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3HO IN THE LIGHT OF EXPERIENCE

A Study of Experiences in the Healthy, Happy and Holy
Organization (3HO).

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The Healthy, Happy and Holy Organization, also known as 3HO, is a New Religious Movement founded by the Indian Sikh and Yogi Harbhajan Singh Puri AKA “Yogi Bhajan” (1929-2004) to spread his teachings and build a community in the West. Since the organization was founded in Los Angeles in July 1969 it has grown and is now represented in many Western countries.

In the beginning, several ethnographical researchers studied and placed 3HO within the sphere of the countercultural influence of the 1970s. Most of these studies recognized the major influence within the construct of 3HO as the Sikh religion, others as Yogi Bhajan’s charismatic leadership or his yogic practices, but very few addressed the three-fold constituent elements of the organization (Kundalini, Sikhism, and New Age/Aquarian Age) and its experiential dimension. Thus, this study brings attention to what seemed to be the substantial dimension of the organization, the experiential, which is vividly present in all the constituent notions of the movement and the *praxis* of its people. The aim of this study was to identify and describe the role experience plays in 3HO teachings and the way a group of members of the movement deemed the experiences they had within 3HO. This was done in order to increase the understanding about the influence of experience in the life of members living in Europe and the way the interaction between constituent elements, precepts, prescriptions and followers came out of the people’s experiential dimension.

The first data used for this study was the educational manuals and books published by 3HO, which include collections of the lectures where the worldview of Yogi Bhajan can be accessed. The second and most important data addressed in this study was gathered through field research and interviews among eleven 3HO members participating in the European Yoga Festival that has been celebrated in France in the past decades.

The approach to the material was through the framework of *Attributional Theory*, which looks for how the notions of experience or experiences (understood as behavioural events) have been presented through a deeming making process. According to this approach the findings show that experience plays a capital role in encompassing the three-fold constituent parts of the movement (Kundalini, Sikhism, and New Age/Aquarian Age), and it gives the followers the aim to *have an experience* rather than believe or merely understand the teaching of the founder. Secondly, the study indicates that the attributions assigned to experience revealed that they are deemed as, *per se*, the most efficacious mechanism to show progress and validate the journey deemed “spiritual”. The study was able to distinguish that the major feature attributed to the experiential is that *experience works* better and above all beliefs, theoretical or axiological principles in producing affiliation and also outward and inward involvement with the organization and the teachings it contains.

“Consider how the Orient, and in particular the Near Orient, became known in the West as its great complementary opposite since antiquity. There were the Bible and the rise of Christianity; there were travellers like Marco Polo who charted the trade routes and patterned a regulated system of commercial exchange, and after him Lodovico di Varthema and Pietro della Valle; there were fabulists like Mandeville; there were the redoubtable conquering Eastern movements, principally Islam, of course; there were the militant pilgrims, chiefly the Crusaders. Altogether an internally structured archive is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations; the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced...”

- Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (2003, p. 58).

“Rather than abandon the study of experience, we should disaggregate the concept of “religious experience” and study the wide range of experiences to which religious significance has been attributed. If we want to understand how anything at all, including experience, becomes religious, we need to turn our attention to the process whereby people sometimes ascribe the special characteristics to things that we (scholars) associate with the terms such as “religious,” “magical,” “mystical,” “spiritual,” etcetera”. Disaggregating “religious experience” in this way will allow us to focus on the interaction between psychological, social and cultural linguistic process...”

-Ann Taves (2009, p. 8)

Dedicated to my daughter Yanka and my son Samuel,
whose presences in my life have truly offered me “peak experiences”.

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PREFACE

The last two decades of the Cold War led Western society into the upheaval of an ideological dispute in regards to how leaders and common people wanted to pursue their dreams. In the field of religion and spirituality, these times witnessed the second Vatican Reform, the emerging of New Age movements, the coming of different gurus from India and an increasing turn towards novel and also intimate forms of religious practices and experiences.

Several New Religious Movements appeared then and boosted interest in exotic forms of religiosity and spirituality and attracted searchers from an increasingly global society. This is the general context that Yogi Bhajan, a turbaned Sikh and Yogi, encountered once he arrived in the USA in 1969. His teaching and charisma seemed comparable to those of many other gurus coming from the East, but his position was distinctive in that he did not accept the title and accompanying profile of a *Guru* to be followed, but rather spoke about creating teachers out of his students. He said he was not a preacher but a teacher giving experience.

I came across this approach to contemporary spiritual matters while I was a student of History and Political Science in Chile, and I was a teacher assistant of the chair of *Cultural History of the Western Civilization* at the University Gabriela Mistral. My interest in the 20th century related to ideology and religiosity and my curiosity about the use of Eastern practices led me to the Doctoral Program in *Ciencias de las Religiones* in the University Complutense in Madrid at the end of 2003. As soon as I moved to Spain I was invited to visit a Gurdwara (a Sikh Shrine) in Birmingham, UK. The invitation was to participate in the project of translating the material of the Sikh community that was going to be presented in the *Forum of World Religions in Barcelona* in the summer of 2004.

My doctoral studies, which run parallel with my initial practice of Hatha yoga and then Kundalini Yoga, and the fresh contact with a Sikh community in UK, led me towards what I thought was a branch of Sikhism, the Healthy Happy and Holy Organization. When I moved to Finland in the spring 2005 I chose this as a subject for my research as I was privileged to continue my studies and shape the final project for my thesis in the Department of Comparative Religions in the University of Helsinki. The progress made as I explored 3HO documents and seminars at the Faculty soon awakened a thirst for field research in me, and in 2006 I embarked on one of three field trips to the annual 3HO European Yoga Festival in France as a participant observer. I chose this place and event because it is the biggest 3HO event in the world and never before had any scholar shown interest in 3HO in Europe (except Thorsten Laue who studied 3HO Germany in his master's thesis in 2003 and edited and republished this work in 2007). Later on, in 2010 and 2011, I completed my field research and proceeded to write my work.

The original impressions of a blend of West and East captivated my interest and led me to choose 3HO as it presented the matter of spirituality in a rather distinctive way; as a matter of experience. In this process of addressing the movement I chose to approach the subject of experience, and reported experiences from the point of view of

attributional theory as this allowed me to deal with terms like ‘spiritual’, “infinity”, “God”, “spiritual science” and ‘religious’ among others as non-technical catch-all terms for webs of religious-like first order concepts. The reason behind this is that in the ideology of 3HO, religiosity and belief are not seen as central to the practical philosophy and goals, whereas the central idea is “deemed” as more technical and experiential in relation to the spiritual progress of people practicing or applying their methods of Kundalini yoga, life style or Sikhism. Over ten years of dedication to this project aimed at providing an updated view of 3HO, which is connected to Europe in the 21st century and how the people’s experiences are deemed *in situ*. It also aims to elucidate the impact of the experiential in the case of a New Religious Movement that was initiated in the USA in the late 1960s and that keeps on growing not only in the USA, but also in Europe.

Since the very first beginning my supervisor, Professor René Gothóni, has kindly guided me through the process that has crystallized in this dissertation. I want to express to him my sincere gratitude for accepting my project in the University of Helsinki and for his subsequent support to accomplish the completion of my study. I would also like to extend my gratitude to those currently working at the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Helsinki, Professor Dr. Tuula Sakaranaho, Dr. Terhi Utriainen and Dr. Riku Hämäläinen, who have contributed with their support to this endeavour. Special thanks to Dr. Maija-Riitta Ollila, who spent several days of her life giving me valuable input to improve my approach, Dr. Constance Elsberg who kindly provided me key advice to pursue my research and lastly to Dr. Julio Retamal Favereau my esteemed teacher and mentor during my early undergraduate years. I also owe special gratitude to the people in 3HO who facilitated my research like Satya Singh, the Coordinator of the European Yoga Festival, Guru Charan Singh Khalsa who shared important considerations about Yogi Bhajan and his official biographer Guru Fatah Singh Khalsa, and the eleven teachers in the “3HO family” who kindly agreed to be interviewed for my study. My special gratitude to Tiina Resch, Don McCracken and my mother-in-law Anneli Alajoki, for their substantial help with the German and English languages.

Finally, I must especially thank my father who encouraged me all throughout my academic journey and my mother for giving me life and priceless values. And last but not least, my gratitude must acknowledge my wife, Sat Darshan, who is one of the most dedicated Yoga teachers that I have ever met. For her love and the children we have together, Yanka and Samuel, I am deeply grateful.

Juan Francisco Lafontaine,
Vantaa, September of 2015

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

All transliterations from Gurumukhi or Sanskrit into English presented in the main body of this study have maintained the original form of the sources quoted, which in general are without using diacritics. The approach without using diacritics applies to the use of common words coming from Gurumukhi and Sanskrit. For example from Sanskrit:

Śiva= Shiva

Kuṇḍalinī= Kundalini.

Or both from the Sanskrit and the Gurumukhi:

Śabda (Sanskrit) - *Śabaḍ* (Gurmukhi) = *Shabad* or *Shabd*

Cakraṃ (Sanskrit) and *Cḥakar* (Gurmukhi) = *Chakra*.

Having said this, the reader will notice that some quotations in this study use letters with diacritics (those coming from the Sanskrit) while other sources quoted do not use them (those coming from the Gurumukhi). The reason is that in this study I have respected the original quotations of other writers (using and not using diacritics) while I have refrained from using diacritics in the transliterated words in the main body of this study following the approach of W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi in *SIKHISM, Beliefs and Practices* (1999).

PART I INTRODUCTION

1. The Movement and the Experiences

In the late 1960s a new movement called the Healthy, Happy and Holy Organization, 3HO, was founded in the state of California, USA. This movement was founded by an Indian-Sikh-Yogi (born Harbhajan Singh Puri (1929-2004) who claimed that the human being had “infinite potential” and that he “did not come to gather disciples, but to create teachers”. His first followers, vibrant youths involved in the hippy and American counter-culture movements, started to attend his Kundalini Yoga and White Tantric Yoga classes. The teachings of “Yogi Bhajan” or “Yogiji”, as his students started to call him, and as he became known, soon spread to other states in the USA and other countries in the world.

From the very beginning of his career Yogi Bhajan, as the founder and spiritual leader of 3HO, encouraged his students to abandon the use of all drugs and self-destructive behaviour. Instead, he taught them how to get *organically high* with Yoga, meditation and Tantric practices. He said that these methods were “technologies” or “know-how” for experiencing “Universal Consciousness” while living the normal life of a householder. He continuously repeated that he was not preaching or expounding a philosophy, but a teacher delivering experience through “ancient technologies”. These fundamental ideas were expressed in many ways and his practical approach made the experiential dimension of his teaching a fertile ground for a process that deems experiences “special” and e.g. religious, spiritual, of the soul, of the infinite etc.¹

At the beginning of the 1970s the 3HO community and Yogi Bhajan launched the first ashrams in Europe and in 1976 they organized the first “European Yoga Festival” in France. This Festival has been the major gathering for 3HO in Europe – and perhaps the biggest in the world – where the community brings together the practices that are used to achieve what is apparently a set of experiential goals, as well as to share their lives.

¹ According to Ann Taves, deeming is “an umbrella term that encompasses processes of ascription and attribution”. This is a process applied to experiences by the subjects that have them, in other words this is “what counts” for them as religious, spiritual, infinity, etc. (Taves, 2010, p.22). In this research I use the verb “to deem” or “deeming” following the attributional theory shaped by Ann Taves. The suitability of this approach also echoes the work of Laue (2007), the only research on 3HO that has been done in Europe. In his investigation Laue allowed the informants to refer to his investigation conducted in 3HO Germany. For this reason the author presented the letter of the first board member of the German 3HO, who has a critical reflection to the etic approach of producing attributions (the researcher’s account). According to this informant:

“I don’t feel good, when it is tried to describe from outside, and with terminology from the study of religion, what has to do with individuals, very personal development of consciousness ... They talked about followers, about healing movements, the “goal of enlightenment”, about founder of religion ...” (p. 55-57, translated by the author’s collaborator).

Over time the European Yoga Festival not only became the main meeting point for the large community of 3HO Europeans, but also for other participants from all around the world. The impact of the teachings of Yogi Bhanan has reached many people and he gathered thousands of followers to whom he conveyed that humans were not supposed to have a spiritual experience because humans *were* “spirits having a human experience”. Their quest to achieve this and other special experiences became a cardinal dimension of 3HO movement. Is it possible that the goal they pursue is a set of experiences that they deem special, and to which they have apparently ascribed some sort of absolute character?

The characteristics attributed to experience through an ascriptional act of 3HO members is the focus of this research, which explores how these experiences play a role in 3HO. The experiences I talk about here are not abstract or singular (as a univocal concept); rather they come in many forms and stem from people’s behaviour. They are not considered intrinsically religious, but are rather deemed religious, spiritual, mystical, etc. by the subjects that have them. This study considers experiences to be behavioural events (with a range of different possibilities) in which the people establish their own psychological attributional association. At the same time, these experiences fall within the consciousness of the subjects although subconscious (or unconscious) associations might be at work once the experiences enter the deeming process. For this reason the study views behavioural events as experiences *of something* (which is related to transitive consciousness) that people try to describe in an ascriptive or attributional way. This study takes the approach of the attribution theory in order to understand roles and the deeming of experiences in 3HO. It follows the recent insight into researching *experiences deemed religious* that has been developed by Ann Taves (2009), whose base on *attributional theory* made the researcher conceive an ascription as “the assignment of a quality or characteristics to some thing” and an attribution as “the common-sense causal explanations that people offer for why things happen as they do” (p. 281). This way of deeming something special, spiritual or religious can be portrayed like this:

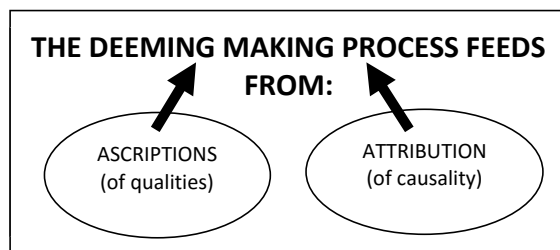


Table1: The Feeding of the Deeming Making Process

In order to proceed with this study, the experiences addressed in this work are basically of two types: the first type (or macro level) is concerned with the formal idea of ‘experience(s)’ with a prescriptive characteristic that were shaped by the founder of the movement (which eventually came to constitute a ‘vision’ or a ‘precept’ within the movement). In this sense I would also speak about Yogi Bhanan as the “first attributor” due to his own process of deeming his experiences and therefore setting a criterion for

3HO. The second type of experience that this study considers is the individual (or micro level) sensory-based experiences that followers of this movement have. Properly speaking, these members are the “attributors” of their own experiences. The general aim of studying these experiences is to enable an inter-subjective understanding of how these two levels of the experiential are integrated in 3HO so we can see a) the role of experience (to distinguish the experiential from being ancillary or central to the path of 3HO) and b) the deeming process of 3HO members shaping the idea of experience.

Experience is presumably the key or common element that pervades all aspects of making 3HO². The constituent parts or 3HO’s realms of thought were shaped by Yogi Bhanjan through the combination of three composite formations: Kundalini yoga, Sikhism and the New Age³. All of these three parts of the movement seem to include the dimension of experience. This research will progressively address these three constituents as a strategy to access the movement’s prescriptive (formal) view of the experiences that they have or should have in their path/practice. This points the research towards the identification of the relationship between these three formations and (their) experience *with* an integrated notion (role) of experience. As we find the specification of the attributions and ascriptions regarding experience by Yogi Bhanjan, we can gain insight into the view of experience that is handled by his followers in order to recognize the set of attributions that followers eventually apply to *their* experiences later on.

The criteria of Ann Taves, who based her work on Bennet and Hacker’s idea of experience, set out to focus on “experience [as] perceiving in its various modalities and forms [such as] sensations and bodily feelings, moods and emotions and other things”. This approach gives this study a base to understand how this raw material, including psychological symptoms and feelings, can become *spiritual* notions through the deeming process (Taves, 2009, p. 58). In other words, as the psychologists Bennet and Hacker wrote, experience is what “a person may have, enjoy or undergo, including activities and adventures” (p. 265) The attribution theory is suited to studying the experiential phenomenon inasmuch as it can be applied very well to experiences that are often non-verbal, sensory and which take place in the context of physical processes like performing yoga, breathing exercises, Kundalini yoga sets, meditations and the like.

The central hypothesis of this study is two-fold: on one hand I suggest that, for 3HO members of the movement, experience is a core formal and prescriptive aim. On the other hand the experiences that the members of 3HO have, which are understood as behavioural events, are presumably the central concern of their practice and would explain why they are part of 3HO. Altogether I can argue that the idea they have of

² Ninian Smart in *Choosing a Faith* (1996, p.16-21) formulated the importance of a balanced interpretation of a religion or religious phenomena. Experiential dimension is one aspect to account in which he recognized that the religious phenomena have another six dimensions such as: Doctrinal, Mythological, Ethical, Ritual, Institutional, and Material, besides the Experiential. This study does not reduce the movement to its Experiential dimension, but embraces the interaction of several dimensions with the dimension of experience.

³ According to Ann Taves a composite formation is when several “composite ascriptions plus the beliefs and practices associated with it” come together (2009, p. 281)

experience might build up a distinctive attitude in 3HO members in relation to the movement, their practice and the teaching of Yogi Bhanjan. In other words, investigating the formal (macro level) aspect of experience(s) will provide the perspective to approach the research question, *what is the role of experience in the three-fold realm of thought in 3HO?* The aim is to use this question to understand the philosophy in relation to experience and how it applies to the three-fold realms of thought mentioned above.

In doing so this research will answer the question by first identifying the macro level of 3HO as a complex composite formation that combines the three other formations mentioned above (Kundalini yoga, Sikhism and the New Age). Bearing this in mind I look at the lectures left behind by the founder of the movement. This approach will also give a good grasp of the worldview held by the movement. In facing this question the development of this study will be led to investigate the personal experiences that followers of Yogi Bhanjan/3HO have (micro level). These members might or might not interpret the experiences they have according to the notions of experience provided by Yogi Bhanjan, which gives rise to the second research question: *How do 3HO members attribute the experiences they have?*

The subsequent section looks at the micro level of encounters with individuals through field research. In this part the study also uses the approach of *attributional analysis* (from *attributional theory*), adding strategic support to approach the interviews and data drawn from *Qualitative Psychology* (Smith ed. 2008) and some of its methods, which are referred to as *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (2009, Smith). These are applied as an ancillary approach to the attributional method in its interactive conversational sense of researching people's experiences and how they have deemed them. To understand the experiences of the members I have focused on members who have made a deeper commitment and been trained as Kundalini Yoga teachers (to become "Aquarian Teachers"), the main agents of the organisation's educational arm. Studying their lived experiences is not concerned with trying to know the experiences in themselves (if they are authentic or not), but rather how the people relate to and shape the experiences *they say* they have. In this aspect of the research participant observation and fieldwork methods must be used to contact the members of 3HO and get their views of their experiences. In this part the research demands a further examination of the fieldwork and interviews conducted among 3HO members⁴.

Attributional theory guides the study all the way to establish the "interaction and relative importance of top-down (cultural sensitive) and bottom-up (cultural insensitive) processing in relation to particular experiences" (Taves 2009, p. 93). Needless to say the attributional approach "does not need to agree that subjects *actually had* an immediate apprehension of the Absolute, [and] researchers do need to provide a plausible explanation of why subjects felt *as if* they did" (p. 93)

This approach leads the study along a discovery-oriented path to find the roles and deeming of experiences in 3HO and it might also provide a theory-testing case. The

⁴ This fieldwork started in 2006 and it took place in the world's biggest yearly gathering of 3HO, at the European Yoga Festival in France.

distinctiveness of 3HO experience (formal) might or might not be at (the subconscious) base of experiences (behavioural events), and if this is so I want to discover how they arise. The case of Healthy, Happy and Holy Organization is one of these movements that not only grew steadily under the impulse of a charismatic leader, but also has many characteristics that induce me to think that the philosophical vision has built up a worldview based on experience.

The way to study the experiences of 3HO in which the macro level (3HO as composite formation) and micro level (individuals encountered in their field) of research complement each other is peculiar to social psychology within which the attributional approach is applied. This approach has recently found a fresh application within Anglo-American faculties of Religious Studies. Ann Taves (2009), who inspired the approach of my study, formulated the problem in the following terms,

“... we should disaggregate the concept of “religious experience” and study the wide range of experiences to which religious significance has been attributed. If we want to understand how anything at all, including experience, *becomes* religious, we need to turn our attention to the process whereby people sometimes ascribe the special characteristics to things that we (as scholars) associate with terms such as “religious”, “magical”, “mystical”, “spiritual”, etc. (p. 8) ... The various ways in which people singularize things and under some circumstances incorporate them into more elaborated formations give researchers many options when setting up an object of study” (p. 49).

1. 2 An overview of the 3HO⁵

Yogi Bhan officially founded Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization in the summer of July 1969 and started teaching in the East-West Center in Los Angeles, USA. There he gave one his first lectures where he sketched the nature and delimitations of his mission. He then stated that,

“Each person must deeply understand why he is a human being and what it means to be a human being. There is a lot of talk and philosophy about this, but remember that intellectual knowledge does not hold and sustain you. Knowledge only becomes real wisdom when you *experience* it with your heart and your own Being. Once you have seen the joy of being a Human Being and have enjoyed the beauty of it, this is an *experience of wisdom*. You have the right to be Healthy. You have the right to be Happy. *You have the right to be Holy. It is your birthright!*” (Yogi Bhan, in Singh Khalsa 1995, p.5, italics in the original)

⁵ The following account is based on the fieldwork discussions at the European Yoga Festivals (2006, 2010, 2011), the official resolution of the House of Representatives of USA Congress (See footnote 12) and on the 3HO official historical book “History of Sikh Dharma of the Western Union”, Ed. Guruteg Singh Khalsa. Sikh Dharma Publications. Española 1995.

This early statement from Yogi Bhajan shows that understanding human nature is taken as teleology, as an end in itself, and according to him this cannot be achieved by means of intellectual exercise. Here he initially highlighted that not only knowledge but ultimately wisdom is the sought-after outcome *attributed* to experience.

The experience is connected to the practice. From the very beginning of 3HO, Yogi Bhajan presented Kundalini yoga not as a religion that demanded belief, rituals or dogmas; rather his understanding was that “religions come out of it” and that Kundalini yoga was “a practice of experience of a person’s own excellence which is dormant and which is awakened” (Bhajan 2003, p. 122). For him the human interior is considered as having a spiritual potential, which is activated by means of actions (practices of Kundalini yoga, meditation and mantras) that serve that aim. This approach made Kundalini Yoga the primal and fundamental tool to stimulate and “give experiences” and therefore spread this message.

Soon, manuals and cassette recordings became available for newcomers to start practicing. During 1969 3HO grew and was able to apply for the legal status of a tax-exempt educational organization, and an increasing amount of people felt attracted to learn *through experience*, as 3HO presented its path to knowledge (Dusenbery, 1990 p. 344). The organization started to grow and so did the group. At the same time, Yogi Bhajan’s students started to become more interested in his background religion and his appearance with his long beard and turban, and this brought more explicit attraction to the Sikh tradition. Perhaps in the beginning Yogi Bhajan was not so interested in teaching Sikhism, but this changed in the first few years of the movement. It is important to note that Yogi Bhajan was a Khalsa Sikh, which can surely be considered the most important order within Sikhism or even the main form of orthodox of Sikhism.

It is worth noticing that the different logics at the experiential base (the one of the Yogis and the one of the Sikhs), and the distinctive methods that concerned and differentiated them, were explained by Yogi Bhajan and later on made official by 3HO. According to him and the official history of 3HO, these two traditions, yoga and Sikhism, met on many occasions during the historical lives of the first Sikh Gurus (16th–18th Centuries), due to 1) the relationship of Guru Nanak and his son the yogi Baba Siri Chand, who later became the leader of the yogic sect of the Udasis and 2) in the relationship between the fourth Guru Guru Ramdas with Baba Siri Chand, in which the later granted the former the recognition in both the spiritual and yogic senses. In many artistic representations, as well as the lineages as explained by Yogi Bhajan, the Sikh Gurus are present through Baba Siri Chand, the yogi and son of the founder of Sikhism. Yogi Bhajan’s interpretation of the contact between the Sikh lineage and the yogic background represented by Baba Siri Chand is at the root of the origin of 3HO and at the core of the members’ belief system.

Yogi Bhajan gradually started to introduce more principles of the Sikh faith to his students in 3HO, and the organization soon began a more complex syncretic process of extending the Sikh frameworks to Kundalini yoga and vice versa. However, 3HO is not only a combination of the tradition of yoga and the Sikh lore in a special fashion, it is

also an expression of the New Age influence that was expressed in Yogi Bhanjan's lectures already at the end of the 1960s. As more recent research in this century has shown, soon after the organization was created it also adopted some concepts and beliefs belonging to new thought while it embraced yoga and Sikhism (Elsberg 2001, 73). Students of 3HO learned these traditions as they were presented as a unity in the person of Yogi Bhanjan, and the New Age provided the circumstantial sense of mission embodied in the shift from the old Piscean Age to the new Aquarian Age. With this frame of the New Age, as we will see later, yoga and Sikhism were deemed suitable for the times and the complex formation of these teachings had a consistent appeal to the masses of young people.

A clear sign of consolidation is present at the beginning of the 1970s when Yogi Bhanjan, who was not only the leader but also the Master of Kundalini Yoga, led a group of 84 students to Amritsar in India. According to Yogi Bhanjan, on this occasion the president of the governing body of Sikh Temples in India gave Yogi Bhanjan the title *Siri Singh Sahib*. This was presented as a great honour in the Sikh culture, although some controversies are attached, as we will see in the next chapter. According to earlier scholarship, he became the first person outside India to be granted that religious recognition (Melton 1992, 280). This title corresponds to the chief religious and administrative authority for Sikhism in the Western Hemisphere. Subsequently the Sikh seat of religious authority given to Yogi Bhanjan gave him the possibility to create a strong Sikh ministry in the West. This event consolidated the position of Sikhism and its conceptual inflow as a pillar of 3HO.

At this time the Sikh tendency in 3HO was made official by the legal incorporation of "Sikh Dharma", and it was recognized as a tax-exempt religious organization by the United States (State of California, 1971). The name was strategically chosen to reflect the religious aspect of 3HO as a "dharma", which they deem as a form of *spirituality* in order to disaggregate the new movement from religion and religious connotations. Soon afterwards Sikh Dharma was publicly referred to as the "Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere", creating a distinctive identity regarding both religious considerations and the possible influences of Punjabi culture on Sikhism. Yogi Bhanjan became the unique and official leader of Sikh Dharma and its central and highest figure, the Siri Singh Sahib.

"Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere" was Yogi Bhanjan's new domain, and although it was a separate organization from 3HO they shared the same principles. According to the heads of Sikh Dharma, their primary mission was to,

"... Preserve, organize and continue to share the teachings of the Sikh Gurus as described by the late Siri Singh Sahib in his unique style. His way of talking and teaching about the path of the Sikh has, for the first time in history, made the Sikh faith accessible to people from every background, language, and culture of the world⁶.

⁶ See more in the official web page Sikh Dharma <http://www.sikhdharma.org/>

Sikh Dharma is predominantly influenced by the ascription and attributions of Yogi Bhajan in his “unique style” and “way of talking”; his way of leading produced the main characteristics that distinguish Sikh Dharma from the rest of Sikhism. It cannot be ignored that most of the members of Sikh Dharma were Yogi Bhajan’s American students who, with their non-Indian origins, formed the base of the cultural differences (Melton, 1992, p. 281). One important significance of this historical consolidation of Yogi Bhajan as the Siri Singh Sahib is that the earlier Kundalini yogis of 3HO eagerly adopted the Khalsa Sikh beliefs and outlook, and the first students shifted from a hippy style to embrace Sikhism. They then progressed to the very formal Khalsa Sikh apparel (known as *Bana*) with full white attire, turbans, long unshaved hair, and other distinctive Sikh symbols, etc.

This interesting route, which ran somewhat parallel to 3HO’s main secular intended profile, expanded the organization and aligned its members with the Sikh tradition, although members continued to consider themselves yogis as well as Sikhs. At this time most of the 3HO Ashrams across the USA became *Gurdwaras* (Sikh shrines), where the reading of the sacred Sikh scriptures, the performing of Sikh vows, and the “baptismal ceremony” or *Amrit Pahul* (requisite to become Khalsa Sikh) and other Sikh services started to take place. The first 3HO Ashram in Los Angeles, the “Guru Ram Das Ashram”, became the first American Sikh Gurdwara in November 1972.

In a parallel development, in February 1972, the *Kundalini Research Institute* was founded to “safeguard the purity, integrity and accuracy of the Teachings of Yogi Bhajan”⁷. Regarding the source of these teachings and practices, Yogi Bhajan had this to say:

“Men of great knowledge actually found out about the chakras – their workings, their petals, their sounds, their infinity, their co-relationship, their powers. They found that the life of a human is totally based on these chakras. This total science gave birth to Kundalini Yoga”. (Bhajan, 2003, p. 183)

For Yogi Bhajan the chakras in the human body, understood by him as “energy centres” within the body, became the special discovery that generated what he called the “science of Kundalini Yoga”. Probably based on this “science”, as he deemed it, he began his project to create “3HO Super-Health” in 1973, which evolved into a notorious drug rehabilitation programme that combined this sort of ancient yogic knowledge and “yogic science” with the modern knowledge of medical science of the West.

In the first five years the organization expanded geographically and their activities became more known among scholars and fieldworkers. In 1974 the First European Yoga Festival was organized by 3HO and took place in France (in the Château La Cloutiere, near the town of Loches), and France has served as the main annual meeting point for 3HO Europe ever since. This Festival was inspired by the model of the bi-annual meetings at the summer and winter solstices which were celebrated in the U.S.A, where

⁷ See more in the official web page of Kundalini Research Institute
<http://www.kriteachings.org/about.htm>

Kundalini Yoga, White Tantric Yoga and different workshops brought 3HO members together, creating a wider sense of community and a social network. This atmosphere provides the environment for many sorts of behavioural events or experiences and, as a participant observer might say, based on the French Sociologist Emile Durkheim, these gatherings palpitate a “religious force” of what he called *effervescence*. The 3HO European Yoga Festival grew steadily from a couple of hundred to over a thousand people, all led by Yogi Bhajan’s personality, teachings and movement. By way of example, my fieldwork in France has shown evidence of the increase in participants, from 1350 in 2006 to 2222 in 2010 and 2666 in 2011.

Back in 1975, however, the journal *Communities* in USA published an article that portrayed the goals of 3HO as,

“a growth-enhancing milieu directed towards at least four levels: a healthy body through yoga, diet and hygiene; a healthy happy mind through meditation, Sikh Dharma ... and group support; healthy happy interpersonal relations through group consciousness and group activities; and a spiritual-oriented attitude of gratitude, a realization of the oneness we all share” (Comeau and Singh 1975, 41, in Elsberg, 2003 p.xv).

This definition of 3HO members portrays the cluster of elements that constitute 3HO, some of the attributions they chose and the interplay of traditional and contemporary ways to perceive, practice and experience life meaningfully.

In the 1976 Yogi Bhajan inaugurated the first Women’s Camp in Espanola to teach women the concepts and knowledge required for facing the New Age. With this specific horizon in mind, it was claimed that “the ultimate aim is to build a purifying woman. A woman should not only be pure, but her presence should cause purification” (Singh Khalsa 1995, p. 111).

1979 was the 10th Anniversary of 3HO and a special event was celebrated in the Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles under the name “Ten years serving people”. In that decade 3HO was already consolidated in its formal aspects, and Yogi Bhajan and his students found new ways of “delivering the teachings and the experience”. Yogi Bhajan and 3HO began to gain fame and wherever he travelled his staff, including doctors, secretaries and different people in the movement, recorded his lectures and registered the events around him. On these trips he strived to represent the values of Healthy, Happy and Holy and the principles of the Aquarian Age by being a living example of the teachings, and he met different religious and political leaders such as Pope John Paul II, the Dalai Lama, the president of the former Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, presidents of the USA Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and two Archbishops of Canterbury.

After this period an important decision was taken for the second decade of 3HO and the headquarters of 3HO/Sikh Dharma moved from California to New Mexico. In Europe, in the meantime, it was reported that among all participants there were 60 teachers at the Yoga Festival of France in 1980 (Singh Khalsa, Guru Tej. 1995, 144).

In June 1985 Yogi Bajan established the first “International Peace Prayer Day Celebrations” in New Mexico. That was the time of the highest tension of the Cold War and the imminence of a nuclear war was an everyday fear. Moreover, the assassination of the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, in October 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards shook the Sikh communities all across the world. 2,000 people gathered at this first celebration of “International Peace Prayer Day” in June 1985.

During this period of expansion and increasing notoriety 3HO faced an unexpected challenge when Yogi Bajan developed heart-related health problems. 1986 was the first time that he was not able to lead the White Tantric Workshop at the Summer Solstice celebration in New Mexico, and his general health would not allow him to travel as much as before. Since 1986 this White tantric Yoga course has used videotapes of Yogi Bajan and has been called “Relax and Renew”. Students of 3HO were “slow in embracing this new format” (Singh Khalsa, Guru Tej 1995, p. 158)

In 1986 Sikh Dharma created a European institutional arm, the *European Khalsa Council*, which deals with different tasks concerning the Sikh faith as well as some aspects of both 3HO, the European Yoga Festival and the Sikh Dharma in Europe. Two years later, on the other side of the Atlantic, Sikh Dharma reported that there were 139 Ashrams in the United States and 11 in Canada (Melton 1992, p. 282).

At the beginning of the 1990s, 3HO started to get ready for the dawn of what they call the “Age of Aquarius”. Already at the beginning, as yogis and then also as Sikhs, they integrated their status and projected their identity in association with the other pillar of 3HO, the New Age ideas. In other words, living in the epoch of the Aquarian Age meant that it was deemed necessary to embrace certain types of qualities due to the challenges of the coming New Age of Aquarius. Yogi Bajan conveyed that the virtues of the Khalsa Sikh way of life embodied the values to face these new times (Elsberg. p. 77). This Age refers to the New Age perspective that, according to Yogi Bajan, a time of transition began on 11 November 1991 and ended on 11 November 2012 (Bhajan, 1998, p. 39). Inspired by these cosmic events Yogi Bajan rephrased the principles taught to the 3HO community in a synthesized way when saying,

“The Age of Aquarius has set in. The rulership of the Lord of this age is the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. The Siri Guru Granth Sahib is the Guru of this Aquarian Age because it teaches subtlety” (Singh Khalsa, Guru Tej 1995, p. 172).

In this way the Sikh scripture, which is considered the eternal embodiment of the Sikh Guru by the larger Sikh community worldwide, reaches out to the realm of the Aquarian Age to become what I would see as a sort of patron of the Age (“is Guru of the Aquarian Age”).

Like Kundalini Yoga and the Sikh religion, New Age thought was also consolidated as a constituent part in the structure of 3HO. Yogi Bajan believed they were living in a special time that would herald the transformation of human consciousness. Apparently based on his knowledge of astrology, he underlined the importance of experience

(experience of the “subtlety”). He thought that in the forthcoming age the main human aim as explained in the “Aquarian motto” would be: “I know. I want to experience” (Bhajan 1998, p. 39). In other words, he sequentially sees knowledge as a sort of predecessor of experience.

In 1994 3HO had important achievements in gaining the status of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and as a private educational and scientific foundation. It was officially acknowledged for its activities, acquiring a consultant status in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. The 3HO *International Kundalini Yoga Association* (IKYTA) was also formed that year. For the leader of 3HO the role of the teachers was crucial:

“The days when we said, ‘Go out to so-and-so place and teach’ are over. We must now have a standardized course for the common man. We must produce an undying Truth for the future. We are the pioneers. We must produce teachers who can teach. It must stand in a court of law. There must be a written exam, files kept on each student, and graduations. In a court of law this documentation is necessary. We will be tested in the court of law. Me, I am a Yogi, and can stand, but nobody will let you be free.” (April 1996)⁸

Naturally the standardization of the techniques and their philosophical side was the next step in the process of the development of 3HO. By the beginning of 2000 several Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training programs had been launched in the majority of the Western countries, allowing the functioning and growth of the organization. Standardization and commitment to the teaching of Yogi Bhajan and the disciplined organization of the various new Kundalini Yoga National Associations around the world made it possible for 3HO to reach and offer Kundalini Yoga in different cities across Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia⁹.

During that time Yogi Bhajan’s health took a turn for the worse, and for the last period of his life he was under constant medical observation and some of the time connected to a respirator. He was seldom available for the activities of 3HO and his students, and on the rare occasions he did give a lecture it was with great difficulty. One example of him in this condition has been published online in a film showing him holding the “Jajji Course” in 2003¹⁰. In October 2004 after years of failing health, he suffered heart failure and passed away among his family members and some of his closest circle of students.

⁸ See more in the official web page of 3HO International Kundalini Yoga Association <http://www.kundaliniyoga.com/>

⁹ Centres of Kundalini Yoga and 3HO are in North and South America: Canada, USA, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Colombia, Trinidad Tobago, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Chile. In Europe: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom. In Africa: Ghana, South Africa. In the Middle East: Israel, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey. In Oceania: Australia, New Zealand. In Asia: China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, Russia, Taiwan, Singapore.

¹⁰ This is available on-line and can be found at www.youtube.com under the title *Jajji Sahib - Lecture by Yogi Bhajan* -

Soon after Yogi Bhajan's death a public declaration about him and the movement was made an official "Congress Resolution" by the House of Representatives in the USA. This Resolution, which was published in January and April 2005, was a posthumous declaration about the founder and leader of 3HO. In the text Yogi Bhajan's life in the USA was honoured by the representatives of the 51 states of the country, and a brief account of the actions and achievements of 3HO was presented as well. The central lines of the resolution speak of the ways and life of Yogi Bhajan and the contributions of 3HO. It also,

"(Re)cognizes that the teachings of Yogi Bhajan about Sikhism and yoga, and the businesses formed under his inspiration, improved the personal, political, spiritual, and professional relations between citizens of the United States and the citizens of India;

"(Re)cognizes the legendary compassion, wisdom, kindness, and courage of Yogi Bhajan, and his wealth of accomplishments on behalf of the Sikh community; and

"(E)xtends its condolences to Inderjit Kaur, the wife of Yogi Bhajan, his three children and five grandchildren, and to Sikh and 3HO communities around the nation and the world upon the death on 6 October 6 2004, of Yogi Bhajan, an individual who was a wise teacher and mentor, an outstanding pioneer, a champion of peace, and a compassionate human being."¹¹

This is quoted here not to show how 3HO and particularly its founder are addressed as contributors to the American society, but because the features presented are relevant for understanding 3HO in the perception of it being a Sikh religious form and Yogi Bhajan a Sikh leader¹². Additionally, in the Resolution's lines, I found a hint that inspires one of the central concerns for my research: a perspective why the experiential dimension of Yogi Bhajan's teachings and practices was acknowledged in this public declaration, since the authors wrote that Yogi Bhajan,

"Recognized immediately that the *experience of higher consciousness* that many young people were attempting to find through drugs could be

¹¹ See the complete resolution of the House of Representatives of the USA, 109th Congress of Resolution Honoring Yogi Bhajan, April 6, 2005.

<http://ftp.resource.org/gpo.gov/bills/109/hc34rds.txt.pdf>

¹² Additionally it can be said that at the end of the 1970s, according to some scholars, the movement was "one of those religious groups that have shown how gracefully their spiritual calling can be broadened towards social responsibility" (Theodore Roszak, 1978 p. 53), or like Michael York, who later wrote in his study of the New Age, *Emerging Network* (1995), that 3HO was not only concerned with a spiritual view as he stressed "their commitment to social service as well" (p.55). At any rate, our quest is neither to highlight nor promote the movement's achievements, rather to present some of the characteristics that have shaped the outsider view about 3HO and how this leads to the role of experience(s) and the attributions made about them being addressed.

alternatively achieved through Kundalini Yoga” (Congress Resolution p. 2 my italics).

This statement considers the phenomenon of the experiential quest as a significant driver of the American youth in the 1970s and 1980s. What is here seen as “many young people [who] were attempting to find...” is what we call the “disposition of the attributors” to experience something. According to the declaration, Yogi Bhanjan was able to recognize this search for experience. The declaration of the Congress also refers to and assumes that the “experience of higher consciousness” was linked to “Kundalini Yoga” and it “could be alternatively achieved through” it. The recognition of something as an “experience of higher consciousness” involves them being “deemed experiences of higher consciousness” by those who know them or have them. What is there to know *about* the experience in the teachings of 3HO and experiences “achieved through” the practices transmitted by Yogi Bhanjan? And how are his followers nowadays deeming their experiences? In other words how are they attributing causalities and ascribing qualities when they have *these* experiences? As far as this study is concerned, the House of Representative of the USA provided an evocative statement that motivated my investigation within a movement in which the experiential dimension is formulated and publically noticed and acknowledged. This dimension of the movement has not been studied before, even though it has been formally addressed by the USA congress.

Finally, Yogi Bhanjan’s demise created great tension regarding the leadership and management of the different companies he had created and given to a few chosen members of 3HO to manage. Several lawsuits took place in US after the leaders of corporations that sustain the 3HO different departments decided to stop financing them and rather change the goal of the companies¹³. These lawsuits have not necessarily affected the stability of 3HO as an educative organization that runs Kundalini Yoga courses and trainings. The crisis initially and mainly affected the first generation of 3HO members who grew and developed their careers as business people in the movement in any of the related companies. It has also affected the staff that 3HO has for keeping the Kundalini Research Institute, the International Kundalini Yoga Teachers Association and other departments running their projects and programmes. These lawsuits also affected Yogi Bhanjan’s widow, who has decided to exercise her rights regarding the companies owned and led by her husband. According to Jackbosh (2008), after 2004 3HO has gone through a “vacuum in leadership, leading to anarchy or apathy, something that appears to have started soon after Bhanjan’s death” (p. 388). But this does not appear to be identical worldwide, as a different picture is seen in Europe. The 3HO Europe community has maintained a steady growth in their yearly gathering in France. This is why in 2012 3HO Europe could afford to buy land and a Château in the south of the country so that all the main activities would have a place all year round, especially

¹³ “The Unto Infinity Board” was Yogi Bhanjan’s appointed group of people that managed the corporations created by him. These businesses (“Yogi Tea” being the most famous) had the task to produce resources and profit to support the non-profit activities (3HO itself, among other departments like Kundalini Research Institute, etc.). In the last years, profit and non-profit organizations were involved in a legal dispute that led to the conformation of a new board that embodies the original idea of profitable concerns supporting the non-profitable organizations. The members of the “Unto Infinity Board” were ordered to return more than \$36 million for wrongful ownership.

the summit meeting of the European Yoga Festival. This place was named “Château Ananda” and is now being renovated so that it can receive up to seven hundred visitors from 2015 onwards.



Table 2: Organization chart. A year before he passed away Yogi Bhajan created *Unto Infinity Board* (UIB). When the law suits came over the patrimony of this corporation and the UIB was dissolved, the *Siri Singh Sahib Corporation* (SSSC) was created and elected from the Western Sikhs. The SSSC has 15 members who have the final word on the profits of the companies (Yogi Tea, Akal Security, Golden Temple Oregon Food Company among others). The Non-profit like *3HO* is responsible for the larger events in the USA, the Summer Solstice and Winter Solstice, the *International Kundalini Yoga Teacher Association* (IKYTA) and the *Ethics Committee*. The *Kundalini Research Institute* (KRI) is in charge of the *Kundalini Yoga Teacher Trainings* (Level 1, 2 and 3), The Library of Teachings (online), book copyrights and translations. KRI franchises the Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training courses in 52 countries and 3500 new teachers of Kundalini Yoga get trained every year. The *National or Local Kundalini Yoga Teachers Associations* (National KYTAs) are semi-independent, but they have to be approved by KRI (their membership increases every year, for example the German association, 3HO Germany, has 2000 members). *3HO Europe*, is under the SSSC, and is responsible for the European Yoga Festival, the Ashram in Den Tex Str. in Amsterdam, Château Ananda in France and the Land Project La Fontaine. The *Khalsa Council* is an international organization that has a counselling role towards the SSSC. *3HO* and *Sikh Dharma* (SD) are members of the UN as NGO's.

2. Previous studies of 3HO

The first scholarly approaches to 3HO were conducted by a number of ethnographers who studied the organization as a new American movement. Of these first approaches, Alan Tobey's (1977) drew information from his field study and observed that "3HO was created on American soil out of American and Indian elements" (p. 7). However, as he considered it, 3HO's ideology had a strong pull towards New Age influences since it was "more important for a member of 3HO to be in harmony with the new order than to be in conflict with an order that will pass away" (p. 28), as he wrote nearly forty years ago. Furthermore, Tobey described in his study the initial growth of this group, addressing some of the multifaceted aspects constituting the organization and their characteristic activities at the Summer Solstice in the USA (p. 7). It was too early to consider explaining 3HO's international growth, however, so the movement was fundamentally seen as a local (American) one inserted into a wider context with counter-culture and hippy features mixed in with exotic teachings brought to America by an Indian yogi.

In a similar fashion, J. Gordon Melton looked at the growing atmosphere of the new movements in the *Encyclopaedia of American Religion* (1978), in which he considered 3HO closer to a Sikh phenomenon, seeing it as the "educational arm of Sikh Dharma" (p. 388). This is an important view that portrayed the activity of 3HO and its founder as educators and promoters of Yogi Bhajan's new teaching. This understanding of 3HO as an "arm" of Sikh Dharma became a common view for many scholars after Gordon, but in a later work this author (*Encyclopaedic Handbook of Cults in America*, 1992) believed that 3HO brought a "new element" to the community of Punjabi Sikhs in America, feeling that it aimed at educating Americans who agreed to be led by "a Sikh teacher newly arrived from India prepared to teach the faith to all" (p. 280). In the early days of 3HO scholarship, the academic perspective on the Sikh constituent of 3HO was attributed more strength as a determining aspect or core philosophy of the movement. An example of this is how later on, even in the field of scholarship on yoga, George Feuerstein in *The Yoga Traditions* (2002) reworded this idea, showing 3HO as a "revival of Sikhism" (p. 448).

Not all scholars who were studying 3HO were entirely in agreement with these perspectives, however. A viewpoint contrary to the scholars inclined to the frame of Sikhism is presented by Harvey Cox in his book *Turning East* (1979), where he wrote that in 3HO the "practices and ideas bore only the faintest resemblance to the Sikh teachings" and that the meanings they gave to the Sikh practice was a mixture of "astral metaphysics and esoteric lore" (p. 18). Cox concluded that "obviously, studying this group in terms of classical Sikhism would cause more confusion than clarification" (p. 18, 19). This would appear to be true.

During the first two decades of scholarship on 3HO, Kirpal Singh Khalsa (1986), who was at the time a member of the organization, conducted a study and published a paper examining the financial activities of 3HO and Divine Light Mission. His approach throughout was participant observation and it was conducted by tape-recorded interviews (p. 233). In his view he acknowledged 3HO's material development and compared the two decades of its existence (1970s and '80s), arriving at the conclusion

that the “long-haired flower children ... have now become turbaned Sikhs” (p. 234). His exploration of 3HO led him to highlight the newness of the group and that they “emphasize spiritual experience over ethics and doctrine” (p. 237). The emphasis that he deemed as “spiritual experience” was associated with the worldly success of 3HO:

“In the worlds (sic) of a regional director of 3HO foundation, “The more we feel that potency within ourselves, that fulfilment (a reference to Kundalini energy), the more we make” (p. 237)

The experience of the “energy” of the “kundalini” was, according to the reports of this author, linked to productivity in the world of business.

Nevertheless it is through the investigation of a specialist on Sikh Religion, W. H McLeod, that 3HO is fully examined from the scholarly perspective of Sikh studies. In his essay *Who is a Sikh?* (1989), McLeod avoids the term “New” and sees 3HO as a “recent movement” within the Sikh tradition, and also as an “educational branch of Sikh Dharma” (as Gordon did), (p. 118). McLeod presented a movement that had a sort of subordination to Sikh Dharma, although he recognized that the association between 3HO and Sikhism is substantive. That understanding leads McLeod to highlight the tension between Sikh ideals and Yoga practices, in which he displayed the yoga practice as a marginal element in accordance with the perspective of historical Sikhism (conceiving of the yogic aspect of 3HO as coming from the “Nath Yogis”). He wrote,

“Sikhs who come in contact with Sikh Dharma (Yogi Bhajan’s denomination for the Sikhs he has ordained in the West) are frequently perplexed by it, not knowing whether to embrace its followers as unusually devout or to avoid them as perversely unorthodox. To those nurtured on Guru Nanak’s conflict with the Nath yogis, Kundalini yoga seems distinctly suspicious and the enthusiasm of Yogi Bhajan’s youth makes them uneasy...” (p. 118).

In his approach to the Khalsa Sikhs (the orthodox form of Sikhs that originated with the last of the Sikh Gurus in 1708)¹⁴, McLeod showed the effort that the group made to follow the Khalsa code of conduct (known as *Rahit Maryana*). He stressed that this ethical aspect is strongly present in 3HO members and apparently even in a stronger manner compared to Punjabi Sikhs¹⁵.

It was at the beginning of the 1990s when Verne Dusenbery provided a more comprehensive observation of 3HO and Sikh Dharma. In his essay *Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs* (1990) he presented a view of the 3HO members as *gora* Sikhs (“white Sikhs”). The term *gora*, he explained, is a pejorative word that is apt to reveal the tensions between Punjabi Sikhs and the new Americans who have converted to the Sikh religion. His analysis incorporated more cultural reflection concerning Western and Eastern societies. Dusenbery’s study draws material from his field studies, where he

¹⁴ See more on Khalsa Sikhs in the section of Sikhism in the part II of this research.

¹⁵ “...the obedience of 3HO Sikhs to panthic ideals seems highly commendable and their loyalty to Khalsa observance appears to be beyond question” (W. McLeod. 1989. p. 119)

asserted that “the members of Sikh Dharma are the ... most numerous, visible and organized of the *gora* (white) Sikhs” (1990, p. 335) and that Punjabi Sikhs consider them “good Sikhs” rather than “non-Sikhs” (p. 348). In relation to Yogi Bhajan, he pointed out that the 3HO members are taught to observe strict discipline, obedience and respect for his “teachings” (1990, p. 350). He concluded that the 3HO *gora* Sikhs have positioned their orthodoxy successfully for the public, and he anticipated a potential encounter of the second generation with the Indian Punjabi influence (p. 354). In this work Dusenbery took a wider view of the movement, but he does not mention the other fundamental strands of 3HO such as Kundalini yoga or the central influence of the New Age ideas that are present in the constitution of the movement.

The preponderance of the Sikh element in the scholarship reached another specialist in Sikhism, W. Owen Cole (1999), who went further, preferring the nomination of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere as the proper denomination of the movement rather than 3HO. For this specialist on Sikhism, 3HO members have turned out to be serious Sikhs and he describes them as “converts to the Sikh religion” (p. 186), in a way downplaying the practice and ideas that are not necessarily all coming from Sikh lore.

It is worth noticing as a parenthesis that, with a few exceptions, the majority of the approaches to 3HO are within a perspective dominated by specialists in Sikhism or influenced by them. They have deemed 3HO in relation to its main perceived religious ideology and outlook, analysing 3HO from the angle of Sikh religion scholarship. These perspectives, from my point of view, lack the capacity to embrace the movement more widely and tend to force a view of the movement as an expression of (confusingly unorthodox, orthodox or ultraorthodox) Sikhism, which implies that the other constituent parts of the movement’s composition have been downplayed.

Evidently the strongest and most common views that scholars hold about the group is that 3HO is a part of the Sikh religion, which does not bring clarity to the understanding of the fundamental experience of their members and the practices of 3HO that are in many ways contrary to what many Punjabi Sikhs would think of as Sikh, so it can explain some of the controversy between 3HO/Sikh Dharma and Sikhs with a Punjabi background. The thesis installed in the scholarly debate at the end of the 1970s was concerned with the “dispute over whether this religious sect is [if it is] neo-Sikh or part of the mainstream tradition” of Sikhism, as Bruce LaBrack said in *Sikh Real and Sikh Ideal* (1979, p. 149). This thesis tended to become the main place to view 3HO from, and it imposed a narrow perspective on theorists. Nowadays the phenomenon has been shown to be more complex and westernized, and that owes more to the contemporary spiritual/religious atmosphere and interpretations of Yogi Bhajan than, perhaps, Sikh lore.

It was thirty years after 3HO was founded that the first study by Constance W. Elsberg (2003) was published. This work presented a more comprehensive and circumspect viewpoint to study 3HO. In her research historical and ethnographic elements combine to focus on the “growth of the organization” and specifically on the “experiences of women members” to see how their identities are shaped within the framework of the

organization “3HO/Sikh Dharma” (p.18). She noticed with clarity that 3HO “merges spiritual and physical practices, assuming that there are spiritual effects and identity alterations following from their choices... they gain an enriched world where sense, actions, thoughts and feelings entwine in new ways” (p. 84). As Elsberg accurately explained, 3HO is “a syncretic mix of Sikhism and yogi traditions and it also incorporates elements of New Age and counter culture thought” (p. xv). However, for Elsberg too, 3HO/Sikh Dharma is a “new form of Sikhism” which has rooted itself firmly in the Khalsa way of life (p. 6). In her analysis, however, she pointed out that 3HO/Sikh Dharma was “heading in the direction of a truly new religion [but] instead they chose affiliation with Amritsar and the Khalsa”. On the other hand she sees that 3HO particularly “remained *as a sister organization* [that] retained their distinctive enthusiasm for yoga and meditation” (p. 338, my italics).

To sum up, with Elsberg one can see the acknowledgement that connects the organization to the experiential level of “physical practices” with “spiritual effects” and how the 3HO people “gain an enriched world where sense, actions, thoughts and feelings entwine in new ways”. As for the status of 3HO, the category of “sister organization” given by Elsberg seems to imply at least three essential things; the parenthood of Yogi Bhajan, the institutional or family resemblance of 3HO and Sikh Dharma, and the integrated form of what I would call here a *syncretic movement*, with several cores and constituents but one shared and integrated philosophy, mission and leadership. It might be worth noting that Yogi Bhajan was not only a Sikh and a Yogi but also a charismatic leader of what was with no doubt a New Religious Movement. One must consider that the type of charisma, leadership, followers, teachings and the way he performed his religiosity had little in common with the culture and ethos of the Punjabi Sikh communities inside and outside India. 3HO can easily be considered a sister organization of the Sikh Dharma, and this becomes self-evident inasmuch as both were created by Yogi Bhajan and that they were composed by the same people that followed the same teachings, albeit with a different emphasis and degree of commitment to the type of Sikhism led by him.

Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2005) published a chapter on the subject of 3HO within a larger monographic work on the different expressions within the bigger frame of Sikh religion. This author, a Sikh woman born in England and raised by Punjabi parents, dedicated one chapter of her work to the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. For her, addressing 3HO and Sikh Dharma is challenging because an effort to make a “distinction becomes blurred” (p. 158). Her main objective is to compare 3HO with Sikh cultural origins and what she deemed as the “original teaching” in what could be considered a ‘religiocentric’ fashion. Similarly she dedicated some further lines to the founder of 3HO and considering that he,

“made claims of being bestowed with the title of Siri Singh Sahib ... [but] there is some ambiguity over whether the term *was* actually conferred by the SGPC”, the main Sikh religious authority in the world (p. 159, her italics)¹⁶.

¹⁶ Indeed she presented a part of an article from the New York Times, stating that the, “High Priest Gurucharan Singh Tohra, president of the management committee for northern India’s Sikh Temples [SGPC], confirms that his council has given ‘full approval’ to 3HO and recognizes the yogi as a preacher.

Takhar not only questioned Yogi Bhajan's authority as a Sikh minister, but also recognised and presented some of the main characteristics of 3HO (p. 166-167) to show how the movement is located in relation to mainstream Sikhism, concluding that,

“... although their core metaphysics are essentially those contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, it is the observable emphasis on the practice of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* and white *tantra* that deviates from Sikh teachings” (p. 168 her italics).

This concern of deviation was the main aspect considered by this author, because although the movement had some merit in her view, she did not practically mention or approach the New Age influences in 3HO. Their philosophy and especially the interpretation of Sikhism passed down by their Sikh members was her fundamental focus, as well as the way their charismatic leader presented Sikhism. All this together led her to consider that,

“One is tempted to question, therefore, whether it is *gurbāṇī* [the word of the gurus] that the *gorā* Sikhs turn to, or whether it is *gurbāṇī* as expressed through Yogi Bhajan that is the focus” (p. 175).

This distance between the Sikh mainstream tradition and 3HO is not a view that is only held by scholars with Sikh backgrounds. For example Eleanor Nesbitt, who is also a specialist in the Sikh religion, wrote in *Sikhism* (2005) that the aims of 3HO are “to clean the whole person, including the subconscious mind, of impurities in readiness for Entry into the Aquarian Age” (p.101): not all ideas presented by Yogi Bhajan and spread by 3HO members reflect in philosophy or language the Sikh belief or the conventional terms used in Sikhism. These approaches are indeed sensitive to 3HO views and need to be considered when studying the movement's Sikh profile.

Alongside the main academic orientation, which has mainly seen 3HO as a part of Sikhism or the Sikh phenomena, another strong approach to the movement has co-led the scholarly criterion to see 3HO as part of the phenomenon of New Religious Movements. These two points of view have been the two most dominant perspectives used to approach 3HO in the different faculties of anthropology, sociology, or religious studies, where scholars have adopted one or combined both of these views. This has meant that the outcome has sometimes been an unbalanced view of 3HO in relation to the three-fold realm of thought constituting the organization. This imbalance has established a predominant view that has downplayed the significance that the element of Kundalini yoga plays in the movement (briefly explained in rather Hindu terms in

Tohra, however, says that this does not mean that Bhajan is the Sikh leader of the Western Hemisphere, as he claims. The Sikhs do not create such offices. Nor, Tohra adds, has the committee given Bhajan the rarely bestowed title, *Siri Singh Sahib* (the equivalent of saying 'Sir' three times) which he uses” (Uberoir, 5 September 1977 “Yogi Bhajan's Synthetic Sikhism” p. 24, in Opinderjit 2005, p. 159, 160).

Takhar's work for example), plus the influence of New Age thought and Westerners' influences in shaping the 3HO members¹⁷.

Nearly forty years after Yogi Bhanan reached North America in 1968 the organization was studied in fieldwork in Europe. Thorsten Laue (2007) wrote his master's thesis in Germany, thereby conducting the first and possibly the only fieldwork in a European country, mainly among the 3HO German community and their members¹⁸. This research is (along with Takhar's) the only one that considered not only the general shape of 3HO but also some of its characteristics beyond North America. Laue voiced something that has affected the understanding of 3HO, which is that 3HO has inspired little interest in religious scientific research (p. 2) and that his focus was not on 3HO teaching but rather on Sikh Dharma and 3HO as it was operating and understood in Germany¹⁹. In his approach he pointed out that 3HO is a 'down to earth' movement, most likely due to Sikh tradition, which is very concerned about living and working in the world as a householder. Similarly he wrote that Sikhism and Sikh Dharma have very little ascetic features (p. 3) and that the development of the movement has shown that the yoga training had become more popular (highlighting yoga over the elements of Sikh Dharma) and that the Kundalini yogis were, compared to the Sikhs, an expanding element in 3HO despite the fact that they formed the "outer circle", as he called them. On the other hand, the people committed to the Sikh Dharma / Khalsa life style (referred to by him as the "inner circle") were decreasing in their influence and number. In his view of the membership he identified a "third circle" who were the people going to the Kundalini Yoga classes and other related events offered by 3HO (p. 45-46). Somewhat echoing the early work of Kirpal Singh Khalsa (1986), Laue addressed the fact that in 3HO the members have effectively combined different components of the movements (Sikh tradition, Tantric yoga, Kundalini Yoga and the New Age elements), which have additionally produced a vast source of commercial articles that have successfully developed a worldwide distribution network through the German online shop Sat Nam Versand.

Approaching another aspect, Laue did not think that 3HO should be studied within Tantric lore because, for him, Yogi Bhanan can be seen to be connected to the neo-tantra boom because, as he pointed out, the founder of the movement was a *path opener* for the neo-tantra-boom and he made White Tantric Yoga and Kundalini Yoga his denominations, claiming that he was the "Mahan Tantric of his time" (p. 1). For this reason, and because neo-tantra arose in the late 1970s in North America and in western Europe in a different form from the Indian systems, the definitions of Tantrism from

¹⁷ In the Part II of this study, I will present further arguments that address how yoga is one of the three pillars of the movement and how yoga practice (Kundalini Yoga) is possibly the main common platform that sustains individual practice as well as the collective practices in 3HO gatherings. The yogic strand has practically never been considered relevant enough by scholars (see the early anthropologists or sociologists, with the exception of C. Elsberg) who do not address the yogic constituent of the movement well enough. In Part III of this study I will address some of the cultural characteristics that 3HO displays in Europe.

¹⁸ This thesis was written in 2003, reviewed and amended in 2006 due to publication in 2007 (Preface)

¹⁹ As the base for his studies, the main part of picturing and referencing 3HO Germany is based on the review of all their books, CD's, cassette tapes, videos, and magazines of the organization in Hamburg.

other religious sources are purposely excluded from Laue's study because, according to him, Tantrism explained by Yogi Bhajan is finally neither Hindu tantrism nor neotantrism (p. 15). In Laue's quotation about Kundalini Yoga he quoted Yogi Bhajan's lesson where he says that, "in Kundalini Yoga experience is the most important. Your experience goes directly into your heart..." (p. 30).

