of information and a calendar of weekly meetings for those readers interested in participating in any of these groups. The

fact that this supplement was published at this time and is devoid of sensationalism demonstrates how influential and integral alternative spirituality has been to the essence of Ojai.<sup>39</sup>

#### Non-Exclusive Membership and Dense Networks

Residents of the Ojai Valley and surrounding areas who engage with the local subculture of alternative spirituality often participate through a standard practice of the cultic milieu, namely non-exclusive memberships in more than one of the groups, beliefs and practices available. Referring to the diversity of religious and spiritual traditions present in Ojai, historian Joseph Ross notes that “when you’re into these groups then sooner or later one of them will say, ‘Have you heard of such-and-such a group?’ ‘No I haven’t.’ ‘Oh they meet in Meiners Oaks’ or they meet somewhere [else]” (interview with J. Ross January 10, 2015). For example, James Voirol, one of my informants from the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, is also the rector at the local parish of the Liberal Catholic Church, Province of the United States (LCC), as well as a member of the local lodge of the International Order of Freemasonry for Men and Women, Le Droit Humain (interview with J. Voirol July 9, 2014).

In fact, within Ojai there appears to be a sort of overall Theosophical community of groups which are in a sense connected with each other due to Theosophy’s early historical presence in Ojai, though they have no official relationship with each other beyond often sharing members; this is a concrete and localized example of the non-exclusive membership which often occurs within the cultic milieu in general. This Theosophical community includes not just Krotona, the LCC, and Le Droit Humain, but

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<sup>39</sup> Michael, Kay. “The Essence of Ojai,” in *Ojai Valley News*. August 8, 1979.

also includes groups who may trace their “descent” from the Theosophical Society, but have different, yet related belief systems and practices. These include: the Krishnamurti Foundation of America, Meditation Mount, World University, and even private schools founded by prominent members of this localized alternative spiritual sub-culture such as the Oak Grove School and Besant Hill School. Although it is not always the case that an individual in this community or in the broader alternative spiritual community, is a member of all the groups involved; as Rev. Voirol told me, “I have church members who are not interested in Theosophy at all... Which is actually refreshing and keeps us alive” (interview with J. Voirol July 9, 2014). Before continuing I believe it is necessary to reaffirm the non-exclusivity of membership between these groups, and the dense networks formed by these members, along with their general emphasis of cooperation over competition between each other; taken together these elements reinforce Ojai’s identity as a spiritual center, where the different groups can work together in relative harmony, and where the seeker is free to experiment in the available beliefs and practices with little to no restriction.

### Famous Spiritual Teachers

Ever since Krishnamurti and the Krotana Institute relocated to Ojai in the 1920’s, Ojai has become a sort of sanctuary for philosophers, gurus, and other spiritual teachers who have either settled down to take in Ojai’s serenity and work with students, or visited on a regular basis offering workshops and other sessions to residents and students. One such famous teacher was Avatar Meher Baba, who in April of 1956 visited Meher Mount, the Ojai center dedicated to serve as a gateway to the Divine; Meher Baba’s visit having supposedly left an invisible fountain of spiritual energy that touches all who come to

Meher Mount.<sup>40</sup> One of my informants, Alison Stillman claims that Paramahansa Yoganada, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship, also visited the Ojai Valley with Meher Baba and meditated underneath one of its oaks (interview with A. Stillman October 5, 2014).<sup>41</sup>

In an earlier chapter, I mentioned that during the twenties both Annie Besant and Krishnamurti visited the Krotona Institute and delivered lectures there, the latter doing so as well at the Star Camp Congress and later through his own foundation. To this day, Krotona invites various teachers and authors from around the world to deliver lectures and workshops, many of which are open to the public. Often these lectures, seminars, and workshops are advertised by both the Krotona Institute in brochures and by the *Ojai Valley News*. Going through the newspaper clippings archived in the research of library of the Ojai Valley Museum allowed me to see a sample of the spiritual teachers to have passed through Krotona, just in the past couple of decades. These include: the Most Rev. Dr. Stephan A. Hoeller of the Ecclesia Gnostica; philosopher of religion Huston Smith; Robert Ellwood, PhD. professor emeritus of religion at USC and former vice president of the Theosophical Society in America; Martin Leiderman, an international speaker who advocates a worldview of a living cosmos; Polish eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski; Joy Mills, lecturer and resident at Krotona; and Tibetan Buddhist Master Dzogchen Choga Rinpoche. An examination of the collection of photographs archived at Meditation Mount also reveals that center's own pantheon of visiting spiritual teachers, including: Roberto Assagioli, developer of psychosynthesis; Manly P. Hall, the

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.mehermount.org/a-gateway-to-the-divine/> (accessed July 20, 2015)

<sup>41</sup> According to the Meher Mount website, Paramahansa Yoganada visited Meher Mount in November of 1946. <http://www.mehermount.org/ojai-valley/> (accessed July 20, 2015)

philosopher-occultist mentioned earlier, Peter Caddy, a co-founder of the Findhorn Foundation community in Scotland; and musician and religious author Torkom Saraydarian.

In its 40-year history, the Ojai Foundation has also had its share of spiritual teachers as either a member of the on-site team or a faculty member; one of the Foundation's earlier leaders was anthropologist and later Zen Buddhist nun Dr. Joan Halifax, while some of its faculty have included: author Joseph Campbell, psychiatrist R.D. Lang, author and philosopher Jean Houston, researcher of parapsychology Rupert Sheldrake, voice teacher and therapist Jill Purce, mathematician Ralph Abraham, author and ethnobotanist Terence McKenna, psychologist Ralph Metzner, anthropologist Francis Huxley, author Andrew Weil, author Heymehyohsts Storm, author and artist Jose Arguelles, Sufi teacher Pir Vilayat Khan, environmental activist and scholar of Buddhism Joanna Macy, and many Native American, Tibetan, Zen and Judeo-Christian teachers.<sup>42</sup>

When I interviewed Anne Kerry Ford she told me that she and her husband were students of the American Buddhist teacher Ösel Tendzen, who was diagnosed with AIDS and came to Ojai in order to “die with his high consciousness,” because in Tibetan Buddhism death is seen as an opportunity for awakening or enlightenment, so “he was laying down the ground to have the best death possible” (interview with A.K. Ford September 28, 2014). Many of his students came to be with him in his final two or three years, which is how Anne and her husband came to settle in Ojai. They recognized that the energy or feeling of Ojai was different and it felt good compared to that of Los Angeles where they were before (interview with A.K. Ford September 28, 2014). Anne

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.ojaifoundation.org/about-us/our-history> (accessed July 20, 2015)

also told me of a couple of shamans who come from different parts of the world to visit Ojai on a regular basis, in order to teach and perform rituals: one is from Ecuador, Don Alverto, the other comes from West Africa, Malidoma Patrice Somé (interview with A.K. Ford September 28, 2014).