In another sense, and contrary to Takhar, Laue commented that the US congress valued 3HO's leader because, as a "philanthropist", he was an example to his fellow men (p. 44). He agreed with her, however, when he considered that many Punjabi-Sikhs pull back from 3HO due to its yoga's non-orthodox connection with "Hinduism". Laue referred to the famous Sikh scholar, Trilochan Singh, who called the synthesis of Sikhism and tantrism an 'outrageous mingle-mangle' and considered Yogi Bhajan's practices forbidden and immoral (p. 45)²⁰.

According to Laue, among the 3HO members in Germany the main characteristic of 3HO life was Kundalini Yoga, whereas Sikh Dharma membership was stagnant. He also reported that the professional associations of Kundalini yoga teachers were increasing and that the yoga teachers did not need to convert to Sikh Dharma (p. 27-29). In an effort to link the North American expression of 3HO with the European/German expression, Laue commented that in the USA Sikh Dharma played a larger role than it did in Germany, and he pointed out that in North America almost every Kundalini Yoga teacher is also member of the Khalsa. Nonetheless, he underlined that this characterisation of the USA changed in the second edition of his text because, according to him, the situation was valid for 2003 but no longer for 2006. According to Laue, in the 3HO community in the USA some changes in this respect happened rapidly, and he argued that the tendency on the other side of the Atlantic was becoming more similar to the one in Germany²¹ (p. 46).

The claim about the insufficiency of research into 3HO pointed out by Laue has another voice in the work of Doris Jackbosh (2008). One of her main objectives was to bring attention to the little amount of work that scholars have done on 3HO. According to her, "little scholarly work has been done on this group [and] it is noteworthy that the organization ... is largely ignored" (p. 385). She further considered that this situation explains why the movement has an unclear status (p. 386). She explained that the reason for this disinterest (based on Goldam MS, 2006) is because 3HO

"has largely passed under the radar of research because the group has simply not been perceived as "controversial" enough, and has in many ways successfully integrated into society at large" (p. 386).

²⁰ Nonetheless Trilochan's idea of tantrism is mistaken. As Padoux considered, "one must beware not to look upon Tantrism as a pan-sexualism: whatever someone may have written about it, Tantrism, even Śāktaśaiva or Sahajiyā Vaisnava, is not "divinized eroticism" (1990, p. 46).

²¹ 3HO Germany does not consider itself a branch of North America, but as an independent association with a decentralized form of organisation . (p. 46).

In her view, “3HO/Sikh Dharma should be treated as a NRM and given more attention for its unique blending of Eastern and Western ideas and lifestyle” (p. 386). She argued that 3HO should be considered a NRM based on the seven characteristics attributed to NRMs by another scholar in this field (Barker, 2013, see part II of this research). What seems to be accepted by the majority of scholars is also accepted by her, as she found that “Bhajan’s approach to religious systems of thought and practice was clearly eclectic and anomalous” (p. 393). Jackbosh pointed out, however, that 3HO has demonstrated a capacity for survival after Yogi Bhajan’s death and the posterior conflict and instability occasioned in the field of the organization’s businesses. This is a point that could potentially be connected to the thesis of my research, because according to Jackbosh,

“Bhajan offered followers an eclectic blend of old and new, a syncretic system that offered his disciples unique ways of relating to the ‘outside’ ... The fact that the movement has survived, and in some ways even thrived, attests to the surprising viability of that vision” (p. 394).

What is this vision all about? Could this be connected to a) the idea of experience with its seemingly experiential aim, and/or b) could this vision turn out to be viable because of the experiences that 3HO members actually have?

A contrary view referring to the viability of the organization is in the paper of James Lewis (2010), a scholar who once belonged to 3HO and whose experience in 3HO is presented autobiographically as he left the organization and formed a splinter group in Florida, USA, at the beginning of the 1970s. In his work, published four decades after he was a part of 3HO, he made “no claim for the ‘objectivity’” of his “memories”; at the same time, however, he believed his vision was not “informed by lingering resentments” (p. 2). In his view of 3HO, in common with many other scholars, he follows the criteria of Melton in considering 3HO the “Sikh Dharma’s educational wing” (p. 3). In his experience he felt that 3HO had more than Sikh overtones because from “being a group that stressed yoga and meditation practices [it] became an *ultra-orthodox* Sikh organization” (p. 7, my Italics). In his autobiographic narrative, however, the author wrote that while he was a member of 3HO he arrived at the conclusion that “3HO would never become a large movement” (p. 13). I will discuss this idea later as I will present further fieldwork data that might contradict Lewis’s conclusion, as I should consider e.g. the growth of the 3HO Yoga Festival in Europe as a transplantation of the 3HO Summer Solstice in the USA. The attendance rose from a couple of hundred people in the 1970s to nearly three thousand in 2011.

In association with the previous author, Constance Elsberg published another study that contributed to the analysis of violence in the NRM and entitled her section *Strong as Steel, Steady as Stone: Skirting Pitfalls in 3HO/Sikh Dharma* (2011). Like Lewis, she addressed the transition of the organizations:

“For the first two years of its existence 3HO was dedicated to yoga and healthy living ... it does not appear that Bhajan originally intended to foster Sikhism, but

once his students expressed serious interest Bhajan seemed to have responded quickly” (p. 326).

In her perspective she considered that 3HO/Sikh Dharma did not align with the model of religion and that members rather preferred the “image of a spiritual path (or panth) which is more suggestive of a loose community” (p. 331). This situation and the participation of Yogi Bhajan in interfaith encounters created positive social conditions so the “members found ways to work within the political system and even affirm their patriotism. Members of 3HO have also, in a number of cases, become successful entrepreneurs...” (p. 332). Another point particularity worth noticing in the approach of Elsberg is that, “Bhajan framed the Khalsa in the language of the New Age”. In my opinion we could also think of it the other way around, inasmuch as the founder could have initially adopted the mainstream worldview of the moment of the counterculture and New Age discourses to connect to his audience to present his teaching, and then later on ‘dressed’ his teaching with the larger Khalsa Sikh traditional repertoire.

Nevertheless, Elsberg’s main subject of violence revisited the characteristics of the Khalsa inheritance as a militant group in how they manifest in 3HO. She did not express further evidence that could incriminate 3HO or Yogi Bhajan in some violent act, although she referred to a certain case:

“two female former members accused Bhajan of assault and battery and a number of other crimes. Although several of the charges were dismissed, the assault and charges were not. These cases were set out of court” (p. 342).

At the end of her analysis, Elsberg refers to the latest economic crisis affecting 3HO in which the companies created by the founder and managed by a selected group of his students broke with the legacy of 3HO as they “removed their turbans ... and have taken over of one of the major organizational entities [Unto Infinity Board]” (p. 346). In this respect she concluded that,

“It seems reasonable to predict, however, that this controversy will be settled in an essentially nonviolent, if painful and contentious, way” (p. 346).

To finalize the presentation of the academic study of 3HO one needs to turn the attention to the most recent publication on the movement that is presented in the journal *Sikh Formations*. This journal dedicated a special issue to 3HO in 2012. This was a collective effort that brought together different scholars who approached different aspects of 3HO and who offered a view of topical issues in the movement. In the following lines I present the main contributions by these scholars.

Michel Stoeber in *3HO Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma* (2012) addressed the characteristics of the movement’s practice, the theory of the practice and the “transformative process” associated with it. He addressed the key characteristics about Kundalini Yoga in a way that had not been done before. In his approach he estimated that of around ten thousand members of Sikh Dharma, “almost all of them practice 3HO

Kundalini Yoga – and significantly more non-members who also regularly practice it” (p. 352). The contribution of Stoeber’s perspective is relevant as he offered a point of view of reflection on the movement as well as a view to the practical dimension of 3HO, giving some ideas about the experiential dimension too. He wrote,

“I need to stress how impressive these practical teachings are in terms of their number, scope, complexity and apparent consistency, as well as the generally well-informed and professional manner in which they are presented and taught ... People claim to experience improved emotional and physical health and balance and integration; enhanced sensual feeling; increased mental clarity and intuitive insight; a feeling of serenity and emotional/spiritual strength and assurance; and an ecstatic state of consciousness. These are key points to keep in mind in reflecting on the concerns that have been raised against Yogi Bhajan and 3HO Kundalini Yoga by some critics” (p. 357).

In other words, according to the point view of this author, paying attention to the “practical teachings” and to what “people claim to experience” are “key points” regarding 3HO and its founder. Although the suggestion of this author is somewhat addressed to scholars and critics of 3HO, he also offered a suggestion to the members of 3HO as he considered that,

“No doubt Yogi Bhajan has his flaws and weaknesses, and perhaps it might be best for the organization if members of 3HO/Sikh Dharma acknowledge these limitations in their biographical-hagiographical accounts” (p. 360).

In another sense, the author also reflected on the status of the practice of the movement in a rather original way. While he agreed to see that Sikh mysticism is in 3HO “at the heart of its practice and experience” (p.359), Stoeber concluded that,

“Perhaps 3HO/Sikh Dharma should be regarded as an alternative form of Sikhism insofar as it champions the practice of what we might call “Sikh Yoga”, in contrast both to other contemporary form of Yoga (including other forms of Kundalini Yoga) and other groups from the Sikh Panth” (p. 361).

Another section of this journal was written by Verne A. Dusenbery (2012), in which one can find one of the latest accounts of a scholar who has been investigating 3HO since the 1970s. In this reflection he pointed out to some recent issues concerning the areas of interest and investigation around 3HO. Similarly to Laue (2007) and Jackbosh (2008) he noted the lack of significant and sustained attention in 3HO (p.336), which made him think that there is

“a good reason to welcome renewed scholarly attention being paid to 3HO/Sikh Dharma – especially at this moment as the institutions and the individuals belonging to them continue to come to terms with the passing of their charismatic founder and spiritual guide” (p. 336).

His involvement studying Sikhism and 3HO has taken place over three decades and this perspective has let him assert that the movement has gained acceptance among Sikhism in general (p. 338). Perhaps due to his historical perspective, Dusenbery has the capacity to confirm (in congruence with Laue's view, 2007, p. 27-29, 46) that we "should no longer conflate 3HO members and Kundalini Yoga teachers with Sikh Dharma members and practicing Sikhs". In order to support the distinction made, Dusenbery quoted a self-reflective account of 3HO written by Guru Raj Kaur Khalsa, who was involved in Kundalini Yoga training in North America for four decades. According to her, the times were changing: "Ashram life was no longer the norm and many were becoming Kundalini Yoga Teachers without taking the identity of a Sikh..." (p. 341).

Through the chapter of Nicola Mooney in *Reading Weber Among the Sikhs: Ascetism and Capitalism in 3HO/Sikh Dharma* (2012) recent reflections about the material/economical dimension of the movement are addressed. His approach intended to analyse the financial situation and the brands with a "multi-million dollar concern, founded and operated within 3HO/Sikh Dharma" (p. 417). In a way building on the earlier account of Kirpal Singh Khalsa (1986) cited above, Mooney addressed the large expansion and crises of the business of the movement until 2012. According to him, and based on his fieldwork, he explained that the material success in 3HO responds to "Weber's notion of capitalist asceticism" as well as the refusal of Sikhism to make distinctions "between the material and spiritual realm" (p. 418). In other words, while at the same time the author implicitly validated Kirpal Singh Khalsa's thesis of capitalism of Weber, he attributed the financial growth to the ideology of 3HO, adding a further emphasis to the explanatory value of the theory of the German sociologist as well as the fundamental role that Sikh ideology plays in the material expansion of the movement. But this author contributed to the previous research on the economical dimension of the movement by adding to his conclusion that in 3HO wealth is to be understood broadly and not just materially. According to him "the 3HO enterprises have an important role in creating social and religious, not merely economic, capital" (p. 432), which from my point of view is, perhaps, what Yogi Bhanjan referred as to "prosperity" and why his teaching strived to achieve it more than wealth or plain economical gain.

In another sense, Mooney considered 3HO's syncretism, in which the practices and the doctrine that Yogi Bhanjan taught "consciously blend in a broadly countercultural syncretism, Eastern and Western, lifestyle and spiritual paths". This contains an "eschatological message" related to the dawn of the Aquarian Age (p. 424,425).

In a more controversial approach, Philip Deslippe in *From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric* (2012) presented one of the most critical perspectives on the official history of the movement and the lineage that the charismatic founder of 3HO taught through the years. Historically well documented, the author considered that the tradition as presented by Yogi Bhanjan was a "bricolage" he had created. This was derived in reality from two Indian teachers, the Swami Dharendra Brahmachari and the Sikh Sant known as the Maharaj Virsa Singh, both of whom are not part of the official history of 3HO.

In his writing he argued that “Yogi Bhajan’s legacy and empire were decidedly built upon the practice of Kundalini Yoga” (p. 369). The author recognized the relationship of the system and experiential dimension because, according to him, “Kundalini Yoga offered its practitioners powerful experiences and life style” (p. 370).

The main concern of his investigation was to show that the lineage of 3HO was embodied in the so-called “Golden Chain” and that it ought to be “unravelling”... According to him, “instead of a single unaltered lineage, there lies forgotten and abandoned teachers” (p. 370). In this respect Deslippe quoted earlier reports and documents about 3HO, which presented Yogi Bhajan as a devoted student of Virsa Singh who, according to his research, was deemed by the founder of 3HO as his (living) “Master” (p.372). Similarly, Deslippe approached the origins of Kundalini Yoga, determining that the influence of Sant Hazara Singh, who is supposedly the direct master who taught Yogi Bhajan this method, is not sustainable; historical evidence shows that another “hidden” teacher, the Swami Dharendra Bramachari, was the real teacher of such a system. The Swami taught him *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma*, which is the system that provides the “defining physical characteristics of Yogi Bhajan’s Kundalini Yoga” (p. 373) according to the author. Not only that, this Swami is the writer of the books from which elements of the yogic practice influence Kundalini Yoga – these texts of the Swami were reworked or copied in 3HO²². The author explained further that Yogi Bhajan’s Kundalini Yoga “comingled elements from both Maharaj Virsa Singh and Swami Dharendra Bramachari” (p. 375) and that evidence provides a point of view that, “there were serious disconnects between what he taught his students and what his claimed teachers taught [him]” (p. 376).

Deslippe considered that the dramatic changes in the components of the “Golden Chain” or the lineage of 3HO shifted after a yoga trip in 1970, when Yogi Bhajan took 84 students to his home land. In regards to this trip, the author estimated that,

“The trip would end up radically shifting its focus, and on the group’s return 3 months later Maha Virsa Singh would be *persona non grata*, the figures of Sant Hazara Singh and Guru Ram Das would become central, and Yogi Bhajan would audaciously claim titles of Sikh administrative authority over half of the globe and Tantric mastership ... this shift has become the accepted standard within 3HO today where nearly all practitioners know of the claim connections that the practice has with Sant Hazara Singh and Guru Ram Das, but hardly anyone is aware of Maharaj Virsa Singh or Swami Dharendra Bramachari” (p. 377, 380)²³.

²² “In 3HO publications included a four-part “Navel Adjustment Kriya”, that was presumably offered as a Kundalini Yoga exercise, but was taken directly and in the same sequence as Dharendra’s four-step ‘Self-Treatment of the Navel’ exercise” (Deslippe, p. 374)

²³ The official appointed) biographer of Yogi Bhajan, Guru Fatah Singh Khalsa, acceded to refer to Deslippe’s critical view in regards to Baba Virsa Singh. In an email conversation that I had with him on the 6th of July of 2014, he wrote that Deslippe’s work “is well researched generally, but I don’t think he trusts Yogiji’s stated intention for extricating his students from Baba Virsa Singh, that intention being to align his students with the orthodox Sikh lineage rather than the cult of Baba Virsa Singh”.

Nevertheless, for this author, what is perhaps the most substantial aspect about Kundalini Yoga is presented in the last lines of his conclusion. For him, in order to explain why 3HO has stayed alive, he suggested that members get involved and committed to 3HO thinking, methods, practices and aims because of the experiential dimension of their teaching. He concluded that although some ex-members and critics of 3HO try to dismiss the practice in 3HO, there have been

“[a] vast number of teachers and students of Kundalini Yoga over the decades [and] it is unrealistic to think that all of them were deluded, found no benefits through its practice or did not have a profound experience through it ... perhaps the individual experience of its practitioners ... is the most honest and fruitful vantage from which to view it” (p. 384)

* * *

To conclude, the first aspect worth reconsidering is the key *syncretic shape of 3HO* in order to properly face its status as a New Religious Movement. In my opinion, to improve the approach to the study of 3HO it is fundamental to properly account for the organization’s three-fold interplay of constituents. Within this wider and more inclusive perspective one can gain a more authentic understanding of the organization and its philosophy. In other words, the task is to expand the scope and stress from Sikhism to Kundalini Yoga and the blend with counter-culture and the New Age elements. In order to sort this out I have decided to turn to Colin Campbell (1972), whose remarks are insightful.

Besides his famous contribution in the form of coining the concept of *cultic milieu*, there is another central idea in his analysis. In his observations of new spiritual groups he saw an “enormous diversity of cultural items [that] are more than counteracted by the continuing pressure of syncretisation” (p. 122, 123). For him, syncretisation is a constant variable in these types of movements and already in the approaches of e.g. Elsberg, Jackbosh and Mooney there is an explicit reference to 3HO as “syncretic”. Therefore I think it is necessary to further explain how this term could be applied to understanding 3HO.

Based on Campbell and using the term syncretism as a theoretical classification, we can understand the concept as a scholarly assessment and not as a religious judgment. It is an approach that allows academics to describe the interacting worldviews that colour the form and content of a movement, stripping the idea of syncretism of all negative and ethnocentric connotations. In this study I propose to view syncretism in such a way that it allows the parts to be seen as components of the organization that combine to create a multi-cored movement.

The modern, academic and non-pejorative approach to syncretism dates from the eighteenth century²⁴. On the other hand, in this century Fritz Graf (2005) pointed out that the lack of agreement around the use and meaning of the term is polemic, leading

²⁴ See Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* in the articles *Eclecticisme* and *Synchrétistes, Hénotiques, ou Conciliateurs*

him to say that it might be better not to use the term “at all”. Certainly I recognize that it is not possible to use the term syncretism as a univocal term, but despite this and for the stipulated research purpose – to gain a good perspective to approach 3HO – there is a value in the term because it implies a useful strategy for analysing groups that are composed of interrelated elements. For this research purpose, syncretism is an analytical concept regarding 3HO that can be further understood on the basis of Carsten Colpe’s ideas (1987). In Colpe’s view, syncretism signifies that a movement (as in this case 3HO) has been a subject to historical forces and has gone through a process of:

- *Symbiosis*, in the sense of principles or elements “living together” for mutual benefit.
- *Addition*, i.e. the inclusion of other elements that produce the result that “the dividing line between diverse elements is removed”, creating another new unit.
- *Equivalence*, “when unities or elements of them are assigned different values and are conceived of as ways to reach the same goal, with the stipulation that one of them leads to the goal more effectively than the others” (8930-2)

The evidence that this study has collected and will present in the next chapters might shed enough light to show that although Sikhism is a strong pillar of 3HO, it has gone through a process which has weakened its presence. Nowadays the Sikh teachings are more likely to be found in “Sikh Dharma” (the “sister organization” of the movement, as Elsberg called it) and to some degree on a formal level in 3HO-Kundalini yoga environments/events. One could also see that the movement’s main action-oriented mission is to spread the teachings of Yogi Bhajan and the system of Kundalini Yoga “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”. Yoga was historically the introductory practice in 3HO and the first method associated with the movement and Yogi Bhajan. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the initial success, posterior consolidation and current expansion of the movement around the globe cannot be understood without a balanced view of the three-fold pillars of 3HO, which regards Kundalini Yoga, as many scholars have pointed out, as the most popular aspect and practice, and the source of the experiences that incline members to join the movement. Sikhism in general, and Sikh Dharma especially, have not had the historical apostolic call compared to the way that 3HO has disseminated and shared the teachings of Yogi Bhajan through Kundalini yoga classes, seminars and trainings.

A second concluding note about previous scholarly research on 3HO must certainly address *the experiential dimension of the movement*. As we have seen, the most common inclination of the academic approach has tagged 3HO within Sikh lore as an organization that provides a theoretical ancillary position for the other elements (Yoga, New Age), but the praxis is somewhat incongruent with this perspective. In this research the approach to the experiential strand in 3HO will reveal some of the particular distinctiveness of the movement’s official way of thinking of ‘experience’ and where and how the members *attributionally* locate their experiences and their frames of reference when they refer to their actual experiences. We could think of this approach as an open debate on how to understand 3HO’s status.

The experiential dimension in 3HO, although not distinctively studied, has not been an absent idea in the scholar's scope either. As we have seen, for Kirpal Singh Khalsa (1986), 3HO "emphasizes spiritual experience over ethics and doctrine" (p. 237), and he connected the aspect of experience to the focus of his study, the worldly success of 3HO. In one of the interviews that he quoted, the experience was presented in a way that, "the more we feel that potency within ourselves, that fulfilment (a reference to Kundalini energy), the more we make" (p. 237). In this approach, the experience (of "fulfilment" understood as "kundalini energy") was serving productivity in the world of business.

Constance Elsberg (2003) predicted the challenges that will be faced by future generations of 3HO, writing that they "will have to create their own blend of East and West ... *based on their distinctive experience*" (p. 338, my italics). Her reflections showed an area of research concerning the development and future of 3HO that link to the experiential, which is indeed a crucial part of their main philosophy. So far no scholar has previously researched 3HO to try to find out if there is a *distinctive experience* or *what the experience is all about* in 3HO. This aspect is a novel area of research and we only find a germinal hint of a door opening with regards to addressing the experiential aspect in Elsberg's final remarks.

Similarly, Jackbosh (2008) considered that there was something in 3HO's *vision* that could explain how "The fact that the movement has survived, and in some ways even thrived, attests to the surprising viability of that vision" (p. 394). In my opinion part of this vision could be linked to a) the philosophical vision of experience with its seemingly experiential aim and b) this vision could turn out to be viable because of the experiences that 3HO members have. Further research is required to reflect on this vision and its possible connections to experience.

However, the link to experience expressed by some scholars in 3HO often seems to be considered a crucial aspect of the movement. In Stoeber's (2012) point of view, he highlighted

"how impressive these practical teachings are [and how] people claim to experience improved emotional and physical health and balance, and integration; enhanced sensual feeling; increased mental clarity and intuitive insight; a feeling of serenity and emotional/spiritual strength and assurance; and an ecstatic state of consciousness" (p. 357).

What these words describe are very close to the experience that members report as I will show later, but Stoeber argues that these are, "key points to keep in mind in reflecting on the concerns that have been raised against Yogi Bhajan and 3HO Kundalini Yoga by some critics" (p. 357). This advice is taken further in my own research in order to recognise what these "keys" open and what can come up from them when we research them.

Finally, in the investigation of Deslippe (2012), who is one of the movement's most robust critical detractors, we find a valuable advice to address the movement which, according to his study, shows several inconsistencies and incongruities. His conclusion was that 3HO's mass of members has remained considerably large through the decades it has existed, so something regarding their practice, Kundalini yoga, and the experience must be reconsidered. In his own words,

“Kundalini Yoga was often described by Yogi Bajan and 3HO as “The Yoga of Experience” ... perhaps the individual experience of its practitioners, and not the figure of Yogi Bajan or the mythology of the Golden Chain, is the most honest and fruitful vantage from which to view it” (p. 384)²⁵.

2. 1. Previous Studies leading to Experiences Deemed Religious

The main scholarly perspectives on religious experience that have influenced the last decades in Religious Studies are *Constructivism* (also sometimes referred as to *contextualism*), *perennialists*, and *cognitivists*. These approaches are associated with the challenge to place the analysis on different epistemological grounds where the scholar has better tools to examine the subject of experience or religious experience. Altogether these three main approaches represent their positions in relation to the *Sui Generis* approach initiated by Schleiermacher and coined as such by Otto. This last approach, the *Sui Generis*, sets aside the object of religious experience considering that only through a religious action can religious experience be authentically understood. In other words, only religious method can know religious experience.

Nevertheless, the academic method found new ways in the view of Hjalmar Sundén (d. 1993), who is one of the first examples of constructivism rooted in the psychology of religion in Scandinavia. Sundén developed an interpretative approach to religious experience called “role theory” (in *Religionen och Rollerna: ett psykologiskt studium av fromheten*, 1959, translated to German in 1966). He postulated that people learn from religious literature and identify themselves with certain roles in those texts. In this way it may happen that a religious experience takes places for them. For Sundén, the presence of *religiousness* as a context determines the occurrence of a *religious* experience. In his words, “without a religious reference system, without religious tradition, without myth and ritual ... religious experiences are unthinkable” (Sundén in Wulff 2000, 426). For Sundén, the experience is tied to the tradition in which it is located, where it happens, and the psychology that expresses it. The Swedish scholar's view locates the subject to be seen from the perspective of interaction between experience and the “religious reference system”.

²⁵ In an email conversation I had with Guru Fatah Singh Khalsa (6th of July 2014) he responded to some of Deslippe's criticisms concerning some of the historical inconsistencies presented in 3HO: “Perhaps the stories were embellished a bit. Who can say? There is a Sufi tradition that if a story serves to illuminate the soul - no matter how fantastic it might be - it is true. The narrative derives its truth from its capacity to inspire true living...”

Steven Katz (b. 1944) is perhaps the most influential scholar of the constructivist approach. In *Language, Epistemology and Mysticism* (1979) he develops his main idea, which is based on the relevance of the patterns of beliefs, mental content, concepts and expectations in the subject's cultural context. For him, these are all "at work before, during and after the experience" (p. 27). However, he holds to the theory that there is "two-directional symmetry" where "beliefs shape the experience, just as the experience shapes the belief" (p. 30). In his view all the experiences are interpreted and "the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience" (p. 26). For this reason, Katz's perspective of analysis discards the possibility of a common core of the experience (spiritual, numinous, mystical, ecstatic etc.), as well as a perennial philosophy underneath the experience. All these are rejected and the religious experiences are considered neither universal nor essentially the same. He writes,

"There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences. Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give indication, or any ground for believing, that are unmediated (...) The notion of unmediated experience, if not self-contradictory, at best empty. This epistemological fact seems to me to be true, because of the sorts of beings we are, even with regard to the experience of those ultimate objects of concern with which mystics have had intercourse, e.g., God Being, nirvana, etc." (Katz, 1979, p. 26; emphasis in the original)

The intention of Katz is to show the causal connection of the context in determining the experience, "including the expectation of what will be experienced" (p. 59).

Wayne Proudfoot (b. 1939) and his book *Religious Experience* (1985) also critically addressed Schleiermacher's theory of religious experience (and the *Sui Generis* approach) in his stance on immediacy and intentionality. Proudfoot argued about their perceived incompatibility (1985, p. xvii). This incompatibility has a profound implication for what is to be understood. He thinks that "religious experience cannot be identified without reference to concepts, beliefs, grammatical rules and practices (...) the labels a person adopts in order to understand what is happening to him determine what he experiences" (p. 228,229). For him, at the same time, emotions are not immediately and intuitively known; rather they are states of arousal to which people ascribe an emotional label. The way he approached the phenomenon is associated with the constructivist perspective. Constructivism (or contextualism) stands for the approach where the context has an emphatic gravitation in order to understand a phenomenon. Any event (i.e. a *religious experience*) happens within a context that is the key to understanding the event in question. For Proudfoot, religious experience is not peripheral to religious studies, and actually he writes that,

"No topic is better suited for an examination of current issues in religious thought and the study of religion than religious experience. If we can understand how that experience has been variously described, and begin to distinguish between descriptive, analytical, explanatory and evocative elements in the

accounts of religious experience which have been most influential, we will be in a better position to assess the current state of the field” (p. xv).

This is one of the main voices that marked the course of the debate about the focus of the experience, and it entirely placed the emphasis on how the experiences have been described. The approach is still entangled with the concept of religiosity, but it places a bigger emphasis on *how these experiences* are seen and described in their first (believer) and second (external observer) accounts; this debate has shown a route that later leads the path through the approach that deems something religious which is used in the case study. For Proudfoot, however, the description is linked to having a proper interpretation of religious experience. The distinction he makes between *descriptive reduction* and *explanatory reduction* becomes crucial for this quest. The former is based on the descriptive account of the experience as given by the person, whereas the latter is “an explanation of an experience in terms that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval” (p. 197)²⁶.

In the Psychology of Religion another perspective gained currency in 1985 when Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick developed their ideas in *A General Attribution Theory for Psychology of Religion*. According to these authors, the attribution theory considers that there are

“three basic needs or desires of people – for a sense of meaning, for control of outcomes, and for self-esteem – are evident throughout the attribution process ... it is maintained that religious and naturalistic meaning-belief systems often exist concurrently within a person’s world view, and that specific factors can be identified ... these factors are discussed in terms of four broad categories characteristics of the attributor, the attributor’s context, characteristics of the event and the event context” (Silka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 1).

In this theory the quest is to explain a given event in a person’s psychology based on how a person has considered to best deem his or her experience. The attribution theory assumes that people “seek to make sense of their experiences, to understand the causes of events they witness [and] to gain an answer to the question “Why” (sic) (p.3). The theory explains that events that can occur to a person have the capacity to challenge “the individual’s existing meaning-belief system”. They can also “challenge feelings of personal control” as well as challenge or “alter feelings of self-esteem”, all together instigating an attributional process (p. 5). For these reasons the attributional process gains functionality and provides a tool to study different phenomena, since a “particular attribution selected on a given occasion should reflect its ability to restore these variables [personal belief, sense of control or self-esteem] to satisfactory levels” (p. 6). According to this theory the quest for meaning is natural for the human being and culture and religion plays a key role:

²⁶ It is worth mentioning that Proudfoot thinks that “to describe the experience of a mystic by reference only to alpha waves, altered heart rate, and changes in the bodily temperature is to misdescribe it” (p. 196)

“The best explanation for the psychological availability of religious attributions is simply that culture provides them ready-made ... Religion provides answers to questions that otherwise might seem unanswerable. In short, religion is a major source of meaning” (p. 7)

Robert K. C. Forman, a critic of the contextualism in the approach to religious experience, approached mysticism and religious experiences in *The Problem of the Pure Consciousness* (1990) in a rather opposite way with his psychological perspective. In his study Forman, the chief editor of the book, refuted Katz' pluralism and differentiation, calling the concept of a *Pure Consciousness Event* (PCE) a universal human event and defining it as “wakeful though contentless (non-intentional) consciousness” (p.7-8), a form associated with “introvertive mysticism” as understood by W. T. Stace (1960, p. 85-122). For Forman, PCE has not supplied content and does not presuppose formative expectation, and the “setting” of the experiencer (the *mystic* in his terminology) should show up in markedly different experiences, which, according to him, it does not (p. 23, 24). Forman approached the phenomena from the perspective he calls *perennial psychology*. Within the same study and following the same line of argumentation Stephen Bernhardt thinks that “it just does not seem that there is sufficient complexity during the pure consciousness event to say that any such conceptually constructive elements are involved” (p. 222-236). For Forman the thesis that context influences the experience is reasonable, however, he places special emphasis on the “vector of influence [that] goes from subjective consciousness to objective culture” (Forman, 2002, p. 9).

From the cognitive approach to the study of religion, the scholars in this field embrace the epistemology that focuses on how the human mind grasps, produces, and transmits ‘religion’ throughout his or her cognitive abilities. For some scholars of this approach the idea of PCE has been seen somehow auspicious. In Finland, for example, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, one of the best known contributors to cognitive analysis, wrote in *How Religion Works* (2001) that “the good thing of PCE thesis is that it allows us to view consciousness as a phenomenon independent of language...” (p. 114). Pyysiäinen categorizes religious experience as a “phenomenon based on the ability to form counter-intuitive ideas, metarepresent them and treat them symbolically” (p. 53). His examinations in this sense are “to see how” to correct the view of the religious experience with the “advancement of the neuroscience” (p. 78). In doing this (and based on the investigations of Andrew Newberg and Eugene d’Aquili) he speculates that mystical and other forms of religious experience are due to *trophotropic* and *ergotropic* arousal respectively, these effects produce a sense of “unity of reality” and this unity “is then interpreted as union with god or some other counter-intuitive agent” (p. 115). For Pyysiäinen a counter-intuitive agent is an agent that violates “panhuman intuitive expectations in a well defined fashion” (p.23). In a sort of conclusion he indicates that “we have religious experiences simply because our neural machinery makes this possible” and that the “religiosity of an experience derives from its object: counter-intuitive representation, but the psychological and the neural mechanism involved are in no way specifically “religious”” (p. 142). This emphatic naturalistic perspective is

already germinal in William James's *Varieties*, yet it finds a technical back-up in the development of technical tools for measuring brain activity²⁷.

Additionally, at the beginning of this century, the psychological approach in *Varieties of Anomalous Experience* (Cardena, E, Lynn, Steven J and Krippner, S. 2000) represents an innovative view that sets the phenomenon of experience free from all previous angles of interpretation. This perspective also shows a crucial building block in the process that leads to the choice of method and approach of this study. The *anomalous* is understood as an uncommon experience²⁸ and it conceptually allows to embrace a diverse range of experiences collected in essays, analysing hallucinatory experiences, out-of-body experiences, alien abduction experiences, past life experiences and so on and so forth. This approach does not set an aprioristic notion based on the culture or the context to understand *religious* phenomena. The authors concluded the book considering that "what may be the most influential of all anomalous experiences: the transcendental experience of unity known as mysticism" (p.15). From the point of view of this psychologist, the experience is no longer approached as a religious experience *per se*, which allows the research community to embrace a bigger set of experiences, deemed *anomalous experiences*.

To conclude, the approaches to religious experience described above and their derivations have been developed to give a scientific frame and method to the study of religious experiences in order to avoid tackling this phenomenon through a religious method as understood by the *Sui Generis* perspective. This development has led the subject of religious experience towards an attributional approach based on *A General Attribution Theory for Psychology of Religion* (1985) by Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick to scientifically understand *experiences deemed religious or spiritual* (Taves, 2009).

3. Research Method: The "Ascriptive Model" of Ann Taves

In *Reconsidering Religious Experience* (2009) by Ann Taves she approached the disputed concept of "religious experience" and took an innovative turn in her approach. From her point of view,

"...we need to abandon the constructivist axiom that beliefs and attitudes are always formative of, rather than consequent to, experience in any strong sense, in favour of a model that takes "bottom-up" or unconscious processing more seriously" (p. 93)

As she suggests, "... we should disaggregate the concept of "religious experience" and study the wide range of experiences to which religious significance has been attributed"

²⁷ Also based on the neurophysiologic examinations of Persinger, Pyysiäinen ascribes to the idea that "with a single burst in the temporal lobe, one may find truth and meaning that lasts for life". See Persinger, M. *Neuropsychological Bases of God's beliefs*. 1987, 15-17

²⁸ The editors use the term anomalous from the Greek etymological root *anomalos* (irregular, uneven, unequal) as an antonym of the Greek *homalos* (same or common).

(p. 8). She proposes that the orientation of the attention is to “focus on things deemed religious” (p. 9). According to her this is done by

“extending attribution theory ... [so] we can place the study of experience that people consider special within the broader interdisciplinary field of inquiry and open new possibilities for understanding the way that religions are constructed” (p. 12).

The attribution theory, as explained by Taves, has become the main pillar of the approach in this study as it matches the diversity of experiences that are documented and reported here²⁹. The general value of this theory is that it allows deflection from the attraction of *a priori* pre-conceptions about experience and religion and the over-theorization that both of the concepts bear. Certainly, this strategy faces the conceptual level of the problem in a different way, and in doing so it has methodical implications that will be embraced next. In order to grasp the diversity that falls within the frame of experience in 3HO, it must be stated that this study has the stipulated object in *unusual sensory experiences* which, as Taves wrote, are understood as “alterations in people’s usual sense of themselves [and that] people themselves consider special” (p. 127).

In the perspectives of Ann Taves I have found the approach that suits the qualities of the material of this investigation. They allow me to turn from the object of *religious experience* to “special experiences or experiences deemed religious or spiritual”. According to Taves,

“The twentieth-century focus on “religious experience” rather than experiences deemed religious deflected attention from the various components that, taken together, constitute “religion”. Refocusing our attention on the component parts and the disparate ways in which they can be assembled provides a method for assessing the role of unusual experiences in the emergence and development of religions” (p. 14, 15)

This approach is viewed as an Attributional or Ascriptive model that claims,

“...that religious or mystical or spiritual or sacred “things” are created when religious significance is assigned to them. In the ascriptive model, subjects have experiences that they or others deemed religious [whereas] the claim that religion is “sui generis” is simply another way of saying that religion cannot or should not be explained in anything other than religious terms” (p. 17, 18)

Ann Taves sketched her view of the subject as *experiences deemed religious* compared to the Ottonian perspective of religious experience as something *Sui Generis* i.e.

²⁹ Following this author we will need to distinguish between *attributions* (commonsense causal explanations) that people often supply consciously and *ascriptions* (the assignment of a quality or characteristic to something) that may be supplied implicitly below the threshold of awareness (p. 10)

experiences that are religious by their own nature. In the following chart we can see the types of research questions and how the different models answer them,

Guiding Question	MODEL	
	Sui generis	Ascription
Are some experiences inherently religious?	Assumes that there are some things (most of the experiences) that can be viewed as inherently religious or mystical.	Assumes that things (events, experiences, feelings, objects, or goals) are not inherently religious or not-religious, but must be constituted as such by persons.
Should certain things always be considered religious?	Yes. There are underlying things (again often experiences), which can or should be understood as (authentically) religious or mystical or spiritual.	No. Diverse things can be deemed religious – “mysticism” is a modern category –and there are diverse views regarding what should be “counted” as religious, mystical or spiritual.
What can be compared?	Religious things are compared with other religious things. Common features are often granted evidential force relative to religious claims.	Experiences are compared with other things that have some similar feature(s) whether they are viewed as religious or not.
What is the goal of comparison?	To understand more about religious or mystical things.	To understand how and why people deem things religious and allow researchers to explore the making and unmaking of religion.
How do they relate to other things?	Religious experience is set apart from other experiences and tacitly protected from comparison with them.	Experiences deemed religious are viewed in relation to other experiences and subjects with them.

Table 3: Methodic Differences between the Sui Generis and Ascription Models (Taves, 2009, p. 18)

A secondary aspect related to the method of investigation is to use some key tools of *Qualitative Psychology* (Smith, ed., 2008), within which I find valuable strategies labelled under *Interpretative Psychological Analysis (IPA)* (Smith et al, 2009). This perspective aims to provide a further psychological approach to the subjects in order to “clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life ... to discern the psychological essence” (Smith 2008, p. 27, 28). This strategy concerns the attributional approach and is based on the principles shared by these authors who also said that “there is no single, definitive way to do IPA” (2008, p.54). Another aspect of consonance with attributional theory as we understand it in Religious Studies is that in *Qualitative Psychology* what happened and what is presented “are taken to be exactly as they present themselves to be, but no claim is made that they actually *are* the way they present themselves to be” (2008, p. 34). This approach mostly serves this research on a practical level as an ancillary approach that provides a perspective to conduct interviews known as “semi-structured interviews”. The advantage of this method is that it “facilitates

rapport/empathy, allows a great flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data” (Smith, 2008, p. 59). It is in this practical sense how the data is consecutively approached through mechanisms of analogical argumentation (in consonance with the psychological characteristics of the data) and the aim is “to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency” (p.66). Applying these strategic tools to the interview section and the initial approach to the data functioned as an adequate support to construct the interviews and provide them with a path for scientific engagement with the people and the material. On this basis the attributional model completed and developed deeper insights regarding the deeming of experiences.

3. 1. The stipulation of experiences considered “special” or deemed spiritual in 3HO

When approaching contemporary religious groups, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead in *The Spiritual Revolution* (2005) shed light on distinctive ideas that are followed and believed by people. They approach and define the new religious phenomena as “a turn towards life lived by reference to one’s own subjective experience... and thus a turn away from 'life –as'... 'to subjective-life'” (p. 2, 3). This turn affects society since “[it] has become the defining cultural development of modern Western culture” (p. 5). This produces the term 'spirituality' “to express commitment to a deep truth that is found within... and the term 'religion' is used to express commitment to a higher truth that is 'out there'” (p. 7). This observation considers how to relate to the NRMs that have philosophical and practical perspectives that deem “spiritual” and “religious” in these ways, thus it serve us to gain accuracy to approach the ideology of 3HO.

The *spiritual* quality ascribed to experience(s) by Yogi Bhanan and members of 3HO is, as we will see in this study, perhaps the main aim of the ‘religious’ motivation of the movement. What Heelas and Woodhead deemed spirituality in the New Religious Movements includes,

“multifarious forms of sacred activities which are often grouped together under collective terms like ‘body, mind, spirit’, ‘New Age’, ‘alternative’ or ‘holistic’ spirituality... (A)s for the spiritual revolution, this can be said to come out when subjective-life spirituality overtakes life-as religion. More specifically ... the spiritual revolution can be said to take place when ‘holistic’ activities having to do with subjective-life spiritually attract more people than do ‘congregational’ activities having to do with life-as religion” (p. 7)

The study of the experiences in 3HO has similarities with the idea of a search for an altered state of consciousness, as even the US congressmen agreed in April 2005. For Heelas and Woodhead, if “spiritual” (and by extension “spiritual experience”) is an appropriate expression of (or attribution about) subjective-life, and spirituality overtakes life-as-religion, the main force of this dynamic is within the human personal life, the experiential dimension and the sensory experience.

Thus, on a practical level, 3HO members seem to have a stronger intentionality to participate in this contemporary view of spirituality than actions that are formally deemed religious³⁰. Following the approach of Taves it must consider that,

“If we do not assume that these experiences are inherently religious, then our object of study becomes *things that share a stipulated point of analogy* as they intersect with the meaning-making process that lead to their characterization as religious or not” (Ann Taves, 2009, p. 25).

This means that approaching 3HO “religious experiences” would be misleading for the reader and inaccurate in relation to the data collected. In this study I have stipulated as the object the *unusual sensory experiences* which, as Taves wrote, are understood as “alterations in people’s usual sense of themselves [and that] people themselves consider special” (p. 127). In consideration of these, this study applies an Attributional model that is not concerned with construction or the production of experiences as verbal statements, but is rather based on the idea of “specialness” that stems from the psychological impressions that can arise from behavioural events or experiences. According to Ann Taves, specialness is

“a broader and more generic net that captures most of what people have in mind when they refer to “sacred”, “magical”, “spiritual”, “mystical” or “religious”” (Taves. 2009, p. 26)³¹.

Furthermore, in this work I am not thinking of a singular ‘religious experience’, rather I am talking about experiences in plural which are not seen as intrinsically religious, but experiential events that informants eventually deemed religious, spiritual or special. How the experiences are deemed enables a fresh perspective for Religious Studies in general and for this study in particular.

Considering the data gathered that shows the perspective in 3HO or how 3HO members deem their status, it can be said that

- 3HO members and the organization itself avoid deeming its status “religious” or as a “religion”, but rather as a spiritual community, path or having spiritual teachings.

³⁰ This type of personal search that is a strong feature of NRMs has sometimes, however, been seen pejoratively by some scholars. For example Harvey Cox wrote about “gluttony for experience” to refer to the current situation of some NRMs that are inclined towards the experiential dimension (Harvey Cox, 1979). This came about with the New Religious Movements of the 20th century and has been the essential aspect of the religious/spiritual debate in the last decades. However, another author explains this shift towards the spiritual approach because, “(c)ontemporary quests for spirituality are really yearnings for a reconstructed interior life” (Wade Clark Roof, 1999, p 35)

³¹ “Specialness”, as seen from this attributional perspective, sets an event apart from a common experience and it has relevant marks that define it as special, such as “prohibition against trading, mixing and comparing”; “specialness” also refers to ideal and anomalous things (Taves 2009, p.29-40).

- The colloquial way to understand “a religion” and “religious” by their members bear some negative connotations because they seem to attribute distinctive spiritual forms and attitudes to their “spiritual path”.
- The experiences that the informants speak about are neither associated with religiosity nor deemed religious, but they are considered special, spiritual, yogic etc.

Furthermore, Ann Taves (2009) addresses the idea of ‘specialness’ in the concept of “Special Path” and her reflections offer a way to explain the 11 cases presented in this study. She sees two ascriptions at stake, one of which “deems the path or, more specifically, the goal towards which the path leads, as special” and the other ascription conceives “efficacy to practices in relation to the goal” (p. 47). This is structured on the base of a tacit agreement of the participants, who, all together, deem things in a coherent and “special”, fashion. In her view,

“For a path to be path, however, practitioners must also agree on *means* that they consider efficacious for getting from where they are to the goal. We can characterize the means of getting to the goal – the thing that people do to get there – as practices. The distinctive feature of a path is the linkage between the practices and the goal; this linkage is constituted when people ascribe efficacy to practices relative to a goal” (p.47, Italics in the original)

The linkage that Taves refers to is in one way or another present in all the informants’ ascriptions. Taves’s depiction helps to understand this idea of special things, paths, practice and goals (Taves 2009, p. 47):

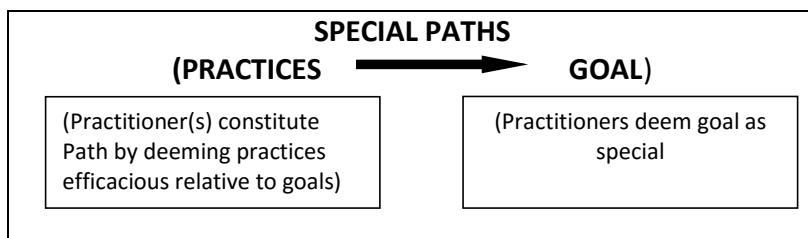


Table 4: Path Deemed Special: from practices to goals.

With this character of “specialness” in mind I aim to answer the two fundamental questions regarding experiences in order to recognize the formal and prescriptive notions of experiences (as precepts or pre-philosophical notions) and how experiences could play a role in the movement’s worldview and practices; thus we will have enough understanding to study the way that the experiences that 3HO members have and are deemed (or not) in relation to the prescribed forms or other novel forms. The increase of inter-subjective knowledge about the stipulated object, i.e. the deeming of *unusual sensory experience* by 3HO members, is systematically pursued with the two questions of this study. These questions are,

- Q. 1. What is the role of experience in the three-fold realm of thought of 3HO?
- Q. 2. How do 3HO members attribute the experiences they have?

These questions are displayed throughout different layers related to the movement and the movement’s link to the experiential (see Table 6). The three-fold layers (A., B. and C.) are also moments of the research that are connected to each other to produce the results of answering the questions (Q.1 and Q.2.). The vector of the study goes from the historic-cultural aspect of 3HO to the encounter with the individual-personal aspect of the 3HO member in the fieldwork (“top-down”). It finally arrives at the instance of the people deeming their own experiences (“bottom-up”), so finally the scholar can arrive at the integrated and inter-subjective results about the dimensions of experiences in 3HO. The following chart represents layers, moments, methodic strategies and the display of questions.

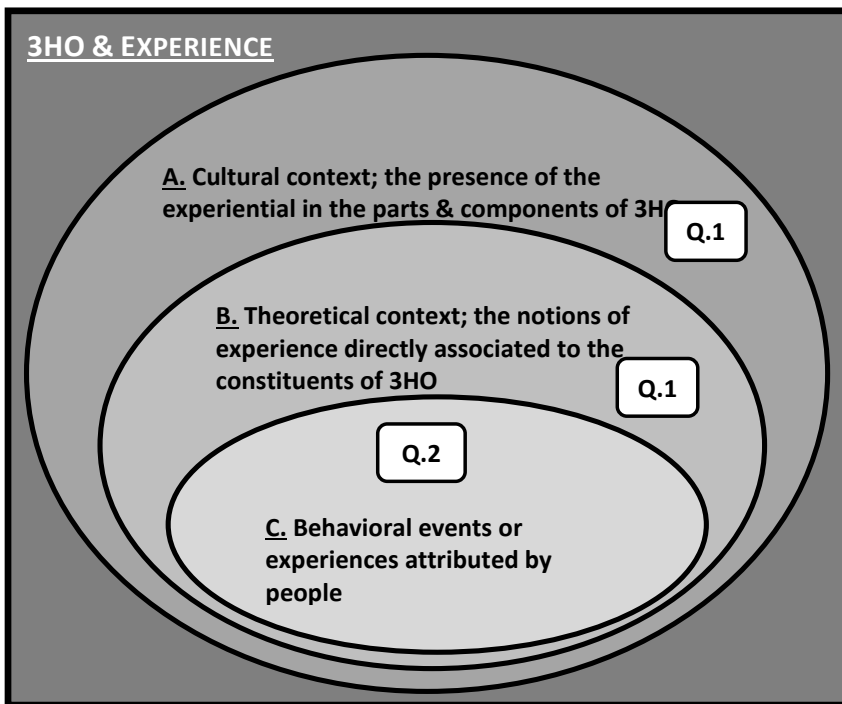


Table 5: Layers, moments, methodic, strategies and questions

Question 1. Answering the first question (What is the role of experience in 3HO’s three-fold realm of thought?) comes after applying the approach to the following layers, from which we can extract the answers,

A. *The cultural context* where Yogi Bhan shapes the worldview of the movement. This movement is set in relation to a historical challenge (deemed as a “mission” associated to the Aquarian Age), for which the elementary parts of the movement, the tools and values that are required to reach the goal, and the notions of experiential are all provided and

prescribed. These elementary parts combine three different realms of thought: Sikhism, Kundalini yoga and the New Age, all of which seem to have the category of experience embedded. Here I will look at the historical context of the three realms of thought and display an attributional approach to see how the “first attributor” described different experiential *things* (Taves 2009, p. 98).

B. *The theoretical context*, from which notions of experience and practice emerge. The distinctive notions of experience that arise in relation to the three different realms and parts of 3HO and the type of experience that is typical of each realm. Since there is no systematic philosophical discussion about experience in 3HO I prefer to speak of a pre-philosophical approach. Yogi Bhajan spoke about *his own experiences* and shared *his experiences* that he attributed in a more direct reference to the experiential. This is to how the “first attributor” described different *experiences*.

Question 2. In order to answer the second question (How do 3HO members attribute the experiences they have?) the study has to face the consecutive and narrower layer:

C. *The behavioural events or experiences* are approached to see how the members share and situate their reflections about their experiences (to later see the interaction of “top-down” and “bottom-up” ascription). Addressing the experiences in the collective grounds of the 3HO European Yoga Festival offers a fresh context to observe interaction between a social/collective force and the individual process of deeming things that have happened to them and how (and if) they attribute the experiences to Yogi Bhajan’s teachings, practices or something else. In this context the description of the experiences is not only concerned with how 3HO people ascribe meaning, but also how they relate to the subject *experience* and turn their experiences into an intelligible subject for themselves and for the outsider.

In conclusion, the first stage of the research strategy is concerned with the description of the constituent parts. This approach is historical in the sense that it relates to the cultural and social environment of documents and texts, and pre-philosophical in the sense that it collects and extracts the notions of experiences from the documents produced by 3HO/Yogi Bhajan (in which experiences are not part of a systematic philosophical reflection). The presentation of the parts that constitute 3HO is displayed to disclose their association with the experiential dimension, at which time the deeming making process about experience(s) is at work and therefore addressed. The next layers of the study deal with field research and here I describe the method, which uses ethnographic tools enriched by qualitative psychological research strategies. This study uses participant observation – how the material is re-collected and the interviews conducted with *Aquarian Teachers* – to look at how individual experiences are described and to what extent deemed in novel forms. Here I will reinforce the research strategy with a number of tools from *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) in order to

assist the approach to interviews that are essentially analysed in an attributional fashion. This will enable an understanding of behavioural events that some members of 3HO have had and their way in shaping them with their own attributions and ascriptions³².

4. Framework of the Research

For the purpose of this study the *widest frame* includes accessing and focusing at the macro level on the three-fold constituents of 3HO. These constituents are related to the notions of experience and the focus is to identify how experience has a role in the organization. This allows the study's progression to get acquainted with the inflow of thoughts, associating experiences and the three main sources. This means that we can address the issue of experience on the macro level in order to consider:

- The notion of experiences in Kundalini Yoga
- The notion of experiences in Sikhism (and)
- The notion of experiences in the New Age

The *intermediate frame* is to address the notions of experiences within the three-fold structure of 3HO, specifically to see the attributions made by Yogi Bhajan, the "first attributor", and how they are all linked to the three realms. This will naturally lead the journey to see and know the roles that experiences play in 3HO.

In the *narrowest frame* I look at the people within the field of 3HO and the attribution of experiences from the followers of these teachings. Evidently the experiences must have a 3HO subject other than Yogi Bhajan, who *also*, eventually, *lives* or *has* them. This way I can systematically approach the micro level in which to meet and interview the "Aquarian Teachers". An Aquarian Teacher is, as will be addressed in Parts II and III, an aim of some practitioners of Kundalini yoga and a model to most of the engaged 3HO practitioners: people study in a 3HO Kundalini Yoga Teachers Training programme to be, among other things, empowered and in harmony with the Aquarian Age and the spiritual values prescribed by Yogi Bhajan. And a key factor that is prescribed to them is to have and handle the experiences *taught* (not as a theoretician but as an 'experiencer'). An Aquarian Teacher is someone trained in Kundalini Yoga to take part in shaping (teaching, sharing, delivering) the *new consciousness* of the Aquarian time, related to society with its values, aims, and experiences.

To sum up, by focusing on *unusual sensory experiences* I can start describing the three-fold constituents of 3HO and their association to the notions of experiences. This allows

³² As a further research ambition, this endeavor could eventually open a door to find a path to research how the experiences might contribute to shaping 3HO, i.e. how attribution could form, maintain and promote or deform, dilute and demote the legacy of Yogi Bhajan and the movement he created. This is just an ambition that the current research does not strive to address, but it might be able to recognize whether it is feasible or not to know if (and eventually know how) some lived experiences shape Healthy Happy and Holy Organization.

us to see how these experiences are deemed by the “first attributor” (Yogi Bhajan) in order to identify the roles of these notions of experiences; the focus will then be directed to the study of the stipulated people (Aquarian Teachers) who are supposedly the living subjects of these experiences and their *unusual sensory experiences*; finally the correlation that may or may not exist between the notions-prior-to-experience and the post-explanation-experiences of the subjects through their attributions will be addressed. In conclusion, I can portray and describe the interactions between the *widest, intermediate and narrowest frames* of this study in the following manner:

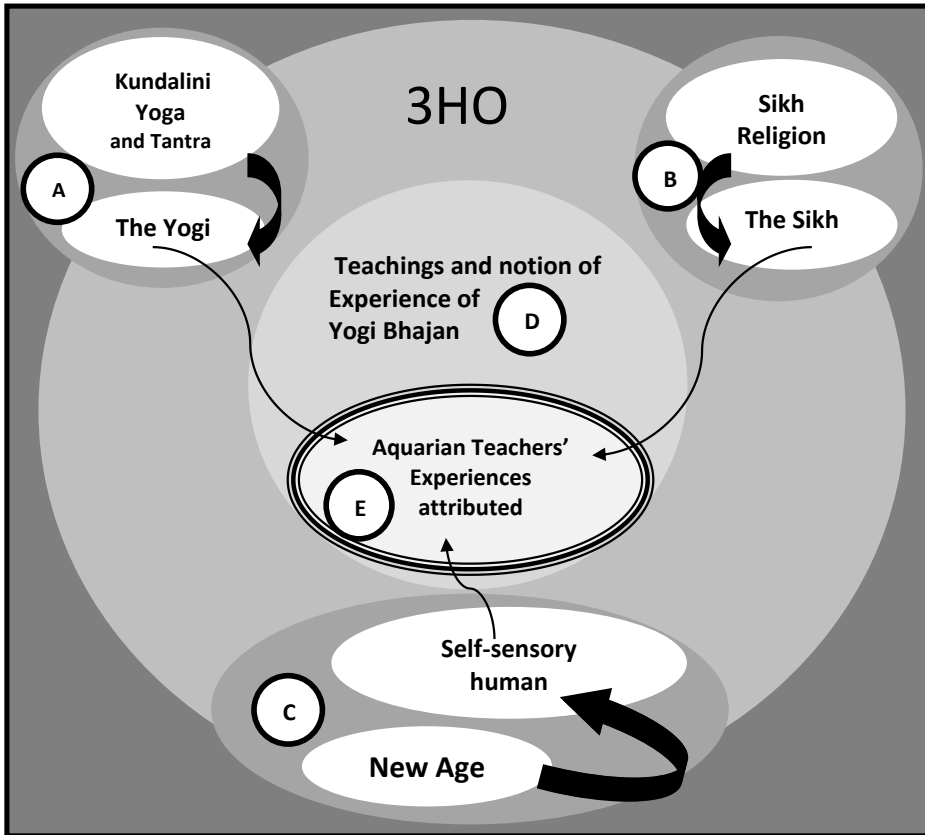


Table 6: The Three-folded Composition of 3HO

4. 1. Frame of the Components of 3HO

A. Kundalini Yoga and the Kundalini Yogi. In this sphere I will refer to the yogic practices and principles of Kundalini Yoga. The experience of Kundalini rising, the chakras and how it is prescriptively achieved by these practices, transforming the person into a Yogi. The form of Kundalini Yoga and White Tantric Yoga that 3HO promotes uses attributions to neuron-physiological and scientific bases in its functioning, and these are constantly referred to. The knowledge they claim they have about the neuron-physiological condition for “having an experience” leads them to believe that they can

produce a spiritual experience at will. Yogi Bhajan was a self-declared “Mahan Tantric” (Master of Tantrism), “perfect yogi”, and a master of the “spiritual science” as he deemed Kundalini yoga. He believed he had the total knowledge of these systems to teach them and give the students an opportunity to “experience the infinite potential”, as he put it.

B. Sikh Religion, the Khalsa Sikh and the practice of the Nam Simran. Here I will delve more deeply into the Sikh Religion and Khalsa Sikh components of 3HO. This is a secondary layer because, as we have seen in the overview of 3HO, the Sikh ingredient was introduced to 3HO students after the Kundalini Yoga system. Sikhism is drawn from the tradition of Punjab in the north of India and nowadays Pakistan. As a minister of the faith in the Western Hemisphere, Yogi Bhajan presented a form of Sikhism ascribing qualities that sought to match the yogic component of the movement. Many Sikh concepts and terms were reframed and rephrased by him for his new Western 3HO members. The model of the *Khalsa Sikh* has been the undisputed model of a Sikh within the organization. Also the understanding of the practice of a Sikh, known as *Nam Simran* (meditation/repetition of the Name of God) and the underlying concept of *Naad* (the “sound current” as they deemed it, the inner sound, or mystical vibration that expressed God or divine melody) participate in the attributions to the notions of experiences of a Sikh.

C. New Age thought and the Self-sensory human. In the third component I will address the associations with the New Age vocabulary, purpose and calendar. Yogi Bhajan claimed that the end of a “dark age” (Piscean Age) was coming and that a qualitatively better age (Aquarian Age) would begin on the 11th of November 2012. This process would include a spontaneous awakening of the consciousness of the people. For him the awakening has a special sensory feature and although it happens spontaneously it is also expected and sought. These experiences are also fundamental in 3HO since, in the way that Yogi Bhajan explained intuition and especially the “Self Sensory System”, they would constitute the enhanced capacity of perception, becoming the “guardian angels” of the human being in the New Era.

D. Yogi Bhajan and his teachings. This aspect is addressed to see the agency that binds the notions of experiences in 3HO. The teachings of Yogi Bhajan are at the heart of the movement and everyone in the organization finds a criterion of validation when quoting his teaching. Yogi Bhajan himself said several times that his students were to “follow the teachings, not the teacher”. This aspect is extremely relevant in order to know how to have “an experience”, since the “teachings” seem to have a practical purpose or at least a prescriptive intentionality. The corpus of Yogi Bhajan’s teachings contains the articulated building blocks of all those practices, principles, values, and knowledge that were expressed by him to his students, altogether believed to be sourced in the “Golden Chain” or transcendental lineage of the self-realized Masters. Yogi Bhajan, therefore, was not only the founder of 3HO but also the ‘first attributor’ of behavioural events that are understood as part of a historical lineage and legacy.

E. The Aquarian Teachers and the experiences attributed. The central focus of this study is concerned with the Aquarian teachers and their way of deeming the experiences they have. This can disclose the connection with the legacy of Yogi Bhaajan or a novel form of attribution.

* * *

It is necessary to consider that although 3HO uses English as their *lingua franca*, only 3 out of the 11 informants were born in an English-speaking country (2 from the UK and 1 from the USA). Besides this, their references had more to do with pre-linguistic events, based on an *unusual sensory experience* and the way they change their personalities (rather than their philosophies) takes us closer to psychology than linguistics. Following Taves, I believe that “linguistic is added to pre-linguistic foundations” (2009, p. 64) so an approach that best suits the study must take into account that the frame is “locating the articulation of [individual] experience as an extension of embodied expressive behaviours [because it] offers a more intersubjective model” (p. 68). Along with this, the method to approach this complex framework and all its parts has to be capable of accounting for the interaction between personal experiences, beliefs, context and the movement as a collective formation. In this way the Attributional Theory is considered the best way to reframe the “interaction and relative importance of top-down (cultural sensitive) and bottom-up (cultural insensitive) processing in relation to particular experiences” (Taves, p. 98).

As a researcher who was trained as an historian and political scientist in Chile, and whose mother tongue is Spanish, I had a practical reason to approach this study using the attributional perspective rather than a linguistic one. Furthermore, the strength of this approach is confirmed by the informants themselves, since they often found it difficult to describe their experiences and would explicitly refer to how the use of language was limiting when trying to describe the type of events they went through. For these reasons (essentially my own line of research, linguistic background and considering the subjects regarding their verbal expression about *unusual sensory experiences*), the research did not benefit from the application of a language-based approach. This study makes an effort to refocus on the experience subjects deem in order to provide a “method for assessing the role of unusual experiences in the emergence and development of religions” (Taves, 2009, p. 14).

4. 2 Frame of the researcher’s position

This position statement is a reflective account that encompasses my relation to the subject of experience, 3HO, and my religious/spiritual background in order to clarify how these aspects are connected to this study and how they have motivated, challenged and shaped this research process³³.

³³ See more in the Part III

I am a Chilean, brought up in a Catholic country. I grew up in a Christian environment and I went through three of the first sacraments consigned by the Catholic Church (Baptism, Confession and The Eucharist). I later enrolled in a University with a Catholic ideology, the University Gabriela Mistral in Chile. My environment and upbringing did not lead me to adopt Christianity as my personal religious conviction, but I was curious and thirsty for more so, having finished my bachelor's degree, I sought a deeper spiritual insight and directed my attention towards reading the Psalms and the New Testament. During this period I was guided by a protestant acquaintance and soon arrived at some conclusions. Through this personal exploration, a) I felt that I understood the essence of 'biblical' Christianity, b) I accepted the figure of Jesus in my life and therefore c) I gained a view of the world and the consequential *ethics* that I deemed "Christian".

While this process was taking place, my academic training was progressing, giving me a critical standpoint regarding *New Religious Movements* and the *New Age* phenomenon. These subjects were a part of the curriculum of the course *Cultural History of the Twentieth Century* that I studied at the above-mentioned university. During this period of my life my personal religious interest developed into an intimate conviction, while at the same time I also began to see religious phenomena in a germinal academic perspective. This was the moment in my journey when I began to assist the Chair of *History of the Western Culture*. During this time the seed of scholarly interest in the field of belief systems, ideologies and Religious Studies was sown and, for the first time, nourished.

However, it was not until the end of my school years that this seed started to sprout and expand beyond the theory. My father invited me to participate in a class of Hatha yoga in the centre of Chile's capital city Santiago and, to my surprise, the dynamics and results of this practice moved me into a more systematic exploration of Eastern philosophies and practices. There was something about the experience of my body and the experience through meditation that caught my interest in a new fashion. Simultaneously I *deemed* the results of my yogic adventure as 'mystical'. The practice of Hatha yoga eventually led me to the practice of Kundalini yoga.

As far as Kundalini Yoga is concerned, this practice not only felt more intense, it also seemed that it had a stronger focus on the experiential level. Experiencing the system seemed to be a teaching method in itself. Soon these practices challenged me because I thought that these rather strenuous exercises and the unfamiliar chanting (Sikh mantras) would conflict with my Christian background – Kundalini yoga was a new movement led by an exotic Indian guru who was also the charismatic leader of a New Religious Movement... However, these seemingly very different traditions (Christianity, Hatha yoga (Hindu), and Kundalini yoga (Sikh)) did not create an unbearable tension within me because I started to take and see things more from the point of view of my personal experience than from the philosophical or theoretical contradictions and paradoxes that were created. This is perhaps the point where I started observing (my) experience as a distinctive religious phenomenon. Despite the eventual conflict of these traditions, I came to see that my experience of my previous exploration of Christianity and later yogic meditations and practices had similar characteristics. Somehow, on this

subjective level, some kind of resemblance *felt* possible and my way of *deeming* my own experience made it *theoretically* possible.

As far as it concerns me as a scholar and this present study, my participation in the practice and then teaching of Kundalini yoga and meditation has essentially been a contribution to the background faith a) as complementary and practical *systems of references* (in the sense of Max Weber), b) as a tool for achieving wellbeing on a daily basis and c) as an unexpected stimulation to address the religious phenomenon of experience in a scholarly fashion³⁴. The experiential characteristics of my journey inside the field of Hatha yoga and then Kundalini yoga “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”, have motivated my quest to find an inter-subjective perspective on the theme of experience through an academic method of the investigation.

For this reason the guiding star of this research is the inter-subjectivity that can be achieved through a systematic approach to the experience of people in 3HO. In other words, while following the academic tradition of a *participant observer* and *fieldworker*, the personal perspective I offer here is oriented to increase inter-subjective understanding (*empathetic understanding*, rather than *sympathetic understanding* – Chryssides, 2013). It also contains a warning to not be hijacked (by myself or anyone) to pander to the interests of the group studied; studies of this kind should rather serve the larger community of scholars and, eventually, non-scholars too.

As we are taught in the academy, a scholar in Religious Studies should not promote a belief or teach anyone what to believe, but rather examine a belief and publicly share the findings of his investigations. These noble intentions can sometimes be overtaken by unconscious or semi-conscious motivations, and this is a challenge that one must not be naïve about. Once the scholar is conscious of the challenges and is in control of them, close contact to the life of the subject being studied is not only necessary but also rewarding. Having this in mind, the inter-subjectivity can be achievable, provided that the study is addressed methodically, critically and based on verifiable data. Perhaps it is worthwhile noting that this is of service to the systematic analysis of evidence collected in a scholarly fashion³⁵. In this way we can make our hypotheses testable in order to confirm, corroborate or refute them. In saying that, however, I do not imply or claim that the scholar, as a *participant observer* who knows the subject ‘from inside’, has the best perspective. One rather has a ‘reflective research’ at hand (Chryssides, 2013).

Needless to say, the present study has given me the opportunity to challenge the ‘insider view’, so I dare to suggest that having this perspective has been beneficial rather than detrimental to the investigation. This is because some unknown aspects of *the experience in the teachings* of 3HO and of *the experience of people* of 3HO have been

³⁴ It has also given me some tools to develop an earlier tendency within the field of ‘alternative therapies’, as well as the opportunity to participate in the biggest social Kundalini yoga 3HO event in the European Yoga Festival, where I met my wife in 2004.

³⁵ The possibility of having an involvement with the subject of the study is not an indication of the identification one has with that subject; the type of approach to the subject, as in this research, is an indication of the identification one has with the academic protocols, their social roles and professional duties.

addressed for the first time in order to increase the knowledge and inter-subjectivity of the subject of experience within a “forgotten New Religious Movement” (Jackbosh 2008). This type of perspective has the potential to enrich and serve the deepening of knowledge of a given topic since it could direct the focus to matters that the outsider is not necessarily aware of. Thus, the present study does not aim to credit or discredit the 3HO community, Yogi Bhanjan’s figure or the “teachings” they represent. The grounds of this study are well rooted in the methodological agnosticism of Religious Studies, an approach which shuns assuming that the *being* of the subject is true or false – in this case the true content of the experiences people have in 3HO. In the present work I have also acknowledged that the participant observer does not necessarily have a privileged epistemic vantage point as in the *Sui Generis* model, and he is by no means the owner of a neutral or objective view, as neither are the scholars of the larger community of scientists in the field of humanities. In this respect, the contribution of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer is insightful, as he wrote that a human being is a “historically effected consciousness”. As scholars, we cannot claim neutrality or objectivity, rather our strengths are encountering one’s own prejudices and, by identifying them, getting a distance to analyse the question at hand without prejudice. Along with the objects of our investigation, we too are within the continuum of history, and as self-conscious beings we must acknowledge the influence of the cultural circumstances affecting our own personality. Our belief is also embedded in our historical consciousness, but this is not necessarily a problem in studying religions as long as it is assumed and presented as part of the scholar’s characteristics and in connection with the construction of the research. Any possible influence could thus become part of the research process, for instance at the beginning when we choose a theme and when the choice is based on the subjective decision which originates in the personal inclinations of the scholar. The scholar and his work are obviously and inevitably interdependent. This, too, reminds me of the education I received as a historian in which the idea of Henri-Irénée Marrou was recurrently highlighted: in his words, “history and the historian are inseparable”. This is why in the human sciences we pursue a clear objective which is not merely ‘inter-subjectivity’ but the axiologically overriding aim to find *a truth about* the phenomenon studied through authentic data. This is at the core of this investigation, so the ideology that best defines my position in the study about *3HO in the light of Experience* is best expressed in the classical reflection attributed to Aristotle, “*Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*”³⁶.

5. The Data

According to Ann Taves, a research strategy to study ascription on experiences must distinguish the types of data described in relation to the time when the experiences took place. The type of data produced in this sense is of three kinds (2009, p. 68-70),

- 1) The data available after the event (post hoc data), such as that collected in

³⁶ “Plato is my friend, but truth is a better friend” also sometimes attributed to Plato, “*Amicus est Socrates, magister meus, sed magis est amica veritas*”, and rendered as “Socrates, my master, is my friend but a greater friend is truth”.

interviews

- 2) The data which is prescriptive in setting the expectations (pre hoc data), such as that found in the literature of Yogi Bhajan and
- 3) The real-time data, which is obtained in the laboratories while an experience is taking place, where the observation describes the brain activity, the breath etc.

The material for studying the object is found in the *Post hoc* and *Pre hoc* documentation, and this material relates to 3HO in the following way³⁷:

On the macro level of this research I used *pre hoc data* by exploring the teaching of Yogi Bhajan and the literature produced by 3HO. The founder of 3HO gave many lectures in which he addressed all sort of ideas included *experience*. Through these lectures, which were recorded, transcribed and published by 3HO, the members of the movement sought knowledge, techniques and inspiration. These are presented as written sources, which are divided into manuals, classics and rarities, and others.

On the micro level of this research I used the transcription of the interviews conducted with 3HO members as *post hoc data*. Based on the elaboration of a “semi-structured questionnaire”, and through a conversational strategy with the subjects, I collected their descriptions of experiences in order to engage with the ways they attribute their experience. These interviews were conducted in the European Yoga Festival during 2006, 2010 and 2011. The material was digitally recorded and transcribed for later analysis; *Post hoc data* also includes the field material that I collected as a participant observer, including different types of notes or hand-outs provided in the European Yoga Festival.

A more detailed list of the material that corresponds to both the *pre hoc* and *post hoc data* in this research is presented in the following lines.

5. 1. Written sources

In the winter of 2005 the magazine published by 3HO, *Aquarian Times*, issued a special number commemorating Yogi Bhajan’s life and work. It includes an article with the title *The Top 15 Kundalini Yoga Books of all Time*, which lists the “best-seller” and the “absolute must-have” literature, all of which are considered “the most vital”. They ask “[are you] looking for inspiration, great yoga, lifestyle information, history, and wisdom? Everything you need is right there.” (Kaur Khalsa, Satya, 2005 p. 78-79). This material is a useful path to the sources and written material that can be used for different research purposes. It consists of:

³⁷ Real-time data is that which can be gathered by medical tools, technology and digitalized circuits, which fall outside the nature of this investigation.

Manuals

- *The Aquarian Teacher-KRI International Kundalini Yoga Certification Manual* by Yogi Bhajan (2003). This is the first-level Kundalini Yoga teacher training text book. It has 585 pages and all the subjects are covered by Yogi Bhajan to “create a teacher of Kundalini Yoga”.

Similarly, the editors of this magazine grouped together a list of five manuals based on the techniques taught by Yogi Bhajan, which are regarded as “the mainstay of Kundalini Yoga teachers everywhere”. The list was compiled by Harijot Kaur Khalsa and the manuals have all been published by the Kundalini Research Institute (KRI) in the USA. They are: *Owner’s manual for the human body* (1997), *Physical Wisdom* (1997), *Self Knowledge* (1997), *Self Experience* (2000) and *Reaching Me in Me* (2002). Later important publications are *Infinity and Me* (2004) and *Prana, Pranee, Pranayam* (2006).

Classics

- *The Master’s Touch* (1997) by Yogi Bhajan “leads the way... to create teachers”. It is considered the book “for every student of Truth... pointed and inspired teachings of and for the Age of Aquarius”.

- *The Mind* (1998) by Yogi Bhajan with Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, “phenomenal information found nowhere else”.

- *The Teachings of Yogi Bhajan* (1977) by Yogi Bhajan, “for an instant hit of inspiration and enlightenment ... on almost every possible subject”.

- *Kundalini Yoga – Flow of Eternal Power* (1998) by Shakti Parwha Kaur Khalsa, “introduction to the lifestyle of Kundalini Yoga”.

Rarities

- *Peace Lagoon*, translated by Sardani Premka Kaur (1971), according to the author of the article, “if you can only buy one book, this may be it” because “their beauty and power will raise your spirits in any circumstance” (p. 79).

- *The Ancient Art of Self-Healing* (1982) by Dr. Siri Amir Singh Khalsa, “everything that Yogi Bhajan said about health and healing”.

- *The Man Called Siri Singh Sahib* (1979) by “the 3HO and Sikh Dharma families”. This book is unfortunately out of publication; it was “the first pictorial history of Yogi Bhajan and 3HO”.

5. 2. Fieldwork Material

This type of data is the cardinal material since it provides a perspective that is not available (published) anywhere else and it can reflect the nuances of how “specialness” is attributed to the experiences of subjects. Fieldwork opens the entrance to the examination of the problems, which can neither be seen through the written material

nor through direct witnessing. Eric Sharpe (1986) referred to this in a very evocative way,

“...the only way to gain understanding of religion is to study it, long and hard in its actual living impressions –and perhaps by implication to spend less time (at least to begin with) puzzling over the ways in which others have studied it. No examination of portraits, sketches and cartoons can ever replace contact, however brief, with the person or the persons they represent” (p. 317)

This material is directly gathered throughout the researcher-subject contact. The material of this study was not only gathered in the field, but also in the ways that technology enables it (e.g. telephone conversation, letters and e-mail letters). This raw material includes:

- Field-notes
- Head-notes³⁸
- Recorded interviews (transcribed)
- Flyers.

The data gathering phase of the research has taken place over a period of five years, starting with the first field work I conducted among the 3HO members at the 3HO European Yoga Festival in France in 2006. During this visit I randomly interviewed some members of 3HO, recorded images and wrote down my observations in field diaries. Since 2006 I have kept contact with some informants, not only from France and Europe but also from the Americas, and I have also signed up to a mailing list where articles, activities and courses are promoted. The contact kept with some informants and the constantly updated status of what is going on in 3HO has improved my understanding of how members actually promote the “Teachings of Yogi Bhajan” on a daily basis and what kind of experiences one could think stem from their regular practice. These informants have contributed to this study and a number of them have been interviewed in-depth afterwards, during my second and third field work trips which were also conducted at the European Yoga Festival during the summers of 2010 and 2011.

A second set of interviews were held with 11 active Kundalini Yoga Teachers, all of whom were involved in the diffusion of the teachings of Yogi Bhajan and Kundalini Yoga. Formally they were all at least Certified Level One Teachers that had also completed or were about to complete Level 2 of the Aquarian Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training program³⁹. About half of them were also Level Two Teacher Trainers. The people chosen

³⁸ Head-notes are the immediate impressions of an event or situation, captured by the observer but not written down at the time, rather being defined and labeled in a scholarly fashion soon after.

³⁹ “The KRI Level One Aquarian Teacher Training Program is a 220-hour professional certification programme in Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan®. As an interactive course in the theory, practice, and basic skills of a Kundalini Yoga instructor, it includes 180 hours of classroom instruction and 40 hours of independent study: service projects, a 40-day meditation, and White Tantric Yoga. Graduates of Level One earn the title of KRI Certified Instructor of Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan® and fulfill the Yoga Alliance RYT (Registered Yoga Teacher) 200-hour requirement”

qualify as “experienced” in terms of the temporal criteria, training and commitment; each of them has had a minimum of three years of experience as Aquarian Teachers, and some had over three decades; they are closest to the model of the Aquarian Teacher; and they all received practically the same standard training to develop other Aquarian Teachers. In these interviews I interviewed six women and five men, which altogether allowed me to develop the fieldwork based on the random (and less systematic) interviews I carried out in 2006. These helped me polish the approach to properly address 3HO’s language and codes. These sets of interviews were recorded in digital format and constitute approximately 389 minutes of audio, an average of 20 minutes per interview.

The level 2 is to “Develop the inner growth and personal discipline of a truly excellent teacher. Open to KRI Level One Certified Instructors, this 300-hour certification program consists of five, 62-hour modules. Graduates of Level Two earn the title of KRI Certified Practitioner of Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan® and combined with Level One certification, fulfill the Yoga Alliance RYT (Registered Yoga Teacher) 500-hour requirement” from <http://www.kundaliniresearchinstitute.org/>

PART II

The constituents of 3HO described: The Three Realms of Thought and their Stand on Experience

In the following pages of the study I will first give a descriptive contextualization of the parts of 3HO that fall within the cultural aspects depicted above. This part deals with the examination of 3HO as a *complex composite formation* to address it on a macro level, from where I can extract notions of experience. In other words, the following pages address the issue in a *top-down* fashion to present the cultural sphere that leads to the individual sphere on the micro level (Part III). Approaching the macro level serves the journey to become more aware of the possible influences on the expectations and unconscious processing regarding the experiential dimension of individuals in 3HO. In order to do this I depict Kundalini yoga, Sikhism, and the New Age as general phenomena to show the way to specify the notions of experience that Yogi Bhajan synthesized from each of these spheres of thought. This is done in order to answer the question: *What is the role of experiences in the three-fold realm of thought of 3HO?* Each one of the constituent parts of 3HO are presented following the same sequence of characterization:

- Preliminary exposé and overview of the constituent
- Scholar views on the constituent and links to experience
- The perspective of 3HO/Yogi Bhajan on the constituent
- The perspective of 3HO/Yogi Bhajan on the constituent linked to experiences

6. Kundalini Yoga

During the last two centuries the study of yoga has gained many adherents. It began to attract more attention after the famous presentation that the young Indian Swami Vivekananda gave about the ancient teachings to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. According to Elizabeth De Michelis in *A History Of Modern Yoga* (2005), the concept of “modern Yoga” (compared to old classical Indian schools) was first formulated with Vivekananda’s book *Rāja Yoga* in 1896 (p. 159). Yoga then began to be introduced to learned groups of society in the USA and Europe.

In the course of a few decades yoga became a growing trend among some Western elites and discussion groups that were interested in spirituality⁴⁰. Due to the early work and influence of Swami Vivekananda, yoga became a “transnational cultural product” (Strauss 2005 p. 9). The system of yoga as presented by this swami is practical and in his

⁴⁰ The popularization of yoga started in the 1960s as Wade Dazey pointed out “... the Immigration Act of 1965 allowed a large number of Hindus to emigrate to U.S from India. By the end of the 20th century there were over one million Hindus in U.S (...) Also, starting around this time in the mid-1960s, yoga and meditation really became visible in popular culture when the Beatles became for a time followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Transcendental Meditation movement.”. Wade Dazey “Yoga in America: Some Reflections From the Heartland” in “Theory and Practice of Yoga. Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson”, Knut A Jacobsen (ed). Brill. Boston, 2005. P. 411

approach to it has explicit remarks regarding the prescriptive value of experiencing it:

“Practice is absolutely necessary. You may sit down and listen to me by the hour a day, but if you do not practice, you will not get one step further ... we never understand these things unless we experience them. We will have to see and feel them ourselves” (Vivekananda in Strauss 2005, p.36).

For Vivekananda experience is also a sensory event (“see and feel”), and this seems to suggest that experience is a feature at the root of yoga and its use. The influence of Vivekananda happens within the context of the cultural contact that happened in both directions between the British (and some Germans) and the Indian sub-continent. During the second half of the nineteenth century several intellectuals were able to travel to India and spend time learning Sanskrit. The fathers of Indiology were born around this time and, as pioneers, they explored the depth of the culture, so the ancient Vedic, Upanishad, and Yogic traditions began to flourish in Western soil.

Traditionally the term yoga is seen as a derivation from the Sanskrit root "yuj", which means "to control", "to yoke, or "to unite" (Flood 1996, p. 94). Yoga is also a term referring to a philosophical perspective (*yoga darshana*), which is included in the traditional six philosophical schools of Indian thought (Eliade, 1973).

The commonly agreed foundational text of the system of yoga is the *Yoga Sutras* by the Indian philosopher Patañjali (ca 200 CE). This is considered one of most important sources about the philosophy and practice of yoga. For Patañjali, yoga is “the cessation of the transformation of the awareness” (Jacobsen 2005, p. 3, 4, rendering Yogasūtras 1.2). But other efforts have been made to trace back the *Mahabharata*, an epic text of India. One part of this epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is considered a religious and technical source of information about Yoga. For many of the classical yoga traditions, *Krishna*, the main character and an avatar in the Gita, was the Lord of Yoga and the first guru that explicitly spoke about the different ways of yoga.

Within the different systems that belong to the path of yoga or *yoga darshana*, the Kundalini yoga system does not stand within a unique tradition or form and its roots are less known than other yogas since it has traditionally been thought of an esoteric knowledge. This is associated with the general idea that because of “the centrality of pranayama and cleansing of the *nadis* for the awakening of the *kundalini*, *hatha-yoga* is also called *kundalini-yoga*” (Jacobsen 2005 p. 19). In other words, in some traditional circles Hatha yoga and Kundalini Yoga have been cognate systems.

Following a similar argument, the author M. C. Joshi refers to another connection between Kundalini yoga and Tantra. For him,

“The Sakta [*Shakti*] Tantras also incorporated Kundalini Yoga into their system sometime before the eighth century. The basic concept of Kundalini Yoga recognizes that the Supreme Power of the universe exists in the human body where it lies in a static or dormant state. The sole aim of Tantrism is to awaken

the kundalini and make it rise in the body through various practices". (M. C. Joshi, 2002, p. 50)

It seems that Kundalini yoga can be referred to under different names and within or associated with different traditional systems. Additionally, a fair degree of protection under the notion of esoteric knowledge and consequent secrecy make it difficult to trace a univocal perspective about the origins of Kundalini yoga. According to Padoux,

"Secrecy is always insisted upon in Tantric traditions, which are initiatory. The teaching is therefore transmitted secretly by the master, the guru, to a carefully chosen disciple, intent on acquiring the esoteric knowledge of the tradition, fully devoted to his master and carefully not to divulge the doctrine to unbelievers" (2013, p. 25)

In spite of the veil of esoterism and occult knowledge that has prevailed in some traditions regarding Kundalini yoga, the links between yoga and tantra have made it a bit more graspable for the research. The challenge of contextualizing Kundalini yoga and the connection to Tantrism is clouded by temporal obscurity, and an accurate chronological identification of Tantrism alone seems to be very difficult, if not impossible. In this sense the study of Brooks (1990) emphasises that

"[t]he seeds from which Tantrism grew were sown centuries before we are able to identify specific text or traditions. Yoga and wisdom traditions, shamanism, alchemy and folklore, all contribute elements to the development of Tantric tradition." (p. 3).

For a temporal location, it can be said that it is commonly agreed that "the figure of Kundalini does not appear in the early Indian literature, such as Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras*, but only emerges in the later Tantric and Hatha yoga texts from roughly the eighth century onwards" (Urban 2005, p. 5266)

It is said that Kundalini yoga is therefore a system of mental and physical practices that has a give-and-take relationship with tantrism through centuries of oral tradition. In the path of Tantrism as it looks in traditional circles the relationship between Kundalini yoga, yoga and tantrism is, however, substantial. Due to its structure and characteristics, Kundalini yoga has been considered a technical part concerned with practicing postures, mantras and breathing procedures within the tantric traditions⁴¹. Another author referred to the procedures that the tantric texts represented:

"...Tāntrikas instead place primary focus on mantra repetition (japa) as an

⁴¹ Feuerstein understands Kundalini as a "Tantric discipline" (1990, p. 191) and André Padoux considers that "The form of power called the *kundalinī*, "the coiled one" – for she is compared to a serpent which, while at rest, lies curled up, and which, when awakened, rises – plays a part of paramount importance in Yoga and Tantrism ... *kundalinī* has an essential symbolic role – as an energy that is both universal and present within human beings- in the correspondences between the human and the cosmic levels. Tantrism asserts this again and again, and the purpose of its teachings and practices is precisely to enable the adept to realize it" (1990, p. 125)

inner visualization informed by the semiotic insight revealed by the authoritative texts and the teachers of the tradition. This joining of japa with meaning is one of the primary Tantric means by which the mind of the initiate attains the goal of yoga: to turn inward, away from the most extroverted form of speech, and to rest in the true nature of consciousness” (Sthaneshwar Timalisina p. 214)

I could say that Kundalini yoga is generally understood in traditional terms as a method of self-awareness which, even though it theoretically belongs to the system of *Yoga darshana*, has been connected to Tantrism through its central notions and cosmology. In approaching Tantra or Tantrism it is therefore important to understand its main profile as an

“Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways”. (White, 2000, p. 9)

It is illustrative to conclude with the view of Katherine Anne Harper (2002), who noticed the link between Tantrism, Kundalini yoga and the backbone of the experiences attributed to these systems:

“(t)antric stands for a collection of practices and symbols ritualistic, sometimes magical, in character... applied as means of reaching spiritual emancipation (mukti) and/or realization of mundane aims, chiefly domination (bhukti) ... by means of Kundalini yoga and other psychosomatic experiences”. (p.116).

According to Harper, Kundalini yoga has an instrumental character in relation to Tantrism, and she qualified Kundalini yoga along with “other psychosomatic experiences”.

* * *

I have referred to some of the general connections, mentioning the links in the practices and the aims of these two systems, but we should not misrepresent the relationship between Kundalini yoga and Tantrism in 3HO. Kundalini yoga and “White Tantric Yoga”, “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”, are not directly associated with the Hindu or Vedic background and therefore I should not approach them, especially White Tantric Yoga, as part of the conventional development of Tantric lore. For example Laue in his work (2007) chose not to study 3HO within the Tantric tradition. For him, Yogi Bhajan is rather more connected to the neo-tantra-boom in which the founder of 3HO is deemed by this author as a *path opener* for the neo-tantra-boom, underlining that Yogi Bhajan made the claims that White Tantric Yoga and Kundalini Yoga were his field of mastery and that he was the only “Mahan Tantric of his time” (p. 1). According to Laue, neo-tantra

arose in the late 1970s in North America and Western Europe and it is not the same as the Indian systems (p. 15). This is why I will not approach classical Tantrism in this study because White Tantric Yoga “as taught by Yogi Bhajan” is rather his own formulation and neither an expression of Hindu Tantrism nor, strictly speaking, neo-tantrism as Laue finally considered (p. 15). Therefore in the current study White Tantric Yoga has been distinguished, and deemed, as a modern form of Tantrism that can appropriately be summoned within the syncretic shape of 3HO. White Tantric Yoga is closely associated to the New Age ideas of the pre-eminence of the “female energy” and not only integrates some pop-culture elements, such as hippie melodies of the 1970s (like “Waking up the Mountain” by Gurudass Singh), but also Sikh symbols like the head cover (normally a turban), the Sikh “Khanda”⁴², deemed by Yogi Bhajan as the “Adi Shakti” and understood as the “primal female power”, as well as the practice of *japa* or mantra repetition of words and passages contained in the Sikh scriptures⁴³, all blended with different affirmations in English language (for example: “I love myself” says the male partner, “Bless you, Bless you Bless you” says the female partner).

6. 1. Kundalini Yoga understood by three scholars

According with Harper and Brown,

“... Tantrism is not a coherent system; it is an accumulation of practices and ideas from various sources distributed unevenly in different times, places, sects and among individuals ... tantric pieces can be mixed easily with other non-Tantric aspects” (2002 p. 1-2).

As these authors pointed out, there is fuzzy frame for the tantric lore. Together with the reasons above mentioned, I am not concerned about the inflow of tantrism into 3HO, I am rather concerned about their experience and how they are connected to the constituents of the organization; therefore I have purposely chosen another approach to this issue. In the next lines Sir John Woodroffe, Carl Gustav Jung and Mircea Eliade have been accounted not because they are scholar authorities outside of the field of tantrism but because they have a) a gravitation in both, the academic and the folkloristic views of the phenomenon of Kundalini yoga, b) they left a mark that partially influenced the folklore on the understanding of the phenomenon of *kundalini rising* in connection to Westerners or Europeans, and for the most important, c) they have explicitly referred to the experiential level of the yogic method in connection to Westerners or Europeans. These three reasons and what these authors have addressed and concluded, are

⁴² See Appendix C.

⁴³ For instance, George Feuerstein (2002), a contemporary Western authority on Yoga, acknowledged the close connection of the Sikh religion and the ways of a Kundalini yogi in a direct allusion to 3HO. He wrote that Kundalini yoga is a contemporary expression of “Yoga in Sikhism” that has been introduced by Yogi Bhajan (p. 443-449). Regarding the connection between Kundalini yoga and the tantric system he noted that the ‘present age’ served as an important cause for this manifestation: “The Tantric teachers place self-examination above social morality, and the texts typically warn the uninitiated and initiated alike that their teachings are radical and dangerous. But they offer a shortcut to enlightenment in the present age of spiritual decline” (p. 235).

perspectives that are directly related to the issues this study deals with.

Sir John Woodroffe

The first scholar who approached Kundalini yoga as a specific subject was Sir John Woodroffe (under his pen name Arthur Avalon), a High Court Judge in Calcutta. When he was living in India he developed a deep interest in Shakti traditions within the Hindu religion. He dedicated his investigation to the translation and commentary of two scriptures, publishing the result in a book entitled "*The Serpent Power*", (1972, first published in 1919). This is actually the translation of two important Indian texts and their commentaries, the *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana* and the *Paduka-Pañcaka*, concerning Kundalini. For some commentators and many Westerners this work served as an inspiration and chief textual reference – usually without acknowledgment. Indeed, it could be said without exaggeration that this book forms the basis of almost all contemporary Western understanding of traditional chakra doctrine and Kundalini yoga. In the preface Woodroffe explains that his work is "a description and explanation in fuller detail of *Serpent Power (Kundalini Shakti)* and the yoga effect through it" (ix). His definition and description of Kundalini and Kundalini yoga goes as follows:

"Kundala means coiled. The power is the Goddess (Devi) Kundalini, or that which is coiled; for Her form is that of a coiled and sleeping serpent in the lowest centre, at the base of the spinal column, until by the means described She aroused in that Yoga which is named after Her (p. 1, 2).

According to this author, the association of Tantra and Kundalini yoga is because of the "scriptural sources" and because "(t)he system is of a Tantrik (sic) character also in respect of its selection of chief centre of consciousness" (p. 3). Here he refers to a chakra as a "centre of consciousness". These phenomena of the *chakra* or *centres of consciousness* are believed to be a part of the human structure and in Woodroffe's view

"The centres, or chakras, of the human body are described to be vortices of 'etheric' matter into which rush from the 'astral' world, and at right angles to the plane of the whirling disc, the sevenfold force of the Logos bringing "divine life" into the physical body ... In the first centre, 'at the base of the spine', is the 'Serpent Fire', or Kundalini, which exists in seven layers or seven degrees of forces" (p. 7-9)

His view of these *chakras* or centres refers to seven types of "vortices" or "whirling discs" which express a divine force or element in the human that he deems the "logos". In the analysis of this author "the end of Kundalini-Yoga is beyond all Heaven worlds. No Yogi seeks "Heaven" but union with that which is the source of all worlds" (p.10), so in other words these "centres" can manifest a "divine life" and therefore an imminent union with the divine, independent of the idea of "heaven" as he deemed it. Later on he referred to the time frame in which the experience of Kundalini can come up as it

"must be gradually raised from one centre to another until she reaches the

Lotus in the cerebrum. The length of time required varies with the individual –it might be years ordinarily or in exceptional cases months” (p.20).

The value of Woodroffe’s analysis is not only theoretical because he presents two case studies of people that describe their Kundalini experience (p. 22-25). From his perspective,

“It is noted, however, that in the estimation of the practitioners of Kundalini yoga it is the highest Yoga in which a perfect Samadhi is gained by the union of Shiva of both mind and body” (p. 213).

Carl Gustav Jung

From a psychological perspective, the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung presented his reflections and research on Kundalini yoga in a seminar given in 1932. In the book of this seminar *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* (1996), Jung contributes insightful psychological observations about this system. He is critical of Westerners practicing it and he deemed the experience not in a religious sense but in a medical sense as something negative, saying that

“the European who practices yoga does not know what he is doing. It has a bad effect upon him and sooner or later he gets afraid and sometimes it even leads him over the edge of madness” (p. xxx).

Jung’s critical perspective was based on his background training, which combined medical approaches and psychological symbolism. Consequently he warned that,

“...if the yogin or the Western person succeeds in awakening Kundalini, what starts is not in any way a personal development, though of course an impersonal development can influence the personal status as it does very often and very favourably. But it is not always so ... If you do, you will soon feel obnoxious consequences ... “(p. 27).

In some ways Jung’s perspective is that the practice of such a system is reserved for a particular cultural type of human. This ethnocentric perspective downplays the capacity of the European type of person to practice and achieve a personal development or other good results through the practice of Kundalini yoga. Jung did not see everything as jeopardizing mental health, however, and using the imagery of Kundalini as a *serpent* he said that

“... the serpent can only be aroused by the right attitude. Expressed in psychological terms, that would mean that you can approach the unconscious in only one way, namely, by a purified mind, by a right attitude, and by the grace of heaven, which is Kundalini” (p. 20).

One can see that his background as a scientist researching the mind conditions his perspective of viewing the phenomenon in terms of the mind's complexity and dysfunctionality, and made him certain that there were some preconditions unattainable for the Western person for rising Kundalini. Although he integrates the ideas of a spiritual call, inner experience and destiny into his approach, the psychoanalytic perspective is cardinal to deem this kind of experiences:

“Something in you, an urge in you, must lead you to it. If that does not exist, then it is only artificial ... And that is Kundalini, something absolutely unrecognizable, which can show, say, as fear, as neurosis, or apparently as vivid interest but it must be something superior to your will. Otherwise you don't go through it. You will turn back when you meet the first obstacle; as soon as you see the leviathan you will run away. But if that living spark, that urge, that need, gets you by the neck, then you cannot turn back; you have to face the music” (p. 20, 21)

Jung expressed further concern about the real value of yoga practice in the West. There he says:

“There are many kinds of yoga and Europeans often become hypnotized by it, but it is essentially Eastern, no European has the necessary patience and it is not right for him... the more we study yoga, the more we realize how far it is from us; a European can only imitate it and what he acquires by this is of no real interest” (p. xxx).

In the same line of argumentation, but this time introducing a new cosmological ideal of yoga for a Westerner, Jung considers that “in the course of centuries the West will produce its own yoga, and it will be on a basis laid down by Christianity” (1996, p.xxx). Jung later interpreted the tradition of secrecy around Yoga as a natural attitude towards unknown consequences, sometimes obnoxious, that common people are not able to handle. In his view the unknown or the obnoxious outcome of this yoga is

“the reason why these experiences are secret; they are called mystical because the ordinary world cannot understand them, and what they cannot understand they call mystical -that covers everything (...) Therefore the yoga way or the yoga philosophy has always been a secret, but not because people have *kept* it secret. One cannot even talk about them, and of such a kind of are the experiences of Kundalini yoga” (p. 28)

Jung recognized in this experience a new perspective of the human psyche that is altogether unknown in the West, but which will enrich research on consciousness, and he warned people that,

“it is wise not to identify with these experiences but to handle them as if they were outside of the human realm. That is the safest thing to do—and really absolutely necessary. Otherwise you get an inflation, and inflation is just a minor

form of lunacy, a mitigated term for it. And if you get so absolutely inflated that you burst, it is schizophrenia” (p. 27)

To Jung the most important aspect of the Kundalini experience was that it presented the West with an opportunity to approach an aspect that Western psychology was unaware of,

“... the concept of Kundalini has for us only one use, that is, to describe our own experiences with the unconscious, the experiences that have to do with the initiation of the suprapersonal processes” (p. 70)

A commentator on Jung’s analysis, *Patrick Mahaffey (2005)*, wrote that the psychiatrist and his analysis did not venture to explain a higher level of consciousness in relation to the higher centre or chakras. Mahaffey’s opinion was that Jung “felt it did not help to speculate about the *ājñā* and *sahasrāra cakra*-s since they go beyond the range of Westerners’ experience” (p. 398). In the words of this writer,

“The task in Jung’s depth psychology, as in yoga sādhana [“Yoga Kundalini”], is to work through the complexes and passions associated with the first three cakra-s. When this is achieved, something new happens in the psyche. One is able to detach from emotional entanglements that typify a highly conditioned life. One glimpses the ātman or the self. Subsequent development is rare in the West” (p. 402)

Mircea Eliade

Another interesting perspective to approach yoga was the one adopted by Mircea Eliade. In the 1920s Eliade went to Rishikesh to become a yoga student under his professor and tantric teacher Surendranath Dasgupta. This trip was part of his fieldwork research and was a theoretical and practical study of yoga. His findings were published in his doctoral thesis on Yoga entitled *Patañjali et le Yoga* (Paris, 1962). Based on his dissertation he later delved deeper and published one of the classic works on yoga, *Yoga; Immortality and Freedom* (1969). In this work, Eliade also showed a similar concern regarding the feasibility of yoga practice for Westerners. He thought that,

“We have no intention of inviting Western scholars to practice yoga (which, by the way is not so easy as some amateurs are wanting to suggest) or of proposing that the various Western disciplines practice yogi methods or adopt the yogic ideology. Another point of view seems to us far more fertile to study, as attentively as possible, the results obtained by such means of exploring the psyche” (1970, p. xvii)

As with Jung, the ethnocentric aspect becomes a hindrance for Eliade, since both share the idea that Western people and yoga practice do not go together. These two giants of the Western intellectual elite raised the same kind of concerns, although Eliade, like

Vivekananda, stated that he believed that the experiential aspect was fundamental in providing a correct understanding of the subject of Yoga. He wrote that,

“Denial of the reality of the yogic experience, or criticism of certain of its aspects, is inadmissible from a man who has no direct knowledge of its practice, for yogic states go beyond the condition that circumscribes us when we criticize them” (p.39).

This manifests a contradiction because he was a Westerner and held the view that, as such, he or any Westerner was incapable of enjoying the “fertile” effects of this system. At the same time as it was “inadmissible from a man who has no direct knowledge of its practice” to say anything about it... But if he was capable of such learning that allowed him to arrive to these and other conclusions about the experience during his stay in India, was he an exceptional Westerner? Or is he an advocate of the *Sui Generis* approach to religious experience?

In this sense Eliade recalled the idea of experience, accepting the perspective that the understanding and the knowledge that is to be attained through yoga can only be gained through some kind of inner and unmediated experience. For this reason, he described the experiential event that yoga aims for and its links to liberation in the following way:

“it is the enstasis [“internal ecstasy”] of total emptiness, without sensory content or intellectual structure, an unconditioned state that is no longer “experience” (for there is no further relation between consciousness and the world) but “revelation” ... “Human” consciousness is suppressed; that is, it no longer functions, its constituent elements being reabsorbed into the primordial substance. The yogin attains deliverance; like a dead man, he has no more relation with life; he is “dead in life”. He is the *jīvan-mukta*, the “liberated in life”” (p. 93, 94)

Here Eliade’s reflection took a turn towards the classical *sui generis* view, where the experience is disengaged from history and the world and is only accessible through a religious mechanism⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ In Eliade one can notice a similar view of the Kundalini experience, which was already present in Woodroffe’s approach: Eliade says that “the pre-eminent sign of transcendence is found in the final act of kundalinī’s ascent – its union with Shiva, at the summit of the skull in the *sahasrāra*” (1969, p. 244, 245). This recalls the notion of centers of divine nature (*sahasrāra* is the seven center). However, it is also significant how he highlights the experiential and tantrism, “it is only through experiences that freedom is gained ... this tendency toward concrete, experimental knowledge, in view of finally mastering that of which one has, so to speak, taken possession through knowing it, will be carried to its extreme by Tantrism” (p. 40, 41).

6. 2 Dimensions of Kundalini Yoga “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”⁴⁷

Yogi Bhajan regularly ascribed to all humans an “infinite potential”, echoing an old and general tantric notion. For him, to experience God-consciousness, Brahm, or some sort of ‘infinity force’ was deemed interchangeably with this notion, and this was necessarily seen as a reflection of an experiential event that the techniques he taught had the power to produce. There are two dimensions that researchers of 3HO must explore to approach matters concerning the experience of these or other notions that are seen as outcomes of Kundalini yoga “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”:

The personal dimension of the experience. Yogi Bhajan spoke about Kundalini and its system, Kundalini yoga, as a fruit of human research and experience. In his thought the system begins as an exploration and then as a consecutive finding. In his words,

“Men of great knowledge found out about the chakras – their working, their petals, their sounds, their infinity, their co-relationship, their powers. They found that the life of a human is based on these chakras. They developed into a whole science. This total science gave birth to Kundalini Yoga. That is how Kundalini Yoga was born” (Bhajan, 2003, 183)

Let us break down this paragraph to see the deeming process. In some manner, the expression resembles some of the authors we have met so far (Woodroffe, Jung, Padoux, White, Eliade), but the biggest difference is that when Yogi Bhajan speaks about the subject he ascribes to it the character of “science”. The experience of ascribing characteristics such as “chakras” to humans played a role in this approach because they were “found out” (similar to an academic who finds evidence to confirm a theory that *could* also imply that a proto-knowledge existed prior to the finding of something special deemed as “chakras”).

⁴⁷ Kundalini Yoga in 3HO can be outlined like this:

- Kundalini Yoga was introduced by Yogi Bhajan through the ashram life style of 3HO to activate the “divine potential in the human”.
- Kundalini Yoga is indebted to Yogi Bhajan for his vast theoretical and technical elaboration that can be learnt without the traditional initiation, defying the traditional esoteric profile and warnings around these techniques. The yoga of Yogi Bhajan is presented as an open school by 3HO.
- According to Yogi Bhajan, his aspiration was not to gather disciples or/and appoint one successor, but to create as many Kundalini Yoga teachers as possible to teach and not preach and have the power to elevate the consciousness of humanity for the New Age.
- Contrary to the academic perception of the Kundalini experience, which is seen as a dangerous thing (Jung), with Yogi Bhajan it is not seen as a dangerous phenomenon but rather a way to transform the individual and collective consciousness towards God-like consciousness, creating the conditions of a Healthy, Happy and Holy humanity.
- Yogi Bhajan’s Kundalini Yoga was presented to Westerners coloured by Sikh Khalsa religion because of his personal commitment to this religion.

Yogi Bhajan's idea of discovery and the *how* they found *these things*, although not explicit, could well be inferred to be a sensory experience that implies an empirical first-person contact with a phenomenon that is then deemed as 'chakras'. Whether this inference is correct or not, the ascription of a sort of *special capacity* is clear, as these men were not ordinary: such a discovery was achieved by "men of great knowledge" who then "found" something was not ordinary either. We can say that this implies that most likely himself and men like him had the "great (empirical) knowledge" to "develop a whole science", becoming the new "attributors" of these particular insights. From this they seem to discover further aspects of the *chakras* ("their working, their petals, their sounds, their infinity, their co-relationship, their powers") and ascribed to them a 'special' importance for human life (because "the life of humans is based on these chakras"). We can see that in this deeming process the clear character of "specialness" sets this knowledge apart from common knowledge, which was characterized by the *infinity* ("their infinity") deemed to them. A subsequent degree of systematization of this vision of "chakras" followed (as it was "developed into a whole science"), and the knowledge of "the system of Kundalini Yoga" was born. In conclusion, the character of "specialness" is behind the whole approach that Yogi Bhajan has about Kundalini yoga and its origins, in the sense that, a) the status of Kundalini yoga is set as a "science" not as something ordinary, b) due to the purposeful "discovery" of a special human thing deemed as "chakras", c) achieved by special persons ("men of great knowledge"), d) who had a special capacity ("great knowledge").

Through Attributional theory it can be seen how the previous quote is expressing how "people ascribe absolute character to things" (Taves 2009 p. 36) (like the chakra's "infinity") and, how people also "attribute causality" that matches what they ascribed as *special* (p. 41), (since the result is that "this total science gave birth to Kundalini yoga"). This deeming making process of Yogi Bhajan not only implies his participation in the development of this "science" of which he was regarded as a master, but also gives Kundalini Yoga its intended use as a technique to experience something 'special' that has been ascribed an 'absolute character'.

In this way we can see why Yogi Bhajan stated that "the purpose of all branches of yoga is to raise the Kundalini, to raise the dormant power of the being so that he can have excellence" (1997, p. 124), and also that "just as all rivers end up in the ocean, all yoga ends up raising Kundalini" (2003, 31). So for Yogi Bhajan there is a common goal in all yoga systems to provide the access to something special, "infinity", "excellence" or to "raise of Kundalini". Here it is possible to see him expressing a general view *about* the experiential goal deemed to all yogas that is not the same as the experience *of* the goal. In other words, the attribution is made about something special, but not of the special characteristics of the goal experienced. This is seen by Yogi Bhajan in association to the "special" knowledge achieved:

"Longitude and latitude are given to everybody. Altitude and attitude are given by Kundalini Yoga. When the spiral rises to penetrate through all the chakras, the man knows he is *Brahm*" (original italics) (Bhajan. 1997, p. 10).

With “longitude” and latitude” he is naturally referring to space coordinates; this is in accordance with the ascription of a *finite* characteristic, compared with, hypothetically, the ascription of “infinity” seen above. However Kundalini yoga is deemed efficacious as its practice provides another special capacity that is conveyed as “altitude” and “attitude”. The Kundalini rising event, also deemed as a “spiral [that] rises”, gives “altitude” to the person, elevating him beyond *finite* knowledge of himself. This type of vertical movement gives the subject the chance to gain knowledge of his divine/infinite identity (“he knows Brahma”). One might naturally deduce that this type of realization would change the “attitude” of the person’s psychology about himself, life and the world. At any rate, these kinds of events that are seen as being experienced as stages or goals are bound to be documented. It was in this respect that Yogi Bhajan spoke about the scriptural knowledge on Kundalini in rather critical terms, and he clearly prescribed the goal as a practical one, as an experience related to Kundalini. He said,

“These books have put us in so many circles that we do not come out of it, and we reach nowhere. Yet there is a way we can set our computer to be in direct contact with Him, the Biggest Computer, and all things must then work automatically. That cannot work until the kundalini, the spiritual nerve, breaks through the blockage of muladhara, travels up, and reaches the stage that you may have Superconsciousness in Consciousness” (Bhajan, 2003. p. 21)

This paragraph contains many ascriptions and attributions that seek to associate the experiential phenomenon initially to a more mundane explanation than the yogic symbol of the Kundalini which favours the more New Age terminology of “superconsciousness”. At any rate, as Taves explained it attributionally, if “the goal of a path is to re-present an original or prototypical event to the followers of the path, the goal of the path is likely to be formulated in experiential terms” (209, p. 140). This deeming making process is constituted by the following ideas:

- “our computer” is clearly referring to the brain and the mental faculty, which in these paragraphs are shown as the task of functioning in order to reach a *male absolute* (“in direct contact with Him”). This is then rephrased as a technological device (“Biggest Computer”). Perhaps it goes without saying that the industry of computer technology was flourishing in the USA when this lecture was given.
- So the idea of “work” responds to the historical context of the attributor. But why is it not working automatically? Because according to him it “... cannot work until...” given preconditions are met. And here again we encounter the same attribution of causality seen before:
- It depends on the Kundalini “travelling up”; so then the human capacity, *brain* and *mind*, “our computer”, in other words deemed *as a processor in a state of ineffective performance*, can start working.
- The ascription process is now conveyed in yogic terms, as the Kundalini is required to “break through the blockage of muladhara” [a block to be thought of as the base chakra], presenting a prescription to which is attributed cause-

effect that works to achieve “Superconsciousness” (another term for the “Biggest Computer”) in consciousness (“our computer”) in the personal dimension of the experience of “kundalini ... that travels up”.

The public dimension of the experience of Kundalini yoga. It is important to remember that Yogi Bhajan’s version of Kundalini yoga has a considerable presence in the field of yoga due to the social activism that I referred to in the overview of the movement. Since this tradition of Kundalini yoga has had an open policy as a non-initiatic path, it is probably one of the most known forms of Kundalini yoga that can be found in specialized journals, web pages, libraries, yoga schools and yoga exhibitions. To some extent, the mission carried out by Yogi Bhajan and 3HO in the West in order to create the individual and social foundations for opening the Age of Aquarius to the world through especially, but not exclusively, the practice of Kundalini yoga and meditation generated a situation that generally links the label of Kundalini yoga to Yogi Bhajan and 3HO. In this respect the influence of the New Age *spiritual market*, that the founder of 3HO lived as an historical context, made him adopt a particular position:

“Kundalini yoga is not a commercial nonsense. It’s not public relations. Either a practitioner practices purely or should not practice it. The system has a power not to pollute itself. The system itself does not allow anybody to pollute the system.” (Bhajan, 1997, p. 116)

The public dimension of the experience and practice of Kundalini yoga and Tantrism in 3HO is restricted to the proper representation of the values, teachings and techniques embodied and prescribed by Yogi Bhajan and protected by the organization. Further, the possibility of starting the practice of Kundalini yoga is deemed in a way that shows its “specialness” by following the rules: “The first rule of Kundalini yoga”, Yogi Bhajan said, “is that you do not show obnoxiously or politely, humbly or powerfully any power of your own” (Bhajan, 1997, p. 51). The potential of the human is to be awakened, that is a clear intention in 3HO, but showing off does not seem to be liked in the founder’s view and it probably reveals the dimension of social concern of misrepresentation. In deeming the technique efficacious and the human potentially capable of reaching the infinite, it sounds congruent that any manifestation of its power is protected and deemed taboo.

His form of Tantrism is indeed deemed in a way that sets it apart as a “special” form of tantrism. In this respect Yogi Bhajan has distinguished his form of tantrism as “White Tantric Yoga”, which was promptly trademarked (WTY™). The literature that 3HO has produced to train Kundalini Yoga teachers (Bhajan, 2003) identifies White Tantric Yoga as the

“reclaiming of innocence and acquisition of purity of subconscious through a close synchronization of the individual in their polarities with Infinity.” (p. 33)

Other forms of tantric yoga such as what in 3HO are deemed as red and black tantras

are commonly ascribed “physical sexual practices” (*red tantra*) and another *lower* form, to which the “control of others through the use of mental power or control of the elements through the refinement of mental power” is attributed (*black tantra*). They finally say that “neither are part of White Tantric Yoga” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 33).

In the scholarly perspective on Tantrism that was briefly described above, it can now be seen that Yogi Bhajan’s views might bear a little resemblance to the general tantric notions and perhaps some aspects of the practice (Kundalini yoga), but no rituals, beliefs or varieties of traditional tantric practices of India. Although Yogi Bhajan claimed he echoed old traditions, it seems he mainly generated a syncretic blend of new approaches to some old things.

6. 3. Further notions of Experiences of Kundalini Yoga in 3HO

In the following lines I will present the themes that encompass the different notions of experience that are related to Kundalini yoga in 3HO. In this section I will explore Yogi Bhajan’s statements, understanding him as a “first attributor”. His statements will be quoted and described in the same attributional fashion as above.

The idea of know-how: “The Experience of the Infinite”. In Yogi Bhajan’s words,

“I will tell you about yoga in very simple terms: The human mind is potentially infinite and Creative. But in practical reality it is limited. So a technical know-how is required through which one can expand his mind to bring about the equilibrium that enables him to control his physical structure and experience his Infinite Self” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 13)

In relation to a scholar’s view, I previously cited the definition in the study of 3HO by C. Elsberg, who considered Kundalini “a form of divine power incarnated in the body” (2003, p. 1). This is a link to a personal dimension of the experience explained in the lines above. In this quote it can be seen that the attribution is not deemed as the encounter of a *limited-physical* being and an *infinite-ultimate-self* as an action of *religare* (or deemed as a religious event) – Yogi Bhajan is rather speaking about generating “the equilibrium”. “The equilibrium” is deemed as a precondition that “enables” an increased command of the physical that is deemed as potentially connected with the infinite. “The mind” is attributed with the driving force that “expands” and thus “enables” an increase in the yogi’s domain. What becomes an interesting implicit prescription in the goal of achieving an “experience of the infinite self” is that it is reached by control that is deemed as a consequence of “equilibrium”, which is in itself is a consequence of an “expanded mind” that originally begins with “technical know-how”. This is another way that Yogi Bhajan used to speak about Kundalini yoga.

In this attribution the “practical reality” would refer to the common human state where the body or “physical structure” is addressed in the common yogic way that claims that it has to be controlled or tamed. I can use an analogy to understand this better: similar

to the wild horse that no one can successfully ride, the attributor seems to consider that the body suffers from the same kind of wild condition regarding equilibrium. However, as the majority of yogic and tantric philosophies agree, the condition of the mind is “infinite in potential”. Yogi Bhajan addressed this by contrasting the active “practical reality” (which is “limited”) with the *potential reality*, to which “infinity” is attributed. Infinity is a key consideration that is used as a regular attribution by Yogi Bhajan, and it is probably linked with yogi-like practices and thoughts that are in the folklore, cultural background or tradition of the “yoga darshana”, all together ascribing the presence of an *infinite reality* within the finite realm of the body referred to as *Kundalini*. Yogi Bhajan approached the mind by attributing and correlating it to a *special thing* that needs a *special path*, a “know-how” to generate the expansion (evidently a condition for reaching infinity) through a practical yogic behavioural event. In this way a person can transcend the boundaries of the finite reality (the “practical reality”) and gain control of its structure (it is implicit that without this control it is unattainable). This is not deemed a personal contact with the “Infinite Self”, but a literal “experience of it”.

“*Experience*” and “*Words*”. It seems to be clear that the techniques that Yogi Bhajan taught were intended to produce a quick experiential effect:

“...in Kundalini Yoga the most important thing is your experience. It goes right to your heart. No words can replace that experience” (2003, p. 20).

What could this mean? On a level of attributed causality the indication repeats that this yoga is intended to create a deep impact (that goes to the “heart”) and that it downplays words: words are “replaceable”, but the experience is *irreplaceable*. This contrast between the power attributed to the words and the power attributed to the experience presents the basis of the contrast between *textual knowledge* and *experiential knowledge*. For Yogi Bhajan, “a teacher [of Kundalini yoga] gives you an experience [whereas] a preacher gives you philosophy” (Bhajan. 1998, p 28). The subordination of words to experience, of philosophical (knowledge) to empirical (knowledge), is also extended to the subordination of activity concerning knowledge deemed spiritual. According to this, a “preacher” (and also a ‘philosopher’) is less capable than a teacher, because a teacher (of Kundalini yoga) is acquainted with the “most important” thing, the thing deemed special – “experience”. And what does experience do that the philosophy and the preacher cannot do? Experience, to which is given the attribution of causality that, “goes right to your heart”. This emphasis probably gives a particular shape to the organization inasmuch as the practice of Kundalini yoga and meditation are prescribed to be promoted through the same mechanism. In considering this approach by 3HO, one can understand the way their books are written since they are mostly manuals or have a manual of exercises and meditations attached in which the common emphasis is on the promotion of the practices and its effects rather than the doctrine or cosmology.

The Cardinal experience of Kundalini. Yogi Bhajan’s ideas reinforce the notion that the *experience of Kundalini* is at the core of the experience in the way that

“Creation needs a base, a nucleus. A person with Kundalini experience provides such a nucleus. It should be understood very simply. It is not window shopping, it is not dogma” (Bhajan 1997, p. 51)

In order to understand this ascription given to *Kundalini experience* one has to see its extent. For Yogi Bhajan, nothing in the world (“creation”) seems to compare with this type of experience. As it was shown before, it not only goes “right to the core”, here it is actually the “base” or the “nucleus” of creation itself. In this sentence “creation” can well be interpreted within the view of the yogic tradition that sees creation as ‘nature’ or ‘matter’ (*prakriti*). This idea seems to correlate with “Kundalini experience” being the “base” or “nucleus”, which corresponds to the notion that material reality is filled by the “self-soul” (*Atma*) as the principle animating it.

It would be useful to establish the association of this aspect with another scholarly perspective on 3HO, that of Alan Tobey (1976), who concluded that Kundalini yoga “is the means by which in 3HO common physical experience becomes the basis of shared spirituality” (p.12). Tobey’s perspective explains the cardinal importance of both “experience” and “Kundalini” in bestowing “specialness” (as in core purpose) to the life of the practitioners. At the same time, regarding White Tantric yoga, Tobey mentioned that it is not part of the daily life of 3HO members, conveying his observation that White Tantric Yoga is set apart as something unique: “it is only taught by Yogi Bhajan himself, at events like Solstice or in special tantric courses” (p. 14).

This author also distinguishes that Yogi Bhajan’s tantric yoga has an individual goal with “consciously psychotherapeutic purposes” that combine with a “corporate aim”, which is schematized in the development from the “individual consciousness” to “group consciousness” and from there to “universal consciousness” (p.15). These affirmations were stated almost four decades ago and with the sole exception that Yogi Bhajan is not alive, they are still observable in the current display of 3HO activities. It is important to recognize that in this progression of consciousness, the “nucleus” is still prescribed to be the “Kundalini experience”⁴⁸

Kundalini experience and Kundalini yoga: a non-religious journey to be as God is. Yogi Bhajan attributed to Kundalini not only an experience that “goes right into the heart” or gives the “nucleus of life”, as seen above. In a different order of things, Kundalini was seen as an origin of e.g. religion. Yogi Bhajan attributed to this experience causality over the process of religion by affirming that religion was a tributary of Kundalini and even Kundalini Yoga:

“The one who practices Kundalini Yoga commands the five tattvas, the three gunas, the seven chakras, and all the 108 elements in the universe, including a conscious creation of the Creator. Let’s be clear about it.

⁴⁸ These were the circumstances I found from my first fieldwork in the Yoga Festival in France. Any observer can see that there is a great deal of attention in organizing the Yoga Festival in order to also reach that “nucleus”, and that seems to be a common goal that the participants of the this Festival relate to.

Kundalini Yoga is not a religion. Religions come out of it. Kundalini Yoga is not a fad, and it's not a cult. It's a practice of experience of a person's own excellence which is dormant and which is awakened." (Bhajan, 1997, p. 119)

Accordingly, the practice is the first element that appears to the eyes of the reader ("the one who practices..."): this is working as the attributor's pre-condition and prescription. The power to command that arises is attributed to the practice, which is deemed as the cause. Interestingly, the object of command or control is not delineated to a physical realm, but to many realms of existence. These are the realms:

- "tatvas", The material reality (as they refer to the five elements of Indian thought: earth, water, fire, air and ether);
- "gunas", the energetic reality (as they refer to the three qualities of nature or three conditions of energy, such as *satva* – pure, light; *rajas* – action, movement; *tamas* – density, inertia);
- "chakras" the symbol of an "infinite" presence in the human (this is normally understood in 3HO as the seven centres of energy/consciousness in the human body: root chakra, sacral chakra, solar plexus chakra, heart chakra, throat chakra, brow point/third eye chakra, crown chakra and the sum of all, considered by Yogi Bhajan the eighth chakra, the aura or "electro-magnetic field" as he recurrently referred to it (2003, p. 183-195);
- the "108 elements of the universe". This notion comes from the Indian tradition of referring to God's qualities. In 3HO this has been paired with the number of chemical elements considered in the "periodic table" (in the 1970s there were still 108 elements acknowledged in chemical science, but nowadays there are 118 elements according to the IUPAC, the "International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry"). This number, 108, also relates to the Hindu tradition of the names of God;
- "a conscious creation of the Creator" which is probably alluding to the transcendent reality within the human reach of command (which probably stands for the key New Age subject of "altered- states of consciousness" that is considered capable of "wonders", as well as the yogic imagery of super-human powers), with the addition that this consciousness is presented as a creation of God which seems to imply that, "in consciousness", God and the human bear a sameness that could also mean that the practitioner has access to the "knowledge" to command God's creation.

From an attributional point of view an experiential event that becomes the origin of others (like "religion coming out of Kundalini yoga") is defined as an "original event" (OE) and, in relation to this type of event in 3HO, the same theory explains that *original events* are behind the "constitution of [practices or paths] for recreating the OE in the present" (Taves 2009, p. 156). In this way, what would it mean that the practitioner of Kundalini Yoga could command the entire divine Creation plus "a conscious creation of the Creator"? In the break down of the last sentence appears: *a conscious creation of the Creator*. The term conscious implies an act of awareness, understood in attribution

theory as a “transitive awareness” or “consciousness of something”. In Yogi Bhajan’s paragraph this happens in a behavioural way, as an act, and the act of the practitioner is the achievement of a power of “creation”. The practitioner, in his awareness, is aware of something that he deems the state of awareness of himself *being a/the creator*. But the paradox lies in what has been created; “*The Creator*”. In other words, the practitioner is believed to reach an awareness in which he re-enacts the divine creative force (which in this attributional view is the “original event” to be “re-experienced”), which in this case Yogi Bhajan attributes to *the power of creating the creator*. The *creative act* is in the founder’s view inverted if we compare it to another tradition, like Christianity or Sikhism itself. In this view of Kundalini yoga and the experience it produces, man creates God. This has a few possible implications that can be extracted from the lectures of Yogi Bhajan, which refer to the human capacity related to Kundalini as a divine force. A man with such a power, or the *experience of Kundalini*, is able to enact for others the Creator’s power in many realms, as I broke it down and distinguished it above. In a similar fashion, and seen from the point of view of a play, as an actor gives life to a character in a play, one can say that the yogi gives life to the divine principle by representing it in his own awareness and *auctoritas*. Is this the causal level attributed to the “nucleus” that was accounted above?