### Community of Artists and Thespians

Setting aside Ojai's status as a notable concentration of alternative spirituality, the Valley is also well known for its culture of the arts, entertainment, and recreational pursuits. In her tome *The Ojai Valley: an illustrated history* (1999), Patricia L. Fry observes that the Valley "seems to have more artists per capita than many communities. Some attribute this to the valley's aura or energy. Others say it's the natural beauty here that inspires artistic endeavors. Whatever the impetus, many artists claim that their sense of creativity didn't blossom until coming here" (Fry 1999: 220). One need only turn to the Artists & Galleries section of the quarterly Ojai Valley Visitor's Guide to see a sample of the plethora of arts present in this small idyllic town.

Although Ojai's early settlers often organized parties and socials it was not until the days of the Great War and the following interwar years that the interconnection between the arts and alternative spirituality would develop in Shangri-La. In 1914, Ojai received its own movie theatre, the Isis Theatre, built by J.J. Burke; appropriately enough, the title of the first motion picture shown there was the film adaptation of Jack London's *Valley of the Moon* (Fry 1999: 213). While the name "Isis," from a prominent Egyptian goddess, certainly fits well in Ojai since it has become a "New Age Vatican," it is probable that when first christened it was because "[m]ovie theater owners in the 1910s thru the '20s wished to evoke the mystery of the exotic or the pomp and privilege of

royalty in both the name and design of their theaters;” such may have been the case for the Isis Theater.<sup>43</sup>

Around the same time, a community chorus (initially all-female, becoming mixed a decade later) was started by the Ojai Valley Women’s Club, which met both at the Presbyterian Church and at the Krotona Institute; in addition, craftspeople met at the library, the theater group at City Hall, and the English Folk Dance Society at the women’s clubhouse (Fry 1999: 217). The local artistic community finally gained a dedicated space when the Ojai Community Art Center, since renamed the Ojai Center for the Arts, was opened in November of 1939 (Fry 1999: 218). In 1940, actor Iris Tree and her colleagues Woodrow and Erica Chambliss, all members of Michael Chekov’s acting troupe, moved to Ojai and performed professional plays, eventually transforming an old schoolhouse into the High Valley Theatre (Fry 1999: 218-219). One story about Iris Tree from the mid-1940’s recounts a “‘twilight procession of man and beast’ down McAndrew Road... [where] Iris Tree would walk with her two white dogs, Jiddu Krishnamurti, the philosopher, often led a cow and a calf on an evening stroll and a sprinkling of Thacher [school] boys on horseback added to... ‘the sunset parade’” (Fry 1999: 220).

Arguably, the honor of being the most iconic artist associated with the Ojai Valley falls upon Beatrice Wood, the world-renowned ceramist. Born in 1893, she had an excellent education at schools such as the Julien Academy in Paris and the Finch School in New York City, and lived a bohemian life as a dancer and artist, and became an acquaintance of artist Marcel Duchamp and others from the Dada movement.<sup>44</sup> In 1923,

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<sup>43</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/history-of-the-ojai-theatre/> (accessed July 6, 2015)

<sup>44</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/beatrice-wood/> (accessed July 6, 2015)

she joined the Theosophical Society, her interest in which eventually led her to the Ojai Valley, where in 1928 she attended and led folk dances at the first Star Camp Congress.<sup>45</sup> Around this time she developed an interest in ceramics, apprenticed herself to a ceramist, and by 1940 her work was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In 1948 she settled and set up her new studio in Ojai, where she would live the rest of her life.<sup>46</sup> Nearby was the Happy Valley School, whose board included Besant, Krishnamurti, and Huxley; Wood would be in association with its foundation till her end.<sup>47</sup> She died at the young age of 105, in her upper valley home a week after her birthday.<sup>48</sup>

A more recent iconic artist to have become part of Ojai's artistic community is world-renowned cartoonist Sergio Aragonés of *MAD Magazine* fame. A resident since 1982, he moved to Ojai so that his daughter Christen could attend Oak Grove School; he said "it took me no time to realize how comfortable, how conducive to thinking, it was. I loved it almost immediately."<sup>49</sup> He has since contributed much to his new hometown where he has spoken at local schools, and does artwork for posters, the Ojai Library, and

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<sup>45</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/beatrice-wood/> (accessed July 6, 2015)

<sup>46</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/beatrice-wood/> (accessed July 6, 2015)

<sup>47</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/beatrice-wood/> (accessed July 6, 2015)

<sup>48</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/beatrice-wood/> (accessed July 6, 2015)

<sup>49</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/ojai-people-sergio-aragones/> (accessed October 19, 2015).

any group that asks.<sup>50</sup> He “often subtly incorporates Ojai in his MAD cartoons: the Arcade, Starr Market, a kid on the street wearing an Ojai T-shirt. ‘Every chance I get!’”<sup>51</sup>

Much as spiritual teachers and artists have been drawn to the Ojai Valley’s natural beauty and small-town charm, so have Hollywood celebrities made a home for themselves there as well. While Ojai is known for its famous thespian and producer residents, there isn’t an official “who’s who” advertising the names of local Hollywood stars;<sup>52</sup> which is highly likely to be the point; following in the footsteps of the Krotona Institute, these actors and producers came to Ojai looking for a tranquil sanctuary in order to escape from the hectic, urban sprawl of Hollywood and Los Angeles. In a New York Times Article, Ojai Mayor Carol Smith said, “I’ve never seen paparazzi up here... You can stroll around town and not be harassed”.<sup>53</sup>

#### Festival and Recreational Activities

In addition to its artistic and thespian communities Ojai is also home to a number of annual festivals and means of recreation. In an earlier chapter, I described the events that led to the creation of Ojai Day, an annual event in the autumn celebrating everything unique about the town and Valley. Its events include “music, hayrides, historical trolley tours and an array of entertainment for all ages” (Fry 1999: 290). I went to the 2014 Ojai

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<sup>50</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/ojai-people-sergio-aragones/> (accessed October 19, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/ojai-people-sergio-aragones/> (accessed October 19, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> The only list I’ve found of Hollywood and other celebrity residents of Ojai was on the Wikipedia page for Ojai, which I assume to be at best partially accurate.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/travel/escapes/30ojai.html?ex=1354165200&en=c70e7ec8d8948ed6&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink&r=1&> (accessed July 20, 2015)

Day, in part in order to conduct an interview with the Chumash elder Julie, at the stand for the *Barbareño-Ventureño* band of Chumash, where they had on display fur pelts, sharp obsidian arrowheads, a basket of ground acorns to serve as an offering later that day, and various artifacts used for either play or hunting. The section of Ojai Avenue in front of Libby Park was roped off and filled with two rows of vendors, including artists and artisans selling their products, and local organizations such as the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy and Ojai Film Society. I had been told some of the local alternative spiritual groups would set up their own stands advertising their activities at Ojai Day, and I did come across some of them, including the Krishnamurti Foundation, the local chapter of Share International<sup>54</sup>, and the Bhagavad-Gita-As-It-Is-Fellowship. The local private schools which have their origins in Ojai's cultic milieu were also present advertising their unique educational methods. An impressive element of this festival is the huge mural mandala painted on the asphalt at the intersection of Ojai Ave. and Signal Street, created in the early morning hours by "artists of all ages" and washed away at the festival's conclusion (author's field notes: October 18, 2014).

Ojai has become home to several different festivals and leisure activities which have attracted people to the Ojai valley over the years, thus increasing the probability of their exposure to the concentrated and explicit presence of alternative spirituality in Ojai. It should also be noted that nearby Lake Casitas has also become home to annual events "such as the Renaissance Faire, the Indian Pow Wow and the Ojai Wine Festival" (Fry 1999: 306).

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<sup>54</sup> Share International is an off-shoot of Theosophy led by author and esotericist Benjamin Crème, advocating that the Maitreya, the World Teacher, has arrived and living in London, UK.

## Activism and Conservation

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that the residents of the Ojai Valley are eager to preserve their unique culture and quality of life from the threatening barbarism of commercialized, urban development that seems to have consumed the rest of Southern California. Local residents are not idle in their fear of “Carmelization,” some have put up an active resistance against this threat and formed different organizations with a united goal of preserving their Shangri-La. Fry notes in her history of Ojai that the city “has created commissions dedicated to various crucial aspects of the valley such as recreation, art and historical. Volunteers are selected from the community to serve on these commissions” (Fry 1999: 282). One such group is the Historic Preservation Commission; since its creation the “interest in historic buildings and local history in general has accelerated” (Fry 1999: 282).

It is not just historic points of interest and the arts that the residents wish to preserve, the ecological conservation of their beloved Valley is of equal importance to them. The Ojai Valley Green Coalition consists of residents and friends of Ojai seeking to turn the Valley into an environmentally sustainable community. On their website, they state that in “the spirit of ‘think globally, act locally,’ we exist to educate ourselves and others about ecological issues; to promote sustainable practices to our local businesses and organizations; to advocate environmental responsibility as a priority to our elected officials; and to bring green consciousness into our lives and our homes.”<sup>55</sup> In an *Ojai*

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[http://ojaivalleygreencoalition.com/2008/05/welcome\\_to\\_the\\_ojai\\_valley\\_green\\_coalition.html#more](http://ojaivalleygreencoalition.com/2008/05/welcome_to_the_ojai_valley_green_coalition.html#more) (accessed October 19, 2015).

*Quarterly* article Mark Lewis observes that this ecological conservationism has its indirect, origins in the hippie movement of the 1960's present in Ojai. He states:

The political coalition that stopped the freeways and stymied the developers and thwarted the mining companies has many components, but it rests at bottom upon an alliance between well-to-do retirees and green-minded activists. The latter might not be hippies per se, but they tend to draw inspiration — and some of their tactics — from the Sixties counterculture. Over the years, they have applied that activism to the essentially conservative project of keeping Ojai pretty much the way it is. And the town's old-school conservatives, such as ex-Mayor Huckins, seem reasonably pleased with the results.<sup>56</sup>

### Health Culture

When describing the early days of the Ojai community, I mentioned that the health culture revolving around the Valley's springs and Mediterranean climate not only made Ojai a household name, but was also in part what made the Valley so hospitable to the incoming milieu of alternative spirituality. That health culture has since expanded to include a wide variety of options for those seeking alternative means of healing. For example, in an article in the *Ojai Valley Visitors Guide* Amber Lennon provides a sampling of the alternative medicine available in Ojai by interviewing and describing the work of a medical doctor and homeopath, a holistic healer using craniosacral therapy, a shaman and ritualist who uses music and sound in his practice, and a person who uses direct channeling and reiki.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> <http://ojaihistory.com/summer-bummer-ojai-in-the-turbulent-60s/> (accessed October 19, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Lennon, Amber. "Alternative Healing in the Ojai Valley," in *Ojai Valley Visitors Guide* (Winter 2011)

## Ojai as the Shangri-La of Southern California

Ojai's status as Southern California's own Shangri-La is based on various interdependent factors, such as the common sentiment of Ojai's residents that the Valley's landscape contributes greatly to its sense of place, that it is somehow a spiritual place, and that it's threatened by urban growth and economic development. My own research shows that the broader Theosophical movement serves as the hub around which many other forms of alternative spirituality revolve, as well as the lodestone that attracted so many forms of alternative spirituality to the Ojai Valley. While the presence of hilltop centers and spiritual teachers significantly contribute to Ojai's mystical sense of place, the artistic and thespian community, festivals, and healing culture also help present the Ojai Valley as a rather idyllic rural retreat from the urbanized and commercial madness surrounding it. In the next chapter, I will conclude with what the evidence I have gathered suggests about the Ojai Valley; how both the physical landscape combined with Ojai's culture have produced fertile ground for alternative spirituality to take root and flourish, how the concentration of these beliefs and practices increases the importation of these ideas elsewhere, and how continued spiritual practice along with naturalistic phenomena have contributed to the legend of Ojai as a nexus of spiritual energies. In addition, I will describe what the next steps would be in order to continue this research, how it will focus on a specific area of the cultic milieu; followed by a brief segment of concluding thoughts.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Conclusion**

#### What the Available Evidence Suggests

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how a combination of geographic, historical and cultural factors resulted in the presence of a variety of alternative spiritualities in Ojai; how the early healing culture based on Ojai's springs and climate made it fertile ground for new forms of spiritual practice, how Theosophy serves as a hub around which other groups in the cultic milieu of the Valley revolve, and how it has fostered this diversity, as well as how Ojai's landscape and artistic culture has contributed to the image of Ojai as a real-life Shangri-La. In this chapter, I will revisit my original research questions to see what conclusions can be drawn from the evidence I have collected." As I was formulating the subject matter, I specifically asked four research questions that would give my thesis purpose and relevance to both the anthropological study of religion, to the community of Ojai, and other interested parties. These questions were: 1) How has alternative spirituality influenced and become a part of mainstream culture in Southern California? 2) How the alternative spiritual communities developed in this location, 3) Why was the Ojai Valley chosen in particular? and 4) what qualities or factors contribute to the folkloric belief of the Ojai Valley as a nexus of psychic, occult, and other spiritual energies?