In this notion Yogi Bhajan is depicting a prescription for the practitioner that is leading to supreme powers that are, however, associated with the “experience of a person’s own excellence”. A comparison with Christian theology, for instance, would show that this type of “excellence” is attributed to divine beings such as angels or God himself (not to humans at all, except those that are touched by grace like saints or prophets). This difference, however, offers an explanation of how Kundalini Yoga is deemed “special” because the Kundalini experience is a place that “religions come out of”. Seeing it in the attributional way, the experience of Kundalini and Kundalini yoga are equivalent to a sort of an *original event*, and as such it is deemed special and cannot be matched (*it is set apart*). It can also be re-experience by those “who practice it”.

Another criterion is the type of relationship that Kundalini and Kundalini yoga has with religion. It is clear that Yogi Bhajan does not identify his system with religion; he is not seeing it as a superior form; he is deeming it as a *source* of religion. According to him it is concerned with human potential that “is dormant and which is awakened”, and in this sense he locates the human experience of this kind as the genesis of an ulterior phenomenon deemed religious. One example shared by one of the informants comes from a conversation with Yogi Bhajan in which he said that he did not feel represented with the sentence on the one dollar bill “In God we Trust”: he rather used to say “In God we dwell”, which seems to imply the lack of a gap. From trusting someone to dwelling with someone there is an ascription of quality that shows *intimacy, communion* and *complicity* with the divine being. In 3HO there seems to be the inspiration to believe and live in God’s *nature* and *abode*. This could be the reason why the practice of Kundalini Yoga and the experience that it awakens seems to aim at active participation as a first-person agent in the Creator’s creation, and then it explains the acquiring (“awakening”) of divine qualities. This attribution of Yogi Bhajan overtakes the relationship-with-the-Creator’s creation and supposes the-manifestation-of-the-Creator’s creativity in the

person. In my understanding, if these powers do not imply behaving as God does, they at least imply the occurrence of an experience that brings about a divine-human phenomenon? Some of the world religions, Semitic or Hindu for example, generally deem the concept of a God as the Creator and aspire to encounter this divine being along with the request that men plead for divine intervention in the world. The religions that Yogi Bhajan normally referred to (Semitic and Sikhism mainly) mainly see God as a being external to the human. His perspective promoted ideas and practices deemed to awaken God *within* the human, so it is an expression of an *originary event* (OE, as understood in the attributional sense) rather than deeming it as an endeavour leading towards a *religious event or experience*.

The technical "anatomy" and the experience of "awakening". As it is presented, the founder of 3HO associated the defining characteristics of the organization (healthy, happy and holy) and its practical aims with the activation of Kundalini. This is deemed in a different way, but most commonly as an "awakening" to a type of experience of consciousness deemed special, spiritual or divine. This kind of awakening is a common topic of New Age thought from the beginning of the 20th century, and as I will show at the end of this section the idea is related to the aim of the "expansion" of normal consciousness. It also refers to growth or development from the natural "latent" or "potential" of the human to the spiritual awareness of one's immaterial and immortal dimensions of existence. For the practical approach and understanding of this type of experiential expansion, Yogi Bhajan used to employ the terminology of the modern technology expert in "wires" *about* the human body. This way of attributing these experiences approaches "technicalities" in the issue of awakening with terminology like conducting electricity, connecting cables or setting up a computer as presented above. The so-called "spiritual natural forces" that 3HO seeks to awaken are to be activated by the natural means of Kundalini yoga (but not exclusively, as I will present after the section on Kundalini yoga). This approach of Yogi Bhajan's to the experience of *expansion* is then deemed in yogic terminology and as a natural and accessible phenomenon:

"We must awaken our inner computer to an awareness of the Infinite if we are to live healthy, happy and holy. That cannot happen until the Kundalini, the spiritual nerve, breaks through the blockage at the base of the spine, in the muladhara chakra, and then travels upward. You must generate the pressure of the prana and mix it with apana and generate heat. With this heat of prana you put a charge on the Kundalini" (2003, p. 173).

The awakening of "awareness of the Infinity" is another way of referring to the divine agency or Creator God, as opposed to the finite awareness of the human that I analysed above. This "awareness of Infinity" is the psychological prescription of the goal to be achieved, and as an attainable object it will grant the three levels of accomplishment of a healthy life, a happy life and holy life. The way the founder of 3HO characterises the process of "awakening" is heavily rooted in the yogic process, in which there is a display of the "energies" of the body (the energies of the yogic philosophy that he refers to as

“prana” and “apana”), in combination with the inner computer. The yogic explanation is based on the terminology of previously-mentioned chakras and energies that “heat up” and “charge” the “spiritual nerve” or Kundalini. The energies are the energies of the body that are connected to the Indian concepts of “life force” with a positive charge (“prana”) and “elimination force” with a negative charge (“apana”). The correct application of the yogic tools will mix them and charge the Kundalini (p. 196-197, 202). I can compare this view with applicable knowledge (*tecné* in Latin). In this sense they have the prescribed understanding and practices that would allow the practitioner to acquire the precise “awareness” of the body and the exact notion of how the energies circulate and “heat up” certain areas to produce an “awakening”. Taking this comparison further, I can propose seeing the phenomenon he described as the electrical system of a hypothetical house under construction: the circuits of the human body are like those of a house, tailor made to improve the general performance and light up the atmosphere and run electronic devices – “awakening” is produced by circulation of the “spiritual nerve”.

White Tantric, the collective effort to purify and awake. The above texts shows the elements involved in the goal and power of Kundalini yoga to awaken the divine in the individual. White Tantric Yoga, however, is a collective practice that is not practiced in pairs but in larger groups that are guided by a facilitator or Yogi Bhajan himself when he was alive. This collective dynamic is concurrently deemed in similar terms as Kundalini yoga, using notions of “energy” in relation to body, mind and soul. In his terms,

“In White Tantric Yoga, energy is created en masse to purify the physical and mental bodies. The soul, which is already pure, starts relating to the very existence of the being” (2003, p. 33)

Purification is here ascribed as a great concern for this form of *white tantric* practice. 3HO aims (as an effect of the prescriptive mechanism) at cleaning the mind and body. It allows people “to relate” to the soul as something “already pure” and deemed special. This view would suggest why a sense of sin does not apply in the conception of the human of 3HO. The mind and body are subjected to impurity (not sin), following the traditional view of the *yoga darshana* that sees the soul or spirit (‘Purusha’) as the unconditioned and unpolluted reality. The process of purification allows the soul to “start relating to the very existence of the being”. In this sentence, a sort of sleeping but pure soul would begin the relationship with the being (an “active and awakened” human being, as it was shown earlier). Everyone has the opportunity for this experience to take place, which differs from the idea of salvation or liberation. White Tantric yoga is conceived in 3HO as the practice that is efficacious for cleaning the body and mind, so a form of epiphany of the soul in the existence can happen while the person is actively involved in the human process.

The conjunction of Tantrism and Kundalini Yoga, two doors to one peak experience. As presented above, these practices aim for a “core”, “nuclear” experience, connecting to the “infinite” and “divine” or “soul”, directly affecting the “conscious” as an experience of *transitive consciousness* related to the research object which is *unusual*

sensory experiences that imply a behavioural event such as “health”, “happiness”, “holiness”, “power” or “purification”, which are *not* deemed religious but rather *set apart as special*.

Thus White Tantric Yoga and Kundalini yoga are 3HO’s formal tools, which have been deemed efficacious to create “equilibrium” “to awaken”, “to elevate” and “to purify”, etc. so that a person can achieve what can be understood as an optimum spiritual condition. If we take a look at this further, in the relationship between these two systems, there seems to be an obvious syncretic blend or at least a practical connection. As a prescriptive combination of the two practices, the descriptive fashion aims at producing the (syncretic) notion of *integration and consistency between these experiences*. Yogi Bhajan refers to this as follows:

“The beauty of life is to experience the totality of yourself in complete unison. Less than that, you will be victim of your own perpetual fears. In every growth, achievement and success there is a pleasure that comes from newness and originality. There is another pleasure, and ecstasy, which is everlasting, and which comes only when you become anew all the time, every moment. That is life at its fullest. That is the energy of Kundalini Yoga and White Tantric Yoga” (2003, p. 36)

It can clearly be seen in these lines of Yogi Bhajan’s that there are recurrent ideas such as “totality”, “infinity”, “excellence”, “unlimited potential” and “universal consciousness”, which are referred to as special events a human can go through. Metaphysically, these ideas place the traditional concepts of divine omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience within the human body and his realm of achievement.

This is what 3HO aims at and the experience is sought within a person’s lifetime. As quoted above, it was stated that “the beauty of life is to experience”, which in another way deems the *special thing* of life in the experiential capacity. In doing so they present another element, which is the search for the whole (“totality”) in the part (“yourself”), rather than the part in the whole. If I understand the attribution correctly, this supposedly gives the divine being the motivation required to awake and rise. In spite of this, the God that Yogi Bhajan refers to is a reinterpreted form of the traditional Indian view as he defines God in relation to each letter: G for Generator, O for Organizer and D for Deliverer or Destroyer (2003, p. 209). This is a common explanation in Indian thought regarding the traditional three-fold form of the deity or “Trimurti” of God (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), but it has been reinterpreted by Yogi Bhajan through the English language in a way that allows a correlation with classical features of the Hindu Trinity. For 3HO and also for some philosophical schools of India this definition of God will match the principles of Generation (which can be seen as a Creator, *Brahman*), Organization (the principle that sustains or supports creation, *Vishnu*) and Destruction (which fulminates or completes the creation, *Shiva*). Some tantric lore has always regarded the human body and its condition from this same perspective: the self-generation of life force, cells, organs, etc.; the sustenance of life, through the

mechanism of the glands and nerves, etc.; and the elimination of toxins in the form of gases, fluids and solids that the body does not need. As an author wrote,

“Also Tantric is the notion of *Kuṇḍalinī*, the divine cosmic power presented in the human body. The Tantric adept lives with the image of this both human and divine power present in the image of his body, this structure of centers (*caktras*, etc) or nodal points (*granthis*) connected with subtle tubes or channels, the *nāḍīs*, where the life breath, the *prāṇa* (*prāṇas*, rather, for they are numerous) circulates along with mantras (Padoux, 2013, p. 9)

* * *

The reconsideration of the theoretical frame of yoga is necessary to gain a better view of the organization’s development. In other words, it is the development of 3HO seen within the context of *a movement of yoga or yogis* that could bring about a clearer historical understanding to approach the organization. In this sense it is worth noticing the criteria of Elizabeth De Michelis (2005), who observed the stages of the development of yoga in the West in relation to the gurus and famous yogis who were the heads of NRMs that had a yogic-like practice and philosophy. With careful attention one can see that 3HO/Yogi Bhajan’s evolution highly exemplifies the view that this author depicted. In her study of yoga she refers to three main moments in this process: *popularization, consolidation and acculturation* (p.190-193). In the following chart she distinguished the stages:

Popularization 1950 to mid-1970s.	From early slow spread to fast popularization. Media attention. Yoga classes growing. More personal and frequent interaction with the gurus. Charismatic magnet.
Consolidation mid-1970s to late 1980s	Schools established more substantial and permanent institutions. Teacher trainings are standardized. School show increasing level of specialization. They aligned more and more with the New Age trends (i.e. health). They start to standardize the various possible practical applications of yoga (sports, stress, prenatal, children, elderly etc.). Gurus tend to be honoured and revered; contact with them becomes more impersonal and diluted. Emergence of core and marginal members reflecting institutional hierarchies
Acculturation late 1980s to date:	Some institutions grant official and unofficial recognition to yoga schools. Professionalization of the yoga teachings. Explicit or implicit criticism of Indian-style gurus (authoritarian). Client-professional or client-therapist relationships, with only a tinge of “spiritual pupillage” overtones.

Table 7: Three stages of the process of Yoga in The West according to De Michelis

The identification of these three stages by De Michelis shows an adequate resemblance to the historical process of 3HO, and it is a perspective that also allows 3HO to be seen from the point of view of yoga, inserted into the larger epistemological frame of New Religious Movements in which the characteristics of Kundalini Yoga and White Tantric Yoga bear little resemblance or non-explicit links to the classical Tantric views from

India. In any case, Kundalini yoga is a core aspect of 3HO, and without it a fair amount of the formative ideas of experiences, as well as the behavioural events, would not be attainable for their members. If in 3HO the constituent part of Kundalini yoga is seen as a fundamental aspect within the organization's view, research should also reflect this reality. If this and all of the three-fold pillars of the movement were accounted for, studies would gain a new clarity and accuracy regarding 3HO members' motivations and worldviews.

7. Sikh Religion

Sikhism began in the historical, geo-political and complex area of the Punjab (the "land of the five rivers") between 1469 and 1708, a time when the Mughal Empire and Hindu society were in a constant state of tension, not only because of their religious beliefs and moral doctrines but also because of political and social influence. The political hegemony and social control were daily issues that affected the Punjabi atmosphere and the mentality of its inhabitants. This scenario shaped the Sikh Religion and character for nearly 250 years and is the backbone of the religious commitments of Yogi Bhajan and the organization he founded.

Sikhism in the Punjab, like old Constantinople (nowadays Istanbul), has been the contact land of many different military, cultural and religious endeavours. Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Yogis, Sadhus and a growing mystic movement known as the *Medieval Bhakti Movement* were becoming increasingly influential from the 13th century onwards, and the large and colourful tapestry of Indian religiosity was especially restless at the beginning of the 15th Century. The instability of society and the variety and diversity of the historical forces at play created a synthesis of the different forces that were growing in vitality and influence. This was the moment when some famous mystics appeared, including Namdev (d. 1350), Kabir (d. 1518) and Guru Nanak (d. 1539), the founder of Sikhism.

Nanak was the first Sikh Guru and he laid the foundations of the new belief system, preaching about the unity of humanity as the creation of *One God Creator – IK OM KAR* – in the midst of a very united and troubled cultural context. All of the nine successors that came in his wake carried on the process of shaping the new faith. In Sikhism they are all believed and considered to be the same soul and essence of Guru Nanak. The growing leadership of the Sikh Gurus and their message of unity brought about social peace and led to the reformulation of the caste system, and their spiritual guidance was followed by masses of Hindu and Muslim people.

The first Guru established the term Sikh in order to answer the growing group of followers, both Hindu and Muslim, who wanted to understand their own identity. The term Sikh derives from the Pali *sikka* and the Sanskrit *sisya* and means disciple, or student. In this case, every Sikh is a disciple or student of the Guru, who was the central figure of Sikhism; later on the Fifth Guru accomplished the separation of their identities, establishing the first conceptual pillars to build the new Sikh identity. However, this

identity development process had to run for several centuries before a Sikh considered himself such in the external and internal senses of the term.

The fifth Guru of this tradition, Guru Arjan, created a proper distinction for the movement with regards to Hinduism and Islam. In his compilation of the writings of his ancestors, the *Adi Granth* (1604) (which later became the official sacred scripture of the Sikhs) he declared that they were a new religion, different from all previous religions. He did not accept the association with the Hindu or Muslim faiths. It was implicit in his statement that there was a connection between Sikhs and the other religions, but Sikhs bore a “family resemblance” with regards to Hindus and Muslims.

However, this conciliatory atmosphere did not last long – in 1606 suspicions regarding the Fifth Guru’s growth in influence cost him dearly when he was tortured and finally killed by the Mughal authorities. With this event the history of Sikh martyrdom began and Sikhism began to evolve in a new political and military dimension. The hostility of the Mughal Empire towards the new religion urged Sikhs to survive the difficult circumstances and, as a natural consequence, the sixth Guru was appointed by the former Guru to assume both the spiritual authority (*piri*) and political power (*miri*). From that point onwards their faith would no longer be a pacifist faith.

After two generations, during which time the Sikh Gurus counteracted the Mughal and enjoyed less hostility, the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, met with the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. This changed the state of affairs, since the Emperor escalated the conflict with the Sikhs and, for the second time in their history, he resolved the difference by ordering the Ninth Guru to be beheaded. His son, the last one of the successors of Guru Nanak, was in a decisive historical, religious and political position. The survival of the Sikhs was not certain since the aggressiveness of the Mughal increased and there was a lot of fear among his followers. In the spring of 1699, during the festival of Baisakhi, the new Guru, the Tenth Guru, Gobind Rai, performed a crucial ceremony and founded a new figure within the Sikh identity, the Khalsa. The legacy of the Khalsa has been preserved ever since, and it endured the time of the British Empire by accepting a prominent role in the British army. The apparel was standardized and protected and this is what the founder of 3HO embraced in relation to the formal aspect of the Sikh faith. Yogi Bhajan imprinted all of the external profile of the Khalsa dressing protocol in 3HO, giving members their distinctive appearance.

7. 1. The Core of the Sikh belief: Guru, Gurus and the Khalsa.

The general understanding in India considers that a person who dispels ignorance or darkness (GU in Sanskrit and Gurmukhi) and instead creates understanding and light (RU in Sanskrit and Gumukhi) in the life of others is normally called *Guru* (Cole & Sambhi, 1999, p. XVI and p. 11). The Guru is attributed the attainment of mystical realisation and is deemed someone who knows the path that leads to God. The guru is believed to be the deliverer of light who illuminates the lives of the seekers; this fundamental function makes him gain the status of preceptor.

In the Vedas and Upanishads it is possible to find many gurus instructing their disciples. In the English language, that person would be called Spiritual Master, the Enlightened One or even the Saviour (Rigopoulos, 2005, p. 256, 257) . The guru has not only a special spiritual insight about life, but also the halo of holiness. He is closer to the Divine than normal mainstream people. Due to the secularisation of the Western Culture from the seventeenth century onwards, the term guru can be applied indistinctly in many different areas of the human knowledge or activities, not only in issues involving spirituality. In Western culture the term guru also means expertise: multiple different analogical meanings of the term guru exist, such as the “guru of economics”, the “guru of psychoanalysis”, the “guru of political analysis”, the “guru of communication” or the “guru of technology” etc. According with Rigopoulos,

“Starting from around the second half of the 19th century, this modernized, “sanitized” form of Hindu religiosity –with the guru as its core figure- will be successfully “exported” to the Western world, creating a most intriguing and complex “hermeneutic circle” between India and Europe” (2005, p. 283)

In Sikhism the Guru is written with a capital letter, so that is how I have chosen to refer to the Sikh Guru in this study. The Guru is the pivot of the whole Sikh philosophy. The Guru and the Gurus are the centre of the faith, and every single Sikh dwells in the Guru’s will and command (referred as *Hukam*) (Owen & Sambhi, 1999 p. 101-105).

According to the analysis of Cole (1999), Sikhs have three objects of veneration, which in turn make them Sikhs. These are: 1. The *ten Sikh Gurus*, 2. The *Unmanifested Guru or Sat Guru* and 3. His words expressed in the Sikh Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, written in *Gurumukhi* language.

The Guru of Sikhism. For the Sikhs the divine, spiritual or incorporeal entity is conceived as the formless God, a Timeless Being (*Akal Purkh*). The human that communicates with God is the embodiment of this entity and is attributed the capacity to manifest God’s wisdom. He is empowered to show the revelatory aspect of God. Guru Arjan, the Fifth Guru, said in his writings that “the True Guru is God”. In other words, the physical person that holds the Guruship is the one through whom the words of the True Guru are verbalised. In his role a Guru is always a man that is spiritually, morally and socially qualified to guide, teach and provide deep existential support to all the people that might come into his presence. He is seen as a mender of hearts and shows the way to God. However, in the teachings of the founder of this creed, the Guru (physical person) is not to be worshipped. A Guru in this sense is an agent of transformation that awakens the knowledge of the person’s longing for God beyond illusion and spiritual ignorance, but paradoxically he is not the object or purpose of this change.

The Guru Sikh is an expert in spiritual and heavenly matters; he is also concerned with the worldly dimension of life. That is why it is said that Sikhism is promoted as a religion for the householder. The gurus showed their followers how to live in the world while remaining detached. Nine out of ten Gurus of the Sikh faith were married and had

children of their own. In the performance of “natural” duties (in contrast to the deemed “supernatural” duties of the Guru) he is the same as his disciples. Equality and no caste division are two things that make them different from the Brahmin or guru of the Hindu tradition. Also, it is appropriate to say that the Guru is not considered an Avatar or incarnation of the godhead as in Hinduism, although for some marginal branches of the Sikh religion the Gurus are Avatars (Oberoi, 1994, p. 102, 103).

The Sikh Gurus. According to the Sikh belief all Gurus performed their spiritual authority under the same spirit and identity. Sikhism considers that they lived, taught, preached and guided in the spirit of Guru Nanak, and this is the reason that all the verses written by the different Gurus that are contained in the Adi Grant were signed ‘Nanak’. Although from the scholarly phenomenological point of view different Gurus wrote different verses, the Sikh theological perspective considers the author to have had the same spiritual identity, embodied in each of Guru Nanak’s successors.

1. Guru Nanak (1469-1539): Coming from a caste of tradesmen (vaishyas), he showed a special inclination for religious and spiritual concerns. His biographers said that he had a deep dissatisfaction with the irreligious life of his environment. According to his hagiography, the *Janam-sakhis* (“life-stories”), the fundamental source of his life account, at the age of thirty he had an experience commonly deemed religious that transformed him into a new person, a Guru. According to the story, this experience occurred after he first disappeared for three days under a river in Sultanpur. His first pronouncement after he was found was, “There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim, there is only one God”. His teachings are a monotheistic expression of the Bhakti Movement of India and are addressed to everyone independent of the caste system based on three ideas:

- Nam Simran, the repetition of the Name of God,
- Kirat Karo, earning an honest living and,
- Wand Ke Chako, share your spiritual and worldly earnings with fellow men.

In Guru Nanak’s philosophy, the relevance of the communal aspect of religion was a fundamental concern. When he finally settled in a town named Kartarpur (“The Land of God”) his efforts were not only to teach and preach, but also to build a spiritual community, the *Sat Sangat*, that would be able to have the earthly activities in consonance with the Sikh spiritual way of life. This aspect, the sowing of the seed of the community of the seeker of God or Sangat, is an essential feature of Sikhism in general and 3HO/Sikh Dharma in particular. The principle of Nanak was to be in the world, but not worldly.

His conviction about the unity of the creation under the same *One Creator* is encapsulated in the *Mul Mantra*⁴⁹. His insight into divinity is expressed in the

⁴⁹ “Ik onkar, Satnam, Karta Purkh, Nirvo, Nirver, Akal Muret, Ajuni, Seibhang, Gur Prasad”; “There is but One God whose name is true, the Creator, devoid of fear and enemy, immortal, unborn, self-existent [known] by the Grace of the Guru” (Macauliffe, 2004 (1909), p. 195); ੴ: The “Ik Onkar”. Symbol and Word: “There is but one God”

opening passage of the *Adi Granth* which is believed to be at once the germinal seed and epitome of the Sikh faith and which contains the rest of the scripture according to the Sikh theology. The *Adi Granth* is the development or expansion of the *Mul Mantra*.

2. Guru Angad (1504-1552): He was born Lehna and later, when he was bestowed with the Guruship, he was renamed Guru as Angad, which means 'the limb of'. In the Sikh belief system the action taken by Nanak implied the transmission of his spirit, so Lehna became part of Guru Nanak. Guru Angad continued the development of a simplified version of Punjabi initiated by Guru Nanak in order to make the religious transmission of the teachings unified in the same type of script. The complexity of Sanskrit was overcome and the scripture that was developed allowed the unification of other linguistic influences. Although he wrote some poems, only two of them are in the Sikh Scripture, the *Adi Granth*. He kept the community together and established and consolidated the *langar* or communal food service.
3. Guru Amar Das (1479-1574): Became Guru at the age of 72 and left a legacy of a growing and well-organised community. He began a more complex structure of the community of Sikhs by organizing the *masands* or *manjis*. From Guru Amar Das, the *masands* were the trustworthy representatives of the Guru, which divided the community into 22 bishop-like districts. This district authority was the link between the Guru and his disciples and was one of the most controversial aspects of Guru Gobind's later reforms when he created the Khalsa. Before Guru Amar Das passed away he appointed his son-in-law, Jetha, as the next Guru.
4. Guru Ram Das (1534-1581): Jetha belonged to a lower social caste of Hindu society but because of the principle of equality introduced by the Sikh Guru he was able to have a very close relationship with Guru Angad. Indeed he married the Guru's daughter and later became Guru himself, Guru Ram Das. As a Guru he maintained a good state of affairs with the Mughal King. This good relationship between the Guru and the Emperor assured Guru Ram Das a piece of land to set up a big pool which was later on called Amritsar ('the pool of Immortality'). His son planned to build the first *Gurdwara* or Sikh Shrine, the Harimandir, in that place. In the Sikh scripture Guru Ram Das is addressed as a *Raj Yog* (a Real/Royal Yogi), the one who possesses the highest yogic knowledge. This aspect is specially highlighted in 3HO. Yogi Bhajan spoke about him as his personal Guru as well as the original historical figure of 3HO⁵⁰.
5. Guru Arjan (1563-1606): The first standardised Sikh text came from the compilations guided by Guru Arjan. This compilation is named *Adi Granth* ('primal book') and includes the writings of the first four Gurus and some poems by Hindu and Muslim saints of the epoch, all of them unified by the consolidated new sacred script, *Gurumukhi*, and with the prescription to recite them in a particular musical fashion, scale and mood ('*Rag*'). In the *Adi Granth* the separate identity of Sikhs is made clear:

⁵⁰ "We come from the Lord of the Lords, Guru Ram Das, the lord of the Throne of Miracle, the Master of Raj Yog" (Bhajan 1997, p. 96)

"I neither keep the Hindu fast nor the Muslim Ramdan.
 I never serve him alone who in the end will save me.
 My Master is both the Muslim Allah and the Hindu Gosain,
 And thus have I finished the dispute between the Hindu and the Muslim.
 I do not go on pilgrimage to Mecca
 Nor bathe at the Hindu holy places;
 I serve the one Master, and none beside Him.
 Neither performing the Hindu worship nor offering Muslim prayer,
 To the formless One I bow in my heart.
 I am neither Hindu nor Muslim".⁵¹

During Guru Arjan's guruship he also accomplished his father's wish when he finished the construction of the Harimandir, the central Sikh temple in Amritsar. Possibly these two major achievements, the scripture and the temple, are the most remarkable efforts that shaped the Sikh religion and helped it grow. However, after these achievements and the growth of the community, political events precipitated and drastically changed the scenario for Sikhs. The death of Guru Arjan came unexpectedly after he was arrested while visiting the Mughal Emperor: he was held captive and cruelly tortured, and finally put to death. Before this dramatic event in Sikh history occurred, Guru Arjan had already directed his older son and the next Guru to form a militant religion to protect its survival and faith.

6. Guru Hargobind (1595-1644): He was the son of Guru Arjan and while he was still a boy he assumed the leadership and responsibility to preserve the religion against the Mughal threat. He had to promptly develop a new form of authority by balancing the power of the temporal and spiritual authorities. The two swords *miri* and *piri* that his father had told him about before his assassination represented the temporal and spiritual power that Guru Hargobind held. This was his father and Guru's command to allow him to guide and protect the work of his predecessors. This duty was fulfilled by adopting the new Sikh form of a spiritual warrior that was later consecrated by the last Guru when he created the Khalsa. Guru Hargobind trained Sikhs and raised an army which successfully fought the Mughal six times without defeat. During his regency Guru Hargobind became not only a warrior Guru but also a leader of all non- Muslim Punjabis.
7. Guru Har Rai (1630-1661): There is an historical episode that happened between the oldest son of the Guru Har Rai and the new Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. In an encounter in the court of the Aurangzeb, the Emperor pointed out that the Adi Granth was in some part offensive to the Muslim faith and demanded the correction of that part. The older son of Guru Hargobind, the successor and heir to the Guruship, accepted and conveyed that the offensive part was a mistake, but this meant that he was harshly scorned by his father and Guru. Because of this, the second oldest son of the Guru, the young Har Rai, became the next Guru and at the same time confirmed the sacred status that the Adi Granth was gaining. Guru Har

⁵¹ Adi Granth. 1136 (Quoted in Oberoi, Harjot. Op Cit. Pag. 57.)

Rai and his youngest son and successor, Har Krishan, enjoyed a quieter regency and were able to maintain peaceful relations with the authorities of the Mughal Empire.

8. Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664): The history of the Eighth Guru is brief. He was five years old when his father decided to nominate him as his successor. He gave continuity to the religious life of the community and performed acts deemed miraculous that counteracted any resistance to his young age and responsibility. From 5 to 8 years old he held the position Guru of the Sikh, but at the age of 8 he died of smallpox. On his deathbed he left only a hint of who was to be his successor.
9. Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675): The Ninth Guru was the son of the Sixth Guru and was known as a skilful soldier on the battlefield. When he became the next Guru, after a long period of meditation and seclusion, he had to deal with the internal and external problems of the increasing offensive being launched by the Mughals. Inside the Sikh community the visible degeneration of the *masands* (district authorities established by the second Guru) reached a destabilising level. Once, for example, Guru Tegh Bahadur went to Amritsar and the *masand* of the Harimandir neglected him. During his period he also had to face the difficulty of the burgeoning process of Islamization. Indeed, the last event of his life occurred when the Emperor of the Mughals solved their disagreement by ordering his execution. The Guru was beheaded and his martyrdom increased the tension to the maximum degree of conflict.
10. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708): This is the last Guru of the Sikh lineage. He became the last Guru immediately after the death of his father and Guru. He had a very comprehensive training and education in many fields which led him to follow the religious and military strategy established by his grandfather, Guru Hargobind, after the death of his own father Guru Arjan. The tenth Guru's approach to all the internal and external problems surrounding him was by far one of the historically most important since the time of Guru Nanak. The very survival of the Sikh faith was at stake, and the tenth Guru gave the Sikh community a new orientation by inspiring them with renewed symbols, rites, faith and a fresh organisational structure. In 1699 he founded the Khalsa Sikh order and crystallized the model of saint and warrior. Although Guru Gobind Singh was the first to distinctively use the term Khalsa in the Sikh religion, its germinal expression took place in the period of the Sixth Guru when he brought the temporal and spiritual powers together, the *Miri-Piri*.

The Khalsa Sikh and the elevation of Sikh Scripture. In the traditional festivity of the Baisakhi in 1699, the tenth Guru performed a ritual that is considered the birth of the Khalsa. History tells us that after spreading the word among his followers that their presence would be important, he spoke to the crowds and set out the path to take to counteract the unbearable animosity of the Muslim rulers. He encouraged the crowds to defend the faith and the legacy of Nanak. In doing so he embodied the archetype of the spiritual warrior of his grandfather (the sixth Guru) and resolved to give birth to a new brotherhood which would crystallize the Sikh identity of the Saint-Soldier ideal at

the core of its conduct⁵².

The legend says that, by holding a sword in his hand, Guru Gobind Singh called five followers to the stage. One by one they came to their leader. The Guru then led them to a tent behind the stage and quickly returned to the perplexed and horrified crowd with his sword dripping blood, supposedly the blood of each of the Sikhs that had come to the stage. It appeared that they had all been killed by the Guru. However, at the end of this episode, the Tenth Guru came out with all of them dressed in a new way and prepared to initiate them through a baptismal ceremony called *Amrit Sanskar*. In this episode the Guru was also initiated by his five chosen ones⁵³. The veracity of the details of this episode is not the concern here, but the consequences of what happened in the spring of 1699 are of enormous significance not only for Sikh history but also for understanding 3HO's Sikh dimension. These five men became the first Khalsas, gaining the brave and courageous name *Singh* (Lion) of the Guru. Those five chosen men were going to be the nucleus of the community. In this act, the Panth (congregation) became the embodiment of the Guru through the transmission of his own purity and spirit. This is believed to be the moment when the Guru merged his entity in the Khalsa. The act also incorporated all the caste levels into the nucleus of the Khalsa⁵⁴ and the creation of a new Sikh identity (Grewal, J.S & Indu Banga, 1999, p. 21). In his own script, the *Dasam Granth*, the Tenth Guru made direct reference to the spiritual dimension of the term Khalsa, revealing his understanding regarding the continuation of Guru Nanak's teachings:

“He who repeateth night and day the name of Him
Whose enduring light is unquenchable, who bestoweth not any thought on any
but the one God;
Who hath full love and confidence in God
Who put the no faith even by mistake in fasting, or worshipping cemeteries,
places of cremations, or jogis' places of sepulture;
Who only recognizeth the one God and not pilgrimages, alms, the non-
destruction of life, Hindu penance or austerities;
And in whose heart the light of the Perfect One shineth, he is recognised as a
pure member of the Khalsa”.
(Grewal, J.S & Bal, S.S, 1987, p. 117).

Besides the creation of the Khalsa, he decreed the destiny of the succession of the Guruship once and forever by bestowing the scripture, the *Adi Granth*, with the authority and power of Nanak. Since this moment the scripture is considered the Eternal Guru by the Sikhs. Once the tenth Guru passed away, the sacred text became the *Siri*

⁵² The phenomenon of the creation and the role of the Khalsa is one of these events that are deemed special and left apart as an *originary event*.

⁵³ This event has an analogical resemblance with the Biblical episode when John the Baptist baptised Jesus and then Jesus baptised him back. In both cases they become historical moments for the development of Sikhism and Christianity, as well as the future Sikhs and Christians respectively.

⁵⁴ Historical accounts indicate that probably only one was Brahmin and one Kshatriya; the rest belonged to lower castes

Guru Granth Sahib, embodying the nucleus of the life of individual Sikhs and the Sikh congregation everywhere. The *Gurdwaras* or Sikh Shrines ('Guru's Gate') is the place in which the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* "lives" and where Sikhs gather to listen to his teaching and participate in their pursuit of God. From that moment the throne of spiritual power was no longer the seat of an individual, physical person. Since 1708, the year when Guru Gobind Singh died, the spiritual authority began to reside in the scripture, and within the orthodox form of the Sikh tradition no one can claim to be a Guru or be called Guru. Human Guruship ended with the Tenth Guru and his only and last successor, the sacred scripture, is the Eleventh and Eternal Guru of the mainstream form of Sikh religion⁵⁵.

In order to distinguish the new order of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh adopted different symbols:

- The suffixes *Singh* and *Kaur* (Lion and Princess respectively) were added to the name of every initiated person. Since then, they related to themselves and each other as a family in which the Guru symbolized the mother, father, spouse and king.
- The five K's (*Panch Kakke*) as the "high standard of Sikhism"⁵⁶ in relation to those who did not receive the initiation and the consecutive five symbols. Sikhs that did not adopt the attire would not be known as a Khalsa Sikhs but rather as Sahajdhari Sikhs. From the Khalsa Sikh perspective, the non-Khalsa is a *manmukh* i.e. one who follows his own mind (*man*, mind), and the Khalsa is a *gurmukh*, i.e. one who follows the command of the Guru. The scholar Harjot Oberoi has neatly explained the differences between them, concluding that "they are totally inverted categories"⁵⁷.

In the eighteenth century a large number of Sikhs became Khalsas, and in a few decades the Khalsa Sikh identity became the most visible group within the Sikh religion. Indeed, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the spiritual warriors of the Khalsa assumed the political power in the north of India, the Punjab, and established the Sikh Kingdom (1801-1839), which was governed by the Sikh King Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839).

⁵⁵ Along with the mystical communion "... the doctrine of the Guru Granth served as a useful substitute for the line of Sikh gurus by providing much needed cohesion to a Panth faced with political turmoil and serious internal dissensions." (Oberoi, p. 70).

⁵⁶ The symbols given, plus some other prohibitions and moral codes known as the 5 K's are the following:

1. Kesh: Totally uncut hair. It is also assimilated to the use of the turban.
2. Khanga: A wooden comb to tie the hair of the head under the turban.
3. Kara: A steel or iron bracelet. In the right wrist in the case of a man, in the left wrist in the case of a woman.
4. Kashr: A type of underwear that reaches the knee.
5. Kirpan: A small dagger carried tied to the waist.

⁵⁷ "(...) Whereas Khalsa Sikhs maintained their hair unshorn, Sahajdhari Sikhs cut their hair; Khalsa Sikhs had to undergo initiation, Sahajdhari did not; Khalsa Sikhs were obliged to carry arms, Sahajdhari Sikhs obeyed no such norm; Khalsa Sikhs were not to use tobacco, Sahajdhari Sikhs smoked; Khalsa Sikh accepted a line of nine successors after Guru Nanak, Sahajdhari Sikhs often had a radically different version of the line of succession; Khalsa Sikhs began to recognize the Adi Granth as the Guru, Sahajdhari Sikhs were not given to accept a text as a guru and favored living human gurus." Ibid. p.76

Sikhs have had an influential position throughout the history of India, and the current Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, is a Khalsa Sikh. On the 20th of May 2004, he became the first Sikh to hold the office of the Prime Minister of India⁵⁸.

7. 2. Scholar Classical Perspectives on Sikh religion

Although this religion goes back to the end of the 15th Century and then goes through a formative process that lasts two centuries, it is not until the 19th century that Sikhism attracts the interest of the British author Joseph Davey Cunningham, who wrote *A History of The Sikhs. From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*. (First Published in 1849, edited by H.L.O Garret in 1918, 1994). This is the first scholarly approach to the *History of Sikhism*, and it not only studies the political and military affairs but also tries to assess moral and religious ingredients from its beginning until 1846. It is considered one of the first standard works on Sikhism.

Two decades later the German missionary Ernest Trumpp wrote *The Adi Granth and the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs* in 1877. This book about the Sikh faith was immediately regarded as offensive to the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh faith and was considered a sample of *odium theologicum* (Macauliffe). Other specialists considered his writing “tendentious” (McLeod) and that it had a “cold, ruthless” approach to historical sources (Dusenbery)⁵⁹.

It is another British man, Max Arthur Macauliffe, whose study is considered in many ways especially remarkable in the Sikh Scholarship. His book, *The Sikh Religion. Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*, was written in six volumes (First published in 1909, 2004) and is regarded as a one of the largest works on the Sikh religion, classical and it includes the first authentic translation of their scripture. Altogether it is a monumental work and the first scholar translation of the Sacred Scriptures of the Sikhs. This book is divided in the following volumes:

- I Volume covers the life of the first Guru (Nanak) and his writings.
- II Volume covers the life and writings of the second (Angad), the third (Amar Das)

⁵⁸ Manmohan Singh sent the widow and followers of Yogi Bhajan a condolence message after his decease in 2004 (in *Aquarian Times Magazine* “Yogi Bhajan Memorial Issue”, 2005).

⁵⁹ More recently In the antipode of Trumpp’s work, is Arnold Toynbee, the famous British historian, who enthusiastically conveyed the idea of specialness in Sikhs, to whom “Mankind’s religious future may be obscure” but, “the Sikh religion, and its scripture the *Adi Granth*, will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world”. Toynbee’s observations go further to say that, “The *Adi Granth* is remarkable for several reasons. Of all known religious scriptures this book is the most highly venerated. It means more to the Sikhs than even the Quran means to the Muslims, the Bible to the Christians, and the Torah to Jews. The *Adi Granth* is Sikhs’ perpetual Guru (Spiritual guide). It was formally invested with this function by the last in the series of Gurus that began with the founder of the Sikh religion, Nanak” (Arnold Toynbee in his Foreword to *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, Published by UNESCO, 1960. p. 9. Quoted in *Guru Granth Sahib in the Eyes Of Non-Sikh Scholars*. Malkiat Singh Rahai. Singh Legal Foundation. Chandigarh. II ed. 2004. p. 1). The insights of this renowned scholar, as well as the criteria of Trumpp, are both expressions of inadequate academic approaches and how not to face a subject in the field of Comparative Religions. Neither of them contains the equanimity and neutrality that is necessary in the field and both of them are but perfect examples to bring up for showing these basic principles when approaching a subject in Religious Studies.

and the fourth Guru (Ram Das),

- III Volume studies the life of the fifth Guru (Arjun) and his several compositions.
- IV Volume studies the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth Gurus (Har Gobind, Har Rai, Har Krishan, and Tegh Bahadur, respectively) the writing of Tegh Bahadur and Gur Das's analysis of Sikhism.
- V Volume deals with the life and composition of the tenth Guru (Gobind Singh),
- VI Volume tackles the composition of the other authors of the Adi Granth – Hindu and Muslim.

Despite the positive Western reputation of scholarship (except Trumpp), Sikh authors have also developed enriching and comprehensive studies about their own faith. Khushwant Singh wrote *A History of the Sikhs* (First Published 1963. Second Impression 1991) in 2 volumes:

- I Volume: Covers the period that goes from 1469 to 1839.
- II Volume: Covers the period that goes from 1839 to 1988

This approach is remarkable attempt, perhaps the first of its kind, to tell the story of the Sikhs from their beginning to the 1980s. This author was the writer of the section on Sikhism in Eliade's *Encyclopaedia of World Religions* (Volume XIII, p. 315-320)

Sikh Studies. Comparative Perspective on a Changing Tradition (1979), edited by Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier, is a remarkable effort based on one of the first Sikh conferences held in the United States. In this conference in August 1976 many specialists on Sikhism discussed and then published this work in 1979 about Sikh history and beliefs and the culture or social condition of their community "as a religious community" (p. 4). In the context of Sikh identity this work refers to Sikh Dharma and considers that for some Punjabis the Americans are "fanatics, hippies who have found a new costume and ideology" (p. 142). The main objective of this work as an extension of the conference was to discuss "the future of Sikh studies" (p. 1).

In February of 1987 another important conference of scholars of Sikhism was held in Canada. In the following year the book edited by Joseph T. O'Connell, Milton Israel et al, *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (1988), "sought to address very recent events" of the twentieth century (p. 2). As this book said, "the outward forms of the tradition may be easily inspected, but the beliefs and the conventions that lie behind the visible forms may be exceedingly complex" (p. 11). An important section of this work deals with one of these complexities, which is the dimension of the religious experience of Sikhism and the "Sikh spiritual consciousness" (p. 42-51).

A year later N. Gerald Barrier and Verne Dusenbery published *The Sikh Diaspora* (1989), which takes into account the geographical expansion of Sikhism, researching the migration of Sikhs from their homeland the Punjab. According to the authors, "this volume brings historical, sociological and anthropological perspectives to the Sikh Diaspora and to the experience of Sikhs living outside India" (p. 2). *The Sikh Diaspora* includes the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, which is Yogi Bhajan's

institutionalization of Sikhism that was created along with the movement 3HO (p. 91-93).

William Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi, a combination of Western and Sikh scholarship, wrote *Sikhism. Beliefs and Practices* (1999) provided a “descriptive, explanatory and multi-dimensional introduction to the Sikh religion” (p. X). One of the values of this book is that it is addressed to scholars and non-scholars alike by summarizing the Sikh religion and including more recent phenomenon such as the “Sikhs of Yogi Bhajan” and 3HO.

The New Zealander William McLeod is possibly the most influential specialist on the Sikh Religion; a compilation of his principal literature is found under the title *Sikhs and Sikhism*. (1999). The collection consists of four of his classic studies and approaches the main scholarly concerns about Sikhs and Sikhism:

- *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (1988). He approaches the reliability of the sources which exist for studying the historical Guru Nanak and offers an analytical view of the first Guru Sikhs
- *Early Sikh Tradition* (1980). This is a study of the janam-sakhis tradition (“life stories” of the first Guru or “biographies of Guru Nanak) but as a hagiographic account of his life.
- *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (1976). This is a venture into the field of Sikh history, religion and society. The stress in this book is on the caste diversity of the followers of the Sikh religion.
- *Who is a Sikh?* (1989). This is about the Sikh identity and the Khalsa Sikhs.

Another important Sikh scholar is Harjot Oberoi. His work, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Religion* (1994) was characterized as an “Incisive analysis (...that) greatly extended our understanding of this period.” (W.H. McLeod). This perspective expanded the views in a comprehensive study of the development of the Sikh identity, with a thorough interpretation of religion and society in India and the Sikhs in relation to other groups. Valuable information about the Khalsa is presented.

7. 3. The Sikh Experience: The performance Naam Simran

Guru Nanak’s experience is for some authors deemed mystical and attributed as the origin of his message, preaching and religious career. As David Lorenzon (1995) noted regarding God of the Sikhs, their divinity “does take partial embodiment in the Name of God and in the collective Words (*bani*) and person of the Guru and the saint” (p. 2). So according to this writer the word, the Guru and holy people are part of the divine; this is explained in the first formula of the Sikh scripture in which the One God is present within this world and ultimately everything in it is Him. As the verses of the

Gurus are available for the Sikhs in exactly the same way that the Gurus uttered them and their repetition has a prescribed musical form, notation and mood (Rágs), these verses or Shabads encapsulate the seed of the Sikhs' mystical experience since they are built with the Divine Word or Naam ('divine identity'). Viewing this experience attributionally, it can be recognized as an *Originary Experience or Originary Event* that is deemed foundational. Repeating the *Naam* is the practice of *Naam Simran*, which produced an encounter with God, as Guru Nanak put it; thus the Naam Simran is attributed causality in evoking the *originary event*. The morning repetition of the Japji (40 verses written by Guru Nanak in which he explained his mystic encounter between God and the soul) is seen as the primal and standard practice in Sikhism (as well as in 3HO practice, e.g. at the European Yoga Festival). As it is written in the Japji itself, the prescription of Guru Nanak was phrased in the following way:

“Get up early in the morning, reflect [meditate] upon the greatness of His True *Naam*. Body is due to one's actions, but liberation is due to His Grace” (//4//) (Singh, Darshan, 2008, Vol. I p. 3)

The meditation on God and repetition of God's name is the central internal practice in Sikhism. As a Sikh scholar pointed out, (Sethi, Amarjit Singh, 1988),

“*Nam-simrana* refers to a way of life that encompasses both spiritual and ethical conduct in accordance with guidance as laid down in the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib” (p. 44).

The same author has the understanding that makes people follow the “Guru's teachings” and engage *Nam simran* because it affects the internal realm of the psyche and consciousness. He says,

“Sikh consciousness is basically a process of transformation – from ego consciousness to *wah* consciousness. The word *wah* literally means “wonder”... Sikh de-identifies from ego through Guru's grace, leading to selfless service, enlightenment, and freedom ... the result is the emergence of *wah* consciousness –creative, free and enlightened, also termed by the Gurus as *sahaj* consciousness” (p. 45)

In other words, the behavioural event pursued in Sikhism is a state of consciousness (“*wah*”) and *Nam-simrana* is deemed the practical path for transformation of the consciousness. At one end of the so-called transformation process Sikhism sees the human as having *ego consciousness*, regarded as the mundane personality (or *manmukh*, unenlightened one), while at the other end is *sahej* consciousness of the *gurmukh* (enlightened). As this Sikh author says,

“[the experience of]... *Nam-simrana* begins by realizing the futility of the life *manmukh*. A *manmukh* (unenlightened person) is living under influence of ego; a *gurmukh* (enlightened person) lives in God's will with a constant awareness that God is the only one who has created the whole

universe and is the cause of all causes.” (p. 46).

In the understanding of Sikhism, the psychological faculty of a person who gets acquainted with in *Nam-Simrana* has a cognitive ability to see and understand the presence of the divine being in the “whole universe” as the “cause of all causes”. The practitioner of this method of repetition of the *Naam* has to choose to see the word not as an end (“*futility of life*”), but to see and observe God’s will. As this author pointed out, for the founder of Sikhism, the *Naam* is in the very root of everything and can be understood as the “expressions of the Divine which pervades the universe” (1988, p. 47). The Sikhs believe that this can be realized as an internal experience through the “Guru’s grace”, which is at work in every stage of the journey to become a *Gurmukh* and to achieve liberation while still being alive. According to this author, the follower of this faith believes that “the total absorption of intellect in His remembrance is enlightenment. This process is also termed *simrana* ... it means living with a constant awareness of God’s presence ... [this is] the experience of *Nam* (p. 47). The experience of the *Naam* is in other words a liberating experience of the divine presence in the person’s life and world. This brings about the idea of consciousness, since *Naam Simran* is taken to be the “central meta-technique of transforming consciousness” (p. 51).

Nanak and his followers believed that meditation on and repetition of the divine name or *Naam* are the paths to divine knowledge and spiritual liberation, and this repetition is the key that opens the mind and heart of the Sikh. As an expression of Sikh art, it is very common to come across representations of the Sikh Gurus (especially Guru Nanak) and the Sikh saints in a visible state of mystical absorption (eyes turned up, and with a peaceful expression of contemplation in their face, in prayer postures or with a meditative attitude). The *Nam Simran* or devotional repetition/meditation of the divine Name of God is the key practical experience to achieve, and it is deemed mystical by the Sikhs.

7. 4. Sikhism in 3HO: “Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere”

According to A. Tobey, in 3HO the “forms are broad and the ethos broader still, [but] 3HO’s central core is Sikhism” (p. 21). In his perspective of observation he recognized the experience quest of the movement and that,

“... their personal goal is to become *jivan mukt*’ –spiritually liberated while still alive in the physical world. These theological images imply that the search within 3HO for the most fundamental unity of mind and life must be pressed in both polar-opposite directions: the inner personal experience of the unchanging divine and life in the transitory world. This is the core insight which Sikhism contributes to 3HO” (p. 26)

From the point of view of this author, the search of the members of 3HO is defined by two fields, namely, one that refers to an “inner personal experience of the unchanging divine” and how this experience is held in the outer world, understood as a type of life

“in the transitory world”. Coherent with this reflection, the author attributes the goal of the search in 3HO solely to the Sikh realm of thought (“becoming *jivan mukt*”). However, he does not offer a perspective that is *broad enough* to acknowledge the “broad ethos” that he actually refers to. The author’s perspective is following the mainstream perspective and ignoring the fact that in the yogic realm of thought, the goal and experience that the *yoga darshana* has set as a goal of the practice are practically the same. If viewed through a classic author in the studies of yoga (Eliade, 1969), the flaw in Tobey’s approach can be seen, “The yogin attains deliverance; like a dead man, he has no more relation with life; he is “dead in life”. He is the *jīvan-mukta*, the “liberated in life”” (p. 93, 94). So it can become highly misleading to note 3HO’s broadness but not embrace research with the same breadth. If the goal of 3HO is taken as the criterion that explains the practice, then attaining such a state is not only a contribution from Sikhism but also from yoga. A perspective that has been influenced by the mainstream debate about 3HO would emphasize Sikhism as the core, but my reconsideration of this perspective shows that if Sikhism is an important core, it is also true that 3HO has three pillars that are combined in a syncretic way. Another recent author who has researched 3HO considers looking at the 3HO Sikh dimension as,

“an alternative form of Sikhism insofar as it champions the practice of what we might call “Sikh Yoga”, in contrast both to other contemporary forms of Yoga (including other forms of Kundalini Yoga) and other groups from the Sikh Panth” (Stoeber 2012, p. 361).

What is the relation of 3HO to the experience of Sikhism? According to Yogi Bhajan,

“We have to just experience and develop the Word of the Guru resounding in us. We are to become the temple of the shabd. That’s all a human can do” (Bhajan 2003, p. 65)⁶⁰

The fundamental mark of this paragraph is concerning “the Word of the Guru resounding in us”, which is a behavioural event deemed as sound, as *the* sound of a *special thing*. In this paragraph at least, Yogi Bhajan is not concerned with understanding the Word or obedience to the Word. It is a living embodiment, a type of experience fully associated with Sikhism. For him the prescription is clear and simple: “we have to just experience and develop” the Shabads. Following this criteria it makes sense that the ascription goes from setting the experience (cause), that a person allows the Shabads to “resound” in him, to attributing to it the effect that the divine sound will make the person “a temple”. In relation to this idea, a well-known Sikh Dharma minister said that the experience provided in the classes of yoga inspired people in a certain way because they included the repetition of mantras and Shabads. In this way she explained why people converted to Sikhism. According to her,

⁶⁰ By “Word of Guru”, also sometimes referred as “Shabd Guru”, Yogi Bhajan understands “a quantum technology of sound which directly alters our consciousness through the power of Naad. The Shabd Guru is considered a special sound current which is a Teacher as it removes the constrictions and distortions of the ego” (2003, p. 65).

“It is a historical fact that almost all the people who chose to become Sikhs were inspired to do so through the practice of Kundalini Yoga, and the practice of Nam Simran at the classes of Kundalini Yoga” (Khalsa, Guru Raj Kaur, 2001, p. 88)

From this passage it can be recognized the form of the connection and combination that Yogi Bhajan synthesized. According to this known senior student and member of 3HO, the yogic and the Sikh spheres do not necessarily meet in the world of idea as much as they do “through the practice,” which is something that fundamentally takes place in the experiential dimension of a composite. From the point of view of this 3HO author, the element of the Sikh practice of *Nam Simran* is explicit in yoga and it therefore plays an important role in the ulterior embracing of Sikhism.

However, it is not purely the practice and experience of the Sikh method that would bring a 3HO member closer to Sikhism. In this sense, this minister of Sikh Dharma also wrote that, “it is truly an act of Grace that so many Westerners have come to the feet of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib through the practice of Kundalini Yoga” (Guru Raj Kaur Khalsa, Victory & Virtue, p. 88). In other words, once the core of the Sikh practice is reached by doing the *Nam Simran*, the consequence she describes is that they establish their relationship to the Sikh scripture as their Guru (by coming to his “feet”), attributing this process to an act of Grace happening “through the practice of Kundalini Yoga”. In this way she describes the process of Kundalini Yoga, ascribing to it the quality of *a path* to the Guru, altogether as “truly an act of Grace”. In 3HO the Sikh aspects of *Nam Simran* and Kundalini yoga seem to be in harmony and interconnected by the aspect of practical experience that is understood as a coherent continuum.

7. 5. Further notions about the experience of Sikhism in 3HO

The psycho-somatic effect of the Sikh scripture. As seen above the experience of the *sound* or *resound* of the “Word of the Guru” is a cardinal point in the practice of Sikhism in general as well as in the Sikhism of 3HO. From Yogi Bhajan’s perspective the *resounding* is deemed not a mystical or religious event, but a sort of neurophysiologic event. The “Word of the Guru” is not the achievement of a metaphysical, philosophical or theological process within the understanding although, as I will show next, the notions, the experiences of this form of recitation, and the physiology are all embedded. In 3HO the main consideration seems to be related to the combination of changes in the organism that lead the psyche of the people reciting the mantras and Shabads. The process of *resounding* the Shabads is explained as follows:

“First the psyche of the person consciously confronts the ideas and ideals of oneness which the ego does not want to accept. The ideals are reinforced by the verbalization, and a subconscious release happens which relaxes the entire physiology of the person” (2003. p. 79).

This is a very rich paragraph. The psyche is probably a loose term to refer to the mind,

self-consciousness and intellectual capacity of the person. In this view it is applied self-reflectively to respond to (“confront”) the idea of “oneness”; in the first moment of his statement there is a philosophical principle of rational activity that “confronts ideas and ideals of oneness”. In other words, the ego, the person’s consciousness or mind contradicts these ideas and ideals and gives the “psyche of the person” an antagonist role in the process described. This is the mechanism of the ego, which is known as *ahangkar* in yogic philosophy and in all of Yogi Bhajan’s teaching is seen as the limited structure of mind/personality. The ego, from which expressions of egocentrism, selfishness and egoism come from, rejects the idea of unity that the sound/*Shabad* is deemed to carry. However, according to Yogi Bhajan, verbalization of the mantras/*shabad* occurs, and this is ascribed a *special* force that “reinforces” the content or meaning that it carries (in this case “oneness”) ⁶¹.

According to the paragraph quoted, the *verbalizations* of the Shabads are believed to affect the layer of the mind/personality psychological structure generally known as “the ego”; when this dimension is affected, the level of the “subconscious” in particular changes too⁶². It is here in the subconscious where the effect turns into a *release*, a “subconscious release”. The attributed *release* relates to the deeper obstacle that holds a non-acceptance response to “oneness”. This *release* produces another effect, a bodily effect, namely the relaxation of “the entire physiology of the person”. The basic psychosomatic logic is affected by an external tool brought to the inner realm of the psyche, which is deemed efficacious to reach and achieve a relaxed mood.

However, this does not present a complete picture of the experience of Sikhism in 3HO. A few more important aspects of the entire process of “verbalization” are as follows:

“Then the real thing: the tongue and lips, the most delicately sensitive organs of the body, play on each other in a certain permutation and combination, stimulating systematically the pituitary and pineal reflexes in the brain. In a most subtle way the personality begins to swing away from fears and complexes and toward a freer, more expansive self-reflection. By very consciously using the tongue in pronunciation to relate and touch the meridian points of the upper palate, one is able to achieve the total effect” (Bhajan 2003, p. 79)

Thus the description addresses a more specific level of psychosomatic occurrence in which the “verbalization” of the Shabads works to bring about a “more expansive self-reflection”. This effect is no longer limited by the ego’s rejection of oneness, but how it is actually ascribed the capacity to work is in the interplay that takes place in the mouth of the person that repeats the Shabad (the tongue and lips “play on each other”). The

⁶¹ “If there is a truth, it will be universal and mutual to all. If it is an ego it will be mutual only to a few” (Bhajan 1997, p. 179)

⁶² To further understand what Yogi Bhajan means by thought, intellect and subconscious, “The intellect keeps bombarding thoughts and thoughts and thoughts and thoughts and thoughts and millions of thoughts go into the subconscious, and then the subconscious becomes loaded then it unloads itself in dreams, in fantasies, in nightmares and God, when it starts unloading into the unconscious, then you have had it” (p. 43)

action of the “tongue and the lips” emulates the musical terminology used for the purpose of “resounding”, the “tongue and the lips” are stroking a sound and it is physically related to the experience of “expansive self-reflection”. This interplay of the tongue and the lips described as “permutation and combination” is the attribution of causality that stimulates the reflexes of the brain (pituitary and pineal).

Although the ascription of causality of a “more expanded self-reflection” began as a reflective act when the “person consciously confronts the ideas and ideals of oneness”, it became “real” with the verbalization as Yogi Bhajan conveyed. The verbalization is not of just any kind of word, but the Naam Simran, the practice of mantra repetition or Shabads. This sort of *realism* occurs when the level of thought (“ideas and ideals”) reaches a somatic expression; it is not concrete before the physical experience is not engaged, it is just mental, it is not the “real thing” that Yogi Bhajan seems to be talking about.

From this point the description addresses the link created between the brain organs and the reflexes, which introduces another level of *subtlety*, since “in a most subtle way the personality begins to swing away”. The personality, which is seen as a limited aspect of a person, very much related and equated with the ego, suffers a transformation. This transformation is expressed in very gentle terms as a process of *swinging away* from its own obstacles such as “fears and complexes”. On this level the ego is not resisting the idea of “oneness” anymore, it (as “personality”) rather begins to act in a more “subtle” way and therefore detaches and floats away from what are implied to be heavier or gross elements (“fears and complexes”). This movement is towards change within the subject, “towards a freer, more expansive self-reflection”.

In the end, the “total effect” that is described is dependent on the (correct) “use” of the Shabad. The practical approach to the “pronunciation” of Shabad in its physiological sense (“meridian points in the upper palate”) takes priority over the initial state of confrontation of ideas and ideals, leaving this state of consideration of ideas and meaning, in other words the doctrinarian or intellectual dimension, behind. The “real thing” seems to be something else. The proper understanding and effect comes from the verbalization, from the practice of being an experiential event, and this is how Yogi Bhajan ascribed it and prescribed the practice since: it leads the way to “achieve the total effect”.

The Khalsa and the Sikh model – distinctive views in relation to the Truth. Yogi Bhajan spoke about the difference between a Sikh and a Khalsa in terms of life and personality:

“One who lives in truth, practices truth and spreads truth is a Sikh. One whose personality is filled with radiance and who projects truth by his or her own presence is a Khalsa” (Bhajan. 1998, p. 113).

The different conditions and values given to action and presence in relation to *truth* come up. In Yogi Bhajan’s view, the Sikh is actively involved with the truth because “he

lives it ... practices and spreads [it]". The key term of the ascription is the Truth that, whatever it is, it is not here a theoretical concern. Rather it is a *special thing* that defines him as an active element in being a Sikh, to be *lived, practiced and shared*. According to this the ascription shows the three levels that truth has in the sense that it

- can be integrated into one's life ("by living it"),
- can be seen as a notion that is to be applied ("by practicing it") and
- can be conveyed to others, because it has a social reach ("by sharing it").

On the other hand, for the Khalsa members, the truth is also a criterion to define their personalities. The truth, in the case of a Khalsa, is not necessarily something to establish a relationship with, in the sense of subject/object dynamics. The attribution of Yogi Bhajan is rather different as he deems a Khalsa to be "someone" that *is* and *spontaneously manifests the truth*, "radiating it, projecting it". In Yogi Bhajan's notion of Khalsa he does not explicit a clear distinction between truth and Khalsa, because "by his or her own presence the Khalsa projects truth". He does not have to live it or practice it because he is filled with radiance and truth. Evidently Yogi Bhajan gives the Khalsa Sikh the highest status as far as truth is concerned. Regarding goals and the relation to a form of absolute, the peak experience of radiating truth can well be associated with the same ideas of experience or gain a "nucleus", "Braham", "God-consciousness", "infinite" and "totality" with Kundalini yoga, but expressed in terms that are closer to the philosophical context or audience where his lecture has taken place. From this text one can see that it is evident that the Sikh engagement with the truth is seen as a sort of journey, in which the Khalsa is at the top, filled with and radiating *truth*.