In relation to my first research question I relied heavily upon examining several interdependent theoretical arguments and using a particular context, namely the Ojai Valley, as a concrete example with which to verify their applicability when discussing alternative spirituality in a regional area, in this case Southern California. Of all the

theories I examined, I have used Campbell's argument about the cultic milieu as my thesis' foundation. To recap, he argues that within a given society there is a permanent, underground subculture of unorthodox religions and sciences, and this subculture in and of itself serves as a fostering environment in which alternative groups are spawned, dissolved, and new groups assimilate elements of previous groups into their makeup. This milieu is sustained through the mutual support and tolerance of many groups toward one another, the pluralistic attitude that many paths to Truth are equally valid, overlapping media outlets with mutual advertisement, and an ideology of seekership.

Concerning the case of the Ojai Valley, I have found that these traits occur in spades. For nearly a century, Ojai has become home to a plethora of groups and individual practitioners of various alternative spiritual, scientific, and medicinal beliefs and practices; ranging from Theosophists and students of spiritual teachers to practitioners of alternative medicine such as reiki and color-light therapy. To my knowledge, none of these alternative spiritual groups claim that the path they practice is the exclusive path to Truth. In fact, there appears to be great tolerance, if not acceptance, of each other in the Valley, occurring in a spirit of pluralism. In some cases, there is overlapping membership between groups, demonstrating the fluidity that occurs in a cultic milieu. The ideology of seekership has a strong presence in Ojai; as one of my informants, Alison Stillman described it to me:

I think there's this rising tide of people who are doing great spiritual seeking right now, and we're seeing it in a way that I have never experience it before in all my years, I've seen more people that are looking for answers in alternative places that are not accepting what has been the norm, and are seeking. So to have a center [like Ojai] where there's so much available in one place, what a great thing, of course people are going to be drawn to it (interview with A. Stillman October 5, 2014)

As stated in an earlier chapter, it has been suggested by an informant that nearly every kind of spiritual group or practice could be found within the Ojai Valley, which fosters the opportunity for local seeker to experiment with a smorgasbord of options until they find their spiritual niche.

These alternative beliefs and practices have had an influence on mainstream culture, as another of my informants, James Voirol, put it, “[alternative spirituality] seeps in, people don’t realize it. Just the whole idea of karma, and it was an idea brought to the West by the Theosophical movement and some others also, quite a long time ago, but it [was] slowly creeping into the culture. [And] the idea of a holistic approach to medicine... is related to the spiritual movements” (interview with J. Voirol July 9, 2014). Sometimes when I asked my respondents their opinions on how the Ojai Valley may have influenced the broader region of Southern California, the response I received was that the concentration of alternative spirituality causes or amplifies the “vibe” of the place; as illustrated by an excerpt from my interview with Anne Kerry Ford illustrates:

I think that everything happens as a result of many causes and conditions. Ojai could be a spiritual hub, without Southern California being open to it, it wouldn’t just come up in Minnesota, you know, because there’s a group uh, there’s a group consciousness in Southern California, that people are even open to something like feng shui or practicing meditation, or practicing yoga for spiritual reasons not just for exercise. So, I think that Southern California has an openness to that, it’s cultural here, where else it might not be cultural in the Midwest. And then Ojai arises like a pinnacle point for that type of inquiry, that type of openness, uh it’s almost like a portal. Portal to what? I don’t know, portal to higher consciousness. And I’m not implying that higher consciousness comes from somewhere else either. But, we’re very influenced by the people that are around us, whether we think we are or not, whoever we talk to during the day, whatever we see around us, influences our consciousness all the time. So if we’re in an environment where people are open, it’s going to allow more openness for the individual who cares about that sort of thing (interview with A.K. Ford September 28, 2014).

In addition, many of my informants reported that large numbers of people from not only other parts of Southern California, but also from states and other countries visit Ojai. In the case of more local or regional visitors, whether they come to Ojai for activities or inspiration within the alternative spiritual milieu of the Valley or for some other purpose, such as festivals or recreational pursuits, some of these visitors may to some degree pick up the ideas or practices within Ojai's milieu which appeal to them, and then import those ideas back home, thus gradually influencing both the cultic and mainstream milieus of Southern California. It could even be argued that while some of those same ideas and practices are also present elsewhere, it is their concentrated and explicit presence in Ojai which reinforces them in the minds and actions of these visitors.

My second research question was concerned primarily with Ojai's sense of place, in other words, the reasons that the Ojai Valley was chosen as the location this concentration of alternative spirituality and the ways in which these beliefs and practices developed and adapted themselves there. When I initially asked the first half of this question, my attitude in seeking an answer was that of either/or, or as I liked to put it, it was a "chicken or egg" question. Was there something about the landscape and ecology of the Ojai Valley that attracted practitioners of alternative spirituality, or was it that a group set up shop there and its reputation, or at least Ojai's culture, served as a magnet drawing other alternative spiritual groups and individuals to the Valley. To my pleasant surprise, the available data suggests that *both* the environment *and* the presence of a "pioneer" spiritual group contributed, and essentially amplified each other in drawing in other waves of alternative spirituality.

Ojai's landscape and ecology are certainly the initial factors in this equation: the tall mountain ranges forming a "nest" and giving a sense of protection from the outside world, the famous "pink moment" at sunset, the Mediterranean climate, the various healing springs of hot and cold waters, the extensive forests and groves of oaks and willows, orange groves filling the valley with a lavish aroma, as well as the Valley's sense of ruralism and its opposition to a perceived threat of encroaching urbanization. These traits, combined with Ojai's artistic and health oriented culture, served as an idyllic location for the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, which was looking for a new place to establish its center as it moved away from the film industry emerging around its former Hollywood home during the 1920's. With Krotona relocated to Ojai, Krishnamurti delivering his lectures at the Star Camp Congress and later through the Krishnamurti Foundation of America, along with the establishment of Meher Mount in 1946, together these events combined with the Valley's landscape, ecology, artistic and health culture, and the fame it received through the 1937 film *The Lost Horizon*, began to solidify in the popular imagination the notion of Ojai as Southern California's own Shangri-La; which intensified with the waves of alternative spiritual seekers who came to Ojai beginning in the 1960's and continue to do so to the present day..

The general time period in which alternative spirituality began to infiltrate the Ojai Valley should also be taken into consideration; according to Ellwood, during the 1920's, not long after the mid-late Victorian period, experimentation with alternative spirituality became a part of many frontier settlers' lives. The Theosophists who resettled in Ojai arguably continued that ethos of the late Victorian era, of reformist and utopian pursuit in the brave new world of the frontier. Much like its antipodean counterpart of

New Zealand, the golden state of California was seen by adherents of both mainstream culture and alternative spirituality as a sort of terrestrial paradise where new beginnings could take place. As Roof's work has shown, Southern California during this time experienced rapid growth in its development, which made sociocultural conditions ill-suited to a strong religious establishment in the region, ideal instead for religious pluralism and greater acceptance of diversity of beliefs and practices, such as can be found in the cultic milieu in general.

Another aspect I examined was how various traditions or currents of alternative spirituality developed and adapted once they had settled in Ojai. This required adopting Taylor's approach of recognizing the interdependent influences between the natural environments on the one hand and religions/human cultures on the other. Ojai's ecology has had a mutual influence on some groups, for example the Theosophists co-operate with the physical and non-incarnate inhabitants (i.e. the devic kingdom in Theosophical vernacular) of the land by not killing any of the wildlife, maintaining a vegetarian diet, and believing in the universal brotherhood of humanity, with similar attitudes shared by other practitioners. According to informants such as Mr. Voirol, it is these beliefs which have in turn shaped a general sense of maintaining the welfare of the environment and of people (interview with J. Voirol July 9, 2014).

Finally, my third research question addressed how the folkloric belief of the Ojai Valley as a nexus of metaphysical energies developed, and what factors contributed to it. Chumash elder Julie compared Ojai to Sedona, Arizona in the way that legends, or "little myths" as she called them, about a place build up as people tell and retell them to each other:

The more you believe in something it's almost like a self-fulfilled prophecy in a way, that when you, the more people who hear about the spirituality of Ojai, the more they will come in that reverence. And I think when you come in the reverence of great love and great spirit the Land reflects it. And when we do prayer in places in our valley, the way that I treat is, you know this Land has not heard its own language, it has not heard its own prayers or been given the gifts that it used to get just only 200 years ago, that it wakens up (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014).

Related explanations she gave me included that people felt a sense of homecoming when arriving in Ojai, and that the surrounding mountains provided a sense or energy of nurturing protection; but perhaps it is a combination of these factors that has contributed to the belief of Ojai as a nexus (interview with J.L. Tumamait-Stenslie October 18, 2014).

I asked various members of the Krotona Institute if they thought the beliefs and practices of either their group in particular or of alternative spiritual groups within the Valley in general have influenced or contributed to the belief of Ojai as a nexus of spiritual energies. All were in agreement that the Ojai Valley had its own unique quality or that energies are present, and that one way or another, the milieu of alternative spirituality has indeed made various contributions to this folk belief. For example, Joy Mills believes Krotona's 90-year presence has certainly influenced the notion of Ojai as a spiritual center, and that Krotona has been in harmony with and contributed to Ojai's unique quality of "complete openness, freedom, freedom of thought, freedom to act in accordance with one's conscious;" her evidence for this spirit of openness and freedom of thought is the letters to the editor of the *Ojai Valley News* showcasing the Valley's diversity of beliefs (interview with J. Mills July 25, 2014). Ms. Mills also believes that Krotona's purpose "which is really to aid in the enlightenment of humanity, really to bring about a peaceful world," a challenge that the residents have set for themselves, has

definitely influenced Ojai. She went on to say that “I’m convinced that, for example, meditation by a group of people can have a powerful effect, and can in some way – not brain-wash people – but can influence them, it can be an influence of compassion, understanding, an influence of beauty which is an ideal. So I think in many ways we subtly influenced the community by our presence” (interview with J. Mills July 25, 2014).

Fellow Krotona resident Olga Olmin also believes that the activities of alternative spiritual practitioners contribute to the belief in Ojai as a nexus; she compared these activities to how people in a church or some other sacred space direct their whole thoughts to a Universal Principle: “if you take Ojai, people who come here or who are living here, they are somehow involved, either through yoga or some spiritual practice, uh we have all sorts of meditation retreats and centers here, so intentionally or unintentionally people who come here concentrate their thoughts on that Divine Principle, more than on material things” (interview with O. Olmin August 14, 2014). Another resident Theosophist, Steve Walker, suggested that a gradual awareness of other groups over the years has led to a sort of shared and informally coordinated objective for many of Ojai’s alternative spiritual groups to focus on; in his words:

it’s a fairly small town and we know each other, so sooner or later we know what everybody else is thinking, and believing, and where the spirituality is focused and that sort of thing. Uh we tend to be...we’re probably more like Buddhist than anything else. In fact two of the society’s founders were originally Buddhist before they founded the present Theosophical Society. So we feel a certain kinship with the peaceful way, uh Buddhist, Society of Friends which is popularly known as Quakers, one of our members is a Quaker too. This bringing in a more peaceful world as a possible choice, where you don’t need choose the things that are wasteful, the things that are violent (interview with S. Walker August 3, 2014).

I asked a former member of Krotona Marcia Doty, this same question, and like most of those I interviewed of the Theosophical persuasion, she firmly believes in the reality of the metaphysical nexus present in the Ojai Valley. She also objected to my use of the word folklore, saying “I think it’s the fact that we’ve been told by those that can see into other dimensions. We’ve believed it on our own because of the sense of feeling, but there are people who can see into those dimensions, and they’ve shared that with us” (interview with Marcia Doty October 18, 2014).

When I interviewed people outside the Krotona Institute, I received similar responses; for instance, Alison Stillman suggested that there are multiple factors which have led to the belief of Ojai as a nexus of spiritual energies, such as the concentration of spiritual masters and seekers:

And is it borne out of geomagnetic-energetics? I don’t know. Is it borne out of sacred relics being buried in the Valley by the indigenous people? Could be. Is it borne out of years, and years, and years of seekers praying and meditating and doing ceremony here? I don’t think you could separate any of them, I think they all play a part in it... And I think that our intention and our ceremony, and who we are affects the energy of the Earth and vice versa (interview A. Stillman October 5, 2014).

Likewise, when I asked Anne Kerry Ford how she thought the beliefs and activities of the Buddhist sangha might reflect or contribute to this Ojai-as-nexus folklore, she said:

any time that someone has a genuine spiritual practice, not just a façade, but something that people are really engaging in whole-heartedly, then it’s going to have a ripple effect. If you’re cultivating you own sanity, if you’re cultivating your own brilliance, and your own skillfulness, and your awareness, that’s bound to have a ripple out to people you might just meet on the street... it’s going to affect the others in some subtle way (interview with A.K. Ford September 28, 2014).