It is an interesting ascription that although the Khalsa and the truth are not different from each other, there is still the general lineament of Sikhism concerning the Khalsa behaviour that Khalsa followers of Yogi Bhajan must apply. Indeed, as with Sikhism in general, the ethics of the Khalsa is also a fundamental aspect that has given cohesion to the Sikhs of 3HO. One could wonder why a person, in whose presence the truth radiates, needs a moral code. The Code of ethics of Sikhism, the *Rehit* or *Rahit Maryada*, was also implemented by Yogi Bhajan to be applied to his Kundalini-Yogis-Khalsa-Sikhs-followers. In this respect the intention seems to refer more to a formal aspect that informs the public display of a Sikh and his mentality, "the personal appearance of a Sikh is one of the foremost ways that a Sikh maintains his or her consciousness as the Guru intended", writes the wife and Sikh Minister of 3HO (Kaur Khalsa, Guru Raj, 2001, p. 13). According to her, "The Khalsa was given a specific form, with a standard of dress, specific ceremonies for purification and commitment, and specific devotional requirements" because "ideally, Khalsa is a highly evolved being, no longer just a Sikh..." (p. 17). In the view of the first researcher of 3HO, Dusenbery, the actual compliance of the formal Sikh standards in 3HO was very often admired by other (Punjabi) Sikhs⁶³.

⁶³ Popular culture warns us that "the suit does not make the man". This aphorism means that one cannot judge a person solely by his appearance, far less know the heart ("consciousness") of someone that shows a certain kind of apparel. Yogi Bhajan himself referred to this idea of "wolves in sheep's clothing" sometimes, speaking about the corrupted people that he met or even were around or close to him, for

The “consciousness of a Sikh and Yogi”: The Perennialism of 3HO. For Yogi Bhajan,

“Kundalini Yoga is a householder’s path. It is a yoga which allows an ordinary person to live in this world, experience the ecstasy of consciousness, then use this consciousness to serve humanity. This is the same as Sikh consciousness, it is not necessary to be Sikh to have Sikh consciousness” (Bhajan 2003, p. 50)

The type of “consciousness” that Yogi Bhajan attributes to a yogi and a Sikh are “the same”. One is achieved by “experiencing ecstasy of consciousness” (through the practice of Kundalini Yoga) while the equivalent other is Sikh consciousness. The element of “consciousness” is deemed the common ground of that “sameness”. But the consciousness has to be experienced and it can happen through the path of the “householder”. In English ‘ecstasy’ is “an extreme emotional feeling of great happiness” (Collins Dictionary). So within this ascriptive frame (Yogi Bhajan’s) the experience is deemed as a behavioural event that brings about awareness; and as it was presented above, an encounter with the spiritual/divine source of the human, the Kundalini, is ascribed as an *ecstatic* form of experience.

The “consciousness” nevertheless qualifies the noun ecstasy. It is not any type of ecstasy of the senses (such as the analogical type derived from culinary or sexual experience) but an “ecstasy of consciousness”, which possibly refers to an extreme form of enhanced awareness, or meta-awareness⁶⁴. This meta-awareness is ecstatic in as much as it is deemed special compared to the common experience that one might have. It is ecstatic because according to the 3HO members it is an organic stimulation of the awareness, or according to the Congress Resolution of USA, quoted in the overview of the movement (Part I), it would correspond to an “altered state of awareness”. What is conceived special in this view of Yogi Bhajan is that “an ordinary person” can experience it and yet “live in this world”. Once the event takes place and the consciousness is achieved it brings the Yogi/Sikh to a social dimension containing a social possibility. Therefore, as a fruit of the “experience of ecstatic consciousness”, the “ordinary person” can use the consciousness to “serve humanity”, setting a formative criterion that stems from the same type of *consciousness* once experienced.

With regards to the Sikh religion, the “householder path”, is another aspect that would need to present further aspects on the coming pages. The “householder” profile has been mainly, though not exclusively, associated with Sikhism, but this aspect is present in some tantric tradition as well as. Similarly, with the idea of “consciousness”, in 3HO the consciousness of a yogi as well as the one of a Sikh are seen as conceptually equal because both are “ordinary people” who are and can be “householders” (and not

which purpose this *Code of Conduct* does not act only as an external frame of representation, but as an internal mandate to strictly observe.

⁶⁴ One of the informants (Charlie from Scotland) commented that in Yogi Bhajan’s terminology this awareness is referred to as the experience of being “consciously conscious of being consciousness” (Headnotes, 2006)

necessarily *anchorites*). This matches the social dimension shaped in Sikhism from the times of the Gurus and offers a versatile category that appeals to the modern urban and busy life. So the research must underline this second aspect of the “householder” besides “consciousness” as a point of syncretic intersection between the two philosophies.

To sum up, without that form of *consciousness*, one can say, they are neither yogis nor Sikhs. This consciousness can be conceived as their psychological perennial base and the *cardinal objective* – or more precisely as deemed by Yogi Bhajan as a core “experience”. In the analysis of this sentence it is possible to identify four stages in the ascription of qualities and attribution of causes. This can be portrayed in a circular progression that starts from and arrives at the same point:

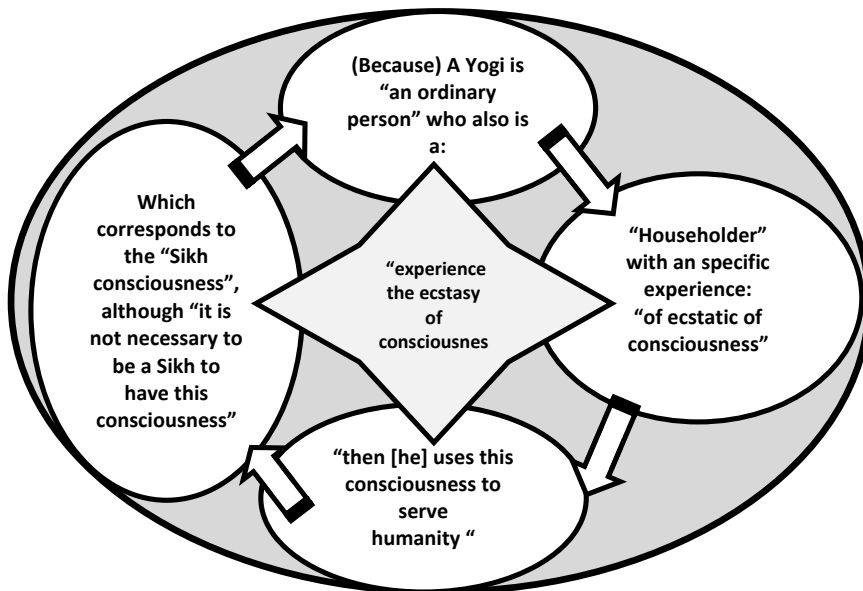


Table 8: The Cardinal experiential core of 3HO Sikhs and Yogis

Guru and hearing the truth: Primacy and Functionality of the sound. In another approach to the mantras and sounds, in 3HO where “the Guru” is defined as “the vibratory impact of the word”, then the Guru has the purpose of uniting a person “with the Infinite through the sound current” (2003, p. 50). The effect of the Guru as sound, the “Shabd Guru”, is considered efficacious because he can “impact” someone’s life to point him towards “Infinity””; this is the effect that is prescribed to be sought in 3HO. The same way a lover of Beethoven’s music would play the 9th symphony to find stimulation and motivation, a 3HO member would chant or “vibrate” the words of the Gurus (Shabads or Banis) for their essential purposes, deemed special, as they lead to an encounter with the “Infinite”. In this view the Guru is not only considered a spiritual principle or persona, but also assumes a versatile form through sound or the “Shabd Guru”. But what exactly is the “Shabd Guru”?

“The Shabd Guru is a special kind of technology with a unique contribution to develop potentials and handle problems of the new age-the Aquarian Age” (Bhajan 2003, p. 77)

“A special kind of technology” is therefore ascribed as a tool to be *employed*. In one way it is seen as a “unique contribution” to “handle problems” attributed to the New Age historical context, but the Shabd Guru as a “technology” is deemed “special” and it can also be used as a tool to perform the specific function of “developing the potential” in the human’s internal dimension. Certainly the notions of “Kundalini”, “Totality”, “Power/command”, “Brahma”, “Infinite”, “Ecstasy of Consciousness” and “Nucleus” etc., are characteristics that have already been ascribed as a part of the “latent” or “potential” capacity of humans as understood by Yogi Bhajan.

In this sentence one can notice that the fundamental description has been cut off from any mystical or devotional connotation. This seems to be the case of the non-religious association that Yogi Bhajan and 3HO established, so there are scattered and somehow secondary references to the devotion or mysticism in the attribution of the properties about the Shabd Guru. A devotional side becomes much clearer, explicit and direct in the context of Sikh Dharma rather than 3HO. As it was described already, the technicality of the use of Guru as a word or Shabd Guru, presupposes the correct use of the *tongue* and the proper stimulation of the *meridian point of the palate*. This was the “real” thing as stated by Yogi Bhajan.

One last point about the relationship between Sikh practical experience and Kundalini yoga runs along the following lines: “Kundalini Yoga” says Yogi Bhajan, “prepares you and enhances your capacity so you can hear that sound current” (Bhajan 2003, p. 50). It is very interesting to reconsider Kundalini yoga in relation to Sikhism, because here the first is attributed a subordinated position “that prepares” the way for the Shabd Guru that seems to be the primal focus. Nonetheless, at the end, the experience is the same and the consciousness is the same. In 3HO Kundalini yoga is established as a practice that has two aspects; one is that of being a tool or a device similar and connected to White Tantric for “purification” and “awakening”, and two, it works as an instance prior to the Sikh belief as it carries the Shabd Guru or mantras as a central part of the philosophy and practice. Is it possible that, in the end, the practice of Kundalini yoga and Sikh methodology are inseparable in 3HO? And they blended together forming a more complex formation of practices: a 3HO *distinctive* practice?

The pull towards ethics and the pedestal of the Guru. Another side of Sikhism linked to its social reach, which is distinctively highlighted in 3HO, is the axiological dimension. Sikh Dharma apparently has a distinctive profile that emphasizes the ethical dimension of 3HO and the teaching of Yogi Bhajan much more because it is the “path of the students... The path is to become pure, filled with integrity, truth, and consciousness”, as Yogi Bhajan said (2003, p. 50). For this reason and the commitment of Yogi Bhajan to the Sikh religion, Sikh values overtake the 3HO moral display of values compared to the traditional values of the yoga of Patañjali, of which Yogi Bhajan also

claimed to be an heir⁶⁵. In doing so there is a paradoxical situation, consisting of the imposition of a code of religious observation or conduct and the ethical responsibilities (known in Sikh terms as the *Rehit Maryana*) of a group of people who do not have any association to religion. How was this affiliation possible? The answer could be linked to the impersonality of the message, which does not exclude anyone. This could explain the religiosity of the Sikh lore, which is based on a different ascriptive approach:

“Each of the ten Sikh Gurus carried the Infinite identity of the Shabd Guru within very different personalities, ages and situations, and yet each affirmed they were all one Light. Their identities, as well as that of the other enlightened men of many faiths who contributed the shabds, mantras and music, are captured in the sacred scripture of Sikh Dharma. Each of these shabds has embedded in its sounds, rhythms and words, the Infinite identity they shared. They awaken the soul, clear the mind and do not depend on any finite identity, ego or group” (Bhajan 2003, p. 70)

The claim that the shabads have an identity which is “Infinite” and that they “do not depend on any finite identity ego or group” seems to be a way to release the practice from the control of a group, type of society or cultural influence as might have been the intention of Yogi Bhajan. This way to approach the core practice of the Sikhs is based on a source that is deemed “shared infinite identity”, and that overcomes its worldly dependency. Sikhism, which began as a local and somehow cultural response to a historical situation in India, gave birth to something bigger than Sikhism itself: in the words of Yogi Bhajan, the Shabads are the “embedded” product. This message is actually a practice to “awaken the soul and clear the mind” and this is the focus of the practice. This is possibly the clearest statement that shows the strand of ‘Sikh Dharma’ that has this distinctive interpretation of the message of the Gurus. In this respect this is backed up with quoting the Sikh Scripture in which similar ideas are presented, like the case of the Swayas in Praise of Guru Ram Das (In the Siri Guru Granth, page 1402),

“Their Kundalini awakens in the true congregation, from the mouth of Guru, they are enjoying the supreme bliss” (translated by Dr. Darshan Singh, 2008, Vol. V, p. 2953)

When Yogi Bhajan started teaching Kundalini Yoga he said he “also began to give people Sikh Dharma”, adding that he “didn’t want people to be misled” and that he “didn’t want to become a *Sat Guru*” (Bhajan 2003, p. 50). “*Sat Guru*” refers to a divine entity, the “True Master” of Sikhism, who has the exclusive condition and denomination of Guru; The Sikh Gurus were *Sat Gurus* and with this approach Yogi Bhajan is acting according to the Sikh interpretative orthodoxy in placing himself below their level. In India the institution of the Guru is embedded in the culture and it has an inflow in the Sikh Religion, just as Sikhs Gurus have given to the cultural background some *special* signification. Both Hindus and Sikhs alike have viewed the path taken by Guru Nanak as a different path, as a derivation and distinct revelation from Hinduism, but for some

⁶⁵ The general Indian tradition of Yoga includes eight levels of practice (known as “ashtanga”), this levels start, according with Patañjali’s scheme, with Yamas and Niyamas a list of “do’s and don’ts”.

Indian Sikhism is another Hindu *sampradaya*, which is a movement led by a succession of Gurus within the frame of Hinduism. In his view Yogi Bhajan declared that his personal relation to Sikhism followed the Khalsa canon and therefore adopted the following position regarding the axiology of Sikhism, with himself as a teacher and Kundalini Yoga as a practice:

“Many people grow in stature and then want to be worshipped in their personal identity rather than taking people to their own infinite identity. Values must be taught with Kundalini Yoga” (Bhajan 2003, p. 50).

Sikh Dharma’s Ecstatic Experience of Sikh Religion. The common explanation of the origin of religion in 3HO is addressed in terms of experience. They have claimed that “Religions were originally the organized result of codifying an experience of ecstasy” (Bhajan 2003, p. 51). This statement could be a literal quotation of classical scholarship addressing “religious experience” by someone like Otto, Wach or Radhakrishnan, who all emphasized the originality of the experience in initiating religious form, institutions and codes (see appendix on “religious experience” from classical view of scholarship). In this criterion 3HO does not entirely depart from traditional scholarship, but it sees the element of “codification” as the consequential action of the “experience of ecstasy”. The founder of 3HO generally speaks about religions in two essential ways, as a very technical human production on one hand, but on the other hand criticizing the evolution and the dysfunctional or critical moment that traditional or old religions faced in our civilization. The fundamental attribution that the founder of 3HO gave to religions is that they are to provide the “experience of the infinity or ecstasy”. Thus in his teaching there is a reformulation of the term religion and Sikh religion producing a new ascription:

“Religions were supposed to give you a technology to regain your reality and tame your mind (...) one of the greatest acts ever done on the religious level to give you wisdom and reality was by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth teacher of the Sikh way. He gave you directly to the Word, to the naad of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. He confirmed the technology to take you beyond fear and beyond the personality conflict within you ... You can sit and read the Siri Guru Granth yourself ... you are only now seeking to understand and experience yourself as a part of God with a sole proprietorship on the soul” (Bhajan, 1998, 105-107).

In this quotation he narrows the focus down to the historical personage, the Tenth Guru of Sikhism, who is considered the one who consolidated all the teachings of his predecessors and crystallized old elements in newer forms. Guru Gobind Singh produced the layout of the final version of the Sikh path towards God as he himself prescribed as the last living Guru, the creator of the Khalsa and the final editor of the Sikh scripture, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). The role of the tenth Guru, according to Yogi Bhajan, was not to give something from God, but to give “you to God” through the prescribed sacred literature contained in the verses of the SGGS. In this sense I could offer an analogy in which the text can be seen as the source, and Guru Gobind Singh as

the specialist who knew how to feed people from it to nourish them with an effect deemed spiritual. Like for all the Sikhs, as well as for Yogi Bhajan, this is the experience of the divine Word or Name (the “Shabad”, the “Bani” or in some cases the “Naad”). 3HO ascribes to the application of the words of the Gurus the quality of not merely of a system or method, but a “technology” that in consequence has a *technological raison d’être*: “to take you beyond fear and beyond the personality conflict within you”.

* * *

In conclusion, one can say that the progression of the ascriptions made about Sikhism in 3HO and the Sikh experience in 3HO moved from the scholarly reference of the *mystical experience* of Guru Nanak, which for Yogi Bhajan is rather deemed an “ecstatic experience of consciousness”, to Guru Gobind Singh’s final consolidation, which for Yogi Bhajan gave the “confirmation of the technology” behind this experience. The individual level of a Yogi, in Sikhism, reaches a social one as the congregation (Sat Sangat) gains importance.

On a psychological level one can deduce from this deeming process that, given the internal pre-conditions to which *fear* and *conflict* are ascribed, the complete removal of such pre-conditions would produce a psychological reaction impelling you towards “seeking to understand and experience yourself as a part of God” as Yogi Bhajan put it. This idea in the attribution is that a human becomes conscious of being a part of God rather than a seeker of reunification with God. This is expressed differently from the ‘unity’ that is pursued in yogic circles and considered traditional, and in Sikhism in general too. An enhanced divine nature is the distinctive property ascribed to the person’s soul (in theory, potential or in its achieved state) and in that sense the Sikh Gurus, as understood by Yogi Bhajan, provided the path to achieve it as an *experience of ecstasy of consciousness*, which is an idea associated with the notion of participating *in the oneness of God*. These notions are commonly found to be connected with the different prescribed practices (Sikh or yogic) and their consequent experiences that are set as necessary goals by 3HO/Yogi Bhajan, which aim to provide the type of training that the members need to “serve humanity” to deal with the problematic circumstances attributed to the Age of Aquarius.

8. New Age

Probably one of the first times when the term “New Age” was used was in the late years of the eighteenth century in *Milton: a Poem* by William Blake (1778). In the preface of this text Blake described a belief in a spiritual and artistic “New Age”⁶⁶.

It was in the twentieth century, however, that the term New Age began to be considered a distinct category in the emerging field of Comparative Religions. One of the main characteristics one author wrote about was that the New Age was a decentralized

⁶⁶ “The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid, of Plato & Cicero, which all Men ought to condemn, are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible; but when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce, all be set right ... Rouse up, O Young Men of the New Age” (p. 61)

religious phenomenon that originated in the so-called counterculture movement of the 1960s (Hanegraaff, 1996, p. 10). In the origins of the study of the New Age, this phenomenon was located in a vast geographic and philosophical area of the Western society.

In the first moments of the development of the phenomenon known as the “New Age” is found Marilyn Ferguson’s *“The Aquarian Conspiracy”* (1980), which turned out to be a sort of foundational book that promoted New Age values for the first time. In the book Ferguson speaks of “a leaderless but powerful network that is working to bring about radical change in the United States” (p. 23). Ferguson wrote in this best-selling book that “its members have broken with certain key elements of Western thought and they may have even broken continuity with history”. The central thesis of her thought is based on the transformation of individuals that will lead them to manifest a substantial change in society. With this in mind Ferguson introduced germinal ideas concerning how inwards-pointing attention provides no limit to connect with an authentic personal reality, in a way that “inner listening makes clearer to us what we really want as distinct from what we have been talked into” (p.29) For the philosopher and religious scholar Jacob Needleman, Ferguson contributed to make “New Age” thinking “more understandable and less threatening” to the general public in the West.⁶⁷

The New Age developed in the 1990s and to some degree the intensity of the discourse faded or slightly changed. In this regard, the scholar Hanegraaff remarked that in a general sense the New Age movement showed that “during the 1990s participants increasingly refused to identify themselves as such, preferring vague and noncommittal terms such as “spirituality””. This corresponds to a strategy of assimilation and adaptation rather than decline, he noted (2005, p. 6497). According to George Chryssides (2000), “spirituality rather than religion is the hallmark of the New Age”. The diversity and lack of central organization of the New Age phenomenon, besides the reaction against the *establishment* in particular and the reaction of traditional organized religions, tended to restrict the growth of the different forms of New Age *spirituality*⁶⁸.

Initially the goals of the New Age inspired different people from all over the world, not only Westerners but the New Age only became a popular concept amidst alternative searchers and paths. It lacked the good connotation that Ms Ferguson would have wanted because it generated detractors and at the same time became somehow exotic

⁶⁷ In a similar way an article of the New York Times referred to “Ms. Ferguson’s message” as “relentlessly positive. In the dawning new age, people would exercise their talents to the fullest; war and social hierarchies would disappear; and the human race, impelled forward by thrilling new scientific discoveries, would embrace the happiness that belonged to it by birthright. The future was not just bright, it was radiant. She once told an interviewer, “We are going to see a burst of creativity that will make the Renaissance pale in comparison” (Grimes, 2008).

⁶⁸ For example the Vatican campaign condemning the New Age was made public in 2003 in a booklet, *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the ‘New Age’*, prepared by Monsignor Michael Fitzgerald’s council and the Pontifical Council for Culture, with help from the Vatican’s orthodoxy watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Vatican’s web site for accessing the document:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_2003_0203_new-age_en.html

and alternative. Massimo Introvigne introduced the term the “Next Age” to indicate a second stage of New Age development. The turn from more global ambitions of transformation to focus on groups of individuals is normally regarded as the “privatization” of the New Age. The initial conditions of the New Age project had a planetary-social-spiritual reach that emerges essentially out of a search produced by a religious and ideological disenchantment with the second half of the twentieth century. According to Introvigne, the second moment is focused on individual happiness rather than global scenarios or Utopia (2001, p. 59). In his approach the New Age failed to produce the change claimed, for example regarding the New Age core prophecy of millennialism, that “...might still come true for a selected group of individuals, although it will probably not come true for the society or planet earth as a whole” (p. 64)

The nature of the original idea of New Age allowed the coexistence of a plethora of different methods and approaches for preparing for a new time in human history. In the postulation of this new period, the astrological criteria have become the common label to encompass its different qualities. This age is therefore more strictly referred to as the *Age of Aquarius*. Paradoxically the “Old” New Age sources combine with new forms and sources of revelation, producing a reinterpretation of ancient esotericism under the criteria of a new consciousness and spiritual life. The mixture of elements from multiple backgrounds defies the ability to distinguish between the New Age and the other traditions integrated into it. As Sergej Flere, Andrej Kirbiš (2009) saw it,

“An even greater challenge to conceptualizing New Age arises in the association of New Age with other religious and spiritual currents, as well as the extent to which New Age is integrated into contemporary culture” (p. 162).

Because of the visible difference between New Age discourse and traditional religious forms, several authors of the New Age have regarded it as an “alternative belief system” (Newport, 2001; Hanegraaff 2005). This phenomenon is linked to the critical assessment of the contemporary religions, and the development of global society is inclined towards finding new paradigms (Capra, 1982).

As noticed by Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield (1994), one of the common characteristics of the New Age movements is that they promote “personal and intimate aspects of human life” (p. 8) and “are not independent of links with the past. Nor is there an absence of continuity with the old ... New Age movements can trace connections to earlier spiritualist teachings and Eastern philosophies [but] have emerged in new forms” (p. 9). For them the characteristics of these groups have multiple expressions and dimensions:

“In both Europe and North America, movements have arisen that stretch the explanatory capacities of older theoretical perspectives. Peace movements, student movements, the anti-nuclear energy protests, minority nationalism, gay rights, women’s rights, animal rights, alternative medicine, fundamentalist religious movements, and New Age and

ecological movements are but a sampling of the phenomena that have engaged the puzzled attention of sociologists, historians, and political scientists” (p. 3)

8. 1. The Development of the New Age

The New Age concepts and old religious principles then deemed spiritual showed signs of fusion from the 1960s to the 1970s onwards. Consequently the application of those New Age principles took place in the New Religious Movements that tried to represent the new understanding, practice and spiritual message of a New Age, and this was the ground for a *new belief or reinterpreted old beliefs* (like in the case of 3HO). It could as well be argued that in the present century there is a new generation of New Agers that is relatively ready to adopt the New Age worldview and to some extent produce distinctive labels for their New Age “newness”. Perhaps there is not enough evidence to show whether or not significant changes, as M. Ferguson envisioned, have taken place in the spiritual awareness of people, but there are groups in which the criterion that inspire them, as I will show next, has a strong anchoring in New Age views.

The next chart shows the distinction between the New and Next Age according to Massimo Introvigne (2001, 62-64),

New Age	Post New Age or Next Age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sacralisation of the self (idea based on Heelas, 1996) - The whole planet heads towards a collective higher consciousness and happiness - Public and collective - Utopian and millennial views 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sacralisation of myself - The change might never happen collectively - Conceived as private - No Utopianism or millennialism, confined to individual happiness

Table 9: Distinction between New and Next age according to Introvigne.

For J. Gordon Melton, the New Age showed an evolution that “has been carried [with] high-minded idealism and ethic to serve humanity” since its beginning. However, this situation failed to prevail and according to him in the 1980s it “quickly developed into an increasingly commercialized “spiritual market”. He perceived the movement as going from “community oriented values to individual-centered ones” (2005, p. 6496). This author offered a perspective to view the phenomenon considering four stages: *origins, experimentation, outcome and evaluation*.

The progression of the New Age phenomenon			
1. Origins (1960s-1970s)	2. Experimentation: (1970s-1980s)	3. Outcome: (1980s-1990's)	4. Evaluation (1990 onwards)
Principles, beliefs, theology, practices and concepts of the New Age start to be known.	Embodiment and application of the former in New (Age) Religious Movements	Social tension testing the new movements and organizations, their feasibility and practicality.	Emerging criticism: New generation of New Age, Next Age, "spirituality" or alike denominations

Table 10: The Development of New Age according to Melton

8. 2. Scholarship on the New Age

Although some of the authors quoted above have brought about most of the key points regarding the New Age, in the next lines I will be highlighting and expanding other important ideas.

In the 1980s Fritjof Capra wrote in *The Turning Point* (1982) about a "rising culture" that was supposed to replace the occidental culture (p. 419). This new society, he believed, was going to be holistic and in tune with the spiritual dimension, and science and religions were going to find a balance and complementary support. To some degree Capra thought it possible that the antagonism between science and religion that commenced in the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century was going to be resolved, and his optimistic claim (coupled with his background as a scientist) influenced the debate concerning the New Age.

However, Paul Heelas wrote in *New Age Movement* that the core of New Age is based on the idea of "Self Spirituality". From his sociological background, he thought that the

"... pervasive and significant aspect of the *lingua franca* of the New Age is that the person is, in essence, spiritual. To experience the 'Self' itself is to experience 'God', the 'Goddess', the 'Source', 'Christ Consciousness', the 'inner child', the 'way of the heart'..." (p. 19).

For him the New Agers "make the monistic assumption that the self itself is sacred" (p.2) and the attractiveness of this form of religiousness is because the New Age "provides solutions to loss of certainty" (p.3). According to him the importance of studying the New Age is because "it epitomizes central features of modernity" (p.4). In this respect the triggering of the emergence of the New Age is seen in the social interaction and how it is linked to the major emerging figure of the "Self".

According to Heelas, the experiential dimension is a fundamental aspect of the New Age, "Truth ... comes by way of one's own experience" (p.21), he pointed out. This experience does not exclusively relate to an isolated internal world:

“what lies within – experienced by way of ‘intuition’, ‘alignment’ or an ‘inner voice’ – serves to inform the judgments, decisions and choices required for everyday life” p. 23.

This idea of experience, he considered, is framed as an internal experience that enables a deeper insight into how to be and act in life in the world. It is an integration of the external demands of our existence and internal reality, which bring things into an experiential unity. For Heelas, the New Age philosophical perspective is not only experiential but also perennial. From his point of view,

“... New Agers are perennialists ... Unity firmly prevails over diversity. Having little or no faith in external realm of traditional belief, New Agers can ignore apparently significant differences between religious traditions ... but they do have faith in that wisdom which is experienced as lying in the heart of the religious domain as a whole. From the de-traditionalized stance of the New Age what matters is... ‘ageless wisdom’. And, it can be added, New Agers attach equal importance – because it is an aspect of the spiritual realm as a whole- to the essential unity of human species, scorning nationally or ethnically differentiated modes of being” (Heelas 1996, 27)

The perennial core of the New Age makes this movement “detraditionalized” according to Heelas. He suggested that “*autonomy and freedom* are highly valued; and authority lies with the *experience of the Self...*” (p. 29 italics in the original). Based on his perspective one could say that the New Ager is a person that invokes the universal principles of spirituality and truth from within and does not search external sources in the same way that he searches for an internal kind of answer. According to the perspective of this writer, answers are accessible through experience. A New Ager would view and deem a sacred text as conveying an external truth, unlike the experiential event of a person that conveys an internal truth. In a similar way, another writer Liseotte Frisk (2001) says that New Age procedures connect individual experience with diverse cultural aspects. In this sense Frisk explained that what works in New Age, “seem to be the accelerated eclecticism and the emphasis on an inner experience of unity of multicultural elements” (p. 33)⁶⁹.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1996) dedicated a great part of his work to religious traditions in the West that he considered have been neglected (p. 3). His study in general is a study of these movements and his focus falls on their religious ideas. Hanegraaff does not believe that the New Age beliefs are an integrated thought. The main characteristic of the New Age is not that it has the same uniform content, but that it has different perspectives which “are opposed to the same thing” (p. 521). He defines the New Age movement as “a popular western culture criticism expressed in terms of secularized esotericism” (p. 521). For him the main characteristic of the New Age is its criticism of modern Western culture. And he added to this view of secularized

⁶⁹ This multiculturalism made Frisk consider that the *lingua franca* of New Age is “English” (p. 39)

esotericism that the New Age core is cultural criticism. In this sense, considering common elements from a New Age perspective, “it adopts from traditional esotericism an emphasis on the primacy of personal religious experience and on this-world type of holism” (p. 520).

This author defines the New Age (2001) as a

“popular western culture criticism expressed in terms of secularized esotericism ... and all forms of New Age are united in their rejection of dualism and materialist-reductionism...” (p. 21, 22).

But this author underlines that the holistic vision is not motivated by reasons or systematic reflection, but by emotions:

“the emotionally-motivated dream of an emerging global spirituality relates to the realities of the so-called globalization of New Age” (2001, p. 20).

The phenomena he described are psychological responses to an increasingly interconnected global society. This type of society allows divergences as well as common criteria, some of which are ideals of “universal truths” that provide an opportunity for the materialization of the idea of unity and fraternity in the world. As he pointed out,

“Within the present social context of a democratic free market of ideas and practices, the New Ager’s strict emphasis on the self and on individual experience as the only reliable source of spiritual truth ... If more and more people feel that traditional Christianity, rationality, and science are no longer able to give sense and meaning to human existence, it is to be expected that a spiritual perspective based on personal revelations by means of gnosis or personal religious experience will profit with these circumstances (Hanegraaff, 2005, 6498-9).

For Hanegraaff the criticism of the New Agers leaves no other option than the “self and individual experience” as the “only reliable sources of spiritual truth”. This is permitted by what he calls the marketing of “ideas and practices”. The emergence of this criticism and the simultaneous growth of such a market gave this new type of personal spirituality an opportunity to gain followers. At the same time Hanegraaff believed that

“there are indeed clear signs that New Age religion is losing its status as a countercultural movement and is now increasingly assimilated by the mainstream of society” (2005:6499; Heelas 1996).

8. 3. The Aquarian Age of 3HO⁷⁰

In the organization created by Yogi Bhanan the members strived to embrace a leading role in the establishment and the development of the Aquarian Age. This is a matter that they have deemed as their “destiny” and to be conceived not religiously, but deemed spiritually. According to Yogi Bhanan,

“We are not asking you to become religious. We are definitely asking you to become spiritual. For God’s sake, find your soul. Find out where you have come from, what you are doing here and where are you going. Look at the map of your life” (Bhanan 1997, p. 269)

This approach can reflect an influence of the late twentieth century and the context of the New Age and its characteristics. The evolution towards a New Age was a central concern in Yogi Bhanan’s lectures. He believed in a “mission” and “destiny” and his duty was to prepare teachers and people with a certain degree of attained special experience and self-awareness. He explained the characteristics of the Aquarian age and the involvement with this event in the following way:

“The Age of Aquarius is coming our way. Emptiness, insanity, and pain shall be everybody’s affair. People will like to hit walls to find out where they can go. They shall come to you as insane as they are, if you do not take away their pain, and instead you sit judgment, you are the wrong people. That’s why we wanted to teach you how to remain disciplined in the most undisciplined world. How to grow and glow. How to serve, to be. First we identify ourselves: We are, we are. Second our words should be such that they should cool down any fire, the desperation, the depression of the person. Third, we must have the power to uplift the soul and serve the person, to be graceful. And finally, we must stand pure” (Bhanan 2003, p. 3).

The tokens here ascribed to the Age of Aquarius are rather negative (“emptiness, insanity and pain”), but there is an implicit idea about being part of a special *chosen* group: people suffering because of this Age “shall come to you”. The notion in 3HO is that they have been chosen by destiny to establish an awareness to enable the arrival of the New Age. Although the concept of *chosen people* is not present in the paragraph above and is probably not a label they would want to identify with (given the religious association), there is an implicit idea that they are forming a vanguard in their actions and communication of their role in society.

The paragraph above shows a prophetic perspective in which 3HO’s leader describes

⁷⁰ Not only for 3HO or other New Agers, the New Age is to be understood as an Aquarian Age. According to a scholar, George Chryssides (2000), “the New Age is the Age of Aquarius”. Within the lectures and teaching in 3HO these adjective can be combine with many subjects or objects: “Aquarian Sadhana”, “Aquarian teacher”, “Aquarian values”, “Aquarian community”, “Aquarian relationships”, “Aquarian human”, “Aquarian teachings” or even “Aquarian Guru” (to refer to Guru Nanak), etc.

future events and challenges. He attributed to the challenge of the Age that there will be a demand for a certain type of person who is suited to face the challenge. However, these people had to develop certain *special* characteristics, and the ones that can “take away pain ... and ... sit judgment”. These people deemed *special* are supposed to engage in a “discipline” so that, at the end of the day, they can “stand pure” (i.e. as in the idea of purity of the Khalsa).

Another ingredient that one can see implicit in the paragraph is the intended auditory. This message is not addressed to the general public, but to the teacher in training, so this is a specific message for a selected group, i.e. those that feel they can embrace the task, those that are the *avant-garde* of this special people who will feel up to the challenge of “how to grow and glow. How to serve, to be”. In those times, this speech was not only addressed to those that have nowadays assumed important roles of the leadership of the organization, but also to the future generations and central heart of the organization, the *Aquarian Teachers-to-be*. For the preparation of this people, he said,

“[s]ome of you who are sitting here will become great Teachers of the Age of Aquarius. You must understand that you have to build up your character first. Care for yourself, be kind to yourself, be compassionate with yourself. That is what you have to do” (Bhajan 1977, p. 253).

The conceived form of being a teacher of Kundalini Yoga, the way to understand the Sikh teachings, the approach to the community and social networking, and relevant values are attributed to a sort of divine plan scheduled at the “dawn of Age of Aquarius”, as they rather refer to it. The 3HO founder and members think that they are ahead of what is going to happen and therefore have “antidotes”, “teachings”, “techniques” and “teachers” to “help the transition” to the “new consciousness”.

This attribution deemed to the Age of Aquarius is not dissociated from the criticism of the *previous times*. In this sense Yogi Bhajan not only seemed to want to prescribe a guideline, but to form a criterion that contrasted with older behaviour and a strategy to face what he saw as eminently happening. The basic individual goal was to care for one’s self, but this was not all:

“In this time Piscean values give way to Aquarian values. The difference between the two is very simple. Piscean values work from ego, creating boundaries. Aquarian values have no boundaries; they are infinite. The Aquarian consciousness takes you inside your soul, so you can relate to the soul in all” (Aquarian Times Vol. 3, #1, p. 9)

Piscean and Aquarian perspectives are seen in relation to a prototypical personality and consciousness that is ascribed to each of these times. The attributed *unity* and *infinity* of the qualities of the Aquarian values are highlighted and if the previous Age was seen as insensitive, divided and limited for the people, the fragmentation of the previous Age is to be overcome by a sense of unity that takes place on a soul level during the Aquarian

age. The idea of unity is described and attributed as a relation *in* and *through* the “soul in all”. Implicit and also explicit in other Yogi Bhajan lectures, the arrival to the “soul” is made possible after the observation of such values. The “ego”, on the contrary, was the source of Piscean values. This can be understood as the individual sense of the personality we spoke of above and how it has to establish itself (its “core”, “power” and “nucleus”) in a finite frame of existence. On the other hand it must be connected with the experience of “infinity within” in order to qualify to “serve humanity”. The ideal of the Aquarian consciousness in 3HO, as well as the Sikh and Yogic traditions, implies a social dimension where supporting each other is necessary.

The New Age in general has influenced 3HO with its concern about the *self* and the attention towards experiencing the *self*. How does this manifest in 3HO? In Yogi Bhajan’s view, the idea of *self* is also sometimes seen as an *absolute thing*. In this context, the *self* is conceived as an ultimate value or as an absolute reference, it is certainly one of the fundamental ideas taught to the *Aquarian teachers* and obviously an experience they should strive having. According to Yogi Bhajan,

“If all spiritual teachers started to teach faith in the Self and stopped teaching faith in the personality, this world would be Heaven. This existence with its infinite mind is at your command. You need guidance and training to experience and manifest this command”. (Bhajan 2003, p. 56)

Here is “faith in the self”. Neither God nor the Gurus, should replace what is seen as the essential act of faith; then “this world would be Heaven”. The personality explained above signifies the determined human, historically and culturally restricted and conditioned (probably closely connected to the “ego” as I have shown before). The “infinite mind” is an ascription that comes again and would certainly involve a higher capacity of the human and divine dimension of the “Kundalini”, “God-consciousness”, etc., which is at the zenith of human capacity. People who are interested in developing in this way and agreeing with this discourse only need “guidance and training”, which sets the stage for the prescribed development under the guidance of someone deemed *special*, a *specialist*, an *Aquarian teacher*. This teacher becomes an important manager of the changes because, as Yogi Bhajan phrases it, in “this existence” one can develop towards “experience and manifest the command” of the “infinite mind”, for which only a special “guidance and training” is presupposed.

The development of the “human potential” is an essential feature which is sought by the members of 3HO and which goes along with the addition of the associated ascription concerned with the *Self*. Both of these ideas, *human potential* and *self*, are seemingly at the root of 3HO’s anthropology regarding the human process of development. The anchoring of this endeavour in 3HO is based on the person’s Self, and in no other agent except the teacher that guides it, but in what way is a system/path deemed for *activating the potential* and *spiritual reality of the self* harmonized with the need of a preceptor? According to the founder of the movement,

“If you feel you can’t believe anybody or anything, fine. Don’t. Instead

believe in yourself. Wake up and go deeply in yourself” (Bhajan 1998, p. 7).

The object of the belief is evidently associated with New Age thought as it commonly addresses the institutional religions, traditional authorities in a *detraditionalized* way with its common context of *disbelief*. In this context, the message is indeed addressed in a historical time when scepticism and criticism in culture is increasingly prone to produce secularist views about religious affiliation or thought. This is an important aspect because the NRMs have normally adopted, among their combination of old sources and new thoughts, the notion of “self”, the “experience of the self” or the “consciousness of the self” as a way to re-establish a link to an absolute thing. This is how the attribution of faith is understood in 3HO. The *self* seems to be a reference that can sufficiently inspire engagement, faith and practice to achieve it. The ways to “work on one’s self” in 3HO are framed by a set of a known guidelines given by Yogi Bhajan called the “Five Sutras for The Aquarian Age”. These sutras are the epitome of the New Age as it is understood in 3HO. This is a fundamental formula that 3HOers must learn and use to guide their lives.

In the next table I present these “Five Sutras”: on the left hand side the “Sutra” of Yogi Bhajan, or compacted message that he established as guidelines (Bhajan, 1998, p xii, xiii); on the right hand side there is a brief explanation from the researcher’s attributional perspective:

FIVE SUTRAS OF THE AQUARIAN AGE by Yogi Bhajan	Ascriptive of view outlined
1. “Recognize that the other person is you”	-Implication of a sort of ontological unity attributed to the human reality (the other “is” you) -It also supposes a substantial ontological indifferentiation between people. - It is explicitly prescriptive, it aims at the overcoming of distinctions and boundaries that separate people (“recognize”).
2. “There is a way through any block”	- The implicit belief in a path that has to be walked -A positivistic philosophy (“there is a way)
3. “When time is on you, start, and the pressure will be off”	-The power of <i>doing over being</i> in relation to life pressures -The idea that values prioritized movement over stasis (inertia as a stressor - “pressure”-)
4. “Understand through compassion or you will misunderstand the times”	-The idea that understanding is not due to reasoning, logic or intellect -The pre-eminence of the heart or love to approach things -The implication of the Aquarian Age (the times”) having an specific cognitive way
5. “Vibrate the Cosmos. The Cosmos will clear the path”	- The notion of vibration (the mantras, the “vibratory power of the word”) as a faculty to change things by putting “Cosmos” into action

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ascription of a cosmos that vibrates, and which as such can be compared to the Christian notion of a sort of (vibratory) “providence” - The implicit attribution of the efficiency of mantra repetition
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Table 11: The “Sutras of the Aquarian Age” outlined.

As it has been presented so far, Yogi Bhan’s discourse often has an inclination to describe things avoiding a religious vocabulary and somewhat choosing to deem things in a more technical way that matches the “science” or “technologies” of Yogi Bhan. It would not be an exaggeration to say that most of his descriptions are awash with the type of jargon used in the fields of medical science, the natural sciences or engineering. Indeed, rather than a religious or mystic language, he often uses a language that is purposely deeming technical and scientific *things* in 3HO. This was, and perhaps still is the most graspable way for communicating their message in this “desacralized” world. According to the scholars I have revised here, the New Age is a response and an expression of the spiritual and religious climate as well as a way to react to the world’s religious and spiritual establishment that is perceived as being devoid of *enchantment*.

8. 4. Notions on the Experience of the Aquarian Age in 3HO

The Superiority of the Experience. Yogi Bhan referred to the experience and the Aquarian Age as interdependent notions:

“The Age of Aquarius will be the age of experience where only people of experience will be liked, respected, worshipped, talked and understood”(Bhan. 2003, p. 8).

What does “age of experience” mean? If this attribution is taken sociologically, then the rule of success in society does not apply and it is not intended to be measured according to the level of education, status, prestige, social recognition or economic status etc. Experience is the fundamental quality necessary to succeed in the sense of being “liked, respected, worshipped, talked and understood”. It can be noticed, the New Agers turned to the practices of inner spirituality and experience as a source of truth and authority. This is the background response of the New Age perspectives against the establishment. Theoretical or intellectual development and understanding are criticized by New Agers, who see the institutions as manifestations of an “old way” of doing things. Yogi Bhan shared this New Age view, and as quoted above, established a way to respond to the times so people could rather build or find their “core”, achieve the “experience of the nucleus”, gain “compassion” or approach to the human *self*, the “spiritual (Aquarian) values”, the experience of “unity” and sense of “oneness”.

A New Age thought within the frame of 3HO looks at the society and the individual not with a concern about an external type of success. For example, the accumulation of knowledge, money or power is rather meaningless in 3HO unless it has been achieved

through those values and procedures deemed Aquarian. For this reason “the age of experience” appears to demand an experience of these values or consciousness as a prerequisite. This involves *special* people, because according to Yogi Bhanan “only people of experience” can gain a special status, according to which they “will be liked, respected, worshipped, talked and understood”. In other words the experience or experiences that Yogi Bhanan has referred to on different occasions are related to an interior level that “awakens” and gives someone a perception of “infinity”, “totality”, “truth”, “self”, “soul”, “Kundalini” and the “nucleus” etc. These are the fundamental ascriptions of the “experience” that sets a *new* form of ambition that has an individual motivation for development and a social impact in the Age of Aquarius. In both senses experience is considered not only special and set apart, but superior. Yogi Bhanan’s sentence shows that “only people of experience will be liked, respected, worshipped, talked and understood”.

A subjective experience, seen as an individual sensory event, cannot be easily evidenced or assessed by others, compared to an external achievement that has been gained through a behavioural event like someone producing a piece of art or a dish of *haute cuisine*, so how can an inner experience of the sort Yogi Bhanan speaks about produce “like”, “respect”, “worship” etc.? In the way that Yogi Bhanan deems experience there is an implicit noetic quality connected to the “realization of reality”, “infinity of consciousness”, “the psyche”, etc., and these experiences give a kind of irremovable or authentic first-hand knowledge to the “one who knows by experience”. In other words, it is not the experience itself but its object and the credibility attached to the one who has an experience of *something* deemed *special*.

This approach to experience naturally opposes the notion of non-empirical or theoretical knowledge that in some cases could take precedence. Theoretical knowledge is deemed an *old* type of procedure and approach, namely Piscean. The most special place is given to someone that has the experience of something in tune with the spiritual values of Aquarius. In other words, a person would deem special the Aquarian value of *experiencing the things he knows*. That approach to experience defines the social interplay of individuals and sets the goal for relationships because “people of experience” have the best chance to lead, according to the teaching in 3HO.

Experience as the Aquarian condition: A new theory of evolution? The implication of the use of the term “Age of Aquarius” in Yogi Bhanan’s lexicon has many sides to it and it is not restricted to one unique idea. This Aquarian Age can be attributed in various different ways and the features of Aquarius are not only limited to “experience”. In the next quote he explains some aspect of the journey to experience and equates “Age of Experience” with “Age of Awareness” and “Aquarian Age”:

“We are entering the Age of Aquarius in 2012, November 11. It will be a new time. The entire psyche is changing ... This Age you will all serve is an Age of Awareness, an Age of Experience. This transition to the Age began in the Piscean Age. The Piscean Age motto was: “I want to know. I need to learn.” The Aquarian Motto is: “I know. I want to Experience”. You will

have to deliver the experience to everyone. And you must deliver the experience to yourself each day. That is sadhana, and for that we have a technique” (Bhajan 1998, p. 39)

This paragraph helps to further describe the ascription related to the evolution of humans through at least these two Ages he speaks about. The evolution that is present in the paragraph can be broken down into four moments or statements: the first two ascribe to the Piscean Age and the second two ascribe to the Aquarian Age:

1. The need to know
2. The need to learn
3. The experience of known knowledge
4. The achievement and delivery of experience

According to Yogi Bhajan the need to know and the need to learn are Piscean characteristics. Inversely, experiencing knowledge and delivering that experience are Aquarian characteristics. A further element can be noticed in the statement that there is a line of “awareness” that seems to give the direction of this process *through these ages*. Remember that in Yogi Bhajan’s thinking consciousness is possible because of an experiential event – otherwise it is just theoretical knowledge. At the same time, this paragraph allows us to see the close connection between experience and awareness (which are equated in the deeming making process), and it also provides the research with a key ascription to see the type of experiences that count as such, an event that is within the field of awareness. In other words, the only way that they can go *towards* awareness is *through* experience. One could now recognize that the notion in 3HO is that there is no awareness without experience, and there is no experience without awareness. Thus awareness is indivisible of experience. Is this why “experience” is prescribed by Yogi Bhajan? Is it because it raises the level of the human condition/awareness?

Following this criterion, it is possible that the type of experiential event considered meaningful in the organization, especially for advanced and developed members in 3HO, are those in which the experience (of the “Self”, “Infinite”, “chakras”, “consciousness” etc.) matches what is known about it and vice versa. People in 3HO can know in theory, but that “will not be enough” according to Yogi Bhajan. In fact, in the interviews coming soon, one will be able to see traces of how some members express their satisfaction when their practical experiences match the theory they know. In the same section there is one case where the informant directly scorned the intellectuals, “the intelligent people”, and refused to give any hint about his experience, preferring to condition the interviewer’s understanding to the experience of the 3HO praxis⁷¹.

⁷¹ In the fieldwork context (see III Part), this situation is clearer when it becomes manifest that the 3HO Yoga Festival environment is itself an atmosphere that evocatively inspires a practitioner and praxis of yoga, meditation, sadhana, White Tantric Yoga and a way of living and perhaps as a secondary thing a theoretical discussion on metaphysics, philosophy or doctrinal matters.

As anticipated above, Yogi Bhajan referred not only to the association of experience and awareness but also to the connection of experience and knowledge. He observed that in the Aquarian Age, “communication will be humongous. Everybody will have access to all knowledge” (Bhajan 2003, p.7). Knowledge is available through technology, and Yogi Bhajan thought that rather than rejecting learning this way or avoiding it, he prescribed knowing by experience. It seems that a sort of *natural selection* in 3HO is based upon the *experienced knowledge* acquired, or in other words the *awareness of knowledge experienced*. The distinction among people in the Age of Aquarius will not be due to conventional status, or the survival of the “most learned” or the “fittest” to think of it in Darwinian’s terms, but rather the “most experienced” and therefore “aware”.

The divine features of the “Self-Sensory Human” and the “marks” of the Evolution. Yogi Bhajan predicted that there would be a natural evolution of human sensitivity along these lines. The sensitivity he referred to was associated with sensory experiences and spiritual perceptions of the *Self* in connection to its *divinity*, and is therefore a key in the general understanding of the notion of experience. Under this terminology it is closely related to the realm of thought of the New Age and less to the Sikh or Yogic traditions. A natural phenomenon and, according to Yogi Bhajan, a condition and outcome of the New Age, is a human sensitivity that is capable of deeper spiritual perception. This increase in the sensory capacity that he attributes to the Age of Aquarius will allow humans to access the divine reality within human nature. This idea has cognitive qualities that are attributed to the progression to the next Age, in which they teach how the soul will no longer be known theoretically but experienced empirically. The emergence of the human “Self-Sensory System”, as the leader of the movement labelled it, is imminent. In his words, the transition to the Age of Aquarius

“will develop a new system where the individual will find him- or herself complete... people will be open, straight, simple, and beauty will be internal, not external” (Bhajan 2003, p. 7).

The internal event that people will experience is “a new system”. It therefore implies that as long as the “old” system is at work, people will not be able to experience the characteristic attributed above (a *new* or *special* form of openness, straightfulness, simplicity and beauty). The *Self Sensory System* can be as well understood as this sort of “extra-sensory ability” or “sixth sense”, which is an added sensory capacity to know the *real Self*. This is the special sense that has a noetic quality of its own. It is described in terms of its ability to provide the kind of refined insight to see that “every grain of Sand is God” (p.13), but Yogi Bhajan set out conditions that ascribed a specific condition to see with this *system*, this is that “we have to have our subtle body, our sophisticated self to see it” (p.13). The qualities of the *Self Sensory System* as a cognitive ability of the “Aquarian human” in relation to the *self* and *awareness* need further understanding. These notions become clearer as he further deems this ability as a “deep intuition” and a “sixth sense”:

“The Aquarian human is a person of truth and experience. Possessing the consciousness of self-awareness and continuous deep intuition, he lives

totally present in each moment, with his sixth sense fully awakened” (p. 13).

So this “new system”, one could argue, is an enhanced cognitive skill, a clairvoyance capacity or simply an intense intuition that some people have had in history. This would certainly not be a “new” phenomenon. What is the new occurrence? Could it be new as it *occurs* to a wider group of people? Could it be that exceptional cases of extra-sensorial abilities will multiply in people during the Aquarian times? Will this be the new thing? The answer seems to be positive, since this appears to be the case behind Yogi Bhajan’s statements. Congruency with this hypothesis is found in the fieldwork from the point of view of the participant observer. 3HO has created, especially during the European Yoga Festival, the settings and atmosphere in which people are taught to find their *nucleus* and develop their capacities to do so. As seen earlier, this capacity is deemed as the *Self Sensory System*. This is certainly intimately related to the 3HO basic axiom of awakening the “human potential”. At the same time the whole “technology” that Yogi Bhajan shared is to prepare and gradually *raise the Kundalini* and have the *ecstasy of experience*. Similarly, some of the important values in 3HO are “faith in the Self” and the expectation, perhaps belief, that the Age of Aquarius will be conducive with the activation of these qualitative capacities in the individual, at the same time as it is expected to happen on a bigger quantitative scale. As Yogi Bhajan said,

“And through this sensory system we will be overflowing with energy, touching the hearts of people, and feeling their feeling and filling their emptiness. We will act great and our flow will fulfil the gratefulness in the hearts of others. It will be a new relationship. We will create a new humanity which will have the new sensory system...” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 9)

This is perhaps one of the key approaches that Yogi Bhajan deemed necessary to experience in order to act in a way that *serves humanity*. The larger scale of the personal experiences would be the new characteristic, understood as a new and quantitatively more massive expression of a seemingly timeless quality of *some* humans deemed *special*.

9. “The teachings of Yogi Bhajan”: Synthesis and (Syncretic) Integration of the three-fold realms of thought of 3HO

According to what has been presented in the previous pages, the teachings of Yogi Bhajan are a synthesized body combining three strands of thought. As was anticipated in the introduction, the analytical concept of syncretism provided by Carsten Colpe (1987, p. 8930-2) gives an appropriate perspective to encompass the way the three different historical forces converged in the formation of 3HO. 3HO combines three strands of thought, which this author regards as syncretic qualities: 1) *symbiosis* (“living together” for a mutual benefit), 2) *addition*, (forming a new unit by the inclusion of various elements where “the dividing line between diverse elements is removed”) and 3) *equivalence* (“when unities or elements of them are assigned different values and

conceived as ways to the same goal, with the stipulation that one of them leads to the goal more effectively than the others”).

The category of syncretism is a good approach to conceive the development of the constituents of 3HO because it enables the observer to see and describe the display and interplay of the three-fold realms of thought without falling into narrower or reductionist views about the movement. Some of these views are those which led to 3HO being mistakenly defined by one of its constituents as a derivation of Sikhism or only as a New Religious Movement, which implicitly ignored some keys constituents and/or downplayed others.

3HO is the outcome of an effort of syncretic synthesis performed by Yogi Bhanjan to combine three streams of thoughts, concepts and practices to produce a result that fits well with the category of syncretism. In my opinion the recognition of syncretism is a *conditio sine qua non* to successfully approach the movement as a historical phenomenon, and it has helped the approach to the experiential in relation to each of the three realms of thought.

From a scholarly perspective the teachings of Yogi Bhanjan can be defined as the encompassing ideology of the movement⁷² that supplies the philosophical glue for the constituents of the organization. The source of these teachings comes from the synthesis by Yogi Bhanjan. This synthesis has been created by drawing from three main places: the Yoga tradition, the Sikh religion and the Aquarian Age perspectives. He is himself an implicit agency that is built in to the teachings as he always refers to is his own experience of these three realms of *spiritual* knowledge and practice. Based on this knowledge I can propose a way to understand the teachings as the loose but articulated body of all the principles, values, knowledge and practices that were verbally and openly expressed or privately communicated by Yogi Bhanjan to his students concerning the distinctive experience and path he walked and eventually taught.

Generally speaking, the teachings are the prescriptions that work as precepts for the followers of this movement. The location of the wider frame of all the “teachings of Yogi Bhanjan” is available through recorded DVDs, CDs and in books and manuals. His teachings articulate the movement and are not only known and respected but mainly practiced. He said that

“The teachings are the Teachings and have no one’s personality in them. I never edit them; you should not edit them, it is a Golden Chain. My own prayer is that you perfect what it is, and go with it” (Bhanjan, 2003, p. 99).

This view shows the intended development for the solidification of Yogi Bhanjan’s philosophical construct. Would this produce one coherent discourse when relating to various 3HO members with regards to their experience? Yogi Bhanjan’s teachings are

⁷² Ideology is understood as a set of principles, ideas and goals which direct the group and the person to pursue certain aims, actions or have certain expectations. An ideology can also be understood as a comprehensive vision, as a way of looking at the world. Ideology is taken in a neutral way.

deemed as a part of a continuum which he referred to as the “Golden Chain”. Speaking about this idea of the Golden Chain or Golden link he said,

“Scripturally, they call it the Golden Chain of Teachers, passing it on from one to another, to another, to another. They keep the standard, they keep the identity, they keep the personality, they keep the teaching” (Bhajan 2000, p. 193)⁷³.

REMOTE PAST	RECENT PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
-Baba Siri Chand→ (Nath Yogi, son of the First Guru) -Guru Ram Dass→ (Fourth Guru and “Raj Yogi”) -Sant Hazara Singh → (Sikh Sant, Tantric Master and Kundalini yoga Master)	Yogi Bhajan→ (Master of Kundalini Yoga at the age of 16, Mahan Tantric and Siri Singh Sahib)	Aquarian Teacher of 3HO→ or Kundalini Yoga teachers	Kundalini Yoga students: the ‘teachers of tomorrow’→

Table 12: The “Golden Chain” and its late links according to 3HO (Bhajan, 2003, p 59-62)

The teachings of Yogi Bhajan are not only what encompasses the three-fold philosophy of the organization or the label which the 3HO members use to refer to the worldview of their spiritual leader – in a bibliographical sense it is the name of the book he authored called *The Teachings of Yogi Bhajan* (1977). According to the editor of this book the information is deemed special and shared accordingly:

“The sentences have been constructed with a special permutation and combination to cut the negative thought waves and to trigger positive polarity in the human ... all the sentences have been worded in such a way as to work on the Heart Center (compassion), the Throat Center (to improve communication) the Third Eye (Ajna) and thus open the person’s intuition, and the Thousand Petalled Lotus (Shashra) to purify the thoughts ... the words in this book are themselves a complete meditation ... this book contains the hidden science of Nadh⁷⁴, the science of eternal sound. The words have been spoken from the consciousness of a Mahan Tantric...”⁷⁵ (Preface, p. ix).

The book of *The Teachings of Yogi Bhajan* is ascribed to have a power to transform the person’s psyche and chakras, and it contains “a complete meditation” as well as a concentrated sample of the panoramic themes that his teachings cover. As for the

⁷³ In another place he speaks of this idea in the following terms, “The Golden Chain is the inner spark of Kundalini that is passed from person to person; teacher to student; guru to teacher; cosmos and God to Guru” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 78) The technical side of this interrelation between the link and the teacher is performed with a mantra: “Before we teach, we all say “Ong Namu Guru Dev Namu. It means “O Lord Creator, Infinite Teacher, who is transparent and unseen, I bow to you”. That is the link. As it says in the scripture: Teaching through the golden ray” (Bhajan 2003 p. 265).

⁷⁴ Also referred as Naad or Nád

⁷⁵ “Mahan Tantric” is the self-declared title of Yogi Bhajan that refers to his mastery of tantrism.

transformational capacity of the book, I can say little or nothing. As in all traditions which have produced textual references that were deemed a source of change, this book certainly demands faith to relate to it in those terms. It is revealing that the book is attributed the power to “cut negative thought” or to “work on the heart chakra”, etc. *The teaching of Yogi Bhajan* is deemed a source to the genuine consciousness of the “Master” and can be compared to the orthodox understanding about the main themes of his teachings.

There is an aspect that needs to be underlined about this text that concerns the attributions in reference to this author, Yogi Bhajan. The descriptions can be correlated to the way the mantras and Shabads from the Sikh Scripture are deemed and “constructed” and the way that *The Teaching of Yogi Bhajan* is referred to as well. In both of these written forms there are views that show a very similar resemblance. In the two, similar explanatory strategies are conveyed about the *teachings* and the *Shabads*:

Comparison of approaches used by Yogi Bhajan to describe the Shabd Guru and the ones used in Preface to describe the “Teachings of Yogi Bhajan”.		
Text or book:	“Shabd Guru”	“Teachings of Yogi Bhajan”
Attributor:	Yogi Bhajan	Editor (Student of Yogi Bhajan)
Source of the authority:	“Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth teacher ... gave you” (Bhajan, 1998, 105-107)	“The words have been spoken from the consciousness of a Mahan Tantric”
Construction of the message:	“By very consciously using the tongue in pronunciation...” (Bhajan, 2003. p. 79).	“The sentences have been constructed with a special permutation and combination” “... all the sentences have been worded in such a way...”
Its effectiveness:	“... one is able to achieve the total effect” (Bhajan, 2003. p. 79).	“ ... to work on ... thus open the person’s intuition, ... to purify the thoughts ... the words in this book are themselves a complete meditation”
The aim:	(to go) “beyond fear and beyond the personality conflict” (Bhajan, 1998, 105-107)	“to cut the negative thought waves and to trigger positive polarity in the human”
The power attributed to:	“... the word, to the naad of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib”. (Bhajan, 1998, 105-107)	“... this book contains the hidden science of Nadh [Naad], the science of eternal sound”
Type of word and his author:	“He [The Tenth Guru] confirmed the technology ... the naad of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib.” (Bhajan, 1998, 105-107)	“this book contains the hidden science of Nadh, the science of eternal sound... from the consciousness of a Mahan Tantric”
Physiology or physical experience:	“... the real thing: the tongue and lips, ... play on each other in a certain permutation and combination” (Bhajan, 2003. p. 79).	“The sentences have been constructed with a special permutation and combination [of the tongue and mouth]”

Table 13: The teachings of Yogi Bhajan according to 3HO and the Shabads of Sikh Gurus according to Yogi Bhajan

From Table 13 some interpreter might argue that Yogi Bhajan was attributed the status similar to Guru Gobind Singh despite his instructions and claim that he refused to be portrayed as a Guru. From an e-mail conversation with Guru Charan Singh (on August 5th and 6th of 2006), I can present a view of the way another of his senior students described the issue:

“He did many things to stay human in others’ eyes. Everything from having a very open door, to burping loudly, to drinking a coca cola. He refused to be worshipped or idolized but demanded strict discipline if you chose to be a student”.