Ms. Stillman also spoke of this ripple effect, about the phenomenal experience a person has during a ritual or listening to a charismatic teacher, how potentially mind-opening and life-changing those events can be:

even if you don't go and follow that tradition, it opened you a little bit to an alternative way of thinking or an alternative way of being, and it sets you on your own spiritual journey of discovery and your own spiritual seeking, right? And so, that affects everything, that affects the culture, that affects the community, that affects wherever you walk, wherever you go, and I think there's this rising tide of people who are doing great spiritual seeking right now...So to have a center [like Ojai] where there's so much available in one place, what a great thing, of course people are going to be drawn to it, of course everything they experience they're going to take back out into the world (interview with A. Stillman October 5, 2014)

Meanwhile, while not denying Ojai's spiritual quality, "Sue Hart" of Meditation Mount offered me a relatively more naturalistic explanation for this Ojai-as-nexus belief. Based on feedback she has received from visitors to the Mount in particular and the Valley in general, people have a phenomenological experience of a sense of homecoming, not just in that place, but in themselves as well. The natural beauty of the Ojai Valley's landscape makes an impression on their sense of place; Sue read off comments written by visitors, which include: "I was so inspired by the power of beauty that my soul came alive and my worries dropped away;" "awe-inspiring tranquility;" with other comments simply being single word expressions like beautiful, lovely, serene, and Namaste (interview with "S. Hart" January 13, 2015). She continued by saying that nothing magical is occurring, that it has more to do with a sense of unanimity underlying the diversity of beliefs and practices (alternative or mainstream, spiritual or mundane); "people are all doing their activities, but [...] overall there's a love for the place and a

protection of it, that uh permeates the whole Valley” (interview with “S. Hart” January 13, 2015).

Ultimately, whatever possible metaphysical factors are involved, I am inclined to suggest that it is a synthesis of naturalistic phenomena and compatible cultural beliefs, both spiritual and secular, which has gradually developed into the folkloric belief of Ojai as a nexus of metaphysical energies, and therefore a spiritually special place; although having antecedents in Chumash tradition and the early health culture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, truly developed since both Krotona’s and Krishnamurti’s relocation to Ojai in the 1920’s. The Valley’s high mountain range offers a sense of protection from the outside world, much as in the case of the fabled Shangri-La, and its role as the setting of the film *The Lost Horizon*, indirectly promoted and augmented its near-utopian status. Perhaps Julie is quite correct in pointing out the “self-fulfilled prophecy” aspect of this belief, in the sense that a mutual confirmation occurs in the relationship between the Valley’s landscape and ecology on the one hand, and Ojai’s rural and bohemian culture and milieu of alternative spirituality on the other hand. Of course, this explanation does not diminish the deeply held belief of Ojai as a metaphysical nexus by many who come to this tranquil valley.

#### Next Steps

While I have conducted several interviews, gathered much archival information, and drawn my conclusions based on these sets of data, I feel that I have only skimmed the surface of the cultic milieu of the Ojai Valley, along with its relationships with both the broader cultic milieu and the mainstream culture of Southern California. In this section, I

will lay out my hypothetical plan for continuing and expanding my thesis research, when I have the opportunity to do so.

It has come to my attention that many participants in Ojai's cultic milieu, including the majority of my informants, are of Euro-American descent. In addition, even though I saw a fair diversity of ethnicities at the events I attended in Ojai, it seems that the majority of the visible forms of alternative spirituality in Ojai are generally frequented by a Euro-American demographic. More precisely, they appear to cater to or reorient themselves to a Euro-American demographic, but not necessarily exclusively. The predominant forms of alternative spirituality in Ojai tend to be Euro-American (i.e. Theosophy, New Age, etc.) or Asian (i.e. Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) in their orientation. Is this representative of the broader cultic milieu in Southern California? If so how, why, and to what extent? I am aware that the broader cultic milieu of the region includes a variety of other forms of alternative spirituality: contemporary Paganisms, Hermetic and neo-Rosicrucian orders, Gnostic churches, and modernistic New Religious Movements such as Scientology. Many of these are easy enough to find advertised in periodicals, metaphysical stores, and through internet searches. However, most of these also appear to have originally catered to Euro-Americans. What of other forms of alternative spirituality that may not be as apparent? What about Afro-Caribbean traditions, Aztec reconstructionisms, devotions to Santa Muerte, botanicas offering their wares for devotional and magical purposes, and other forms of alternative spirituality that are not as visible in the cultic milieu as say Theosophy and the New Age movement?

My future research would attempt to address these questions, but with a much more focused objective; specifically, given the increasing number of people immigrating

to Southern California from Latin America, I would want to look at forms of alternative spirituality affiliated with the Latino/a community, and what influence or impact they are having on both the cultic milieu and the mainstream culture of Southern California. Are we seeing an avant-garde of alternative spirituality that is based in Latino identity, has it already taken root and established itself beneath the radar, and to whom is it accessible?

For instance, I have learned from two of my informants about the presence in Ojai of two groups of the Aztec danza tradition: one is presentational, while the other is more “traditional,” which sees the dance movements as prayers. If possible, I would like to interview members from each of these dance groups. Are they representative of a more ethnically diverse alternative spiritual milieu within Ojai, are they incorporated in this milieu or are they segmented within it? Also, how representative are they of Southern California’s cultic milieu? Therefore, in the future I would like to study not only these and related Latino/a alternative spiritual groups in the Ojai Valley, but in nearby areas as well, and to evaluate their place and identity within the cultic milieu.

The general methodology would not change, with the exception that a separate interview guide of questions would be developed for alternative spiritual practitioners outside the Ojai Valley (based on questions raised above). Ultimately, these next steps are designed to both dig deeper into the Ojai Valley’s milieu of alternative spirituality and to better understand the contemporary influence it has had in other parts of Southern California with more concrete examples.

### Concluding Thoughts

In this section, I will speculate on the implications of my research on our understanding of the cultic milieu’s relationship with and the impact on mainstream

culture, as well as its influence on community identity. In Chapter Two, I showed that according to Campbell, elements of the cultic milieu can be incorporated into mainstream culture through various outlets, including periodicals that cover esoteric religions, unorthodox sciences and alternative medicines; in addition to how secularization as a historical process reduces if not deprives orthodox religion and science of their monopoly on truth and validity, thus opening the floodgates to experimentation with new ideas and practices. A well-known example of this was the counterculture of the 1960's, when virtually a whole generation left the mainstream religion of their upbringing, even if temporarily, to adopt the practices and worldviews of Buddhism, Hinduism, Neopaganism, the New Age movement, etc. We can see the results of this today, when even those people who do not identify as members of the cultic milieu can, for instance, practice hatha yoga at a studio in a respectable neighborhood and pick up magazines dedicated to the subject in the check-out lane of a major grocery store, or purchase a statue of the Buddha at a home décor retailer even if they are not practicing Buddhists, or receive a crystal-healing therapy service even if they identify with either a mainstream religion or no religion.

I should also reflect here on how my research ties in with the broader esoteric history of California, the US, and globally specifically in the establishment of world centers of esotericism such as Glastonbury and Sedona. I would say that following Taylor's lead, instead of focusing exclusively on either religious/human culture or on environment of a place, we should focus on how both of these form an interrelated lens by which we can examine why a particular place gradually becomes a sacred place or magnetic center of alternative spirituality. In the case of Ojai, it was the fusion of the

shape of the landscape, the geographic remoteness, and relative ruralness of the Valley, combined with Ojai's health culture, artistic community, and avant-garde of Theosophy, which over time created an image of Ojai as Shangri-La into the popular imagination of Southern California residents – that in the end sealed the deal. In her articles, Bowman demonstrates that the vernacular religion, the geographical and cultural contexts of beliefs and practices, together with the forms of alternative spirituality found in Glastonbury, have gradually turned that West Country town into a magnetic center as well.

Finally, how does alternative spirituality become heritage? I would argue that an element which helps the cultic milieu become incorporated into the heritage of a place is pilgrimage. Beginning in the mid-1920's hundreds came to Ojai in order to hear the philosopher Krishnamurti and to be in his presence. By the 1970's, there were at least four mountaintop centers where pilgrims came to meditate, study esotericism, listen to a guru, or conduct related work in a tranquil and serene place. And, for better or worse, in our modern world with pilgrimage comes an opportunity for revenue from tourism. As the newspaper supplement I mentioned in the last chapter testified, by 1979 alternative spirituality was advertised as being "the essence of Ojai," and it seems that since then this has not changed; while not every resident may like it, they acknowledge that alternative spirituality is part of their heritage.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide

- 1) What is your impression of the history of alternative spirituality in general within the Ojai Valley?
- 2) What is your impression of the history of your group/organization in particular within the Ojai Valley?
- 3) What is your impression of the Ojai Valley's cultural and ecological environments?  
What role do you think they play in the local forms of alternative spirituality?
- 4) What factors or qualities do you think are responsible for the concentration of alternative spirituality in Ojai?
- 5) In what way do you think this concentration impacts or influences the broader Southern California culture?
- 6) In what way do you think that your group's practices and related activities have influenced Ojai as a concentration of alternative spirituality?
- 7) How have your group's beliefs and practices adapted to changing cultural conditions in Ojai over the years?
- 8) What factors, phenomenological or otherwise, led to the belief of Ojai as a nexus of spiritual energies?
- 9) How do you think alternative spirituality within Ojai in general, or your group's practices in particular either reflect or contribute to this belief?

## Appendix B



Figure 1.1 Chief's Peak in the upper valley of Ojai. Named as such because it resembles a man's face in profile looking skyward, and according to Chumash legend one of the First Peoples who now protect the Valley. Photo by the author.



Figure 1.2 Kahosh Mountain near Dennison Park in upper valley. According to Julie Lynn Tumamait-Stenslie, this is a shrine-mountain that is associated with bear-medicine, a form of integrative healing. Photo by author.



Figure 1.3 Hot springs of Ecotopia, in the Matilija Canyon of the Ojai Valley. This site is considered to be sacred by the Chumash, and its sulphuric, healing waters are good for rheumatism, arthritis, and skin abrasions. Its current owners, Ecotopia, are trying to create a stewardship program whereby those wishing to come to the springs can either pay what they can or donate their time to maintain and cleanup the site, to restore it from previous damage. Photo by the author.



Figure 1.4 Manly P. Hall (left) with Florence Garrigue at Meditation Mount, 1983. Hall was a frequent visitor to the Mount. Photo used by permission of Meditation Mount Archives, Meditation Groups, Inc.