Although this will be addressed in the coming pages, what can be said now is that Yogi Bhajan considered the Tenth Guru’s legacy on Shabads and mantras in practically the same way that his student-editor considered the message “encoded” in *The Teachings of Yogi Bhajan*. The similar terminology (sound, words, naad, etc.), structure of wordings (combination, permutation), aims (purification, overcome of fears, conflict, etc.) and the type of ascription (i.e. technology/science) show small variations in the two descriptions. However, for this study the question is not about the status of Yogi Bhajan, it is about the experience that Yogi Bhajan and his students in 3HO define and deem. This table parallels the way the experience of Sikh mantras is deemed by Yogi Bhajan (in relation to the mind, the mantras and the path deemed efficacious for the ends) and how his approach is later on “continued” or “copied” by his student to refer to the experience of reading *The teachings of Yogi Bhajan*. In other words, this table provides an important hint about how the attributional process, at this point, is set and carried with the slightest variations. One could consider that Yogi Bhajan is thinking of his own experience when he is addressing the subject that falls within the experiential category; therefore could it be that his teachings are the way he deemed his own experience to others? And could it be that when others deem their own experience of the teaching of Yogi Bhajan they show a continuation of the deeming making process he initiated? As for the first question the table above would suggest that this is the case. As for the second question the query will be address in the next Part of this study.

A useful perspective to recognize the interplay of the “Teachings of Yogi Bhajan” and his experience is the way Mircea Eliade approaches the myth. According to Eliade (1970), the myth and view of a religious man about his myth “becomes exemplary, and consequently repeatable, for it serves as a model, and by the same token a justification, for all human actions” (p. 23). Then, in reference to Christianity, Eliade adds, “the religious experience of the Christian is based upon an imitation of the Christ as an *exemplary pattern...*” (p. 30, italics in the original). This criterion exemplifies the relationship between the myth and the model. I can stipulate here that the first model corresponds to Yogi Bhajan’s teacher (in this case Guru Gobind Singh), the second is Yogi Bhajan and “The teachings of Yogi Bhajan” (as experienced and deemed by his student-editor), and from there onwards to the “Aquarian Teachers”. “The teachings” and the exemplary subjects with their experiences (the “Aquarian Teacher”) are the fundamental levels of attention I have approached in a consecutive progression.

Another side to this is that Eliade also considered it important to recognise the connection of *truth* and *myth*, and this is linked to this study. This might explain why this

teaching should not be changed. Eliade considers that the view of a religious man regarding his myth is an “absolute truth, because it narrates a *sacred* history ... which provides the pattern for human behavior” (p. 30 italics in the original). One can see this applied to Yogi Bhajan when he refers to the truth in his teaching in the following terms:

“So very briefly, I am just giving you the A-B-C’s of a Kundalini Yoga Teacher. Kundalini yoga is a source of life and happiness, prosperity, nobility and courage ... it is the ultimate science... This is not gossip. This is not to inspire you. It’s not to butter you up. It’s not to cheer you up. This is the truth” (Bhajan 2003, p. 272)

9. 1. The Aquarian models of experience

Yogi Bhajan

I ought to point out that there is not a great variety of academic sources that comprehensively contribute to depict Yogi Bhajan’s career, especially before he arrived in the USA in 1969. Every study about 3HO refers to Yogi Bhajan to some extent, but biographical research in this area is perhaps one of the key unattended subjects that previous and contemporary scholarship in 3HO has ignored. Despite the fact that most papers, monographies or encyclopaedias that refer to 3HO also refer to its founder, to my knowledge at the time of writing this research there is no extensive biography of Yogi Bhajan available.

3HO has produced biographical accounts like *The Man Called Siri Singh Sahib* (1979) by “the 3HO and Sikh Dharma families”, but this book is unfortunately out of print. Yogi Bhajan also appointed Guru Fatha Singh Khalsa to produce an account of his life. On the 6th of July, 2014 in an email conversation with him he referred to Yogi Bhajan’s main work,

“I would say that by the grace of Guru Ram Das he managed to do two remarkable things. One was to connect his students with the original, experiential basis of Sikh teachings - which controversially included his embracing the Sikh heritage of a disciplined life of meditation. The other was to successfully propagate these teachings cross-culturally as a path beyond the thrall of any personality. I recall him saying more than once that “we shall bow to no man, only to the Word of God.”

Some of these characteristics seen in Yogi Bhajan’s work and intentionality are not only stated by this close student. James R. Lewis (2010), who was once a member of 3HO before leaving to become a scholar specialist in the field of NRMs and New Age, considers that

“The stereotype of a selfish cult leader ranking in a handsome income from the labours of his overworked devotees did not fit Yogi Bhajan [however] despite his de facto role as guru, Bhajan never explicitly laid claim to the title. Instead he relied on his personal charisma plus his status as the master of various systems of yoga as the basis of his authority” (p. 5, 10)

Based on the biographical aspects that are available, it is possible to state that Yogi Bhajan’s life shows that he succeeded in a few different ways;

- Materially, as he owned several companies and had a million dollar fortune
- Spiritually and religiously, as he was Chief of the Sikh faith in the West, Siri Singh Sahib, *the* master of Kundalini Yoga, the only living ‘Mahan tantric’ and he was followed by many in 3HO and Sikh Dharma
- Intellectually, as he held an MA in Economics and a PhD in Psychology of Communication and
- As a householder because in most of his life he embodied the idea of a family man, husband, father and grandfather.

Yogi Bhajan was seen as a successful man and he did not reject that reputation and status. He was also known to have an extraordinary mental capacity to know people’s mental or emotional states, and as some of the students that knew him have recalled, Yogi Bhajan also seemed to have been able to acknowledge people’s past situations, intimate things of their present and even foresee their future. These characteristics would align his skills not only with those of advanced Tantric or Yogic masters, but with those of psychics, clairvoyants, healers and the like. As Brooks concluded,

“... the Tantric guru/scholar offers an example of the fully authentic person who has achieved human perfection. As society’s collective representation of the ideal yogi or “ascetic householder” he is significant not as an individual but as an embodiment of divinity in human form. He is, at once, perfectly himself and yet no longer merely the person who is defined by an ego” (1999, p. 133)

This are perhaps some of the characteristics that created a very strong impression in the people around Yogi Bhajan, who saw him not only in relation to all his achievements and power but also as a role model that his disciples – that he deemed as *students*, especially the Aquarian teachers-to-be – have followed since the beginning of 1970. It cannot be denied that his influence and the *image of the human* that he embodied have served as the main model of the *Aquarian teacher*⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ This could be associated with the reflection of a scholar who said that, “A yogin or guru who lacked power (sakti) would not be considered a true yogi or a true guru. The latter is thus always expected to act powerfully, to use his power in a performative, often spectacular way” (Rigopoulos, 2005, p. 278). In *The Biographical Process* (1976), Reynolds and Capps proposed a criterion that is classical and I use in this research to understand the model of the human given to and shaped for the movement. These authors provide a sensitive perspective to address this aspect, since in their view the “cultural model’s approach... is concerned with culture’s understanding of the ideal or essential man” (p. 8). This perspective, which has been followed here, “emphasizes not the individuality of the personage but their role in generating

In some of the 3HO literature it is written that a student once asked Yogi Bajan, "How can I get to know you better?", to which he replied, "I am my teachings. Read them, practice them, and you will know me" (Bhajan 2003, 61). Thus, in the absence of Yogi Bajan, the teachings have naturally assumed the referential status of a model (in a similar way that the Sikh scripture did for Sikhs after the death of the tenth Guru). At the same time, the teachers in 3HO are the continuators who have to represent this reference or model after their master has died (this is perhaps one of the fundamental difference between the traditional Sikh followers and the 3HO members).

Another perspective is offered here to see the relation between the life, the personage and the model. In Erikson's "psychohistory" he examined the life of "ideological innovators", personages "who have succeeded in making the environment adapt to their special demands" (Paul Roazen, 1976, p. 73). This effect of adaptation is clear and unequivocal in the followers and members of 3HO, especially in those that have taken the path to develop themselves as "Aquarian teachers". This idea was at work particularly during the life of Yogi Bajan; his concern for creating teachers manifested in a strong leadership that included communication strategies and techniques to empower his students so they could continue his legacy, and at the same time generate the same dynamics aimed at changing the environments where they lived.

The greatest source of all of Yogi Bajan's accounts in relation to practically all he taught and deemed important for the movement and his teaching is himself. In other words, it is difficult for the scholar to identify sources other than Yogi Bajan for what he quoted, or to draw information from or learn the things he posteriorly shared (except when it was about the Sikh sacred text). This consideration was noticed by Deslippe (2012), leading him to say that

"It is from the singular person of Yogi Bajan that all information about the lineage and practices of Kundalini Yoga originates ... while Yogi Bajan can be seen as a primary editor of the understanding of his Kundalini Yoga and its claimed lineage, this filtering was reinforced by figures close to him who wrote and edited 3HO's periodicals and literature" (p. 381)

According to Yogi Bajan and the members of 3HO, he considered his life a successful attempt to apply the various disciplines he taught in the West and to lead a young generation towards the values and methods of a healthy, happy and holy life inspired by the Age of Aquarius. This exemplary profile was often reinforced with tacit and self-referential approaches to the role of a teacher and how to experientially enact the teacher's task. These views of how a teacher should be, as well as the integrated concept of experiences, are part of the core building blocks of the "teachings", which are nourished by the three-fold traditions mentioned before, altogether constituting the precepts and prescription to pass forward:

and/or personifying the life model" (p.8). The reason for choosing this perspective is because it suits the type of cultural model that is nurtured by the cultural three-fold spheres that constitute 3HO in its relation to the way that Yogi Bajan constructed his teachings

“... the difference between belonging to some egocentric maniac who calls himself a Guru, Man of God, or Messenger and a real teacher [is that] the phony will create a fog of words around God and distract you with beautiful and fanciful experiences. The teacher who you go to experience God will first show you yourself and tell you to clean up” (Bhajan 2003 p. 58).

From this statement one can see the notion that the type of “experience” is what makes a teacher *good* or *bad*. The false teacher will emit “a fog of words”, which in my eyes resembles the charlatan’s display of oratory and “mumbo jumbo”. However, the false teacher is not only trapped in his verbal communication, the element of experience is also a trap for the false teacher, whose “beautiful and fanciful experiences” serve as a distraction. The true teacher, Yogi Bhajan believed, is sought as part of the journey towards God, “to experience God”; this kind of teacher, the “real” one, directs the process in terms deemed *self-reflection* and *purification*. This is the practice and discipline demanded of a 3HO member, and it is also the path to becoming an Aquarian teacher.

The motto of Yogi Bhajan seems to have been to produce this “elite” (profiled as Khalsa) for the “New Age”. Yogi Bhajan’s early statement, which is often quoted, explicates the former, “I have come to create teachers, not to gather students”. For the authors of the Kundalini Yoga training manual:

“Kundalini Yoga presents us with an image of the human being; an individual who has a core shining soul, with a consciousness that is luminous and which carries the experiences of God” (Bhajan 2003, p. 29).

Here the reference to an “image of a human being” is addressed. The human being in this sentence is depicted with three features deemed special: “a core shining soul”, “a consciousness that is luminous” and is a carrier of special experiences – the “experiences of God”. Was this the image of Yogi Bhajan in the life of his students? Perhaps I can answer this now, but let me first take the perspective of Eliade in “Myths, Dreams and Mystery” (1970) who provided the category of archetype for the myth-type creation, which confers a regular pattern onto the figures of spiritual leaders and it explains the effect of their message:

“... one of the chief characteristics of the myth [...] is the creation of exemplary models for the whole society. In this, moreover, we recognize a very general human tendency; namely, to hold up one life-history as a paradigm and to turn a historical personage into an archetype” (p. 32)

Yogi Bhajan naturally and evidently incarnated and produced a paradigmatic life-story, to use Eliade’s terminology. He fashioned a paradigm based on the traditions that he was inspired by and with his life-history. He had a strong charismatic leadership and his personal features have empowered the teachings with his authorship, but was he an archetype? Not in the Freudian sense at least. If one compares the issue with the human

model of the Gurus of Sikhism, it must be agreed that the characteristics of the type model produced (the Sikh “saint and warrior”, synthesized in the Khalsa) took several generations of Gurus to be ready and over two hundred years to reach the followers.

At this moment, and in regards to this issue, I could say that the main legacy of Yogi Bhanjan was not in crystallizing an archetype but rather in laying the foundations for a human model. In my opinion, in his legacy he defined and conveyed the fundamental characteristics of his path, within which the model or *image of the human* is the essential, and the centre of this idea is the experience of this human (as it was shown earlier, “Creation needs a base, a nucleus. A person with Kundalini experience provides such a nucleus” [Bhanjan 1997, p. 51]. For a correct understanding, one should consider his own life experience to be one of the key sources of his legacy. For this reason it is a suitable choice to follow Capps’s (1976) classical perspective, since he points to the background of philosophy and the theoretical contradictions that need a reformulation by historical personages who created models. As he wrote:

“The historical personage is believed to have fused in his own life two or more exemplary patterns. This fusion is especially remarkable when it involves two patterns previously considered incompatible ... whatever the precise nature of this fusion of two or more exemplary models, the historical personage is understood to be, in some sense, the very embodiment of these exemplary patterns” (1976, p. 394)

This is evidently the case in Yogi Bhanjan’s life and his multifaceted reach into different human models coming from different sources.

The reflection of Carsten Cope (2005) can also bring a favourable perspective to understand this kind of personage because in a similar fashion he considers that

“An enormous intellectual power is required in order to cement all the elements together into a new type of tradition, and further, to maintain the combination of the erudite and the popular” (p. 8933).

Intellectual power and some drops of genius are apparently the base of all religions and compositions deemed spiritual. William James (1929) commented in the case of geniuses, “such men do not only remain mere critics and understanders with their intellect. Their ideas possess them, they inflict them, for better or worse, upon their companions or their age” (p. 25). This description is an adequate expression of what the model pursues in the case of the Aquarian teacher embodied and passed down by Yogi Bhanjan through his teachings.

To summarize, Yogi Bhanjan was, as far as this research is concerned, the maker and “first attributor” who assembled all the main parts of 3HO structure through an attributional effort and the embodiment of the philosophical perspective (the “Teaching of Yogi Bhanjan”) and prescribed practices for the members to become *experienced*. All the philosophical content and the intended human-model of 3HO are displayed to configure human events and models who have the experiences deemed special in the persons of

an “Aquarian Teacher”. If one views this in the classical perspective of Donald Capps (1976), the insight of a significant further criterion is gained, since “for an adequate fusion to occur, there ought to be a similar fusion at the level of his ‘achievement’ of greatness” (p. 407), he wrote. In fact the condition that Yogi Bhajan claimed he had achieved gave him, as has been said, the recognition as an authority within these different traditions and teachings and supposedly the command of the spiritual powers and knowledge of the human being. He was the leader of the organization as well as the intellectual vortex at the centre of the synthesis of 3HO’s worldview, and it seems to be correct to think of him as the first “experienter”, who has gone through the different behavioural events that he conveyed to his students. And what about the followers of the path delineated by Yogi Bhajan? Capps (1995) would consider that,

“... followers of the historical personage have a vital stake in their belief that he truly fits the exemplary model ... it means that it provides the basis for the selective evaluation of the life” (p. 394)

The founder of 3HO emphasized that altering or editing any of the teachings passed to him and from him to his students was forbidden. The model and the building blocks to accomplish it are to be followed without any change or manipulation. He spoke severely about the respect due to the teachings:

“There is an order. That order nobody is authorized, including me, to change. We teach. We are not monopolizing people. The teachings are Infinite. The teachings are not that I made them, or you can make them. That’s not right. We are not winning an election and Kundalini yoga is not democracy. It is exactly the way it is and it must be kept pure – that it is what it is” (Bhajan 2003, p. 286)

As the teachings are deemed “Infinite”, which essentially means that they are neither limited nor determined culturally (by or against Westerners), regionally (by American, European, Indians, etc.) or temporally (only by the Age of Aquarius), they have an attributed “special” condition, which is deemed “divine”, “eternal”, “infinite”, “of consciousness” etc. by “their” own nature. In other words, they could conceptually correspond to a perennial philosophy as understood by scholars of religion.

In turn, 3HO promotes the teachings of Yogi Bhajan by conveying the importance of learning, practicing and experiencing the precepts, echoing Yogi Bhajan’s explicit prescription. At the same time the model of the human and the experience constructed by Yogi Bhajan evidently take on elements of the three-fold sources and their circumstantial historical environments, which are shaped syncretically, and throughout the person and work of Yogi Bhajan these *teachings* reach a new expression in the movement he created. Yogi Bhajan can be deemed the nexus that links everything together, the first “Aquarian Teacher” who worked as the initiator and first messenger (“the mailman” as he described himself), as the founder of 3HO, as the initiator-model, as the nearest expression of the mystical tradition he refers to as the Golden Chain and, I would say, and most important as the “first attributor” of the experiential dimension

of 3HO⁷⁷.

The Aquarian Teachers

The “Aquarian Teachers” are the men and women who are the product of 3HO’s education departments, the Kundalini Research Institute and the “Aquarian Teacher’s Academy”⁷⁸. Both these institutions look after the content of the education and the people going through the education respectively in order to spread Kundalini Yoga through the Teacher Trainings, in order to “create teachers” as stipulated by the founder of the movement. They are probably the main members of 3HO and the fundamental actors of the European Yoga Festival in France, the event and place where the field research was conducted for this study.

Through the 3HO schooling system, all the teachers-to-be finally graduate as “Certified Teachers” to carry the teachings forward. The teachings of Yogi Bhajan have continuity and growth because of the promotion of these Kundalini yoga instructors, Kundalini yoga teachers, Kundalini yoga teacher trainers or Kundalini yoga teacher trainings. The yoga centres, yoga studios, yoga classes and the like are the main venues and media through which 3HO interacts with the world. These teachers are the ones who make the practices and the teaching of Yogi Bhajan known, practiced and experienced. This happens in an intensified manner, in number and quality, at the European Yoga Festival as the “great teachers”, as Satya Singh the Program Coordinator commented to me, are “present to share”.

Subsequently, to approach the prescriptive features of these Aquarian Teachers and Aquarian Teacher Trainers, I am presenting the essential aspects of their intended profile or characteristics that are ascribed and expected from them. According to the material for training the teachers, the “teacher’s identity” must comprehend the following features (Bhajan, 2003 p. 264):

- “A teacher gives you experience. A preacher gives you philosophy”
- “A teacher is the personal honor of God Himself”
- “A teacher must go through calamity with a radiant smile”

⁷⁷Not everyone would want to see Yogi Bhajan in the terms he described himself. According Deslippe (2012): “Without the lineage that he claimed and without creating Kundalini Yoga out of the cloth, Yogi Bhajan is best thought of as neither a lineage holder nor an inventor, but as a bricoleur who brought together elements of different practices and presented them to his students as a distinct entity with romantic mythology surrounding him” (p. 382)

⁷⁸The Aquarian Academy of Kundalini Yoga is in charge of defining and developing the guidelines to train and produce “Aquarian Teachers Trainers” in accordance with the general frame of the *Aquarian consciousness* as seen above. It is worth mentioning that Hanegraaff (1996) approached the terminology that people who follow the New Age philosophy use for themselves and he considered that, “... people involved in the New Age will be variously rendered to by such designations as “New Age believers”, “New Age adherents” or “New Ager”. None of these terms is intended to carry any content more specific than “people involved, in some way or another, in New Age movements” (p. 7). In 3HO the use of the term Aquarian or Aquarius are the ones to refer to the quality and their distinctive association with an intended future or New Age.

- “A teacher has width of heart and deep understanding”
- “A teacher answers the call of duty with grace and compassion”
- “When confronted by negativity, take altitude, then change attitude”
- “A teacher deals with another person with a humble imperial majesty”
- “A teacher appears in utmost grace. He or she doesn’t try to appeal to the Earth”
- “A teacher is straight, talks straight and lives straight”
- “A teacher is an institution for help, service, and raising people’s consciousness, not an individual”
- “As a teacher you must look smart, be smart, talk straight; never be right or wrong; always be neutral. Speak through your neutral mind”
- “Serve all, and all shall serve you”

Number one on the list of the depiction of the “teacher’s identity” is: “a teacher gives you experience”, which refers to the sort of task of that a teacher in 3HO engages (p. 264)⁷⁹. According to this guideline the teacher is seen as a doer, who “serves”, “talks”, “elevates” and therefore facilitates the students’ learning process through experience. This can be seen as the primary action and main effort in the relationship teacher/student and in the dynamics of the transmission of knowledge in 3HO. The way this is understood in these teachings implies that once a teacher *has given an experience* the student is in a way on another level, which gives him or her a different view. This view is an experiential view that potentially engages him or her more than just intellectually. There is an attitude as well as a special psychology in the teachers which clearly does not aim for the perfection of a yogic system or the teacher’s role model or character, but the perfection of an interactive role in which the teacher enacts exemplary virtues, skills and tasks for the students. It seems evident that the core task is not to transmit a theoretical message to the students, a message that is limited to a theological or a philosophical concern, but to “give [the students] an experience” of the message. One can say that the message itself is the experience and in giving it the teacher’s role is fulfilled and that is why they are deemed as an “institution for help, service, and raising people’s consciousness” as the prescription refers to them. According to this, the teacher’s psychology plays a social or humanitarian role, and this was depicted by Yogi Bhanan to serve the spiritual purposes connected to the three realms of thought in which the Aquarian ideal directs the mission “to give birth” to a new society (Aquarian). It is because of these times, which are deemed special, that it is required to train a special type of *midwife*.

Yogi Bhanan’s idea of profile and goals of a teacher is understood in a relational way that is concerned with the Golden Chain; in other words, what the path of these teachings presents to someone’s life and “destiny” must have a correlation to what the person receiving it (the future teacher), in turn, does to represent the Golden Chain or lineage behind these teachings. What also seems to count is what he or she self-represents in relation to this *path* (what type of role the person plays in this link to the Golden Chain).

⁷⁹ Based on my observation, “to give an experience” is to challenge the student to go through an experiential event in which the practices and tasks are the tools that the teachers use for providing it, for “giving an experience”.

The importance I see in this is that apparently Yogi Bhajan seemed to attribute to the Golden Chain a sort of *mystic influence*, or the workings of the “Grace of God” as they would often deem it, which is an aspect believed to be active within his teachings and practices as well as associated with most of the spiritual experiences of people in 3HO. Although Yogi Bhajan explained that the perfection of a teacher is not required, what is required is the teacher’s “link” to the “infinite consciousness” attributed to the Golden Chain. In his own words:

“Some people say it is wrong to teach when you are not perfect. But history has recorded again and again “perfect” teachers who have fallen. They begin to think they are great. Their ego grows and breaks the link to the Golden Chain” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 265)

As a general explanation of the downside of being a teacher Yogi Bhajan refers to the growth of the “ego” (the “finite”, mundane or limited personality marked by selfishness and personal agendas as I have explained above), which breaks the link to the Golden Chain (the spiritual “infinite” and unlimited “impersonal” source of “the teachings”) and which causes them to fall. So, Yogi Bhajan says elsewhere that the reason of teaching this teaching is

“To be an instrument of the cosmic flow. Anyone who teaches to be a teacher rather than to serve will fall. To be a teacher is the ultimate human end ...” (p. 265).

At the foundations of 3HO’s worldview, Yogi Bhajan instilled the idea of a state that a human can reach in being or becoming a spiritual teacher. These idea looks like a movement from *potency to act* (as in the Thomistic perspective) taking the shape from what is considered a dormant state of consciousness to what is deemed as the “infinite consciousness” achieved (“linked”) in the teacher’s journey. He taught that the way that a teacher succeeds in this endeavour overrides the teacher’s skills:

“The problem is that Truth is infinite and cannot be captured in any mental or emotional imagination. Teaching is infinity. It is a flow of the same energy and reality. Therefore no finite man can teach the truth” (p. 265)

These are the conditions that Aquarian teachers are meant to integrate into their work, to which an *infinite* quality is ascribed. The paradox is, as stated by Yogi Bhajan, that they are at the same time considered *finite* humans. While the *truth is infinite* and “cannot be captured” by a human, the possibility instead seems to be to experience infinity. What is ascribed to the teacher of these teachings implies not a rational apprehension of the subject, but “a flow of the same energy and reality”, which is ascribed a *special* and *absolute* character deemed “infinite”. In other words, mental and emotional limited conditions will constrict the teacher so he must have a connection (“a link”) to infinity in himself so he can deal (“flow”) with it. For this type of mission the Aquarian teachers might need to bring the model of the leader of the movement to mind, and his example will provide him with a reference. Yogi Bhajan referred to a

teacher that can enact this form of job to serve the “true self”. In his view,

“Through God’s Grace, you may meet some whom you love beyond emotions, beyond dedication, whom you love for the sake of love. You are inspired to obey him and this open true self in you” (p. 265).

To sum up, the qualities ascribed to the conception of the teacher in 3HO have several features that are necessary to outline here. Yogi Bhajan depicted the notion of a teacher who is 1) at the service of humanity, 2) linked to *infinity*, both directly and through the Golden Chain he is part of, 3) with a type of love for his lineage (or his own teacher) that goes “beyond” worldliness, 4) with no personal agendas or “individual” motivation, because his duty is by definition to the server and to deliver experience and 5) whose duty is a reward in itself (“a blessing”), 6) consisting of “opening the true self in others”, that finally 7) makes him eligible to achieve his own “ultimate human end”. To complete the teacher’s profile, his projection into the future and the way this is to be established through experience, Yogi Bhajan said:

“You can satisfy your feelings, your dramas, your traumas, your missions, your dreams in many other ways. That is not a Kundalini Yoga Teacher. A teacher is one who purifies a person to help the person gain the experience of his or her own purity, identity, infinity, reality totality strength and piety” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 268)

10. Conclusions

What is the role of experiences in the three-fold realm of the thought of 3HO?

First, one must consider and understand 3HO as a complex formation inasmuch as it has three essential constituent parts. These parts, Kundalini Yoga, Sikhism and New Age, are to be addressed in depth and none of them should be downplayed, ignored or suppressed in order to avoid a biased result. Downplaying any of these elements is very likely to produce challenges to the understanding of the legacy of Yogi Bhajan and the philosophical backbone of 3HO. A second consideration is related to how the experiential plays a major role in the integration of the three realms, within which experience and the three realms combine to construct a complex grid that has theoretical consistency. The three realms of thought and the notions of experience in each of them have a visible bond.

Additionally it should be considered that if there are changes in the understanding of the dimension of experience, then the performance of the Sikhs, Yogis and Self Sensory people who give shape to the *Aquarian teacher* might not be representative of the 3HO ways to *how* to test and *how* know things (both *through* experience), about *what* is to be delivered (experience) and *what* is to be achieved in the new Age (experience, because it is the *Age of Experience*) and finally *what* are the objects to be experienced (the “Infinity”, the “Self” and the “ecstasy of consciousness”). Similarly, if these teachers do not personally engage themselves with the experiential dimension, its meaning,

methods and objectives, this seemingly key bonding element would be absent and *their* teaching would become “preaching”, the “infinite” would not be “linked”, and the teachings will not “flow” to their students. Ultimately, the grounds of experience seem to provide the “flow” that “the teachings of Yogi Bhajan” need, which are the *raison d’être* of the movement. Whatever modification in the experiential dimension, such as for example, overtly emphasizing theory or philosophy instead of “delivering the experience”, would give expression to something other than Yogi Bhajan’s message, which is enshrined by 3HO.

In the current state of the organization as it was observed in the European Yoga Festival (2006, 2010 and 2011, and in the later participation until 2014 registered in the 3HO offices, see Table 20), it appears that 3HO has the tendency to stay growing as a movement. It is already clear at this point in the examination of the precepts contained in 3HO that the bonding element of experience is actually presented to be applied in the personal dimension of the individuals who practice and teach what Yogi Bhajan prescribed. At the same time the dimension of experience is present in the relationship between the three aspects of the organization, creating a bond that integrates the three different aspects through the behavioural act of experiencing yoga, Sikhi and the Aquarian new cognitive capacity (the “Self-sensory system”). In the notions synthesized by Yogi Bhajan, experience lacks any centrifugal impact on the three-fold nature of the movement; on the contrary the experiential dimension plays a general role which is prescriptive and centripetal: *to narrow things down to be experienced*. Kundalini yoga, Sikhism and the Age of Aquarius ultimately have to be experienced, at least this is what the “teachings” say and what the teacher teaches. The notion that *things must be experienced* to be adequately understood binds the theoretical architecture of 3HO, provides a practical goal and downplays potential theoretical contradictions as it emphasizes a concrete unitary experiential aim for all the three-fold realms of thought in the movement⁸⁰. In relation to this general role of experience, there are further particularities to address and identify. These particularities are that the experiential plays a role:

- To unify and articulate all three constituents as they have an experiential characterization. The sources quoted reveal that the system of Kundalini Yoga is “to experience Kundalini...”; the message of the Sikh Gurus is “an experience of the ecstasy of...”; the Aquarian Age is “the age of experience ...”; that a teacher “gives you experience” and so on and so forth.
- To depict a common practical objective that engages people in actions by setting experience as a goal or aim. This is in order to achieve that goal and seek a living experience of any or all of the different ways that experience might be nuanced,

⁸⁰ 3HO’s emphasis on experience is a case that shows a balanced between expansion and cohesion against all odds of some of the classical scholars of religion who showed that experience could be an element of instability or disruption (Radhakrishnan), a failed acculturation (Eliade), a de-contextualized notion (Schleiermacher) or an unmediated and *Sui Generis* phenomenon (Otto). See more in the appendix “Religious Experience in Classical Religious Studies”

such as an experience of *Infinity*, of *God*, of the *Self*, of the *ecstasy of consciousness*, etc.

- To set a criterion for self-evaluation that has the potential to shape the members' religious or spiritual "careers" (Smart)⁸¹. Experience confirms the practice and effort of the person and therefore has the potential to validate someone's position in the field of yoga, Sikhism or Aquarian *consciousness*. From the point of view of 3HO, although not explicit, someone can progress or slow down due to the type of experience and therefore consciousness they have and eventually how they deem them could also be a key consideration in their process. This is linked to the idea that experience has its "own credentials" (Radhakrishnan)⁸².
- To provide a rhetorical strategy, as well as a practical strategy to prescribe to *go experiential*, which successfully matches the secularized religious atmosphere of the twentieth century onwards. From this point it can build up a distinctive human model and a community disentangled from the religious notion of belief, organized religion and doctrine. Thus the message becomes attractive as it is conveyed that one should not believe in it or trust it as an external reference or philosophy, but rather to approach it in a way they deem "special": through experience.
- To embody it as a fundamental shared value, discarding the influence of any utopian, ungrounded or strictly ideological views that is not grounded on the living value and perspective of experience. In other words, if something is not experienced it is not necessarily worth being considered. The value of experience directs the action of a yogi, of a Sikh and of an Aquarian person to "expand consciousness" and therefore this focus leaves little room for theoretical or metaphysical concerns. This explains the abundant list of "manuals" of all sorts to experience the "teachings", rather than monographies or other forms of literature to understand them.
- To form an identity for the organization which seeks to distinguish 3HO from other forms of religion, belief or spirituality. Thus the role of experience creates an interpretation of the three-fold constituents and a mode to address the whole that is closely connected to the denominations created, such as "Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan", "Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere" and the "Aquarian person/community."

Besides these roles of experience and the experiential, one can argue that the different roles of the experience in 3HO are obviously inseparable from Yogi Bhajan, who addressed the subject in a particular way and supplied the content as the "first attributor". It seems highly likely that his realm of expertise was a tributary of *his*

⁸¹ See more in the appendix "Religious Experience in Classical Religious Studies"

⁸² See more in the appendix "Religious Experience in Classical Religious Studies"

experiential knowledge, which he gained in his career as a religious or spiritual personage. Based on the lectures addressed here, it can be said that his expertise was neither theological nor doctrinal. He did speak about God and Sikh Doctrine, but it was never a systematic reflection. He did not engage in systematic writing, and even on the few occasions that he wrote more systematically, the approach always contained the idea of experience, for example in his doctoral dissertation *Communication: Liberation or Condemnation* (Bhajan, 1980), where he addresses the subject of the “power of the spoken word” as an “elaborated collaboration of action through which a human can experience infinity and merge in infinite consciousness” (Abstract p. vi).

Finally, what seems to be imprinted in the memory of the majority of his followers is his natural inclination to set an example of mastery with an attributed *experience of infinity* while he was living in the *finite* world as an ordinary person. The experiential message, therefore, seems to have become the most suited for his type of personality: he is often quoted saying, “stupid think and saints do” (sic). The founder of 3HO put his stamp on the way of approaching his teachings, which seems to be the way he lived his life. According to the evidence presented so far, the way his teachings are constructed is fundamentally concerned with *experiencing something* in connection to an object (as a mode of transitive awareness). Anything that belongs to the realm of thought that forms 3HO is without exaggeration *by default* presented and prescribed to be experienced, while the role that the idea of experience has is to integrate all the sides of the panoramic message as well as to integrate the message in the receivers and in *their* eventual future receivers too. The role of experience started in the person of Yogi Bhajan, who ascribed experiential characteristics to most of his teachings, as well as the power to *give* or *deliver* experiences to his students. So what happens with the experiences in practice? Do people after him have them? And how do people address them once they have them?

PART III

Field Research

This part of the research moves from the macro level of 3HO's three-fold realm of thought to the micro level of the individual people within the 3HO European Yoga Festival who are trained as *Aquarian Teachers*. Here I address the stipulated object of *unusual sensory experiences*, which these people have, in order to look at how these experiences have been deemed by them. The approach to the Aquarian teachers was sought to provide the grounds to answer the second question: *how do 3HO members attribute the experiences they have?* This part of the research is where singularized data and field material is collected, allowing a closer look at the movement, its members and *their* experiences.

According to Taves (2009), regarding the process of the "singularization [of experiences], the researchers need to select the research site where the process is occurring" (p.49). This task brings ethnographic field research strategies to the fore as ethnography is a method of gathering material *in situ* through *participant observation*. The field research and the collection of data took into account the environment and the people who belonged to the organization. Here, the state of the movement is depicted as an individual social situation, which was observed on multiple occasions (2006, 2010 and 2011). The singularized events, as deemed by the people, are the core data of this qualitative approach that aims at finding constant variables within different deeming making processes. Using inductive argumentation based on the grounds of the analysis of the data, I have searched for generalizable features about the reported experiences of the people that, considered as a whole, could present one or more regularities about the experiential dimension in the lives of the members of the movement.

11. The “European Yoga Festival”

The 3HO European Yoga Festival has taken place in France every summer since 1976 and has been the main and biggest gathering of the so-called “3HO Family” in Europe. The beginning of this Yoga Festival dates back to the times when 3HO was expanding in the 1970s. In my first fieldwork in 2006 Satya Singh, the Director of the Program of the Festival from 1992, kindly explained how the Festival began:

“There was always a large Festival in the USA to celebrate the summer solstice with Yogi Bhajan present. We wanted to do the same in Europe, but Yogi Bhajan could not be in two places at the same time. So we arranged for a date in the summer for him to come, when we would invite all Kundalini Yoga practitioners from Europe. We asked him for a name and he came up with the name: “Yoga Festival”⁸³.

2006
Gathering number: 30
Location: Fondjouan, near Blois
Date: 25 July until 2 August 2006
Number of participants: 1350
2010
Gathering number: 34
Location: Fondjouan, near Blois
Date: 25 July until 2 August 2010
Number of participants: 2222
2011
Gathering number: 35
Location: Fondjouan, near Blois
Date: 26 July until 3 August 2011
Number of participants: 2666

Table 14: The Characteristics of the Festivals

The European Yoga Festival soon became an eight-days-gathering in France, in which people from all over Europe and the world (including South and North America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania) come together to live, practice and revolve around the teachings and practices of Kundalini yoga, Sikh Dharma and the Aquarian Age that was taught by Yogi Bhajan.

In the next pages I will cover the Festival to be able to address and contextualize the major 3HO members’ habitat and, perhaps, the most multicultural expression of the 3HO movement in the world. According to Satya Singh the purpose of the Yoga Festival is:

“ ... to study the teachings of Yogi Bhajan and Kundalini Yoga in depth in workshops and other meetings; to be in nature as recommended by Yogi Bhajan (“sleep in a tent at least twice a year to connect with the earth”);

⁸³ In an email exchange in September 2006.

to practice three days of White Tantric Yoga; *to experience* group consciousness and meet each other as European practitioners of Kundalini Yoga; to have an opportunity to do *seva*, to serve each other, our spiritual teacher and the path; to have meetings and create structures as Kundalini yoga teachers; *to be uplifted by the experience* of having so many powerful teachers and serious students together at one time” (Ibid, my italics)

11. 1. Festival Environment

According to Ninian Smart in *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1997), *religious experiences* have to be seen through the mists and flavors of the practices of people. In their practices, Smart wrote, “lie some of the important properties of more direct experience.” (p. 173). All the practices of 3HO, all of which Yogi Bhajan encouraged, are presented to the eye of the researcher during the eight days of the 3HO European Yoga Festival.

The Festival is held near Mur de Sologne, about 20 kilometers south of Blois, in the grounds of the late nineteenth-century Château Fondjouan, which is surrounded by extensive fields and centro-European forests. This Château and the lands around it have been the venue of the Yoga Festival since 2000; the first Festival in 1976 took place in Paris and the subsequent 23 meetings were in Tours. In the recent years 3HO Europe has rented this place for the Yoga Festival, but in 2011 it bought a few hectares of land so the members can hold the Festival in their own place near Lyon⁸⁴.

Château Fondjouan is classical French architecture within a typically French countryside landscape. This venue has distinctive features that serve different events from weddings to parties, but for the Yoga Festival it has been modified to match the characteristics of this annual event. Besides the Château, Fondjouan has several buildings including dormitories and rooms that can accommodate hundreds of guests, several meeting rooms, a big restaurant kitchen and a restaurant (that closes while the Festival is taking place). It also has a large lawn that can be covered by tents to accommodate over 2,000 people⁸⁵.

Some of the activities take place in the Château itself, although it is the place where the leading members of 3HO’s staff stay and hold their meetings. However, most of the principal action that concerns this study, such as the 3HO *sadhana*, the White Tantric Yoga, the workshops and the *langar* (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and so on, are held in the open fields or under the trees of Fondjouan.

⁸⁴ It is expected that from 2016 the Festival will take place in the own land of “3HO Europe” which, according to their plans, will be offering a year-round location for several types of activities that will be run by the members of the organization.

⁸⁵ Some of these facts about the 3HO European Yoga Festival and the increase in participation, and purchase of their own land can refute the considerations of James R. Lewis (2010) who considered that “3HO would never become a large movement” (p. 13). Here I can also anticipate my discrepancy by referring to 3HO constant growth and to its tendency, at least in Europe, to enlarge. Comparatively I can as well argue that 3HO Europe Yoga Festival is larger than the Summer Solstice in the USA and both together with the Winter Solstice are getting larger every year (See Table 20).

Surrounding the Château there are two ponds filled with stagnant water that unfortunately produce a smell and a muddy rotten colour⁸⁶. This does not seem to bother the attendees though because in general the nature is fresh and the heat of the summer, the forest, the damp earth, the clarity of the sky and the circulation of fresh air give people the chance to forget the city and the stress of urban life for a while.

The human atmosphere of the place is very international, and people from over 20 countries come every year. All the European languages are spoken there⁸⁷, but the lingua franca of the Festival is English. Many of the activities are held in different languages so that people from different places can attend special group discussions (or language groups) which are divided by languages (what they call “missals”). These are held by representatives of each country. Another example of this multi-lingual environment can be seen in the staff in charge of the festival’s Sikh temple, the Gurdwara, which organizes different Sikh ceremonies that are led by different nationalities in turn⁸⁸.

When Satya Singh was asked about the relevance of the Yoga Festival, he pointed out:

“It is an important meeting point, quite a few relationships (I met my wife there) and friendships start here, and the intensive spiritual quality of the festival carries people for a long time”⁸⁹.

In this environment the 3HO community has successfully tried to generate a family atmosphere inspired by the practice and the teachings of Yogi Bajan. Members are not there to only meet, but to move into the actions to manifest the future or *the dawn the Age of Aquarius*. Yogis, Sikhs, teachers and students either attend on their own or along with their spouses, partners, children or their complete *yogic families*, as I deem them. Everyone seems to have a space at the Yoga Festival, where “Toddlers”, “Children’s” and “Teens” camps are also organized within Fondjouan. These camps are run by volunteers among 3HO who receive a part or full discount for looking after the organization’s youth. In fact, the whole Festival is run in this manner; everything from cooking to security and sound engineering is provided by members that receive a discount according to the length or amount of responsibility of their tasks.

⁸⁶ Every year after all the activities of the Yoga Festival have concluded, the participants have the tradition of standing around the main pond and holding hands to chant a special mantra that is supposed to have a healing force. The mantra is “Ra, Ma, Da, Sa, Sa, Se, So, Hung”, which they translate as “Sun, Moon, Earth, Impersonal Infinite, Thou, Totality of Infinity. The personal sense of merge and identity, the Infinite vibrating and real, I am thou” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 86). This activity also symbolizes the end of the activities and the sense of unity achieved through the days of the Festival. For Paul Heelas (1996) “a great deal shows that New Age healing practices can generate positive *experiences of the self*” (209, italics in the original).



⁸⁷ Finns attend the Festival too, but the larger groups are Germans, followed by Spaniards, and Italians.

⁸⁸ In 2006 during the 8 days of the Festival there were five days when the different nationalities performed the service, so it was held in German, French, Italian, Spanish, and the rest of the days in English. This later changed, and all ceremonies are now held in English.

⁸⁹ Email communication in September 2006



Table 15: Map of the Chateau Fondjouan (Provided in the leaflet of the Yoga Festival)

-  Location of my tent during my stay at the Yoga Festivals
-  Locations where the interviews took place

* Numbers from 1 to 16 are the places where the workshops take place.

11. 2. Festival Activities

One of the characteristics of the Yoga Festival is to have a special theme for each year. From 2001 until 2011 the activities have been oriented towards the ten human aspects that, according to Yogi Bhanjan, are the “Ten Bodies”. The “Ten Bodies” or “Ten Spiritual Bodies” is the teaching of Yogi Bhanjan that is intimately related to what he taught as “Tantric Numerology”. According to him, every person has ten different dimensions that are composing the human structure. He called them “bodies”. He mentioned that,

“If you understand that you are Ten Bodies and you are aware of those Ten Bodies, and you keep them in balance, the whole universe will be in balance with you” (Bhanjan, 2003. p. 199).

The ten bodies are: 1. The Soul, 2. The Negative Mind, 3. The Positive Mind, 4. Neutral Mind, 5. Physical body, 6. Arcline (or “halo”), 7. Aura, 8. Pranic body, 9. Subtle body, 10. Radiant body plus an “extra” guiding aspect, the 11. The “Guru”. The year 2012 had a different theme the “Aquarian Age” as it was believed to be the year of the transition. From 2013 onwards the festival theme follows the order of the “Sutras of the Aquarian

Age” as understood by Yogi Bhajan (presented in the previous section of this study, in Table 11).

THEMES OF THE YEARS OF FIELDWORK RESEARCH		
2006: <i>The Sixth body.</i>	2010: <i>The Tenth body.</i>	2011: <i>The Eleventh body.</i>
<p>According to Satya Singh the meaning of this is that, “The topic was Open Mind, Open Heart. We worked on the sixth subtle body, the arcline. Yogi Bhajan says about this: “The Arcline extends from earlobe to earlobe, across the hairline and brow. It’s your halo, and is the nucleus of the aura. Women have a second arcline which extends from nipple to nipple. The Arcline is your projection, your radiance. It gives you the ability to focus, to be concentrated, to meditate. The Arcline, associated with the pituitary gland, regulates the nervous system and glandular balance, thus protecting your heart center. You can use the intuition of your sixth center to protect yourself, so that you can deal with the stresses of life without shutting down your heart. The projective power of the Sixth Body helps you manifest whatever you want in your life. “I am, I am,” is the Arcline. This is the balance point between the physical realm and the cosmic realm, referred to in Sikh Dharma as Miri-Piri. If your Arcline is weak, you may be overprotective and easily influenced”</p>	<p>In the 2010 brochure the topic was the 10th Body, the “Radiant body”.</p> <p>The Radiant body is related to the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs and stands for an attitude they synthesized in “all or nothing” (1 + 0). “The Radiant body gives you spiritual royalty and radiance. Its strength makes you courageous in the face of any obstacle. You exert a magnetic presence and command with respect of all who know you...” (Bhajan 2003, p. 203)</p>	<p>In 2011’s version of the Festival, the topic presented was the 11th Body which, according to Yogi Bhajan’s numerological view is represented in the principle of “Guru”.</p> <p>According to Yogi Bhajan, “When the God in you, and the human in you are in parallel unisonness, then you are 11. You have no duality, you have divine vision and the truth flows from you. You don’t have to find anything outside of you. The jewels are all in you – you are rich inside, you have satisfaction and contentment” (Bhajan 2003, p. 203)</p>

Table 16: Themes of the years of fieldwork research

The topic of each year frames the workshops and overall activities, yoga, mediations and the main camp mentality. Everywhere within the fields of Fondjouan there will be a workshop that studies or presents the topic from the perspective of a trained and qualified Kundalini Yoga teacher.

In all these instances the teachings of Yogi Bhajan are explored, analyzed, shared and experienced. For the same reason, the workshops and study groups are not only about information, but also about practicing certain meditations and sets of yogic exercises known as Kundalini yogas *Kriyas*, which are deemed as “set of complete exercises”.

Above all, the Festival produces a continuity in the collective life of “3HO Europe” and, according to Satya Singh, the activities in the Festival have important features that he presented in this order:

“Morning Sadhana, yoga and meditation starting at 5.00 am; Karma Yoga, the volunteer work that the festival is based on; Missal Meetings, language-oriented meetings for 20-30 people which provide a family type atmosphere to do Karma Yoga and prepare the program for the day; 20 or more morning workshops and evening study groups around Kundalini Yoga to choose from; Gurdwara; Evening program with music and entertainment”⁹⁰

The Yoga Festival schedule:

Day 1: Arrival day	Day 2 to day 4: Pre-Tantric days	Days 5 to 7: Tantric days	Day 8: Peace Prayer Day	Day 9: Departure day
	4.00 Wake up	3.45 Wake up	4.00 Wake up	4.00 Wake up
15.00 Dinner	4.30 - 7.00 Sadhana (Yoga and Meditation)	4.15 - 6.30 Sadhana	4.30 - 7.00 Sadhana	4.30 - 7.30 Sadhana
17.00 Opening Session	7.00 - 8.00 Gurdwara	6.30 - 7.15 Gurdwara	7.00 - 8.00 Gurdwara	9.00 Breakfast
19.45 Evening Yoga or Newcomer Introduction	8.15 Breakfast	7.00 Breakfast	8.15 Breakfast	10.00 Goodbye!
20.45 Healing Meditation	10.00 - 11.30 Missal (Language Group) and Karma Yoga	8.00 - 18.00 White Tantra Yoga	10.00 - 11.30 Missal (Language Group) and Karma Yoga	
21.45 Silence	11.30 - 13.30 Morning Workshops	18.15 Dinner	11.30 - 13.30 Morning Workshops	
	14.00 - 16.00 Afternoon Workshops	20.00 Bazaar, Healing Hands	14.00 - 16.00 Afternoon Workshops	
	16.30 Dinner	21.45 Silence	16.30 Dinner	
	17.30 - 19.00 Study Groups, Bazaar, Healing Sessions		17.30 - 19.00 Study Groups, Bazaar, Healing	
	19.00 - 19.30 Children' s Yoga		19.00 - 19.30 Children' s Yoga	
	19.30 - 20.45 Evening Yoga / Healing Meditation		19.30 - 20.45 Evening Yoga / Healing Meditation	
	20.45 Evening Program		21.45 - 23.45 Rockout Night	
	21.45 Silence			

Table 17: Schedule of the Yoga Festival

⁹⁰ To these activities one has to add the bazaar that not only offers all kinds of New Age/3HO related products, but also counseling, alternative therapies, energy healing, massages, etc.

Sadhana in the "sadhana field"

In the teaching of Yogi Bhajan, *Sadhana* is understood as the early morning practice that is a combination of a Sikh recitation, Kundalini yoga and the seven Aquarian Mantras he prescribed. This is normally understood as the "Aquarian Sadhana" and it is a standardized group discipline that starts in the early hours of the day, in theory two and a half hours before the sun rises. At the Yoga Festival in Fondjouan this is done outdoors on the lawn in front of the Château while the moon still dominates the horizon. Nonetheless, the word *sadhana* has essentially two meanings in 3HO: it is an individual practice and a group practice deemed *spiritual*. As an individual practice it is understood as a "daily spiritual practice, self-discipline that allows one to express the Infinite within one's self" (Bhajan 2003, p. 144). This kind of practice is a must for the Aquarian teachers because "the best way to have a potent projection as a teacher is to develop your own sadhana. Your influence as a teacher is not from control, but rather from control over your own inner shadow" (Bhajan 2003, p. 145). Although this practice is not mandatory for everyone, practically all the camp attend it due to its believed effectiveness in leading to or producing some of the experiences mentioned above.

3HO's second meaning of sadhana is defined as "group spiritual practice". In this sense Yogi Bhajan commented that the

"group consciousness in morning sadhana is to help each other... If in this whole group, one person opens up to God just once, we will all be blessed in his openness". (Bhajan, 2003 p. 146)⁹¹.

This kind of sadhana or *spiritual group practice* is divided into four parts and altogether takes about 2½ hours. During the Yoga Festival sadhana starts at 4:30 am (except the "tantric days", the 4th, 5th and 6th days, when sadhana starts half an hour earlier, at 4:00 am). The specific parts of this combined practice are a reflection of the three-fold aspects of the movement and it contains the following elements:

1. The recitation of the Japji Sahib (this takes 20-30 minutes). This is the composition of the First Sikh Guru in which his core teachings are contained⁹².
2. A Kundalini Yoga "Kriya" or set of exercises of Kundalini Yoga (approximately 45 minutes including often a short preparation known as "warm ups"). These

⁹¹ This aspect was noticed by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1915) who reflected on the social effect of people's religious practice and experiences, "the collective life excites religious thought because it gives rise to a state of effervescence... passions become more animated, sensations are strong: there are even some which are only produced at that moment. Man no longer recognizes himself; he feels transformed" (p. 151).

⁹² According to the view that is taught in 3HO, the Japji Sahib is "A mantra, poem and inspired religious scripture composed by Guru Nanak. *Japji sahib* gives a view of the cosmos, the soul, the mind, the challenge of life and the impact of our actions. Its 40 stanzas are a source of many mantras and can be used whole or in part to guide both your mind and your heart" (Bhajan 1998, p. 195). According to Yogi Bhajan he was once asked about how it was possible to be the wisest man in the world and he said "Read the *Japji* and you will be ... that is all it takes. If anyone can understand *Japji*, he can understand the entire wisdom of God" (Bhajan 2003, p. 79).

exercises combine breathing and physical exercises and postures with other yoga techniques including mantras (some times in Gurmukhi, in Sanskrit or in English), postures of the hands and body locks⁹³.

3. A short relaxation lying down (not more than 10 minutes) for a rest and recuperation.
4. The chanting of the “Mantras for the Aquarian Age”, also known as the “Aquarian Mantras” (‘62)⁹⁴.

The moments prior to sadhana begin with waking participants up. This starts at approximately 3:30am and is led by a group of volunteers who are in charge of going along the camp singing the wake-up song⁹⁵. These volunteers are generically called “sevadars”, a Gurmukhi and Sanskrit word that comes from *Seva* that in 3HO is rendered as “selfless service”. The singers form an enthusiastic but not necessarily improvised band who walk the tents and dormitories to get people out of their sleeping bags and beds so they attend the group sadhana in the middle of the lawn in front of the main entrance of the Château.

Some minutes or seconds before the practice begins, people emerge guided by their torches, carrying their yoga mats or in most case their sheepskins, an essential piece of equipment for the Kundalini yogi. Sometimes some of them, the “yogic families” and “yogic parents”, can be seen carrying their small children and babies to go to *Sadhana*. From the perspective of the participant observer I also saw what I called *sleeping yogis* or *passive practitioners*, i.e. those who carry their sleeping bags and continue their sleeping routine among the other decisive practitioners.

The process of the Sadhana is not always the same as the Kundalini yoga part is always somewhat different. Although the Sikh Japji at the beginning is the same text, it is always recited by different “Sadhana leaders” who put different melodies or tones to it. After the yoga, the whole camp relaxes for a few minutes before the chanting of the Aquarian Mantras completes the practice. This last part is carried out by professional musicians who are 3HO members. The mantras that are sung, although they come from India, are accompanied by a blend of traditional Indian instruments and melodies (tabla, dilruba, sarangi, sitar, etc.) with Western instruments and melodies (harmonium, guitars, drums etc.), producing an overall harmonic fusion of styles that carries the singing of the hundreds of people present.

⁹³ According to the view that is taught in 3HO, Kriya’s “literal meaning is “complete action”. A Kundalini Yoga Kriya is a sequence of postures and yoga techniques used to produce a particular impact on the psyche, body or self. The structure of each *Kriya* has been designed to generate, organize and deliver a particular state or change of state, thereby completing a cycle of state. These effects have been codified and elaborated by Yogi Bhajan and form the basic tools used in yoga and its therapeutic application” (Bhajan 1998, p. 196)

⁹⁴ The “Sadhana Mantras for the Aquarian age” were given by Yogi Bhajan in 1992. (Bhajan 2003, p. 152). These *Aquarian Mantras* can be found in the collection of photos at the end of this study, exactly as the lyrics of these mantras were captured at the Yoga Festival’s site.

⁹⁵ The lyrics of the wake-up song go like this: “Wake up, rise up sweet family // It’s the time of the Lord and remember love is here // Oh, love is all you need so wake up and rise up right away // God has blessed you in so many ways!”

In order to understand these types of practices I can recall the two specific notions, one of William James's in relation to religious experience and another from Alan Tobey in relation to 3HO sadhana in general. According to James, to shift an emotional state, one has to change the "outward motions" of the body. A commentator of James's underlined this idea that although it was not explored by James in the early works, such a view can find supporting evidence in yogic practice, he thought (in Jeremy Carrette 2008, p.424). James considered how the body manifests in religious emotions and how rituals change emotions through bodily acts to be of great importance. For James, "(...) all religious experiences have a physical root" (p.424). This perspective can offer an approach to explain why the practices are not only deemed important, but also deemed efficacious. This is what Kundalini Yogis seem to expect to have when they practice the Kriyas/sets of exercises or more specifically when these people gather to go through the whole experience of sadhana. On the other hand Alan Tobey offered another observation that can be recalled from the earlier studies of 3HO at the beginning of the early 1970s. He thought sadhana was the most important practice of the day: "morning sadhana certainly ... is the center and source of 3HO's life wherever it may be" (p. 17). This continues to be clear in the European Yoga Festivals that I have witnessed. In general, the discipline or practice they engage there is strong, since most of the exercises are quite demanding and the people seem to endure and expect intense workouts every morning for the eight days of the Festival.

Sikh Services in the Gurdwara

Gurdwara comes from the Gurumukhi language and it is normally rendered as "the Guru's door" ('Guru' and 'dwar', door). The Gurdwara is the place where the Sikh ceremonies are held and it is located far away from the Château area (about 400 metres away; in Table 15 the map shows the location of the Gurdwara where the symbol of the Sikh Religion is displayed⁹⁶). In order to reach the Gurdwara one has to walk through a corridor between two buildings (on one side the kitchen and dining hall/restaurant and on the other side some dormitories). In this location the Gurdwara is set away from the noise of the main stage and the bazaar. The Gurdwara itself is a room of about 130m² that has been modified for this special event and decorated by the *sevadars* or volunteers of the "Gurdwara staff".

According to the daily schedule, people have two main options after Sadhana finishes at 7:00am. They either use it as free time or they go to the Gurdwara. Some go back to sleep or they socialize, but others choose to go to the daily service at the Gurdwara where the essential components of the traditional Sikh ceremony, or Sikh Dharma as they rather say, is expressed by the 3HO Sikhs. The ceremony includes the *Kirtan* (devotional music), the *Ardas* (prayer) and the *Gurprasad* (a blessed sweet snack that is served at the end of the service). The Gurdwara is inaugurated at the beginning of the Festival with the performing of the *Sahaj Pad*, which is the traditional, almost continuous reading of the sacred book of the Sikhs, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. This

⁹⁶ See more in the Appendix C

process of reading needs to be completed by the last day of the Festival, which is also the last day of the Gurdwara. The tradition of the *Sahaj Pad* consists of an intermittent recitation of their sacred text which allows breaks during the reading process until the 1430 pages have been covered by the devotees of the Sikh Guru. The Sikhs in general have also another similar tradition known as the *Ahkand Pad* in which the uninterrupted reading of the whole religious text is completed in one continuous process. This last variation is not the one performed at the Yoga Festival.

The Gurdwara is the scene of another major activity: on the last day of the festival the Sikh marriage ceremony (*Anand Karaj*) takes place. In these ceremony a picturesque decoration adorns the hall and everyone wears their most elegant Indian Sikh garments. This is the event when one can see hundreds of 3HO Sikhs or Sikh Dharma and the common secular 3HO or Kundalini yogi practitioners together at the same time, which turns the scenario into an exotic blend of East and West. The ceremonies in 2006, 2010 and 2011 had different stages that were directed by a minister who is acknowledged as a wise and dedicated representative of the Sikh Dharma; in all the years of my field work there was always a different western turbaned man as the minister.

The general guidelines for executing the different parts of the Gurdwara are explained and described in the book *Victory and Virtue* (2001), in which Yogi Bhajan expressed his will in the foreword,

“It is my prayer that they may be ten times better than me in projection, expansion, and organization in holding the banner of the Khalsa”.

This direction is addressed to the Sikhs of 3HO who have not necessarily grown up in a Sikh environment and have in most cases come to Sikhism through the practice of Kundalini Yoga and Yogi Bhajan’s teachings. For the purposes of serving the activities of the Gurdwara, the protocol of Sikh Dharma demands a very standardized set up and decoration of the place that hosts the Sikh Scripture deemed as the “Eternal Guru”, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. According to the editor of *Victory and Virtue*,

“Sikhs are worshippers of the Shabd Guru. When the Shabd Guru is part of one’s life, it is a very personal, intimate experience. It brings one’s life into focus, it heals, and brings forth the inherent joy which lies within. It brings grace. This is achieved by developing a relationship with the Shabd Guru, through the Siri Guru Granth Sahib” (Preface).

This initial statement shows another form of the experience in connection to the Shabad Guru or the Sikh hymns contained in their sacred scripture. The Sikh Dharma belief must be considered to be of a different kind, not only because of its distinctive perspective and approach to the Sikh faith, but also because of the vernacular use of the Sikh scripture. The majority of the Sikh Dharma members do not know, speak or read Gurmukhi, the sacred language, so as it can be seen they have to read from the English transliteration and translations. For Indian Sikhs, understanding the Gurmukhi language is an essential condition to be what they believe is a genuine Sikh. This is perhaps in some of the critical criteria of Takhar (2008) presented above. At the same

time this rather westernized form could explain why the interpretative work of Yogi Bhajan was not only necessary but a *conditio sine qua non* for making Sikhi available for his students. These might be behind the reasons why the editor of *Victory and Virtue* finishes her introduction to the manual by addressing the issue of the Sikh Dharma's faith as a "way to experience your ecstasy":

"Please don't use the information in this book to "pickle" Sikh Dharma. Don't be fanatic. Rather, tune into Sikh Dharma as a dynamic, living faith. Always remember the precious Spirit of our Dharma. AND, embrace the form, merge with it as your destiny. It is a way to experience your ecstasy..." (Preface, emphasis in the original)

Besides being a place for the presence of the Sikh Scripture and for the Sikhs of the Guru, the Gurdwara has the versatility to serve as a venue to hold some of the festival's Kundalini Yoga workshops. Some of the teachers can use the Gurdwara to teach in, and you can see the flexibility of the Gurdwara staff (and Sikh Dharma) in allowing people to come and sit facing the teachers while showing their backs to the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, something that is uncommon and not allowed in other Sikh groups because it would be considered disrespectful to the "Eternal Guru". This is certainly unusual in Gurdwaras managed by first or second generation Punjabi Sikhs, for example. Despite these particular expressions, the Gurdwara at the Festival shows the concentration of the highest expressions of genuflection, religious chanting, tears, prayer and devotion. The Gurdwara is the place *par excellence* where one can see the activity referred to as "bhakti", or the devotional ingredient of 3HO. Here is where "Bhakti energy", as they refer to it, is most clearly manifested. The reading of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib attracts the people who come to listen to the Guru's words (*Bani*), to meditate on them and to pray. Some Sikhs sometimes come to read their daily prayers there too.

This place and their activities bring an interesting flavour to 3HO, adding exotic shapes to the aesthetics found in other corners of the Festival, where multiculturalism is expressed in a communal type of movement: different people with laymen-like profiles are as abundant on the site as turbaned men and woman.