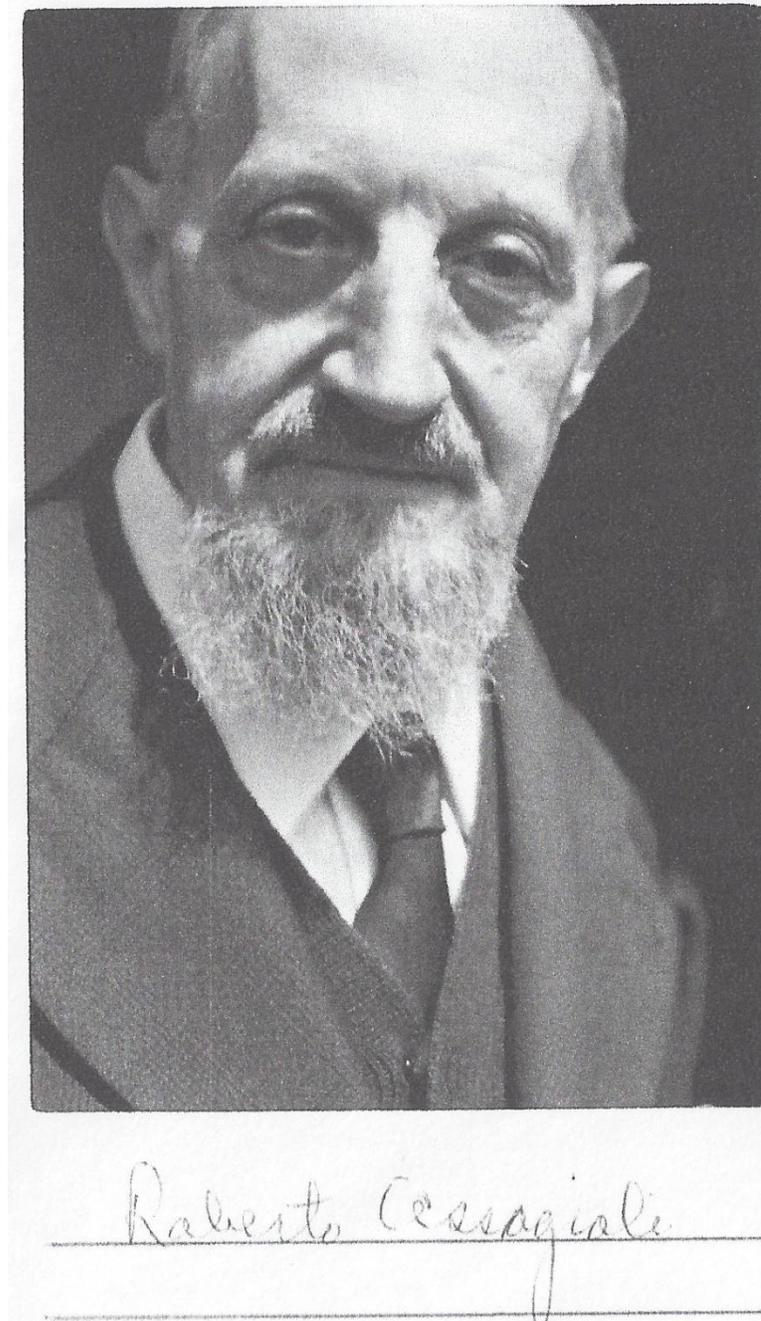


Figure 1.5 Archival photograph of Roberto Assagioli, who was involved in the development of Meditation Groups, Inc. and Meditation Mount; his work on psychosynthesis plays a major whole in their beliefs and practices. Photo used by permission of Meditation Mount Archives, Meditation Groups, Inc.

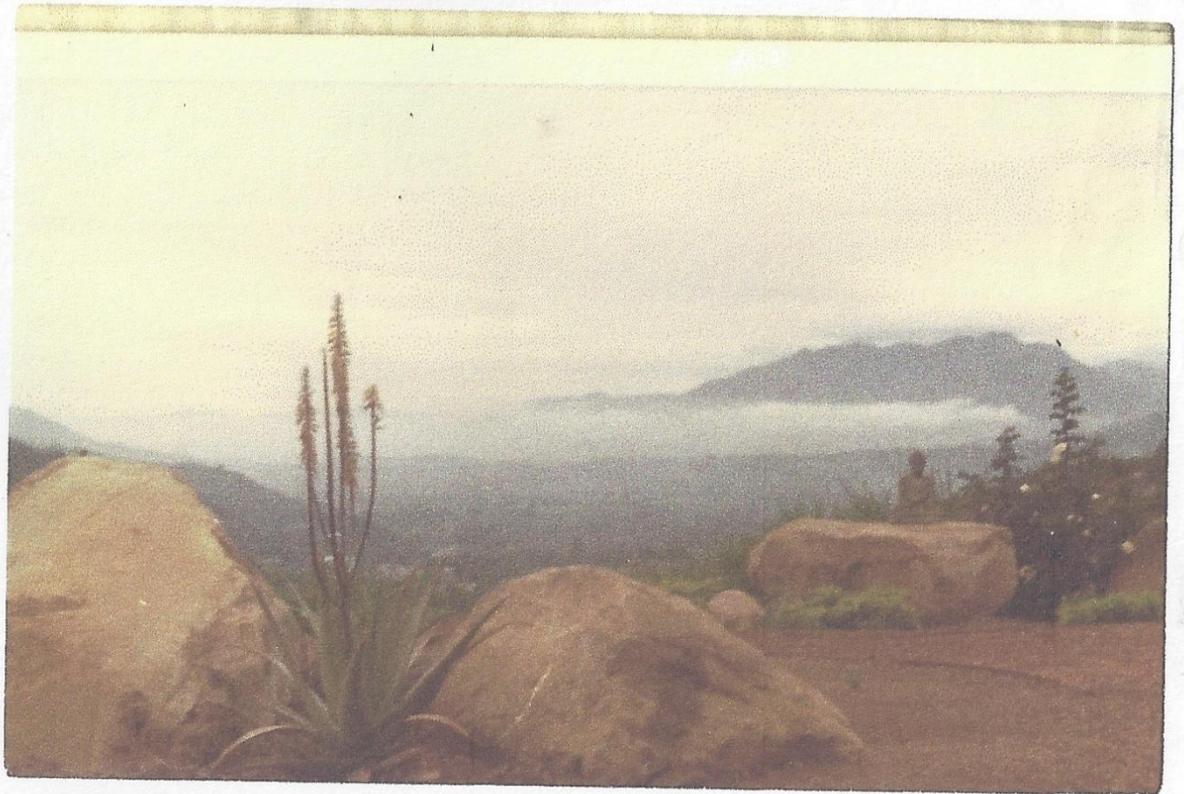


Peter Luda                      Francois  
Caddy      Marris                      Desquene

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January 1979

Figure 1.6 Picture including Peter Caddy at Meditation Mount, 1979. Caddy was one of the co-founders of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland. Photo used by permission of Meditation Mount Archives, Meditation Groups, Inc.



Ojai Valley  
1971

Figure 1.7 Archival photograph of the Ojai Valley as seen from Meditation Mount, 1971.

Photo used by permission of Meditation Mount Archives, Meditation Groups, Inc.

**Ojai Valley Museum**

# The Essence of Ojai

**Schedule in Progress**

**Meher Mount the Month of August**  
 August 14 Introduction to Avatar and Meher Baba  
 Speaker Sam Ervin  
 August 21 Meher Baba's 1956 visit to Meher Mount  
 Speaker Billie Goodrun  
 August 28 Essence of Meher Mount Past & Present Panel Discussion

**Krishnamurti Foundation the Month of September**  
 September 4 Lecture  
 September 11 Film Krishnamurti "The Challenge of Change"  
 September 18 Lecture  
 September 25 Film Krishnamurti "Talk One Ojai 1983"

**Meditation Mount the Month of October**  
 October 2 Topic to be announced Speaker Jean Bates  
 October 9 Esoteric Christianity and Occult Meditation  
 Speaker Jeriel Smith  
 October 16 Spiritual Principles for the New Era  
 Speaker Brock Travis  
 October 30 TBA

**Krotona the Month of November**  
 November 6 Theosophy What's It All About  
 November 20 Knowing Who You Are

**Chumash the Month of December**  
 December 4 TBA  
 December 11 TBA  
 December 18 TBA

**Ojai Foundation the Month of January**  
 January 8 TBA  
 January 15 TBA  
 January 22 TBA

**Exhibit Lecture Series**  
**Thursdays Nights**  
**7:00 until 9:00 PM**  
**Ojai Valley Museum**  
**130 W. Ojai Avenue**  
**Reservations: 805-640-1390 Ext. 2**

**Single Lecture \$3.00**

**Complete Series Total of 19 Lectures, panel discussions or films**

**Non-member \$35.00**  
**Museum Member \$25.00**

*Refreshments will be served*

Figure 1.8 A flyer advertising the “Essence of Ojai” exhibit at the Ojai Valley Museum, the themes shown in its schedule of lectures, panels, and film showing revealing a sample of the diversity of alternative spirituality in the Ojai Valley. Used with permission from the Research Library of the Ojai Valley Museum.