White Tantric Yoga at the "Big Top"

White Tantric Yoga is a form of meditation introduced by Yogi Bhajan that is always practiced in a group. It consists of two rows of people, generally of the opposite sex, sitting in front of each other. This is a set up to create an interplay between the energies of male and female polarities. This seems to be the main and perhaps only visible tantric characteristic of White Tantric Yoga. It does not involve rituals, worship or sexual contact, unlike most Tantric traditions. Having a non-sexual expression makes this form of tantrism *white*, as Yogi Bhajan declared. The fundamental aim of the practice, which takes place in the "Big top", is deemed different from the traditional circles of tantrism and according to Yogi Bhajan the aim is mental purification:

“During White Tantric Yoga meditation, much subconscious negativity is released from the participants. In order to release that negativity without its projection onto its partner, the Mahan Tantric filters the negativity through his own aura”. (Bhajan 2003, p.62)

The power accorded to White Tantric Yoga makes it different from the practice of Kundalini Yoga in which no training or teachers of White Tantric Yoga exist, and which was specially restricted to Yogi Bhajan’s own and exclusive domain. As they explained,

“White Tantric Yoga is an integral part of the Kundalini Yoga experience. There is one essential difference from other Kundalini meditations. White Tantric cannot be practiced under any circumstances, without the guidance of a Mahan Tantric” (Bhajan 2003, p. 138)

This is his domain because, as seen in this paragraph, he is the one that can “filter the negativity through his own aura”. However, although this practice was his exclusive responsibility, while he was still alive he trained a few “facilitators” and the number of whom has multiplied in the last two decades. During my fieldwork this situation certainly raised a question, in regards to how is it possible that this practice can *still* work when Yogi Bhajan is not present anymore? When I asked the program director Satya Singh about this, he said that:

“He used to be there in person every year until 1986, when he started to have problems with his health and could not travel anymore. After that he came once or twice personally, but the white Tantric Yoga that is the highlight of the festival was led by facilitators and a video recording in his name”⁹⁷

In other words, even though the concept and figure of the Mahan Tantric went into a sort of retirement, 3HO used technology to maintain Yogi Bhajan’s *presence* during the White Tantric practice, while Yogi Bhajan himself created a new group within the organization, the “White tantric Yoga facilitators”, who can be considered *channelers* of the energy of the Mahan Tantric. In an informal conversation with some older members of 3HO that took part in this practice when Yogi Bhajan was still leading it, some of them shared their belief that the experience of White Tantric Yoga was “more powerful” when the founder of 3HO was still around ⁹⁸. It is worth mentioning that the White Tantric Yoga courses lasted up to nine days in the early 1970s.

⁹⁷ By e-mail communications in 2006

⁹⁸ When the White Tantric Yoga Courses were launched through video, Yogi Bhajan said, “Whenever you will come to these courses through the television, you will go through the energy, your Subtle Body will tune in with my Subtle Body. So death for that purpose will never, ever mean a thing. But those who believe that I am dead, I shall be dead for them. And those who shall believe that I live, I shall live hundred times more powerfully, stronger in them than they have ever experienced. With these words I would like to tell you that we have an everlasting, loving, beautiful relationship, here, hereafter, unto Infinity, and even beyond that. Believe me. Even if you can’t believe it is true”(Bhajan 2003 p. 139)

Viewing this from another early scholarly perspective on White Tantric Yoga in the 3HO Summer Solstice in America can help us attain a better understanding of this form of discipline. Alan Tobey considered this form of tantra “a strong business indeed” (p. 16). Practice is basically physical and mental, and exhaustion is not an exaggerated term to describe what the participants have to bear during the three days of practice, each of them sitting very close to each other in narrow spaces and meditating together for six hours or more. Some of these characteristics are in another context addressed by Durkheim as he underlined that,

“...there is in us, outside us, religious forces ... forces that we cannot but engender by the mere fact of coming together, thinking together, feeling together, acting together”⁹⁹.

This is a valid description of what seems to occur during the three days of this tantric practice. As an observer, one can notice that towards the end of each segment of the Tantric practice the crowd feels drawn to scream and applaud in an expression of liberation (apparently from the practice itself!), rejoicing in a sense of accomplishment. The whole “Big Top” seems to act like a big amplifier of the sound that they produce. This, without exaggeration, reminded me of a football match after a goal is scored and the multitude celebrates at the top of their lungs.

But the “Big Top” is also the place where the most activities of the Festival are held, from the music concerts, to classes, lectures or workshops by different teachers. The “all camp” activities of the Yoga Festival happen there in this big tent too. According to the people in charge, every year in recent years they have had to enlarge the tent by adding a new panel to its structure. Despite the multiple uses of the Big Top, the White Tantric practice is indeed at the heart of all the activities of this Festival and the growth in the number of participants in the White Tantric practice explains the extension of the area of the tent¹⁰⁰

Langar under the trees

Langar is the traditional dining place in Sikhism. This tradition of “sitting together to eat together” goes back to the time of the First and Second Gurus of Sikhism. The value of human egalitarianism and the encounter between all sorts of followers and their different backgrounds, religions or castes made it necessary to build up a community that could integrate the collective religious project, the *Sat Sangat*, of the first Guru Sikhs. One of the ways to materialize this idea was through the habit of collective eating.

⁹⁹ Emile Durkheim, “Contribution to Discussion “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time”, in *Emile Durkheim* by W.S.F Pickering, in *Religion and Emotion*, Corrigan, John (Ed). Oxford, 2008, p. 442.

¹⁰⁰ The tent is as big as a football field and is located in the middle of the green lawn, about a hundred meters from the Château, and it is surrounded by the forest and the biggest of the ponds. The tent is decorated with Yogi Bhajan banners and his most valued quotes. In there over 2,000 people are able to sit and meditate or listen to the lectures or chant along with one of the multiple bands playing Kundalini Yoga music. But the main *raison d’être* of this tent is to house the three-day practice of White Tantric Yoga.

They launched the tradition that all the people were to eat on the floor, regardless of caste or if they were Muslim, Hindu or anything else. All food was vegetarian and it was served free to ensure that everyone, regardless of their economy or dietary stipulation, could eat as equals. They probably thought that cohesion and a reduction in differences was bound to happen if all the Sikh followers, as well as visitors, would sit and eat the same meals together. This inspires the Festival's 3HO langar.

The mealtimes are scheduled in such a way that breakfast follows the early morning practice and the Gurdwara service, at 8:15am, and then lunch is held after the morning and afternoon activities between 3:00pm and 6:30pm, depending on the day. Before being served and starting to eat the food, the whole camp "tunes in", as they say, by chanting the mantra *Sat Nam* three times. This is a way to bless the food that was introduced by Yogi Bhajan to make a shift from an individual to a group dynamic and endow the meals with "spiritual vibrations".

The langar takes place under the shade of big trees where people come to sit on the ground in specially marked rows. This is where all of the participants at the Yoga Festival gather to share a special yogic diet, which is the same throughout the whole yoga festival. In the mornings the breakfast is a soup made with onion, some spices, potatoes and celery along with oranges and bananas. The lunch is a preparation of a variety of Chinese beans ("mung beans") combined with basmati rice along with what they call the "trinity root" (a base made of ginger, onion and garlic fried in "ghee" or clarified butter) altogether with cooked carrots, beetroots and fresh lettuce. On the last day of the Festival there is a different menu that corresponds to a farewell kind of meal. The traditional meal on all the first 7 days of the Festival is recommended and possibly designed by the founder of 3HO because, as people commented, he knew about Indian Ayurvedic medicine. This diet with "mung beans" with rice is said to clean the body and to give complete nourishment, providing a "perfectly balanced protein dish, easy to digest and satisfying". It is very important to point out that the 3HO community has a strict vegetarian style as well. They are not, in this respect, following the Sikh tradition of *Singh Sabhas* and the central council in Punjab, the SGPC¹⁰¹, which permits the eating of meat. They are following the yogic philosophy regarding hygiene and food as presented by Yogi Bhajan and embodied by 3HO's three-fold realms of practice.

The *langar* is where different generations, nations, old-timers and newcomers to 3HO meet and share time in a relaxed atmosphere, and where the most experienced teachers, those who learnt directly from Yogi Bhajan as well as their students and perhaps the students of their students too, share breakfast and lunch together in an environment that is characterized by leisure, informality and companionship. Some of the teachers' programmes and plans for the forthcoming seasons are apparently discussed there, as the Coordinator suggested. The langar is also a time for meeting and business. This is a time for physical regeneration as well as a moment to generate partnership among teachers and envision projects to expand the teachings, the community's businesses or simply to find new ways to engage in the community's life. It gives newcomers the chance to get to know their peers and many relationships are

¹⁰¹ "Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee" in Amritsar, India.

initiated here: the *langar* is not just coming and sitting to eat together, it is a philosophy of companionship and equality turned into a group practice.

Workshops

Workshops at the Festival are theoretical-practical, and the general theme is addressed from the perspective of yoga and meditation “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”. Workshops are important educational events where the teachers, students, teachings, practices and experiences happen at the same place and time.

Workshops normally take 2 hours and they all start after breakfast, and after this the language groups’ discussions, the “missals”, are done at 11:30. All the workshops begin with the same mantra (*Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō*). The 3HO teachers are taught to sing this mantra, which is believed to link them with the *Golden Chain*: in doing so it provides a “spiritual connection” in order to hold the classes and the group experience. The workshops also finish with the singing of the “Long Time Sunshine” song, which rather resembles a children’s song from the pop culture and hippie times of the 1970s¹⁰². Perhaps this is the purpose of this song, to retract density and eventual seriousness from the effects of practice and provide some innocence and lightness after the strenuous “work”. After this song, the next and last mantra chanted is *Sat Nam*, the same mantra that is used to bless the food in the *langar* and which is taken from the first lines of the Mool Mantra in the Sikh Scripture.

As they often refer to, in the workshops people “process” things at an intimate level that the observer can only perceive in the expression of their face and eyes. Experiences in a workshop vary according to the style of the teachers, who can really magnify the intensity of the group’s practice depending on the kind of combination of exercises, meditations and certainly the allocutions they present.

My attention was captured by a long-time member of 3HO who published a few lines about her experience in a class. This happened in a different time and context, but the settings of the class, mantras, teaching, approach and dynamics were the same and have been practically the same since the 1970s. In *The History of the Sikh Dharma* (1995), this “beginner” wrote a testimony called “My first class” in which she explained,

“... I had an experience that most people don’t have in their first class. We were doing three minutes of “Breath of Fire” in the camel pose, and when the time was up and we relaxed out of the position, I had a “kundalini” experience. Suddenly, I was so high, so expanded, I was outside the confinement of my body! I remember thinking “Wow! So this is why these people do this!” My vision had darkened, my extremities were tingling, and my ears were ringing so loud I could hardly bear. This voice in my head

¹⁰² The lyrics are: “May the long time sunshine upon, all love surround you, and the pure light within you guide your way on”

kept getting louder and louder saying, “I am home, I’m HOME, I’M HOME”
(p. 21)

Certainly this description has an embedded degree of elaboration because it happened in 1970 and this account was published in 1995. However, it can actually fully represent the vocabulary of 3HO and the notions of “expansion” commonly found there, and at the same time it shows the return to an intimate place within the person (deemed as “home”). What captures the attention is this participant’s memory of what she thought at the moment when this experience took place: “*Wow! So this is why these people do this!*” This exclamation sounds spontaneous and it could give the hint to answer the *why*. Although this is an interesting reflection concerning an event that happened in the 1970s, one should consider this report to see the degree of likeness that it displays with current expressions of experiences, which I will show soon.

One can say that, beyond all these practices in the workshops, the styles of the teachers in the Festival vary significantly, although all are teaching under the umbrella of Yogi Bhajan or “as taught by Yogi Bhajan”. Some of them have a clear Sikh tendency and their lessons are strongly based on the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, while other teachers might have an artistic approach to yoga and spirituality, combining dance and music as the main ingredients of their workshops. Some teachers have become specialized in topics about relationships, yogic diet, healing, postures, etc., and some have a more New Age way of addressing their audience. All these perspectives fill the lawn and forests of Fondjouan and they provide a spectrum of possibilities that still fall within the framework of the teachings of the founder, or are explicitly linked to his teachings.

Bazaar near the Chateau

Every evening gives rise to this colloquial activity at the Festival: time for shopping. The bazaar is the place where many different kinds of products are for sale. In the different stands that are set out in front of the Château from approximately 7pm until around 10pm, different participants of the event offer a variety of music, literature, clothes, jewelry, Sikh symbols such as some of the Five K’s, instruments, natural medicines, and also alternative therapies, healing sessions of different kinds and various techniques of therapeutic massage . The trade is conducted in a very relaxed way while some “sevadars” (volunteers) serve “yogi tea”, a combination of black tea with spices that Yogi Bhajan recommended as a part of the diet, and also “golden milk”, a drink prepared with turmeric and milk which is believed to be good for joints and skin¹⁰³.

* * *

In general and *in situ*, the Yoga Festival looks like a gathering of many kinds of people who want to try new experiences or repeat old ones, create or maintain social contact,

¹⁰³Yogi Tea” acts as a mild stimulant. Helps to correct damage to nervous system from drugs. Cleanse the liver”; the “Golden Milk” is “very good for the spine. It lubricates the joints and helps to break up the calcium deposit” (Bhajan 2003, p. 255, 256)

learn or teach yoga, buy or sell products, conduct business, have a different type of holiday or simply gather as a big “spiritual family”. Attendees come to the Festival to engage in a collective dynamic where they share their time in daily routines with a like-minded international community who agree with and participate in the practices prescribed by Yogi Bhanan and the general ideology of 3HO. The overall atmosphere and sense of belonging to a common path is also visible as the organizers have had over one generation of experience in making this Festival as cohesive as possible. On a more specific level, in relation to the micro level of the members, their distinctiveness as a group can also be perceived. Many children of these men, women and families are part of the event too and they establish their own relationships and impressions of the collective life and ethos of the movement. These people, the great majority of whom are Europeans, form a fundamental part of this environment and these activities. Now I should take a closer look at some of these people, the key informants, the ones selected as the experiential stipulated protagonists: the *Aquarian Teachers*.

12. *The Meeting of Informants*

Aspects of the Interaction

In order to meet with the informants, the scholar has to address how the interaction is going to take place and for what purpose. In the interaction one must always consider and respect the other’s own way of being in the world; their thinking and acting is not to be judged or confronted, but rather listened to, observed and collected, all in order to be understood. On the other hand, the scholar who acts as a participant observer should know the worldview of the informant to spot the association that he or she produces or ignores. The scholar should also adopt a suitable outlook that generates empathy at the same time as his position and purpose of conducting interviews is stated. This whole interaction happens through a process of dialogue that the researcher directs towards the subject matter. My participation in the field as an observer granted me a closer perspective, as if I was a research instrument myself (Pelto, 1970, p. 90) and the dynamics of how I entered the field was constructed in three stages:

The recognition of the field. After I first moved to Europe to live in Spain in 2004 I began to study Religious Studies at the University of Complutense. By then this research was a germinal project and my first contacts with the 3HO European community began in Madrid. My Spanish contacts helped me connect with the larger 3HO community of Europe¹⁰⁴ when I had already moved to Finland and enrolled in the University of Helsinki in 2005. I planned my first fieldwork for the summer of 2006. In July of that year I flew to France from Finland and took a train to Blois from Paris. I then took a bus from Blois that is commonly arranged by the 3HO Festival for those attending

¹⁰⁴ Through Sarabjit Kaur Khalsa and Devta Singh, a married couple living in Madrid that kindly advised me and welcomed me to the European Yoga Festival. In 2006 and for nearly three decades they have been the elder Kundalini Yogis and 3HO members in the Capital of Spain and the initiators of the organization and their activities there.

the event. Once I arrived with my bag, research material (digital recorder, camera, pen and paper) and my tent, I found a spot to camp and started to familiarize myself with the location of the Yoga Festival. On this first trip I made contact with Satya Singh, The Festival's coordinator and several other members of the organization. I engaged in conversation using a fairly random method for choosing the people, mainly those that appeared to be more advanced as they wore the full white outfit, the turban and the long beard in the case of a man. My position as a participant observer led me to join their *Aquarian Sadhana* and workshops and adopt their common dressing in white, and I covered my head as they normally used to do. Once I started a conversation I was colloquial and if I got the impression that the person was open to share on a more formal level, then I communicated that I was not only interested in the 3HO teachings and life style, but also in the people's *life experiences* (the stipulated object of the research was still broad at this point). I then proceeded to make explicit that my interest had an academic orientation for a PhD study. However, my skills in data collection were still raw and my exploration of the field was not narrowed down to the final research questions and stipulated object. The experience *in situ* and the data collected aimed at creating a panoramic view of the place, the event and the people attending the European Yoga Festival.

Identifying and interviewing the people. It was due to this first opportunity to spend time in the European 3HO community that I properly collected a good amount of practical information on 3HO and the Festival. I could now become more familiar with their ways and their people, and from the second fieldwork trip in 2010¹⁰⁵ onwards the fundamental work was to hold interviews. This was possible since the field and the first recognition of it allowed me to focus on more specific fieldwork during my second trip in 2010. However, these interviews did not find the ultimate shape or the definitive informants since the approach was not completely mature. This period is marked by more field diaries containing information about different stories of some members and their lives and experience and less head notes about the general setting.

Adjusting my scope and improving the method. It was only in 2011 that I could re-direct my energies to relate to the research question and the stipulated object, the *unusual sensory experiences* of members and then utilizing a digital recorder I conducted methodic interviews about their experiences. For this third trip I had arrived with the clear and final approach about who I wanted to talk to and the way I wanted to conduct the conversations. For this occasion I filtered the criteria to choose the members; some were re-interviewed and a few new ones were selected. I always confirmed in advance if the people I was about to interview were trained and certified teachers or not. The way I confirmed this was by creating a conversation that allowed me to ask about Kundalini yoga and how they got into this practice and if they had ever taught the teachings and practices. If they were certified teachers with a minimum of three years in the movement and, if I detected their interest in my project, I then asked

¹⁰⁵ It was only after four years that I could come back to the Festival, because my family life changed with the arrival of my daughter in autumn 2005 and my son in summer 2007. Between 2006 and 2010 I kept e-mail contact with some of the informants I met and also improved my approach to 3HO by reading more about the organization and the teachings of Yogi Bhajan.

if the person would agree to sit for a recorded interview. After this I would invite him or her to find a place in the Festival field (see above marks in the map) where I could further introduce my neutral stand in relation to the conversation and the aims of Comparative Religions. At this stage I was normally wearing a casual white cloth, not too far from the traditional dress in 3HO and not too casual that I would look like a complete outsider stranger. In this last stage the interviews were conducted in the open field of Fondjouan and while the conversation took place I made very few notes in order to avoid losing eye contact and the proximity created with the informants. All the interviews were recorded. Out of this last participation in the field I got the final material consisting of the eleven interviews presented in this study.

Emic and Etic in Attributional Theory

The people interviewed and the accounts collected referred to experiences that were in general accounted by the subjects as intimate and personal and by me, the scholar, as *unusual sensory experiences*, as stipulated for research purposes. These different accounts required a further level of theorization as the method chosen is based on the *attributional theory* that has a specific procedure. According to Ann Taves (2009), there is a distinction that needs to be made regarding how experiences are approached in emic and etic accounts:

“Emic observers are those who agree that a particular event should be deemed religious (thus constituting it as an originary event [OE] and that a path can be constituted for re-creating the OE in the present... Etic observers are those who do not consider the event in question special (that is, as an OE) and thus stand outside the composite broadly defined by the OE” (p. 156)

So as the subject matter was being stipulated as *the unusual sensory experiences* that informants have attributed and the goal is to discover something about the thought and worldview of the informants in relation to their experiential events, I aim to discover how 3HO/Yogi Bhanjan’s worldview is, eventually, embedded in them or if something different is discovered that could bring about different forms of deeming the experiences/teachings.

What is aimed at is not the evidence of an experience in itself. The nature of these experiences is not the concern of this study. Then as Clifford Geertz (1975) warns us in his article *On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding*:

“What do we claim when we assert that we know the semiotic means by which, in this case, persons are defined to one another? That we know words or that we know minds?” (p. 52)

It is perhaps needless to say that our understanding of their understanding does not have to be expressed in exactly the same way, since both expressions serve two

different purposes; one is an emic account (the informant’s view) and the other is the etic account (the scholar’s view). These two perspectives have some “sameness” with regards to the subject matter, but a difference in the objective of the account and the approach to it. For one person, the emic perspective, the experience is an *original event* as understood attributionally and it eventually serves as a turning point in life and gives a new perspective *about* life, whereas for the other person, the etic perspective, it is an expression of the psychological associations accounted attributionally by the subject about their behavioural event. This difference is partly concerned with the way of expressing it and totally with the way it is deemed or ascribed meaning. This is the concern of this study. The fundamental reason to approach the experiences of the Aquarian teachers is neither to know the experiences *per se*, the world of words or meanings, nor to understand them without the cultural context, but to see *how they (3HO members) shape their worldview through an attributional exercise that could reflect some regular variables on the micro level of the movement’s individual sphere of personal experiences*¹⁰⁶.

It is inevitable that some prejudicial elements can appear in the scholar’s view once the process of approaching and encountering *the other* takes place, but this situation does not impoverish the methodic approach of the humanistic science of observation; the prejudicial views can be seen as the media or as pre-understanding from which something like knowledge can be drawn. According to René Gothóni (2010), a study that considers language, “shows that the immersion of the interpreter in what concerns him or her is not merely prejudicial to the authentic understanding aimed at, but in fact the *sine qua non* for any understanding” (p. 33). For the purposes of leading the research towards the knowledge of how they deem experiences, it seems opportune to present the scheme elaborated and followed to meet and interact with the informant and his or her experience. In the chart below the experiences are seen as a part of a human continuum that takes place as an historical process within the deeming process. Therefore I have distinguished three levels in the process and seven parts in the whole:

FIRST LEVEL OF THE SUBJECT AND HIS/HER EXPERIENCE		
1 st Moment - Event: Experience of a person	2 nd Moment - 1 st impression or immediate ascription of quality and attributions of the person’s own experience: pre-understanding of 1 st degree	3 rd Moment - Internal articulation or expression of the pre-understanding of the experience, before it is deemed for others: Understanding of 1 st degree ¹⁰⁷
COMMON LEVEL OF THE ENCOUNTER AND REPORT		
4 th Moment –		

¹⁰⁶ The understanding of how experiences are deemed, is found, expanded and perfected by the scholar when he or she revisits the description once the interaction first took place and then through the later systematic examination of the transcript. It is worth noticing that in the dialogues, the majority of the interviewees improve their own understanding by making more or better sense of their explanation, since they can bring more reflection into the narration as a post-fact exercise of the deeming making process.

¹⁰⁷ Normally regarded as emic account

Act of externalization of ascriptions and attributions that the informant applies to his own experiences (emic) in the meeting with the scholar		
LAST LEVEL OF THE DEEMING MAKING PROCESS		
5 th Moment - The researcher's 1 st impression or immediate ascription and attributions to the other's report of the experience: observer's pre-understanding	6 th Moment - The researcher's integration and internal articulation of the impressions before it is made a text or deemed for others: pre-understanding of 2 nd degree	7 th Moment - Act of deeming etic understanding endowed with a higher level of elaboration in relation to a stipulated problem. Inter-subjective or public understanding of 2 nd degree ¹⁰⁸

Table 18: The scheme elaborated and followed to meet and interact with the informant.

These seven moments of the deeming making process each have their characteristics concerning the scholar's aim of intersubjective understanding, therefore as scholars I consider that:

- We cannot know and we are not concerned with the experience (itself) of the person (1st moment)¹⁰⁹.
- We are able to marginally or vaguely know some of his first impressions and mental associations (2nd moment),
- We can know something behind (worldviews or other circumstances embedded in the latter description) how the person deems his experience (3rd moment).
- In the 4th moment when we meet the informant and when the person communicates something that will have the elaboration (of 3rd moment), the immediate associative interpretative efforts (of 2nd moment) and that altogether carries some of the flavor, the images or the direct first impressions of the original event (1st moment).
- In the 4th moment one can observe the ascriptions and attributions made and subsequently think as he or she thought about his or her experience. The attention on this level allows a hint that goes back from the more elaborated to the less elaborated. This process of description contains the way that the deeming of the experiences took place. On the basis of this level and onwards we will have the grounds to answer the questions of *how do SHO members attribute the experiences they have?* Furthermore, on the common level of the encounter of informants and scholars is the "fusion of horizons", as Gadamer called it, (1989, p. 304-317), which takes place and it is here that we share a living

¹⁰⁸ Normally regarded as etic account

¹⁰⁹ The "being" of experiences of an informant is not to be understood; certainly this is a false problem that can easily be surmountable by attesting that the concern is to understand what a person says about an experience, not what the person experienced. Paul Heelas put this in simple terms, "If people say that they are enlightened, for example, the academic simply does not have the tools to assess the claim. The spiritual realm - as adherents like to attest - lies beyond the compass of the intellectual inquiry" (1996, p. 6)

momentum between a personal story (of the informant) and the inter-subjective quest of the scholar¹¹⁰.

Bearing the dynamics and the interplay of the scholar/informant in mind, and using the scheme presented above, one can reduce the risk of falling into some of the common ditches of prejudices, attachment to involvement and/or emotional influence. In this respect ethnographers have three essential problems to sort out. According to Geertz (1975, p. 48) these are:

- “confinement to experience-near concepts”¹¹¹
- being “awash in immediacies”
- “entangled in vernacular”

As seen in the scheme elaborated, if the focus is stronger at the “common level” there is the risk that some of the above conditions can occur (for example: the “confinement to experience-near concepts” or being “awash in immediacies”). However, focusing attention on the last level without the necessary contact with the informants can generate a situation of “confinement to experience-distant concepts”, leaving the scholar “stranded in abstractions and smothered jargon” (Geertz, p. 48)¹¹². In order to reduce this last sort of ‘cognitive contamination’ is to “adopt a participatory role over an extended period of time, either by ‘living in’ and ‘going native’” (Chryssides, 2013, p. 78)¹¹³. Nonetheless the over-engagement of the scholar and his subject is something I accounted for and addressed. The over-engagement is perhaps the most contested aspect of the methods of field research because it challenges the validity of the results of a given survey among a foreign or familiar culture. It can be a professional pitfall for a scholar and indeed it has affected the neutrality of many them.

In this study the strategy was to generate the necessary detachment by producing a “temporal distance” between the actual fieldwork and the data gathering and the analysis of the data collected (Sanjek, 1991, p. 56). This was shown to be a simple and

¹¹⁰ The access to the first moment of the first level is out of the scope of the researcher. The closer to the origin (1st moment) the lesser one can know. The success in investigating reports, to produce a scholar work, is fundamentally based on the common level of the encounter and the examination that stems from this one and carries on through the last three moments. The result is sought to be a more comprehensive expression and knowledge of the subject (7th moment) or, the best possible *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (“correspondence of the intellect and the thing”) in relation to the thing understood as a stipulated subject matter. For Gadamer, proper understanding is not “a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in common meaning” (Gadamer 1998, p. 292). It is perhaps needless to say it again, but even if mild emotional influences in the researcher are operating in this process of generating the intersubjective-understanding and also if the historical consciousness of the researcher is at work, all this does not downplay the study of this kind, but it rather gives life to it.

¹¹¹ “...experience-near [concept] means that the ideas and the realities they disclose are naturally and indissolubly bound up together” (Geertz, 1975, p. 48)

¹¹² Clifford Geertz questioned this problematic (“What happens with *verstehen* when *empfinden* disappears?”). For more see Clifford Geertz, *On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding*, “American Scientist, 63; 1975, p. 47-53.

¹¹³ “Such roles help to ensure that the researcher is acquainted with a wider spectrum of a religious community, which is not so likely to be filtered through public relations staff” (Chryssides, 2013 p. 78)

efficient way to create enough space between the observation and the collection of data, and it allowed me the necessary perspective to locate the observer, myself, outside the emotional context. This strategy prevented a bias due to personal connections and involvement in the movement's routine (Preuss, J. S. p. xix). So the strategy of temporal distance between gathering data and analyzing it is an effective way of creating a perspective that can facilitate the scholar's neutrality, and it also moderates the empathy generated in the fieldwork process. Even if the study has some characteristics of a *reflective research* it poses similar challenge that can be addressed by making "the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (Novalis). In other words, to pose a critical distance where the insider-researcher must always consider that they "cannot assume that he or she has already possesses the needed explanations: at best only knows a part of one's tradition" (Chryssides, 2013 p. 83)¹¹⁴.

At any rate, the value of the fieldwork was that it permitted contact with the people deeming their experiences *in situ*. As Erik Sharpe showed, it is a necessary task to move the attention from the study of the idea (referred here as macro level) to the place where people are manifesting or trying to manifest them (the micro level). In his own words a scholarly study "can never replace contact, however brief, with the person or the persons they represent" (1986, p. 317)¹¹⁵.

The Choice of informants

The characteristics of the chosen group of 3HO members that are deemed as "Aquarian teachers" are here defined as those that have gone through a training process and are certified Kundalini Yoga teachers. I have further defined the group that matched the homogeneous criterion, so that all of them:

- have had a minimum of three years of experience as Kundalini Yoga teachers,
- participate regularly in the 3HO community life (in their local environment or the European Yoga Festival itself),
- engage with a personal daily practice and
- engage with at least a weekly sharing of the "Teaching of Yogi Bhanjan" and Kundalini Yoga classes.

Nationalities	Age range	Genders	Years of Experience	Status
2 Dutch (of which 2 live in another European country)				3 Kundalini Yoga teachers

¹¹⁴ This kind of research is known as 'reflective research' and "it is therefore important to researchers undertaking such study to declare their stance and discuss its bearings on their work" (Ibid, p 83)

¹¹⁵ In a similar perspective René Gothóni refers to what fieldwork can give us, since this type of research has proved to be, "The most rewarding scientific procedure for understanding "foreign" religious customs and traditions. It is not enough to study the "foreign" concepts and lexicon only. Field research provides insights into the language, culture and history of the phenomena, all of which are necessary parts of the whole" (Gothóni. 2005, p. 104).

2 Germans (of which 1 lives in another European country)	36-40= 1 41-45= 3	♂ = 5		(and) 3 Professional KY Trainers
2 British (1 living in Sweden)	46-50= 3 51-55= 2		-10 = 1 11-20 = 6 21-30 = 2	(and) 4 Lead Trainers
1 Italian	56-60= 1	♂ = 6	31-40 = 2	1 Advanced* Kundalini Yoga Teacher (*self- declared "advance")
1 Spanish	61-65= 1			
1 American (living in Spain) 1 Indian (living in UK) 1 Mexican (living in Italy)				

Table 19: The Profile of the Informants

The questions

The questions presented to these informants were designed to guide the interviews in accordance with the method developed within the field of qualitative research in psychology (specifically the method called *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, IPA, as understood by Jonathan Smith, 2008). The IPA strategy has served the purpose of this study because it allows a large degree of flexibility for the conversations and the potential to open up into novel areas. This type of interview has the advantage that it,

“facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a great flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data (Smith, 2008, p. 59)

The questions are mainly semi-structured for *guiding* the conversation with the informants as well as to produce the material to answer the second research question about the experience in 3HO: *How do 3HO members attribute the experiences they have?* In this research these questions assumed their final form after two rounds of fieldwork and were addressed to the informants during the fieldwork conducted in 2011. The questions were:

- What is the experience (in 3HO) all about in your opinion?
- Have you ever had an (unusual, inner, sensory) experience?
- Which has been the most significant? When, where, and in what conditions?
- How did you feel? What did you see or hear?
- Please explain, describe it further.

- Do you think you can categorize it? How would you categorize it?
- How do these experience(s) relate to the frame of thought of Yogi Bhanjan?
- Why do you think it (or they) occurred?

The questions are not to cover all 3HO life, membership, ideology and institutions; they rather strive to catch and therefore concentrate on the deeming making process of the experienced practitioner teachers. Similarly, any other random choice of informants would have not ensured the minimum required experience (of the informants), and any wider frame of questions would not have served the particular research questions (of this study).

13. *Methods of Examination*

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis contributes to the analysis as a preliminary and ancillary approach inasmuch as the handling of the data allows the deeming making process to be pulled through a mechanism of analogical argumentation similar to a “free textual analysis” (Smith, 2008, p. 67). The analogical argumentation is a way to refer to a particular ascription or attribution, situating it as an expression that can be seen analogically in relation to other phenomena deemed religious or spiritual. Analogies can be understood as a way to recognise “family resemblances” amongst different phenomena deemed religious or spiritual in consonance with the characteristics of the comparative vocation of Religious Studies (see Gothóni, 1999, p. 17-30). On its own, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as understood by Jonathan Smith (2008) studies,

“the meanings [that] particular experiences, events, states hold for participants... it is concerned with individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce and objective statement of the object or event itself” (p.53).

The IPA provides a strategy to approach the data with a systematic look at most of the simple attributions that have been made. This is how one can identify the themes put forward by each person interviewed. It should be noted that IPA studies were originally conducted in small sample sizes. For this reason the detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts takes a long time to break down, and the aim of the study is to say something about the perceptions and understanding of these particular individuals from the group chosen rather than prematurely make more general claims (Smith 2008, p. 55). In that sense the production of inductive argumentation can provide regularities and point at generalization that is assumed by the approach of the attributional method. In the field of *purely* IPA researchers, they usually try to use a fairly homogeneous sample in which, for example, IPA studies have been published with small samples of one, four, nine, fifteen or more cases. In recent times the IPA approach has evolved so that five or six interviews has often been the most recommended number of informants to have for a reasonable sample size (p. 56).

The Attributional Approach was first enunciated within the field of Psychology of Religion by Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick (1985). A more recent perspective on the attributional theory was presented by Ann Taves (2009), who developed an “updated attribution approach ... as a means of illustrating what can be gleaned from historical documents”, within which the data, i.e. the experiences reported, play the role of post-hoc material (A. Taves, 2009, p. 94-97). In this sense the processing of the material collected through the interviews is a sequential approach commencing with a *descriptive presentation* by providing an elaborated five-fold scheme that identifies the main aspects of the experiences reported. Five levels are to consider are:

1. Event characteristic
2. Event context
3. Disposition of the attributor
4. Context of the attributor
5. Attributional conclusion

These five aspects are a more specific way “to brush” through the data in order to pick up the key aspects concerning the experiences reported in order to proceed to identify the attributions¹¹⁶. This is more specific than the IPA since the intent is not only to recognize simple attribution, as how IPA is applied here, but to engage the attributional structure in every report collected. Taves’s method renders it possible to let the informants make the attributions of their experiences. The *Sui Generis* perspective may presuppose that one already knows which experiences are religious or not. However, if one wants to conduct empirical research on the members of 3HO, the only way to incorporate the views of the informants is to let them describe their deeming process themselves.

At any rate, this approach to the material also gives the scholar a way to describe and ascribe an experiential process, considering these five marks which are presented within the continuum of the personal deeming making process that an informant discloses to another individual in an original fashion or in connection to a known explanatory referential frame. It is worth addressing if the attributions and ascriptions of the experiencer are incorrigible. The approach of Taves’s method comes from social psychology and in Attribution Theory psychologists simply want to understand what is going on in a person’s head: what are his or her attributions or ascriptions. Therefore we cannot question the believer’s choice of attributions. If the account of the experiencer deems something as “good” or “bad”, beautiful” or “ugly”, “spiritual” or “religious”, “real” or “illusory” , etc, there is no correction of that account that the scholar can produce. The references to the object of experiences are subjected to a deeming process and this is the exclusive domain of the *first attributor*. As Chrystides pointed out, the “believer’s explanations have privileged status above those of the outsider” (2013, p. 168). Despite this fact, as W. T. Stace wrote, the “mystic” or the one with a “sense experience” and someone else who wants to understand the experience

¹¹⁶ In Finnish scholarship within Comparative Religions this method is sometimes associated with what is referred as a “haravametoodi” or ‘the method of the brush’, but a higher level of theory and deeper level of grouping themes is used in the attributional approach.

are both interpreting, and in both cases, the interpretation is “liable to be mistaken” (1960, p. 32). However, the corrigibility of the believer’s account deflects from the focus of this study. In this study I consider that the accounts of the experiencers are not necessarily corrigible, but they can be made more intelligible and enriched by classificatory concepts, cultural associations or logical inferences. The scholars’ explanations are in most of the cases the ones that not only can be improved, but also corrected. This is understood in terms of Ann Taves as the,

“Experiences that scholars of religion might view as mystic or ecstasy or prophecy might be viewed as shamanism or spirit possession by anthropologist and as symptoms of hysteria or dissociative disorders by psychiatrist ... if we use such terms unreflectively, we may inadvertently reproduce long-standing historical controversies at an academic level (2009, p. 124-125)¹¹⁷

* * *

Despite the value of the Attributional Analysis and the ancillary method strategy of IPA, it is necessary to say how they have complemented each other in practice. The basic structure of this approach to the data works as follows:

The first stage of the IPA’s strategy was arranged into three columns: a) the central column is where one places the transcription of the interview itself, as it happened, b) the left-hand column is used to annotate what is significant and interesting and c) the last column, on the right, is a further expression of how the significant and interesting subjects of the left-hand column become “document emerging themes”. In this right-hand column the themes were decanted and shown by the scholar as a more inter-subjective attribution. In other words, the initial notes coming from the left column were transformed onto a higher level of abstraction that is equivalent to the “explanatory task” of the attributional theory, which “attempts to explain when and why people explain an event” (Taves, 2009, p. 99). It is worth mentioning that the IPA approach to the material is similar to a “free textual analysis” (Smith, 2008, p. 67), which is a valid way to see and identify attributions through analogical argumentation. The approach to IPA strategy was grounded on attributional notions in the sense that allowed me to be able to be “more sensitive to experiences that are genuinely creative and generate new insights and, in some cases, entirely new meaning systems (Taves, p. 99). The fusion finally came about when these “emerging themes” were combined with the five levels that concern the attributional structure of the reports. The five aspects of the attributional approach (event characteristic, event context, disposition of the attributor, context of the attributor and attributional conclusion) were extracted and explained along with the IPA’s “emerging themes” in order to provide a higher level of rationale that could serve as a basis for an etic presentation (or scholarly attributional account) endowed with a higher level of elaboration in relation to the stipulated

¹¹⁷ Taves furthers adds that “often there is a no ready-made concept that works for all ... In such cases we can use extended descriptive statements instead” (Taves 2009, p. 126).

problem that, in turn, provided the perspective for an increase in inter-subjective understanding.

14. The Deeming of Experiences

Case 1, Sigrid¹¹⁸

Sigrid is a woman, 47 years old, living in Berlin and married to a Kundalini Yoga teacher. They have a daughter who was born in 2004. She has a master's degree in Language and Philosophy. She started Kundalini Yoga in 1987 and already at the end of 1980s began to attend the European Yoga Festival. In 1991 she became a certified Kundalini Yoga teacher. She is currently at the top of the teaching status as she is a Lead Trainer in Kundalini Yoga (Level 1 and 2), which allows her to set up a team of Trainers and to launch a Teacher Trainer course in Kundalini Yoga in both levels.

Attributional approach to Sigrid's experiences:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
- "feeling that in the aura there was some kind of sparkling or some specific light or some electricity that it was very intense...", "... the feeling of that is how we ought to be" - "I experienced a very beautiful state ... the situation was such that I could hardly read the letters because the light is too extreme. I really had to concentrate and in spite of the light be able to read what it was"	- "But then there are other meditations, especially with White Tantric Yoga I have had very, very interesting experiences" - "I have had similar experiences using the Siri Guru Granth"	- "Sometimes there would come, during the meditation and you could never predict when that moment was" - "If we are Sikhs we want to reach a state which we don't want to separate, where we feel one with God and if we do White Tantric Yoga we want to use this polarity to overcome the polarity so it is all, it has all the same direction and so I can't say that the state comes from something, general in both experiences: I am a very analytical person, very mental, I have studied and structured (sic), so usually my brain is governing my life."	- "I was meditating with my husband in the White Tantric Yoga" - "Like when I practiced Akand Pad, when I participated in Akhand Pad for example ... reading of the Gurbani"	- "The normal state is a state of complete awareness, of non-identification, I mean not identifying with anything and state of light and state of being connected with the light of the other person. A state of feeling limitless within myself ... just the real state of completeness" - "It is a state where I felt that differentiation between self and not self would not make any sense anymore ... I experienced the reality"

¹¹⁸ The names presented in each case study are pseudonyms.

written there. So the state is like, again, very aware, limitless state, elevated state.”		And that is the moment when there is not brain, there is no thought, there is no mind, there is no limitation of experience”		everything as it is” - “So it is the normal state... a state of expanded and, and unlimited consciousness ”
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Theme 1: The Ego. To begin with, for this woman the experiential dimension was a determining factor to “stay with Kundalini yoga” as she said. It can be said that her experiences were part of the causal elements to affiliate with 3HO. The rationality behind her decision is expressed in that the experiential events she has had in 3HO have produced deep impressions “for the ego” as she put it. She has felt an overwhelming impact from her experiences which have defined her previous views and her common understanding of things especially in regards to her “ego”. By “ego” she seemed to imply the formula deemed in the teachings of Yogi Bhajan and understood as the “sum of all the identifications of the mind”. In other words her mind, and all she used to relate from her psychology, was changed by her experiences. She said,

“...in both experiences: I am a very analytical person, very mental, I have studied and structurized (sic), so usually my brain is governing my life. And that is the moment when there is not brain, there is no thought, there is no mind, there is no limitation of experience”

That could be the reason why, for her, on a mental level the experiences presented a new perspective where “no ego” is associated with “no brain”, “no thought” and “no mind” as a sum of mental elements put together, as in Yogi Bhajan’s definition of “ego”. Taken as Yogi Bhajan defined it, she is identifying and developing the idea of ego as a mental construction (“structurized”, sic) that the person herself identifies with. She felt that her experiences had made her change her position in relation to the world, and she linked this to Yogi Bhajan’s idea of ego as she had come to an attributional conclusion through an experience that “The normal state is a state of complete awareness, of *non-identification*” (my italics). As she felt this happening she collected familiar terms and notions and deemed them in relation to *the teachings* of 3HO. The fundamental level she is referring to is the mental level which the experiences had an effect on. I could argue that for her the experiential events affected ‘her ego’ because, as she said, they brought her to a point of “non-identification, I mean not identifying with anything”. In this sense I can understand that she deemed the experience with a background idea that supported the possibility of a total disengagement from “ego”. What she considered an experience of “non-identification” allowed her to reach and state what she ascribed as “a state of feeling limitless within myself ... just the real state of completeness”. The conditions implicit in her description show that for a moment there was no “brain, there is no thought, there is no mind, there is no limitation of experience” and that as an experience it made her “ego” identify reality not with the usual objects she had around but with those that, at the moment of the experience, impressed the ego and established a new concept of the reality based on a state she deemed as

normal: "So it is the normal state... a state of expanded and, and unlimited consciousness"

Theme 2: Brain Changes. What she deemed the most concrete explanation for the changes in her was that "meditation somehow changed my brain". Her attribution gave meditation the causal force behind the concrete or tangible changes that happened in her "brain". In this approach she ascribes a transformative physiological event to the practice of meditation she had learnt from Yogi Bhajan.

This way of deeming the experience of meditation and its effects recalls not only the idea of change through practice but also the view of "transformation" through Kundalini yoga that Yogi Bhajan prescribed. The movement from some human conditions through a behavioural event where she said "... I experienced the reality everything as it is" giving us a hint of why the change in the brain happened. As an organ of cognitive and intellectual capacities, it was chosen as an image that explained the *reality of the experience* that she recalled.

This is very much in tune with the 3HO narrative that relates changes and experiential events in the state of mind, consciousness and perception to bodily parts, making it sound less mystical and more medical or scientific. In other words, in her experience with meditation she attested that the part of her that changed after it was specifically situated in the brain. She did not speak of it as a conversion of faith or a sort of "illumination", although the experience itself was associated with light, as a "state of light and state of being connected with the light of the other person". The physical level was the key point chosen as an explanatory base regarding the changes she described to understand the nature of the changes that happened to her.

Theme 3: From inexplicable to normal state. Along with the previous theme, in her process of deeming her experiences she approached a singular event that she went through in the White Tantric Yoga workshop in the Yoga Festival at the end of the 1980s-beginning of 1990s. This experience was something that she "could never predict", although she had been "on the path" for a few years. In other words, the implication of a degree of what could have happened was reasonable, given that she had been on "the path" already for some years, but nothing could have anticipated this event. In other words she is saying that she heard of something like this in 3HO or Yogi Bhajan or/and she experienced something that defied her previous understanding. Even if there was some expectation or even previous knowledge about what can be experienced with these methods and her knowledge of the teaching of Yogi Bhajan, she did not predict she was going to face an experience that took her by surprise. But what was that experience? "I can't even explain", she said as an almost automatic response that challenged her linguistic ability to convey ("*explain*") her experience. At this moment something about the experiences escaped her previous consideration and knowledge to explain it and the way to deem it became the ineffable argumentative choice. One can say that the experiential unit not only had some suddenness and spontaneity but also some originality in it. In attribution theory we call and consider this too an "Originary Event". However inexplicable it was for her, she went on to say that she had

a sensory experience of seeing and feeling “sparks, light, electricity”, although she could not provide a clear definition of the space where she saw/felt these things since they were “here or there, something like that”. This first expression of the experience gives another hint about the understanding of what she went through, and she ascribes to it a sort of energetic content that involved her organs of perception – eyes specifically. Secondly, the reference to the spatial indetermination when trying to provide the place or location reflects that on some level her sense of orientation was weakened or impaired, not in relation to this singular perception but to the perception of her environmental situation. It can be noticed that, according to her, she had an awareness of herself and the place where she was; she was not lost at all, as she indicated. But what can be fruitful to consider, in order to understand the theme, is concerned with what she ascribed as the effect. She said that the experience produced an immediate reaction: “happiness”. How could an unexpected experience like this bring the person to an immediate emotion that for her was undoubtedly “happiness”? One has to consider that in her elaboration of the event’s effect, she estimated that to arrive at this “happiness” was possible as she deemed the outcome as “the normal state”.

In order for one to understand this state it is convenient go back to the lexicon of 3HO, “healthy, happy and holy”. These three elements are part of the life experience depicted in the worldview of Yogi Bhanjan for his students and community, so the practice and experience will most likely never produce an ascription of “I have been saved” as a Pentecostal could report as an effect of his religious experience. It would also be rare to hear a Pentecostal or 3HO member saying “I reached the nothingness/emptiness of nirvana”, the same way it would be probably rare to hear a Buddhist monk to say “I felt happy and saved” after reaching an experiential event like *nirvana*. It is therefore natural to find that in this case, in the intra-cultural precepts of 3HO she almost automatically found a matching term that fitted her feeling, while at the same time one can presume the presence of a semi or unconscious (unintentional) choice of words that expressed this event in terms cognate with the organization’s name. In this sense the term “happiness” is a leading term in 3HO and the members of the organization would naturally have it close to hand. For Sigrid the denomination of 3HO helped her to voice the feeling *about* something experienced that was at first unexpected and “hard to explain”.

Themes 4: State of awareness. The other aspect and characteristic of the experience that she spoke about was “awareness”. This ascription led her to say that no mental limitation can be derived from the experience of “reality as it is”. But what is more substantial is the defining factor that is present in both her deeming making process of the experience as well as in the worldview she recalls, and this is “awareness”. In the teachings of Yogi Bhanjan, awareness or *consciousness* is indeed a major subject. For Yogi Bhanjan Kundalini Yoga is, as it can be seen in all standard definitions of the 3HO yoga teachers, the “Yoga of awareness”. He often used the word “awareness” interchangeably with the term “consciousness”; as I also mentioned in the yoga section the same term of *consciousness* or *awareness* is used by Yogi Bhanjan to convey one of the main effects and purposes of both White Tantric Yoga and Kundalini Yoga. One must remember that the experience that this informant spoke about

occurred when she practiced White Tantric Yoga and as it was presented in the previous chapter, White Tantric Yoga is, according to Yogi Bhajan, “to purify the subconsciousness”. In her words, this experience attributed to the White Tantric Yoga brought her to “the normal state [that] is a state of complete awareness”. In this other context she expresses this technique, deeming it in a total alignment with the vocabulary of the teachings of Yogi Bhajan. That is why it would be a mistake, for example, to pair this *consciousness* with the “Pure Consciousness Experience” (PCE) or consciousness without object as described by Forman (see Part I previous research on Religious Experience). The consciousness referred to by this interviewee is deemed as *having* an object that allows her to experience a “state of completeness”. As the subject of her own experience the object is *something* that brings about a “state of completeness”. The implication is that she probably saw herself self-reflectively as an incomplete being and then through the prescribed technique of White Tantric Yoga she felt in a “state of completeness”, and in doing so she gained the “awareness” of “reality as it is”.

I will briefly stay with this issue and recap: the informant moved from the statement that she did not have the words to explain these experiences to venturing to describe them in simple words as a perception of “sparks, light, electricity” producing a feeling of “happiness” intimately related to the “consciousness of reality”. This apparently came to fill a sense of lack as she ascribed it as producing a “state of completeness”. One could argue that this experience moved her to see and feel something that she considered a fundamental part of reality – whatever that is – *a thing* that she was not having in her normal life. The event was attributed as having a positive emotional effect (happiness), and then when she saw it from a more distant point (the time of the interview with me) that state does not provide “happiness” anymore, but a new feeling: “longing”. This is how the originary event becomes an experiential goal and the techniques that helped the person arrive there, the tools, are deemed efficacious. She then reflected that there is a “longing to reach that state again”. That state in which she felt complete was for her more real than the state she normally lives in. Thus the longing for that state is a longing for a reality that is more real than the daily experiences of her life. Further reflections about her experience left her in the paradoxical mood of having achieved reality/completeness, but then this was followed by the subsequent loss and therefore longing for what she had achieved. This suggests that one can understand her experience as an encounter with *something* in her that made her feel complete and happy; this part, as she verbalized it, is an awareness that she further refers to as a state of “unionness” (sic). This led her to say that this “unionness” (sic) is the common thing of various paths. In simple words, she felt united and that introduced other elements in her ascription to the experience: this idea of unity resembles the idea of Yoga (unity), the Sikh Religion and New Age thought. At this state of the narration she directed her focus to her *spiritual path* and the Sikh sacred literature¹¹⁹, about which she commented that “the reading of Gurbani” is not only a “beautiful experience” but, in a similar fashion as the first experience in White Tantric Yoga, it is also an “experience of light”. She said about reading from this Sacred text of the Sikhs that “the light is too extreme”, and that

¹¹⁹ This is indeed the first principle of the Sikh faith as it comes in the written work of Guru Nanak: ੴ (IkOm Kar, “One God, One creation”), the beginning of the Sikh scripture.

when this experience happened she was reading this text and she felt, “again very aware, limitless and elevated”. This light was in her view a permanent light because she attested that “... it is there anyways”. The “unity” or “sameness” of the experiential event she deemed in reading from the Sikh Scripture was presented in a similar fashion as the experience of White Tantric Yoga. In the next lines this will be explored further.

Theme 5: No mind and beyond. These two events provide a key notion to understand her deeming of the experience; the fact that something is there, but it cannot be seen or reached in a “normal” state, which is finally deemed by her not as the normal state. Let me offer a mundane and hypothetical example that helps the reader to understand this informant’s description. If there is a young first-time mother who has a full-time job and cannot enjoy the presence of her young son (who is in the nursery two blocks away from where she works) the distance will produce a similar interplay of feelings and explanations. Why so? If the hypothetical mother (as the informant) is in the same neighborhood (“it is there anyways”) and they have an existence that is interrelated on a daily basis, then when it is inactive (because of the distance between his nursery and her work, or the daily routine in the case of the informant) it might make the mother feel incomplete and emotionally in need of the son’s presence. Similarly, for this interviewee, when the light, i.e. “the reality” that “is there anyways” is not seen, it makes her experience an emotional state: in this case a feeling of incompleteness. Whether the faith in that “light” as the normal “reality” is due to her religious education or personal experience, I cannot say. What I can say is that her explanation of the experience attributed the causal link to the practice of reading from the Sikh text as well as the practice in White Tantric Yoga or meditation. For both of these practices the association of her thought about being “brainless”, with “no thought”, with “no mind”, and with “no limitation” was the same. She attributed to these two events, both of them deemed consequences of these two different practices, the qualities of “full experience” and an “experience of totality.”

This reference suggests that she was in a state of perception where there was a sort of absence of the mind in its common active operation, eventually missing an overflow of thoughts or/and tasks. This can explain her loss of spatial orientation as her perception or cognition too found itself to be somewhere else. This decrease in spatial awareness led her to a kind of consciousness or increase in awareness regarding what she deemed a *full or total* experience, which otherwise *with* the same state of mind would not have been possible. Here it is possible to find, again, an interesting pattern in her narration of the experience: the mind. The mind is seen as a thing that limits the experience, so when her mind was somehow *removed or shifted*, the “light”, the “reality”, what is “always there anyways”, became somewhat *evident*.

Theme 6: Longing. Let me look at this aspect a bit more: the effect in her life is that ever since this experience happened she felt the “longing to experience it again”. In her own words it was “one kind of inspiration” and “a reason to continue” that redirects her to look for it again. This statement in itself would explain why the experience became an aspiration and reason to engage in and maintain the journey within 3HO. The reasons which she gives for feeling “inspired” and for “continuing”

(with her path) can be located along with her experience, which provides the evidence of something essentially important in her mind: this is, the “reality”, the “light”, the “consciousness” (paradoxically) with “no mind”, “no thought”, “no limits”, and all that together produced “happiness”... The experience of these events worked as a sort of evidence to live her life in 3HO and that certainly made her “stay in Kundalini yoga”, as she attested. It furthermore gives her the strength to commit to the world because achieving these experiences and making others achieve these same or similar kinds of states “makes a difference ... to make this a better world” as she commented. The personal experience of this state has become more than an aim that was registered in her memory about the *thing* she deemed as “reality”, which gave her “happiness”, etc. What I can also say is that her personal experiences with the prescribed practices gave her enough motivation to believe and engage in them (“stay in Kundalini yoga”) and in a collective endeavor of the movement. These experiences can also be understood as the kind of justification that she needed in order to maintain the prescribed exercises of 3HO and “to stick with the practice” as she thought, because in this system she has found the tools that trigger these personal experiences and consequent “states of consciousness”. For her both the system(s) and the experiences are shareable and transferable to others and she as Yogi Bhajan and 3HO members believe in them to be efficacious. All of a sudden the “unpredicted” experiences that happened to her turned out to be uncontested evidence regarding the predictability of how these can be passed forward, and that engaging in this “mission” of teaching can again make her and others experience these states in the future.

Case 2, Javier:

Javier is a Spanish man, 41 years old, with over 18 years practicing Kundalini Yoga. He is originally from Valencia but most of his life he has lived in Madrid, and in the past few years he lives near Toledo. His family is catholic, but he chose the life of 3HO and from 2011 the Sikh faith. He married in 1990 and his wife is also a Kundalini Yoga teacher. They do not have children. He is self-educated in the field of Computer Informatics and has worked in that field for decades. He is also an inventor. In 1992 he began to teach Kundalini Yoga. He is also a Professional Trainer in Kundalini Yoga (stepping into the next and last stage of level 1 Trainers, the Lead Trainer).

Attributional approach to Javier’s experiences:

1. Event characteristic:	2. Event context:	3. Disposition of the attributor:	4. Context of the attributor:	5. Attributional conclusion:
“I feel like lights opening inside of me. So it is like when you are looking in a train or in a car or you are	“... just a regular-deep meditation , I experience sensations	“... This object is God. So any experience is just a reflection of God ... For me living is to realize that we	“sometimes you just don’t put attention to that, you just keep meditating	“I understand experience is to have an impression of the reality, but usually – often- we talk in the world of yoga of experience as having

<p>travelling and you are passing a curve or passing a hill, the sun is reaching you and your vision: you are with the eyes close and you know that the sun is reaching you". "I experienced that I was been connected to several different channels and finally to one big, huge channel that is the Guru, in fact, but the... I really feel that it was a physical thing, like this channel were or are like rivers and we are like inside these rivers and all these rivers were embodying in you, in this case in me in my life. the real life. This was what I was feeling... in the last step I felt that I was connected to all the Khalsas that had existed in any other times, the past... I was seeing all these channels of... It was like the candidates were like these light bulbs and they were plugging wires and after that letting the</p>	<p>and, not feelings, but it is more like physical sensations " "for me the greater experience I have had it was just 2 days before [ago] when I took Amrit, in the Sikh life style, the Khalsa votes are like confirmati on ... I was with the eyes open. You know the ceremony runs one by one of the candidates and I was not the last one, but one before the last. So I was seeing everything, the <i>Panj Piare</i> as we call them, that are the five persons that are representi ng the lineage and they are challengin g the</p>	<p>are living in a world that is just a reflection of his Creator ... you must live here, but having the Infinite, and God and the Guru as a guide for living here in this world" "...you realize that the relation between you and the world comes through the Guru ... it was awesome, especially because I have always considered that initiations are just a mind thing only a mental thing, but for me this was absolutely real and absolutely not physical, but ehhh it was physical of course, what I mean it was existing it was REAL in capital letters you know... I was living as a Sikh mostly eighteen years, seventeen or eighteen years, and I was not afraid of having this experience and I was not hurried at all, so I think I was thinking that nothing was going to happen, but surprisingly it was a real thing so this absolutely real and absolutely not physical, but ehhh it was physical of course, what I mean it was existing it was REAL in capital letters you know... I was living as a Sikh mostly eighteen years, seventeen or eighteen years, and I was not afraid of having this experience and I was not hurried at all, so I think I was thinking that nothing was going to happen, but surprisingly it was a real thing so this</p>	<p>as a mind training or sometimes you fall in love with this experiences and maybe you can get unfocused of [from] your mediation" "I was not afraid of having this experience and I was not hurried at all, so I think I was thinking that nothing was going to happen, but surprisingly it was a real thing so this experience changed me... I was with the eyes open. You know the ceremony runs one by one of the candidates and I was not the last one, but one before the last. So I was seeing everything, the <i>Panj Piare</i> as we call them, that are the five persons that are representing the lineage and they are challenging</p>	<p>an unusual or having a different impression or feeling, that something different is happening to you, and in some manner I think that it is like very related to the expression "I realize". "... when you experience something you are not only having an impression but being conscious of the meaning of that impression" "... when this happens to me I know I am reaching the basic level of my meditation so if I continue I am going to have a deeper experience, and probably any kind of expansion ... Living as a Khalsa means that you are a pure being, you have no sex, nothing in the sexual... you know I am a male, but nothing... we have no differences between women and men and we are pure beings living in our best conscious and our higher... conscious. So for me it was to realize that that commitment to the Guru is real and it is guiding me in some and the feeling that I am really living as a pure being –nothing to do with the puritan thinking- but pure as God is within me and this is the mantras that Yogi Bhajan uses a lot of times ... I am realizing that, yeah, it is true. It is a real truth"</p>
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energy flow into this new bulb connecting to a... (framework)"	candidates "	experience changed me"	the candidates".	
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Theme 1: Reality, the expansion of knowledge and meaning. For this man deeming his experience was rather simple as he did not consider them indescribable. For him, in principle, an experience was an "impression of reality", as he attested without doubts. His view of experience has an object that is 'reality'. In his own understanding, his experience is the experience of "I realize" (the reality), ascribing to it the quality of "consciousness" as the main characteristic of the subject experience. The defining main character of "having an experience", for him, is the awareness *within* which the experiential event happens. His position could be parallel to the traditional view of mysticism by classical scholars like Underhill or James in which a "noetic" quality play a role. In the way that Javier deemed his experience he explained that it allowed him to "integrate meaning to become greater" knowledge (or increased knowledge). In other words, one could arguably understand this idea of experience as a process of semiotic development that expanded the worldview of this informant, the one who "has an impression of reality" in which the object through the experience produces insight. In this process he gives a hint about a sequence that is underlying his statement which starts with the impression that leads to consciousness that later arrives at meaning. Based on his point of view, it can be said that everything that happens to him as an experience has the potential to become meaningful for his existence since it deals with reality. In his description an experience is a way to gain an "expansion" of (one's) universe, which is driven by an intention and that has the ascription of being "meaningful". When I look into his ideas of experience, I see that he depicted five steps worth to present further.

Theme 2: Stages of Meditation. Javier deemed five stages of meditation that often happen to him as an experiential continuum; these are:

1. "Focus on..."
2. Go beyond "the threshold"
3. The experience developing his personal "referential frame" outside its own known "frame" (limits)
4. The experience forces his intellect in relation to a current "referential frame", the reason that "you need to re-dimension the frame"
5. Then "consciousness becomes greater" in relation to "abstract, higher concepts" of *the* "reality" experienced

In the first moment he is deeming the experience of meditation in relation to the willingness to set an intention *to focus*. He has an intentionality, which I refer to as the *disposition of the attributor*. There is something he looks for (which is in the last stage referred as "abstract, higher concepts" of reality). One can say that in his ascriptions the idea of "having an experience" cannot really provide a meaningful aim unless there is such a disposition he called "focus", but then the disposition is to experience events

that are deemed to be beyond his current “frame of reference”. Such a frame is possibly the worldview and philosophical position from which he sees life and the world, including ordinary concepts, perceptions or more elaborated mundane or philosophical positions. This raises a question: why, if the implications of the experiences he has in mind will somewhat contradict his personal views, does he want to engage in types of experiences (or focus on something like this) that will sooner or later force him to reassess his own “frame”, understood as his worldview? Why is this beyond-ness of the experience that violates his pre-existing worldview explored? He suggested that the “re-dimensioning” is the assessment he applies, and explained it as a natural stage in the outcome of the experience of meditation. In fact, when he “goes beyond” he has the critical task of integrating or rejecting the experiences he has had, but he seems to have the disposition to take different events and integrate them. When an experience is integrated it produces what he deemed as “growth” in the worldview he believes in. He attributes to the experience a stimulating agent in his process of growing. This, Javier believes, is a chance to gain (“expand”) consciousness so that his “consciousness becomes greater”, or in simple terms he learns something new in relation to the “abstract, higher concepts” he is expecting to find through experience. It seems possible that this general view of experience is contextually based on 3HO’s philosophical stand. There is a positive pre-understanding of the experiential which in this informant matches with Yogi Bajan’s teachings and key subject of “consciousness” and its “expansion”. The value of his explanation is that he provided a simple and at the same time spontaneous view of how the experience of meditation works *gradually* in him, adding flavour to what is to be understood in meditation practice according to the teachings of the founder of 3HO.

Theme 3: Sense and beyond. His relation to the object of the experiential is not based on one level of reality alone, but it has a link to the “multidimensionality of reality”, as he deemed one of its characteristics. What he seemed to suggest is that the human capacity is somehow capable of experiencing reality on different levels, beyond, eventually, sensory organs and physical perceptions. This way of attributing the “multidimensional” quality of the experience is in some ways tributary of the teachings of Yogi Bajan. But how is this connection made? What are these “higher concepts” or “abstract objects” that he spoke about? His answer was direct and simple: “God”. For him, he added, the “world [is a] reflection of the Creator”. This seemingly theological/metaphysical way to deem all reality reveals a theocentric stripe, suggesting connection to his background as a Spaniard born and raised within a prevalent Catholic culture as well as someone who is newly involved with the Sikh-like and New Age concepts of God in 3HO. The experience of “reality” and “higher or abstract concepts” are ascribed qualities that suggest meanings that relate to something equal in substance to “God” as it is deemed in Christianity. So, in other words, the “impression of reality” or experiences he speaks of are events that, in fact, give the impression that the expansion of his consciousness is sought in order to “... try to open your comprehension and understanding ... to be closer to God” he affirmed.

This suggests that in this somewhat theocentric narrative, the supposed *closure* or *openness* of a person in relation to the object (“God”, “Reality”) and the disposition of

the attributor (“focus”) will define his or her proximity or distance to the object. In other words, to be closer to God is for him something that happens “in this world”, therefore I can say that it is a matter of life and not death (compared to the Christian notion of salvation) what motivates the advancement in his journey. This affirmation regarding the attitude (“openness”) and location (“in this world”) are significant for understanding how the deeming of these experiences gained shape. For understanding the category of attitude (or *disposition of the attributor*) the “openness” is an essential key. What his suggestion seems to have implied can be exemplified with an ordinary feeling: hunger. If someone is hungry and he is in a supermarket looking for food his sense and mind will be very sharp and *open* to notice the food, but if another person is in the same supermarket, and is not looking for food but detergent, will he notice the food compared to the products that he is really looking for? Or will he rather pass by the other sections to reach the searched section of the market? So the attitude (hunger) of the first man will possibly create a stronger drive towards food while the second man will be driven towards something else. What Javier speaks of as “openness” is an internal condition related to the object (God) that not only directs (as a disposition of the attributor) but also allows the experience of something that is out there “in the world” (as the conceived context of the attributor), to be noticed and eventually found and understood. The disposition towards something and the relationship to experience it is pre-established as *special*, and once it occurs it confirms or adds more to his conviction that “God” is to be experienced “in the world”. The interviewee had suggested that the experience can always bring forward a new perspective to the pre-established “frame” which, according to him, will not dismiss it – the experience of this *object* will “re-dimension it” (the “frame”). What would this imply?

Theme 4: Passing the known frame and re-shaping it. As the interview proceeded, some singular concrete events and experiences were introduced to illustrate his view and why he deemed experience in this way. One seemingly recurrent experience that was significant for him happened while practicing “regular-deep meditation” which produced an experience “like lights opening inside of me”. If one bears in mind that meditation is a deliberate action with a clear intention, one can also see that in his speech the same primal attitude or disposition came up as the “openness” deemed earlier produced an “opening inside of me”, as he affirmed. By saying that “meditation” that begins with “focus” and then goes on to “pass the threshold” is directed at opening up to *beyond-of-frame experiences*; these experiences take place in-the-world and the disposition drives Javier towards experiencing “expanded consciousness” as “impressions” of “reality”, of “God”.

This brings about the fundamental post-experiential challenge: to “re-shape his frame”. This seems to be the main paradox in his narration, since on one hand the “world” that contains God, and on the other hand a frame that does not seem to contain it *at all* or at least not *enough*. These two poles of the event come together when the experience occurs. However, he conveys the message about these experiences as intrinsically personal and as part of the reality of the world as well: the “frame” is his property so to speak, one could argue, this frame seems to have a tendency to either outdate in time or contract itself back... Even experiencing God does not allow him to achieve freedom

from a “frame” as in the goal of liberation of the *yoga darshana* and the Sikh philosophy once God is realized. In other words, according to Javier, it can be deduced that *his* frame is always there and it always has to be expanded, again and again. That is probably why the attitude of “openness” is brought up by him. He mentioned later that the perception of light is not the end in itself and that “you can get unfocused [with it]”. It seems to be that in this “regular type” of meditation, as he deemed it, the internal experiences are only stages in which the attitude of internal openness is a key aspect *along with* “focus” (*focus while staying open*, I could say) that constructs Javier’s disposition and produces the experiential process, the expansion of the consciousness and the subsequent task of re-shaping his frame.

Theme 5: Sikh experience. As the narrative continues the interviewee introduces the religious element of the Sikh tradition to deem his own recent experience. During that Festival (2011), he went through the process of the Khalsa votes and the Sikh baptism, (known as *Amrit Sanskar*). He offered a detailed description of what was happening in this ceremony: the experience he deemed began with the sensation of being “connected to channels”, with “channels like rivers ... rivers embodied in you” to the final steps of the ceremony, in which he felt he was finally connected to “all the Khalsas [and the] Khalsas that are going to be”.

The Khalsa Sikh initiation was an experience in which he introduced references that blended aspects of the composite of 3HO. The overall tone of the conversation served him to connect his experience to further stages of development or realization in his life experience. He deemed the Khalsa Sikh initiation as a crucial experience of “connection”. He sees membership of the Khalsa as a timeless affiliation and as a form of communion with this type of Sikh membership. In other words the experience he referred to implies that there is a non-physical and non-temporal dimension that recalls the notions he previously shared (“multidimensionality”) in which not only the senses, but the *sense of being connected* is a key factor in participating in the process, and that is how he deemed his new link to the Khalsas. His description gets richer when he explains what these “channels” were, and the type of “connections”, deeming the event as if it was about “plugging wires ... [so that] energy flows into the new bulb” (his new status). It is perhaps needless to say that his background in informatics and as an inventor might be the reason for choosing such a way to deem the experience. However, the informant changed his pre-existing opinion about initiations (he reshaped his “frame” after this experience), he said first: “initiations are a mental thing” but then, considering his initiation, he concluded that “it was a real thing”. Therefore for him it was more than a mere formality, it was an experience of something “real”. It is worth noting that in the academia initiation has generally been understood as a *rite of passage* (coming from the Latin *initium*, meaning ‘entrance’ or ‘a going in’). However, for him, the whole experiential dimension is a road in which the events that happened are like gates that open up more “openness” towards God.

The fact is that for him the experience impacted his way of thinking about Sikh Khalsa initiation: “the experience changed me... God is within me... It is the real truth” (sic) he said. The initiation experience was like a testing criterion regarding his view of initiation

in general, so as it is common in rites of passage, this ceremony he went through made him feel like a new person. Disengagement from the previous status occurred and the event was deemed as an act of new “connections”, *supplying* the mind with new experiences of “abstract, higher concepts” that bring not only new but higher and deeper challenges to re-dimensioning his frame regarding his identity; after the initiation he sees himself as a “new bulb” that matches the quality of the new source of “energy”, the Khalsas, which he is a part of. The unpredicted characteristics of this experience, of which there was a theoretical pre-existing knowledge, changed his perception of what Sikhism was. What happened did not relate to the belief system he had in relation to Sikh mysticism or the initiation, but rather it resembles the terminology of his own occupations as well as yogis and new agers when they speak about the channels of energies or *nadis* (commonly compare to the meridians of the Chinese medicine), the flow of energy of the vital force (known as *prana*), and of course the cardinal 3HO/Yogi Bhajan notion of *expanded consciousness*.

Despite what has been said, for him, “becoming a Sikh expands your frame work further more than Kundalini Yoga”, because although “All of them are part of a sequence ... [Sikhism has a] “deeper relation with the abstract”. Becoming a Sikh was for him a continuation of the process of Kundalini Yoga. According to the informant the new element is that the Sikh Guru is a “postman delivering the truth and the bliss of God”, so becoming a Khalsa was for him the next step in his journey. When he was asked about the next or the ultimate step, he said: “You are God living here” and he attested that the Age of Aquarius is *that* “new framework”.

Theme 6: Development of awareness. In his reflection and attribution about the experience it is possible to see the recurrent development of “consciousness” of a member of 3HO. It is interesting to discover the role that the experiential dimension plays in “opening” the path, as well as the internal attitude or disposition of the contributor to move him forward in what implies an ascension in the journey to God (from “higher abstract concepts” which are “God” to the realization that “you are God living here”). At some point he seemed to engage with faith in the agency of the Sikh Guru to assist the path towards God. This attitude became stronger than the other attitudes, at least in the fresh experience of the Sikh baptism of this informant as a Khalsa: “we are pure beings living in our best conscious and our higher... conscious”; at that stage he inferred the next steps of the sequence, embracing a more New age one: the next step is deemed the realization of the divine self or divine being in the human. Addressed in the 3HO fashion, this is the contextual opportunity of the New Age to change the humanity’s frameworks. In the case of Javier it is possible to hear the idea that Sikhism still carries the same conception in which Kundalini Yoga is a primal stage in the *process*, where Sikhism provides the more advanced spiritual stage in the religious philosophy of the organization, while the New Age ideas provide the motivation to engage in the historical task that the group and the individuals of 3HO have to face in the future.

Case 3, Michael:

Michael is male, 54 years old. He was born in India and moved to live in the UK when he was in his twenties. He was born in a Sikh family and his religion is still Sikhism. He is single and works in the Security Check of the Heathrow Airport. He began to practice Kundalini yoga over 13 years ago, and for the last 11 years he has been a Kundalini Yoga teacher. He is not a trainer but he has taken part in the Level 2 Teacher Training and completed his studies of this level.

Attributional Approach to Michael's experiences:

1. Event characteristic:	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
<p>- "... do 'Breath of Fire' three minutes and the Kundalini Yoga works in three minutes and you do it three minutes and it will give you experience. What experience? Anything".</p> <p>- "Now diet has changed, with the diet, my weight has changed and my habits have changed and my everything has changed ... before I came to the teachings I was eighty kilos, now I am seventy four, seventy five (laughter), the weight has changed"</p>	<p>-"Yeah, yeah, it's nothing, you have to keep your sadhana, you have to keep your practice and that practice is going to bring you in balance"</p> <p>-"I was ... cutting my beard, eating meat, yes (laughter), in the morning I had to shave, now everything is there"</p> <p>-"Look, you will see here two thousand four hundred people... And we are living, for a week, in harmony. It is not experience, how you call it? You tell me".</p>	<p>-"Do the exercises, do the set; get the experience ... Either mantra, or the exercises; do it. Then you see 'oh my God', 'what thing... oh my God', what am I doing?' Yes".</p> <p>-"This is why you can't know this teaching, dharma can never be known and you try the whole world because you want to know and there anybody who wants to experience it".</p>	<p>"We were ending up every day in the pub, in the bar, before we came to the teachings. Yes. ... before I came to the teachings I was eighty kilos, now I am seventy four, seventy five (laughter)"</p>	<p>-"It is for the human conscious to develop... for the human conscious... it will create more awareness and self-conscious in you, that's why it has nothing to do with any country, any religion or any, anything else..."</p> <p>B. "Because of the experience I came to the teachings"</p> <p>- "These teachings bring everything in balance and when you not... when you keep the practice [it works]... Yes... Yes. These teachings will put you back to balance, not anybody else, you in balance. If you are overweight, keep the sadhana and you will come on the weight, if you are underweight then you will come to your weight"</p> <p>-"Kundalini Yoga will lead to that life, otherwise you will be hanging nowhere in between. That is a way of life that is not religion, that is a way of life, and that is a natural way of life, not cut the beard, for the men. Yes. It is a natural way of life, it has nothing to do with Sikhism. Yes".</p> <p>-"No, it is not a philosophy ... Don't come to Sikhism. Then go somewhere else, then you don't have to work hard"</p> <p>-"Look. It is already happening, already happening. You will get sick. Yes. You will day of a disease, here you will get the freedom when you are dying ... when you don't do anything it is guaranteed that you will get sick"</p>

				<p>“You intellectual people, intelligent people, PhD people will spoil everything; you want to give it a name (laughter)”.</p>
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Theme 1: Believing experience. The next interviewee raised a new dimension of the deeming process because for him it could be a challenge to “believe your own experience”. In this sense he raised the question about how the experience in itself can be taken as *something* real, but when it is associated (deemed) with something else it could become *hard to believe*. In his understanding to believe in something was not a problem in itself, but what was implicit in Michael’s view was that to believe that that *something* happened to him was the challenging part. For him the difficulty is that the experiences that he was thinking of were not to be conveyed to others and possibly he protected himself from the disbelief, misinterpretation or misunderstanding of others. This is apparently the reason that made his disclosure of some events during the interview difficult, such as the ones I stipulated for research purposes. During the interview his personal experiences turned to be a kind of taboo (not so when we were *off the record*), because what seemed to happen to him, his experiences, could have sounded unbelievable as he expressed. He was most likely thinking of the “outsider” *other* as a “skeptic” *other*. He argued that the “experience is not to preach but to teach”, somehow literally quoting Yogi Bhanan and giving the impression that the subjects of *belief* and *preacher* were interdependent and did not have anything in common with the subjects of *experience* and *teacher* in which he was standing. This was probably the background problem for Michael as he was invited to speak about something to someone who was a potential *disbeliever* and therefore it explains why he deemed the issue distinguishing the two different realms of action (preach and teach) and the challenge of *believing in experience*. This brought about some remarkable insights about the subject of “religious experience” as a Sui Generis phenomenon as understood in religious studies and here expressed by a 3HO Aquarian teacher. The difficult task of *believing in your own experience* was the starting point for him to discredit how someone else’s experience (his) can be the object by an outsider (me), creating difficulty in the flow of conversation and the roles and approaches that he deemed best to make sense of the subject of experience. I noted that he considered or imagined that I would not properly believe what he had to say and he was rather ready to teach me (to *give* me an experience as claimed in 3HO) instead of supporting an approach to experience that would engage either the field of belief or intellectual reflection. His position was the following;

“... do ‘Breath of Fire’, three minutes, and the Kundalini Yoga works in three minutes and you do it three minutes and it will give you experience. What experience? Anything”

Theme 2: “Do”. Evidently experience was for Michael not something that he felt comfortable talking about. For him experience was always deemed in a practical and prescriptive fashion. This is why “Breath of Fire” (a common type of breathing practice in Kundalini Yoga), as well as other techniques and the “life style” of 3HO, were the kind

of experiences he was willing to share and speak about. During the interview he centered his speech and approach on teaching me that the experiences are to be experienced while deeming the practices in 3HO as experiential events in themselves. For Michael the purpose of having experiences was to engage in the practice and not what the experiences intimately produced or are to him. His idea of practice and experience is consequential as he said “do” (the practice) and then “get” (the experience?). What can someone “get”? I asked him and his answer was: “You see... oh my God”. I would venture to say that in the deeming of what one can “get” in an experience, he was surely translating the expression of *spiritual fulfillment or bliss* associated with God in Sikh mysticism. In Sikhism, such an experience or encounter is referred to as “*Wahe Guru*”, and because this has no literal translation, the majority of times it is rendered as an expression of the encounter with the divine-lord-the-preceptor, as an event that implies and is regarded as ‘something’ *tremendum et fascinans* to use Ottonian terms. The Sikhi expression “*Wahe Guru*” can be associated with Michael’s expression of what a practitioner can get through doing the practice of Kundalini yoga: “Do” then “get” and then “You see ... oh my God” was his essential formulation. Did he mean that practice leads to an “experience” of God as it is understood in Sikhism? Is this implied? Is this the reason why it would be difficult to “believe” the experience? One, because is *God* the thing that is to be experienced? Two, because it is an event that enters the area of Sikh mysticism? Now I cannot refer to these issues, but, for Michael, he tried to avoid everything that reached the realm of belief and meaning making and instead redirected the attention to the practice and the *direct* experience one can *get* from it. Michael would say, “Do the exercises, do the set; get the experience ... Either mantra, or the exercises; do it. Then you see ‘oh my God’, ‘what thing... oh my God’...”

Theme 3: Teacher Teaching from Experience. Michael did not show himself very open to explain anything in particular about his experiences, but his way of expressing things reminded me of someone that has just tasted an exclusive fresh truffle from France and wants to keep the taste on his palate with no interruption from another sense and intentionally withdraw from the mind trying to describe it. When he referred to the “Breath of Fire” he was concerned about not sounding like he was preaching but teaching something that is meant to *feel special through* personal experience. He was again trying to *teach me* about it. In the continuation of our dialogue he seemed to assume that he had to embody the role of the teacher who wants the student to experience *something* himself and arrive at his own conclusion by his own means of experiencing it. Despite his reluctance to approach his experiences, he did mention something personal that resembled other approaches from other informants. For him, experience was crucial in his process within 3HO teaching: “because of the experience I came to the teachings” he stated. For him the experience came first, and then the teaching. However, in Michael the two seem to be intermingled as he added,

“Now diet has changed, with the diet, my weight has changed and my habits have changed and my everything has changed ... before I came to the teachings I was eighty kilos, now I am seventy four, seventy five (laughter), the weight has changed”

Theme 4: To experience the "General Human Consciousness". Another key factor that he shared is that experience is attributed the quality of *consciousness*. Experience is concerned with and about "the general human consciousness", he said. In so doing one finds that in his explanation the personal reason for affiliating is a combination of two elements such as "experience" and "teachings", and through this consequential combination he entered 3HO. The practicality of the experiential dimension led him to the whole body of theories known as the teachings, but as he explained, the purpose of the experiential dimension in the teachings is not only mere consciousness, but "general human consciousness". What would this mean? According to the worldview of Yogi Bhanan, addressing a human life means addressing the "human experience" and its growth (or expansion) and the awakening of consciousness. In Michael, consciousness also comes to a place one could consider "cardinal" because it is a core from which other things in 3HO practice and philosophy are articulated (like "experience" and the "teachings"). This would explain why the informant used the clause "general human consciousness" as a way to express the level of "awareness" in, perhaps, all human aspects. One can think that in this "general" sense of the human Michael might have in mind the idea of the three-fold denomination of the organization. The levels of the "general human" are most likely connected to its organic and physical aspects (with "health" as the goal), the emotional and psychological level (with "happiness" as the aim) and the spiritual and existential real (with "holy" as the purpose). The consciousness, in this general sense, must probably be developed on these three human levels, and this most likely holds an implicit relation between the words of this informant and the three aspects of 3HO: in order words, to "do" things to "get" a "healthy", "happy" and "holy" "human experience" in "consciousness". This way of understanding Michael's view about "general human consciousness" is appropriate as he attributed that the teaching and experiences "bring everything in balance". This "everything" is probably another way to deem the three qualities in 3HO's denomination. As observed, he mentioned "lifestyle" and "sadhana" as things that generate the experiences that promoted "balance" in him; this (general) effect can explain why, for him, the *teachings* and *experiences* are seen as prescriptive commodities to which is attributed the capacity to affect "everything", produce positive "change" and certainly bring "balance". These are the effects experienced and the reasons why *they gave* him a certainty to choose his way of living his own life. Michael's experiential process in 3HO had clear connotations with *personal transformation*, and he appeared to see, understand and convey that "sadhana", the/his spiritual practice, was the foundational discipline and experience which would provide the understanding I sought about experience. Michael insisted in prescribing this to me as a teacher would speak to a student who does not get it right. He commented,

"This is why you can't know this teaching, dharma can never be known and you try the whole world because you want to know and there is anybody who wants to experience it".

Theme 5: From Kundalini Yoga to Sikh. His interpretation of how the different elements combine in 3HO bear in mind the common notion it was presented before in other people. Although he deemed his path as one in which "Kundalini Yoga leads

towards Sikh Religion”, it must be acknowledged that he was born a Sikh and to be rigorous he came from the Sikhi environment, passing through a “wild” life (“We were ending up every day in the pub, in the bar”) to the practice of Kundalini yoga and from there to re-embrace the teaching and practice of Sikhism as understood in “Sikh Dharma”. However, as usual in 3HO, for him Sikhism was not seen as a belief, but rather something leading to “natural way of life”. It is worth saying that the view he expressed about this faith coming from India not only reflects the perspective of 3HO (“a way of life”), but also it seems to be independent from the cultural, social and religious context he was brought up in in India. The “religious” connotations and “religious” characteristic normally deemed in the Punjabi Sikhs were removed from his speech and *his* Sikhism was conveyed using 3HO’s terminology. What “natural” stands for is probably the human sphere of life and experience (rather than something reaching a supernatural sphere or a lifestyle that includes artificial substances). Indeed for this informant, this kind of enterprise was related to life in this world, and in one sense with *natural* experiences of this world rather than with a concern about life in another environment with unnatural or supernatural implications (a “bar” or a “religion”). In another sense his view of personal experiences is concerned with the techniques in Kundalini yoga and in this sense they apparently seem to have other qualities as he attributed they could be “hard to believe” (“You see... oh my God”). This is an idea relatively close to the ones known from the earlier times of 3HO with the notion of *liberation* as a phenomenon that would take place while one was still alive in the world. In other words, according to Michael, the different things that should naturally concern a person from waking up in the morning to going to bed in the evening are deemed part of the path of 3HO, and as teaching *given* by “nature”. The Sikhism that is attributed with these characteristics is actually cognate to 3HO’s path and practices. In the case of this man, an Indian man from Punjab who was born into a Sikh family, it shows the extent to which culturally diverse people who arrive in 3HO can learn, adapt and agree to relate and even practice and stand behind its philosophy.

Theme 6: Dharma, a game. When we ventured into this novel area of the Dharma and I asked about the objective of this lifestyle, he gave no aim or purpose for it. He deemed the process of following this way, the “Dharma”, as “a game”. He considered that “the aim is to play”, or even more to “stay in the game” as he put it. What this seems to imply is that to have another purpose, or understand the Dharma as having a purpose, is actually to somehow miss the point as the Dharma seems *to be* the purpose. For him the idea to *play the game* meant to be in the Dharma and it was equally important as the idea to *stay in the game*. I can understand this if I associate the idea of *stay playing* the game/Dharma with Yogi Bhanjan’s usual affirmation to “Keep up” (keep up the practice, the commitment, the faith, the Dharma...). In fact a fundamental prescribed behaviour for the members of 3HO is to “Keep up”, which indeed concerns all levels of responsibility and duty in life and gives 3HO members a precept to inspire a determination to permanently continue on their journey “unto infinite”, as the founder of the organization put it. For Yogi Bhanjan, to “keep up” was a prescribed teaching to remove from the students’ minds the choice of *giving up* or any similar choice that would break the student’s commitment and affiliation to a) their spiritual development, b) the longing for the group c) the responsibilities as a human or c) the *Aquarian* mission.

But what is Dharma according to this interviewee? “When *tarm* and *karm* are gone”, he said. In this rather Sikh terminology, he deemed “*tarm*” as *doubt*, and “*karm*” as the negative consequences of actions (popularly known in its Sanskrit version, “*karma*”). Without these two aspects present in someone’s life, *doubt* and *karma*, one would be psychologically and ethically living a “harmonious life experience”, as he conveyed. This is the experience of Dharma. This is the “game”, to “play” and to “stay” and ultimately a thing deemed as an experience, rather than a realization, state or faith. In this sense, for him, the European Yoga Festival was a chance for “living for a week in harmony” in which, according to him, there are no ways to experience “a problem”.

Theme 7: Experience seen as taboo and set apart. This conversation and my inquiry into understanding his views on experience in a better way led him to comment that intellectuals “spoil everything”. My questions, I later realized, were disturbing his “harmonious life experience” because I did not seem to be, in his eyes, playing the right game. I was introducing theoretical inquiry (“problems”?) that seemed to be far removed from his intimate view of experience. Perhaps it would be correct to think that for him, my approach and mode of relating to the experience was far from the one a “student” should have and I might have become a difficult case of those -intellectual ones- that “spoil everything”. He actually strongly asserted that the teachings cannot be known, he deemed them to be “experienced and believed” in that order. This perspective of the informant suggested that the human capacity regarding experience works better if it is stripped of the rational faculty. Is that what produced the challenge in believing one’s own experiences? Maybe it is needless to repeat the idea, but the teachings of Yogi Bhajan emphasize the experiential dimension and in this way that could be a teaching strategy to bypass the intellect that would make us *doubt* (“*tarm*”) even our own experience. This produces the equation of experience and belief. Rationality would naturally be introducing *doubt* to the act of believing one’s experience and thus, rationalization is deemed a challenge which seems to “spoil everything”. Apparently this is the “problem” behind intellectuals that for Michael “spoil everything”. My presence or my way of addressing something was not on the side of the “game” and “the experience and the harmony”, rather it was on the side of the “problem” brought about by “intellectuals”, my way of understanding the issue probably presented him with a perspective that he possibly did not want. This could therefore explain his reaction against the outsider’s incapacity to see (or experience) the subjects discussed. My inquiries were perceived as a problem, a problem to be overcome. This was simple: the solution to the problem was not to engage me in a rational discussion, rather I had to access the grounds where he had positioned himself. For Michael, if I had only entered the field of practical experience I would have been able to understand him (perhaps believe him too?), and I would have probably stopped asking him these questions: I would have been in the game, I would have played it and “You see ... oh my God”...¹²⁰

¹²⁰ It might be appropriate to mention Jung’s view on these experiences with Kundalini yoga, “That tendency to keep things secret is merely a natural consequence when the experience is of such a peculiar kind that you had better not talk about it, for you expose yourself to greatest misunderstanding and misinterpretation” (1996, p. 28)

These two worlds, practice and experience in one side, and theory and rationalization on the other, were not collateral in his view. For him, for example, the personal practice (“sadhana”) was not something to be shared because he defended it as his own private matter (“mine is mine!” he said vehemently when I asked him about his personal sadhana or personal practice). The approach in the informant’s speech was to convey the message that the personal dimension of his experience was to be shared only with alike people (those with a similar experience, or those that *play the same game*). This could be the reason for the informant’s self-restriction and was probably aimed at avoiding saying something that could be misunderstood or taken as preaching or, as I have suggested, he was perhaps concerned about my disbelief in his experiences. Because there was an evident resistance towards disclosing information to the outsider other, it is possible to understand that in his view of the teachings and experiences there was an intention of not allowing intellectual curiosity to access and discuss or reflect on personal experiences. Would the experiences lose their *specialness*? In my later analysis of the conversation with this informant (off the record), it became evident that for him the field of experience was an exclusive field. It could be compared to the VIP boxes in opera halls. To be there, to see and listen, to experience the opera itself, one is required to *join the club* and show a distinctive inclination for the experience; similarly in this case, if I wanted to speak about experience it was required that there was a common ground, not just being at the Yoga Festival but being part of its “game”, to actively “play” the game, in this sense for Michael it was required *to have experience to understand experience*. As an author once wrote, some informants play the role of “gate keepers” and others as “gate openers” (Geaves, 2014, p. 263-268), Michael was a *gate keeper* of the realm of experience provided I was heading there as an intellectual, whereas at the same time he was a *gate opener* if I chose to engage with the subject in the way he was trained to deal with it, i.e. by delivering it to me as a teacher does with a student.

Case 4, Hector:

Hector was born in México and has been living in Italy for the last three decades. He has unfinished university studies in Mathematics. He is separated from his wife, the mother of his grown up children. He is 61 years old and has been over 40 years in 3HO. He is a teacher of Kundalini Yoga, but he did not follow the standard journey to become a Trainer. For the interview he self-declared he was a teacher of “Advanced” Kundalini Yoga and a healer. He has background in some shamanic knowledge and practices.

Attributional Approach to Hector’s experiences:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
“No, I don’t have miracle experiences ... [experience] has nothing to	“... the process of learning Yoga it is a <i>paulatino</i>	“For me the relation with the teaching of Yogi Bhajan is a human	“I think that in one way or another you start to develop some	“If you are in ecstasy, you have a taste in your mouth that is what all the classics always refer to the state of bliss as a

<p>do with “especial effects” “It is only that you are more aware of what is going on, you are less distracted by your own picture until you don’t have a picture ... Because it appears in the perception and the perception uses the channels of the body”</p>	<p>(sic) [gradual] development that brings you the sense to integrate the whole”</p>	<p>experience ... has to do with you with the capacity you have as a human to develop your human qualities”. “It [an experience] has to be a process, because it is so open in my awareness” “You cannot have in this human life any experience who has no reference to the body”</p>	<p>level of stimulation on your perception and one day the perception can change quality”. “You are the source of sensations. Sensation is how you respond to the stimulation ... That is how the consciousness becomes aware of something that is happening; it is by the production of a sensation”</p>	<p>sensation. And the sensations only depend on the body system”. “The body is a holder of the identity, but in the same time is the screen of the experience” “... you cannot have a state of bliss without having a reference to the body” “An event has a succession of logic, a logical succession; that is what you call ‘normal’ an “especial effect” is when you move in a transversal [way]... you jump from moment to another and that produces a change in the logic of the events”. “In the system [the whole] is included everything, there is nothing that can happen in the whole that is not included in the whole”.</p>
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Theme 1: Human experience of the whole. In this interview I encounter a concept of experience as something common, “down to earth” (mundane) and substantially belonging to the human realm. The experience’s main characteristic is consciousness and the way it embraces the world; in this interview there is nothing above the human dimension, portrayed as divine, religious or considered abnormal or supernatural. According to the interviewee, the subject of experience does not have any extraordinary or supernatural meaning, it is a human thing, and nevertheless, the human experience is deemed as a meaningful event due to its main characteristic (consciousness). For this reason he talks about experiences as distinct from “special effects”. He ascribed the quality of “irrelevant” to these “effects” regarding their relation to the human process of consciousness. But what is a “special effect”? For him it is a “change in the logic of the events”, in other words these *things* defy the logics. Although one can often hear the term “special effect” in cinematography, it might be correct to say that the “effects” the informant speaks about have probably an intended similar meaning as in cinematography. In cinematography these effects are sensory (optical or audible) and they are produced to enhance the scenes. In cinematography the *special effects* are created to give the human the sense and mind that what is happening is *truly* impressive as in “awe”. They are fantastic and most of the time they defy logic. They are there to stimulate the imagination of the spectators with spectacular views and sounds. As far as the 3HO practices are concerned, the experiences that this interviewee refers to have no value if they are “special effects” because, as an alteration of the natural “logical”

way, I can presume, they stimulate the imagination and the fantasy rather than the consciousness. These effects focus the attention on something external and phenomenal, which may distract from the important objective this informant considered: “gradually developing the consciousness and human capacities”. It can be said that for him the experiences that are significant are not singularized ones but plural and “gradual” (logic?) development of the human consciousness. For him “an experience” deemed significant is something that implies continuous attention and an engagement of the attention throughout the timeline so that it produces a conscious state of permanent “experiencing”. The degree of control of the subject is somewhat absolute since, for an experience to be worth considering, it has to fall within the person’s “attention”. Why is this kind of experience relevant? “Because it is open in my awareness”, he answered. This “openness” is deemed by him as an outcome of being attentive (conscious). If again this is compared to the analogy of cinematography, one could see him as a camera shutter, which is open to register any or all the events of life. In other words, when this awareness is “open” it means it is active (the camera is recording). Thus he attributes value not to an experience as an isolated unit or event, but to the experienter’s attitude who *can* go through life experiencing *everything* with a constant state of “open awareness”. This attitude of the experienter is for Hector the experience itself and he deems it as something that develops the human capacity. Experiences, as he sees them, are a continuum defined by consciousness or how conscious a person is in relation to them. For him the object of the experience was deemed as “the whole” and the crucial question was “in what degree I am allowing the whole? (sic)”, in other words the stress is not in a singular experience, isolated or a “special effect”, but in the “continuum” that one attentively *records* (makes conscious) and that is concerned with the “whole”. To “allow” it is probably to passively let it be as it is.

Theme 2: Awareness and perception. “The whole” that a person interacts with and that *happens* to them is experience itself, and it carries a qualitative potential: given a certain attitude, awareness can “increase”, as he said. What Hector implies is that the *volition* for having an “open awareness” or “attention” in the experiencing the subject is what not only defines the quality of the event (consciousness experience) but also the quality of the subject (as a developing human). In other words, consciousness and experience are to be understood as possibilities that can occur *if* he decides to have attention and *a* further (“gradual”) development can happen *if* he decides to “allow the whole”. For Hector, therefore, the experience is deemed as an attribution of all that is human, in which the agency is each human (and not their surroundings) and is made experience (meaningful) by each human that wants to take the whole human process as a conscious act. Evidently the development of this idea of experience is linked to the dimension of perception, so if one follows the informant’s idea, and if according to him one stimulates the perception, then the ability to register the *whole* will change one’s capacity to experience, changing the quality of what can be perceived. This implies that the awareness of the object perceived shifts from less comprehensiveness to more as a person starts “to develop some level of stimulation on your perception, and one day the perception can change quality” as he said. To understand this in the similar lines of the analogy used above, one could think that looking at the sea and in smelling and touching

the water will become *an experience* if one's "awareness is open", as I can think based on his explanation. That would happen if the attention and mental presence is there, if one is mindful, and "allowing" the "whole" that is happening. But the "stimulation" is fashioned in relation to the world of thought, cognition or mind stuff. He said that through attention that allows the whole, you become "less distracted by your own picture... until you don't have a picture", implying that the perception/consciousness can be stimulated by a sort of thoughtless mind of the one perceiving. So the "stimulation on the perception" that he deemed, is generated not by an act, but by a voluntary and mindful omission, by "allowing" the whole, and perhaps it would be correct to say by not projecting subjectivity ("one's own picture") into the whole that is experienced/perceived. To be distracted by one's own picture, that is to say by one's own mind (or mind's activity), creates a certain experience, and stopping this distractive agency results in a different experience. One could understand the informant's idea as the cognitive frame through which a person sees the world, within which the interference of one's own mental processing and worldview, referred to by him as "pictures", is what colours the perception of the things of life and the consecutive experience that will eventually lead to consciousness. In other words: consciousness would expand if thoughts do not interfere with the experience of the world. For this the disposition of the attributor is to be "opened in the awareness" by the attitude of "allowing the whole". This develops towards not having a "picture" that distracts from the (direct) perception of the whole. Hector's idea of a "picture" is similar to Javier's idea of a "frame", and it is an expression of the quest of an unmediated experience which has no supernatural connotation or spiritually intended object apart from the world as a whole.

Theme 3: Image of the world v/s perception of the world. These ideas of the "picture" can be compared to the Myth of the Cave by Plato, in which what the common man sees as the shadows on the wall of the cave correspond to the projected images of his understanding of reality (Hector's "picture") as they appear to the mind (Plato's "wall" of the cave). The shadows seen (or "pictures") have nothing to do with the reality (Hector's "whole") that is happening outside the cave (or beyond the distraction of the pictures). Following the comparison of the Myth of the Cave, the philosopher becomes free of the limited experience happening in the cave as he frees himself from the chain holding him to see the shadows and turns to look at things directly as they are outside the cave. Similarly, for the informant a person is free from having pictures if he "allows" himself to see the reality or "the whole" independent of his own "pictures".

The question of experience for this man does not have a special external agency (for example the outside of the cave), rather what takes place happens in the dimension of the body and its sensory organs: "the body is a holder of the identity, but at the same time is the screen of the experience", he commented. In a similar way he also said that the body is "the gateway to experience", in which experience is always "bodily located". So it would be correct to say that consciousness is the awareness of the "screen" of experiences that are created through the body's sensory perception, and it works at its best when it is unmediated by the mind stuff or its projections. In other words, the body is deemed by him as a sort of interface for the level of awareness of "the whole" and the subject ("the identity") that experiences it. This way of looking at the situation shows

that the somatic dimension of experience has a naturalistic base, similar to the type that William James once described (see appendix A).

Theme 4: Immanent source. For this interviewee in all experiences “each individual is the source for himself”, and by saying this he posited the source of the experience not in the “whole” as a different or separate reality from himself. He further explained this saying that “Awareness comes to being because of the sensations and the experience” and these conditions are possible because of the body and the person himself. In this approach Hector is depicting a self-conscious human being relating to the direct life experience he encounters. However, for him, the sensations in the body do not have “correlation” [with the experience]: “Perhaps it is possible [that that happens, but]... I haven’t experienced it”, he said. This insight might suggest a paradox. Even if he has not had that sort of experience (one in which there is no correlation between body-location and type-of-experience or awareness) the paradox is that in 3HO the teachings of Yogi Bhajan and the exercises of Kundalini yoga are meant to come as systematization of such a correlation. Indeed Yogi Bhajan, as it was shown in the previous pages, spoke about “body language” and the different spots (“chakras”) in the body that are correlated to different “states of consciousness”, and that knowledge of this correlation gave birth to the system he taught because “men of great knowledge” found the correlation to create the system as he, the founder of 3HO once explained (Bhajan, 2003, p. 183). The paradox and the interesting view of this informant, who claims to teach “Advanced Kundalini Yoga”, does not seem to support this idea or have experience of such a correlation. Most likely a Kundalini Yoga teacher would convey that there is a correlation and that it is the base of the different sequences of exercises. According to this informant, one thing is clearly deemed; the immanency of the sensation and experience give the human the agency of all the events he experiences in life, without a “supernatural” intervention or without a concern with “special” effects. This view might suggest that the activation and boosting of the consciousness happens when one is triggering the sensation in the body (experiences of perception) by having the disposition to hold and allow one’s undisturbed attention of them. Then the human progresses towards an increased awareness.

The difference he attributes to people regarding if they experience this or not is that some are “awake” and some are “asleep” regarding what is going on. This could be understood as the attention that some people have in relation to what happens to them, compared to those that are numb. This allows one to see that there are two types of “experiencers”, as I might call them: those who are aware of the experience happening to them and those who are not aware of the experience happening to them. To be aware is “to be awake”, he said. This being “awake” was deemed for someone who does not “put his dreams between the experience of reality and himself”. “To put”, seems to consider the act deliberate or a mechanical projection of one’s conceptions or views as an interpretative response to the experiences. These are the “dreams” which are being used as a synonym for “pictures”, and they interfere in the experience of reality; the opposite experience is when the person “allows” him or herself to have a fully and mentally undisturbed unmediated experience of the whole. In his description of these kinds of awakening experiences, the immediacy in terms of the distance

between “reality” and “him” experiencing it is achieved by “how much I can penetrate the event”, which at the same time he ascribed to “how much I allow to be penetrated by the event”. Certainly this means that there is a dual direction of influence between the “whole” and “him” who experiences, at the same time as there is the condition of a clear and deep perception as well as a subject-object interrelation. Understanding this is perhaps the key for reaching a wakeful state, he asserted. One can understand that this interrelation between the experienter with *reality* is similarly expressed in the scholastic idea of *adequatio intellectum et rei*. To fully match this case to the scholastic axiom, however, the word *intellectum* should be replaced by the word *conscius* (Latin *con-* “together” + *scire* “to know”). *Adequatio conscius et rei* would be the most exact *etic* formula to express the informant’s notion. This type of consciousness (*conscius*) is similar to the notion of bare awareness, or the awareness of being aware, with a thoughtless mind in front of (“together” *with*) reality (*rei*).

This is probably where the idea of “special effects” is anchored, because according to him no experience can go against nature: “in the system everything is included” he said. The “special effects” are a deemed part of the normal and are nothing special in themselves however they defy logics. This shows that the criteria of anomalous, fascinating (*facinans*) and awe-inspiring experiences of some scholars, (all criteria that I can associate with what he calls “special effects”) are seen as events of no special significance, and they are even deemed in a negative way since they can be distracting: they are “tricks” he said. For him, these types of experiences do not promote the purpose of increasing awareness and are not the concern of the teachings. In this respect the informant is echoing Yogi Bhasan as he spoke about those teachers who get distracted and distract others with “beautiful and fanciful experiences” (see part II).

Theme 5: The system. But let us address the “system” Hector spoke about. When in this moment he uses the expression “the system”, he seems to be referring to what can also be called the universe, with its laws and natural settings (“the system” would then be a structural aspect of the “whole”). He thinks that the system or structure allows everything that happens to happen because all events that take place (even if they defy logic like “special effects”) are supported by “the whole” (could this be the universal laws of nature?). Probably what he has in his mind, I can say, is a view that if something is happening it is because it is allowed by some sort of *default settings* of the universe. In this way there is nothing really “extraordinary” or “supernatural” about it, just things that “change the logic of the events” one experiences. In the informant’s view, abnormalities are not possible and it would be a wrong assessment (one’s wrong “picture” or “dreams”, distorting one’s view) to categorize an event of experience as abnormal. All that happens is normal following Hector’s criterion. Judging something as abnormal can be seen as a misinterpretation of the experience of “reality”, and the “whole”: it would be a “picture” of what is reality happening.

From this point onwards the discussion was concerned with how to make the development of this kind of awareness/experience possible. His answer ascribed to “discipline and a specific awareness” the causal conditions attributed for this to happen. This turned his attention to the traditional 3HO idea of “know-how”, for which Yogi

Bhajan recurrently prescribed the yogic methods of exercises and meditation for reaching different levels of consciousness *through* experience.

Theme 6: Human development. He also attributed this insight about experience and human development to the epoch, geographical location and philosophy where Sikh faith was born. In this context the historical personages of the 3HO mystical lineage, the “Golden Chain”, are seen by him as an operative influence in the practitioner, a graceful aid or “Baraka”. “I am a transcendental traditionalist” he said, and in this way the Chain is a source of a specific “consciousness” – by its grace it allows someone to maintain a link to that consciousness and “reflect it”, he concluded. The externalization of the agency that brings a blessing (“Baraka”) to someone on this path is introduced as a condition for this process to work.

For this informant, the purpose of the human experience as understood in this “path” is “to merge”, to arrive at the experience of “indifferentiation” in which people can reach the “one integrated consciousness”, as he called it. In English the verb to merge: “to combine together to make one whole thing” (Collins), has a meaning that is very close to the yogic aim of “Samadhi”, which is probably what he meant when he spoke of “merging”. His “traditionalism” moves between the three-fold realms of thought and uses the idea of merging from yoga lore. Samadhi is understood in the *yoga darshana* as a non-dualistic state of awareness in which the awareness of the experiencer becomes one with the experienced object, so the “integration” is the one where individuals and the world take part together to manifest the attributed spiritual “oneness” and “sameness”. Almost paraphrasing Yogi Bhajan, he said that the stages of this *path* move from more differentiation to less: from the individual person to the group of persons to the “whole”. The experience of oneness and the realization of oneness is the goal, and this informant ascribes to experience the same proposition of development as Yogi Bhajan, to whom the expansion of the consciousness goes from individual consciousness to group consciousness and then finally to universal consciousness.

Case 5, Gordon:

Gordon is an English man who is currently living in Sweden. He is 54 years old and has been practicing Kundalini Yoga for 30 years. He has a BAAC (Bachelor of Accountancy), is married with children and he is a Lead Trainer in both Kundalini Yoga levels (1 and 2). He also has a background in practicing oriental (Chinese) medicine since 1988.

Attributional Approach to Gordon’s experiences

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
- “I have experienced a	- “During and	“.. an inner experience ... is part of the	- “The stronger the	- “When people practice the

<p>kind of a dissolving self into a greater self that yes, has been a very beautiful, profound experience”</p>	<p>sometimes immediately after meditative practice”</p>	<p>journey, and a journey that connects the person to their heart and to some concept of their soul and their purpose of being here...” - (experiences) “are certainly step stone of learning in outer level of philosophy and if you like, prescribe things and things that are suggested to clear the consciousness” - “then you have the kind of correlative experience that you kind of, if you like, relate to some of the physiological effects that you are having as being the counterpart to that mystical language” - “one would, as it were, learn the practical application or the practical experience of the philosophy that underlies the yoga itself...” “... the key difference between philosophy in the West and philosophy in the East, philosophy in the West is essentially an academic, intellectual discussion about ideas and concepts that is directed through words, in the East this philosophical understanding is given a reality through one’s physiological experience that they, the practices themselves, manifest “</p>	<p>yoga practice and meditation has been over the years, has correlated exactly with deepest peace, greatest happiness and greater success in life”. - “It has been an absolute direct correlation, so when my practice has been strong, everything, all the circumstances of life seem to work out easily in a natural flow. If my practice has been relatively poor then things have been much more difficult, challenging, less flowing and stuck”</p>	<p>techniques of Kundalini Yoga and meditations then they have an inner experience” - “... all aspects of the yogic life style create the effect, but I suppose the foundations has to be the actual practice of the yoga and the actual meditation and the consistent application of those in a preferably daily basis, all what creates greatest changes, greatest transformations in people” - “... the understand and the response of ‘ah’ this is what the texts mean when they talk about the lotus of the chakra turns over and the devotee receives the nectar of the Naam, in spiritual language” - “[experiences] act as a confirmation and an affirmation that the yoga as it were, does what it says on the book does what it claims to do, which is to widen your perspective to awaken your consciousness, to develop you as an intuitive person, but with the stability so you can be in, you know, in what we usually call the everyday world”</p>
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Theme 1: Journey of experiences. This informant says that Kundalini Yoga “triggers inner experiences which are part of the journey”. For him, everyone has a “destiny” which entails a “journey”, both things deemed spiritual. Gordon referred to “Inner experiences” as things that happen on the interior level of the person. In a more precise sense regarding the idea of “inner experiences”, he explained that there is an outer level of “philosophy” that needs to be learnt and an inner level connected to the deeper aspects of the mind where one has to “clear the subconscious... [to be] free of debris and self-limiting patterns”. Gordon compared the debris and limiting patterns to a “monkey on the back” that bothers or distracts a person on his “journey”. This way of

expressing the “inner process” is very much coherent with Yogi Bhajan’s approach, and what can be further understood is the attributions related to the location (the psychological element) of most of the *work* that is deemed for the “journey” to move forward. For him, experiences “are certainly stepping stones of learning in the outer level of philosophy and, if you like, prescribe things and things that are suggested to clear the consciousness”.

The “learning of philosophy” is ascribed as it provides knowledge, but ‘self cleansing the mind’ seems to be for Gordon the central thing. These explanations bear an evident link with the practice of the prescribed exercises in 3HO because they are attributed the capacity to remove the psychological inability to be clear and, in doing so, these methods free someone’s mind from subconscious “dirt” and animal impulses (or “debris” and a “monkey on the back” as referred to by Gordon). But for him the method that is at stake includes all “the package... all aspects of the life style ... practice of yoga and meditation...” as he phrased it. In his view “the package” is not to be contemplated as a mere collection of techniques that would help without a determined personal involvement; he said that what works is the application of it through consistent “daily based practice” and he emphasized that this is how one can create the “greatest changes”. What I could deduce from his words is that he sees that on the cause level of the experience one finds the application of the system of Kundalini Yoga and the lifestyle followed in 3HO. Additionally, he implied that the “journey” and the “destiny” are practical matters that must involve the person in a practical way and not as matters of knowledge or “philosophy”. In other words, that is why he emphasizes that knowledge must be applied as prescribed for producing “great changes in their lives”. The application of the method produces, what I see as a *disposition in the attributor* as the application must be “consistent” in order for it to work. He deems it necessary to practise on a “daily basis” to get the results the “books speak about”. It is necessary to remark that the path he followed is to arrive at an experience that has psychological effect, which according to Gordon, it can happen “During and sometimes immediately after meditative practice”, these descriptions represent the core ideas that Yogi Bhajan taught his students, especially in the implication of an intense practice determining an intense outcome of experiences. According to Gordon’s experience,

“The stronger the yoga practice and meditation has been over the years [it] has correlated exactly with deepest peace, greatest happiness and greater success in life”

In addition to these ideas the informant expressed that one of the constituents, the “use of sound and mantra”, is a special one in relation to the “package” of techniques. This statement refers to the general view in 3HO that gives a distinctive place to the mantras in relation to the rest of their practices.

Theme 2: Two traditions, one technology. What shows a distinctive view in the interviewee concerns the parts that he deemed constitute this “package”. In this respect he considered important to say that the “confluence of two traditions: Kundalini yoga and Sikh Dharma” generate the effects without accounting for the New Age as one of

the constituents or “traditions”. He did not speak about the agent that brought about this confluence either (Yogi Bhajan). To properly approach his view one must know what the term *confluence* stands for. In English the term refers to the ‘meeting of two or more bodies of water’ (Collins). It is perhaps needless to say that in this distinction there is an historical criterion inasmuch as the “confluence of two traditions” took place in the past and not within the life of 3HO. This can shed some light to see the perspective of this informant. The current view of 3HO and the teachings/worldview embraced by its members is that there is one body of “teachings and practices” (“the package” for Gordon) that unifies and gives coherent strength to Yogi Bhajan’s message. This is why Gordon first spoke about “[all] the package” to refer to this one method (or one resulting “body of water”, the result of the “confluence” I could also say).

For Gordon in particular, “When people practice the techniques of Kundalini Yoga and meditations then they have an inner experience”. For 3HO in general, and for this informant too, the teachings of the Gurus delivered through the “Shabads” (collection of hymns and mantras in the Sikh sacred scripture) are not seen as a religious narrative but as a technological tool, as I have presented in the previous chapter. The deeming of the term *technology* is certainly not in the ascription of the ten Gurus, but it is a contemporary term attributed since Yogi Bhajan taught his teaching. The contemporary context is that nowadays and from the irruption of television, computers and telephones, everyone uses some form of technology and most of the people would agree that technology makes life easier. That was not the approach of Guru Nanak and the people of his time, however. The historical context of the first attributor (Yogi Bhajan) and Gordon is perhaps one of the key reasons why such a human device, technology, is used when speaking about the written hymns and poems that were left and compiled by the Sikh Gurus. The word ‘technology’ speaks to anyone since the second half of the 20th century. This needs further exploration. My view is that yoga, since the second half of the 20th century, has been addressed or made available to a larger mainstream audience, a “desacralized” mainstream audience, as almost all Indian Gurus from Vivekananda onwards spoke about a *technique* to refer to yoga. So nowadays it is widespread as well as convenient to address yoga (including Kundalini) as a *technical device* rather than deem it as religion. Everyone ‘knows’ what technology is and deals with it daily (“practice it” on a “daily basis” this informant would say). The majority of people do not necessarily question the status of technology and techniques (that are stripped of any supernatural/superstitious content), but the status of religious rituals and foreign belief systems are commonly regarded as suspicious. That is why I think the emphasis on promoting the practices as “technologies” took form and spread in the attributions of 3HO’s Sikhism as well as 3HO’s Kundalini yoga.

In this approach to the “confluence” one has to consider it also as a rhetorical strategy. For two or more traditions (or “bodies of water”) to converge as one, both have to be on the same or a similar level, or both must be deemed in a similar fashion. A confluence requires two bodies of water. In this case there are two forms of spiritual technology. Technology is the fashion this informant chose as the way to ascribe the quality of the practices of these two traditions. So what is technology? In Greek, technology comes from (*téchnē*), meaning "art, skill, craft", and (*logía*) that means the "knowledge or study

of". So the word technology, as used in its classical way and applied to the case of yoga and mantras in 3HO, could be understood as the knowledge, study, art or skill of specific exercises and specific sounds (mantras) to transform or clear the consciousness from debris. This would also help the understanding, showing why this informant and 3HO at larger would refer to the Shabads of the Gurus as some kind of empowered sound that "technically" a skillful practitioner can master. What is at stake is a way to deem the philosophical or the religious legacy, ultimately, as a practical and modern device intended for the use or improvement of the psychological and spiritual dimensions. As it is popularly known, technologies are of a different sort, so nowadays one will find many denominations such as information technology, space technology, medical technology, and so on and so forth. This is most likely the reason why in 3HO they speak of a "spiritual technology". This approach to the methods of 3HO allows people (the "providers" in 3HO and "consumers" in the audience) to bypass the controversial field of religious connotations and instead use the notion of technology as a more familiar denomination to speak of the tradition. This denomination in the speech and in the practice unites Yoga and Sikhism and gives the tools to walk the "journey" in order "... to clear the subconsciousness... free of debris and self-limiting patterns". Only later on did he refer to a personal and more "inner experience" that took place in meditation as "a kind of dissolving self into a greater self ... beautiful, profound", which implies another level of unity ("the greater self"), this time achieved within and through the practice.

Themes 3: Test and confirmation. Another interesting idea that was shared by this informant is that the experience of the practice being *consistent* is clearly ascribed as a cause of "changes" and "transformation", according to him "consistent application of those [practices] in a preferably daily basis, all what creates greatest changes, greatest transformations in people". I could argue that what he is implicitly referring to is that the adversities of human life are mitigated and overcome through and with the practice. This could mean that individual practice is believed to affect the person, enabling the shifting of the "inner experience" *as well as* outer sojourns in life. The "inner experience" might also produce a change in the perspective how things in life are experienced by a subject. In this way the experience of "dissolution of the self" is possibly one of the events that come along with "getting rid of subconscious limiting patterns" and "debris". Certainly the experience of *dissolution* is not to be understood as a negative event, as it was not deemed as such by the informant.

I asked him about how these types of experiences have an impact on his own life and his answer pointed at his own understanding and responsiveness in relation to literature "about" experience. These kinds of experiences were for him a "confirmation" of the knowledge presented in the literature about the subject of experience. In other words, what he earlier read about experience in 3HO was confirmed in his own experience and vice versa; the importance attributed by him to this was concerned with not only the confirmation but also the *affirmation* of the theoretical claims regarding "awaken consciousness" and the "journey" of spiritual development. What can be added as a criterion for understanding his ascription is that his experience of the "dissolution of the self" also became for him a proof of his pre-existing knowledge; such a criterion of

'proof' gives more solid ground to this, and eventually other members of 3HO, to construct the meaning of these practices as technology, i.e. testable and somewhat repeatable. Technology evolves based on trial and error, through experiments that offer the chance to prove whether the technological device works or not. In this case the criteria presented is that there is an empirical condition of the subject that, along with the elements of attributional analysis, considering the way of deeming the *event characteristics*, the *event context* and the *disposition of the attributor*, produced an *ad hoc attributional conclusion* that if something cannot be proven then it cannot be applied, and because he has successfully applied the "technologies" he has found the proof to attest that they work.

Theme 4: Technology and beyond. Based on the premises that I presented above that everyone *knows* what technology is and that technology is a part of everyone's life, I can explain why 3HO practices are deemed as technologies and ascribed effectiveness: as Gordon said the practice "does what it says on the book, does what it claims to do". Furthermore, if the practice and the experiences of the experienced or advanced members, the Aquarian teachers, have allowed them to corroborate the theory in themselves, then those experiences could reinforce their careers as yoga teachers, which are concerned with *giving experiences* (see previous chapter), especially when nowadays yoga is fairly popular and suitable for an increasing range of people. This is what Gordon confirmed, as he affirmed, that people in general are looking for "peace, happiness and success in life", as the informant himself reports about his own achieved experience. For him, the other values of these events or experiences are in how it develops a "change in the consciousness" of a person, by "awakening it" and affecting the growth of the "intuitive capacity". In other words, the "technology" has an extensive outcome that can be deemed in more ("peace", "happiness", "success in life") as well less (as it changes or awakens the consciousness and intuition) mundane terms.

The *attributional conclusion* of this informant was that this subject is about how to "learn the practical application or the practical experience of the philosophy". This statement gives the chance to see that his view of the practice in 3HO is constructed over what I would call a *conceptual palindrome* in which, based on Gordon, I can witness how the *philosophy of the experience meets the experience of the philosophy*. This *conceptual palindrome* is embedded in his affirmations about the experience, in theory and practice, allowing him to arrive to the exclamation: "Ah! This is what the texts mean". Could this tested "technology" perhaps be one of the key elements that could explain 3HO's growth in membership or at least the growth in the participation in their collective events as the Yoga Festival?

Case 6, Rachel:

Rachel is an English woman, 47 years old. She was working as a manager in a company when she started to practice Kundalini Yoga 12 years ago. She had a very busy life, although she has been single and has no children. She is a Professional Trainer of Kundalini Yoga (stepping into Lead Trainer level 1).

Attributional Approach to Rachel's experience:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
<p>- "... I reach such a place of ecstatic joy ... it was literally bubbling up inside me and it was this excitement inside me" - "at the end of the meditation I got the most clear voice speaking to me than I've ever had ... I was instantly in tears, I didn't cry I was just in tears ... it was a very clear message it was a very simple message actually, that it would just only say "you can do it" and it just came through with such a sound, such a volume that I was almost on the floor ... this was so loud and it had a different tone to anything have had since ... this voice that comes from inside me comes up and with that "you can do it""</p>	<p>- "It as a yoga class and nothing "to do with alcohol or because I have gone to a good party" - "when I went to Española for the first time and it was for the first Japji course that Yogi Bhajan was teaching"</p>	<p>- "A couple of things. We know the Aquarian Age is all about experience, but that we learn afterwards ... So I think this is really what works with people because they have their own experience and some people like it and some people don't..." - "I think that as human beings we are more sensitive than even the greatest... I don't know, weird movie you can have in the TV where you have all these powers and all of these... we are even more than that". - "I was back, every week, every week, every week to a class ... that was what I wanted, I had no idea that I would end up here and if I knew I would have probably stop (laughter)" - "...now is the time I am gonna (sic) have an experience I am going to challenge this and I am going to see what is this about" - "I trust my teacher who tells me this is what I need to do, then I still I have my own experience. For me once I have had an experience, nobody can take that away from me, not even me"</p>	<p>- "I was determined to go coz I wanted to see him [Yogi Bhajan], so we finished the course and I had a couple of experiences up there ... I was invited to one of the trainer meetings because I was the European, token European ... we did a meditation"</p>	<p>- "I think it is not part of this Age where we are just going to be happy with just trusting someone else. It is like the only reason why I am here is because I have had the experiences I have had" - "I decided it [the voice heard] was from Yogi Bhajan, but whether it was my higher self or whatever... I became aware of one [thing], how often I was unconscious of how often I said "no, I can't do this", you know, and I wasn't aware of that at all so I became aware of this and then it really has changed because now, it is like somehow I know there is nothing I can't do and there is part of me that goes, "how?" I have no idea how I do it, but I know that if I want to I can" - "I see Kundalini Yoga as a catalyst, that is what I say to my students when they come ... it will really accelerate and support you physically, mentally, emotionally to be able to open up to what is inside you ... So it gives you an opportunity to really confront anything that comes to you and know that you can confront it and it is not going to kill you and it is just an experience..." - "I still come back to those little bricks of experience and I think 'okay that happened, that was real for me and I think it is more real than anything I have had in my life in terms of before"</p>

Theme 1: An Aquarian phenomenon and criterion of truth. For this informant the subject is indubitably concerned with the times we live in, as Rachel said in third person plural that “We know the Aquarian Age is all about experience”. She deemed that the subject of experience is a part of the Aquarian Age that is “all about experience [because] experience works”. Indeed, for her the experiences she has had have been a determining factor for teaching as well as for participating in the 3HO community. According to her “the only reason I am here is because I have had experiences...”

From the beginning of her narration, she emphasized that the reason for affiliating 3HO was caused by what I call the *experiential units* that happened in the regular practice of Kundalini yoga. When she said that experience “works” and that,

“I was back [to yoga practice], every week, every week, every week to a class ... that was what I wanted, I had no idea that I would end up here and if I knew I would have probably stop (laughter)”

This might suggest that on the concrete level her experiences happen to be important engines to inspire, as they suit her and they work for her. These experiences make her acknowledge the type of practice that produced them and gave her a consequent trust in it. This is evident in her speech when she commented that, “I trust my teacher ... [but] then I still have my own experience”. In other words, the ultimate word is neither the teacher’s nor her own, but what I would rather call *the word of the experience*. This approach to her case will become clearer in the next few lines.

For her, experience is her domain, as she asserted in a defiant manner that “nobody can take that away”. She said that when she is in doubt she resorts to past experience, and the affirmation in her mind was expressed in these terms: “Okay that happened, that was real for me and I think it is more real than anything”. In this way the experiences she has gone through were presented as having a retrospective power, as if by the sole act of revisiting a memory of a past experience would be enough of a boost to confirm what was and is real or true for her in the present. But why does experience have such a status?

Theme 2: Experience works. Through the narration of this interviewee we can approach a rich attributional process. For her, her own experience is deemed far more influential and important than anything else or any other referential point (for example, a current challenging reality, another’s experiences or her teacher’s view have less to say compared to her own experiences). Her own experiences go beyond the teacher’s presence in her life, as if the experiences could convey a message or a teaching that would best suit her position in life. This is also seen in a very centripetal way as her experience becomes her possession and no other human agency seems to have more influence than that. This can explain why it “works” because a determined experience that happens to her would not probably work for another person. For her, experience is a very personal way to test things, as she has recently become determined to have an experience through the yoga practice: “I am gonna have an experience, I am going to challenge this and I am going to see what is this about (sic)”. “To see what is this about

(sic)" shows that the experiential units work in providing a perspective and clarity "to see". The experiences she is bearing in mind could be seen as a unique personal sphere of real certainty, and they worked not only in the past but in the present too when she recalls them, and she believes they will work in the future if she needs to recall them later. What she sees in or through the experience transcends circumstantial situations, time and a space. Even more, her own experiences, those that make her see things about her or her life, have the interesting capacity to transcend her domain too. This is a paradox in Rachel: the experiences she has gone through are her intimate possession, but she has no power over them and she cannot get rid of them or apparently manipulate them either. The experiences work as a power over her, and it is a higher power than any external object or subject. She expressed that she cannot remove *these* special experiences from her consciousness because, "once I have had an experience, nobody can take that away from me, not even me".

Theme 3: Attraction to experience. Rachel spoke about a personal experience of reaching "a place of static joy ... [that] was bubbling up inside of me..." which acted as a magnet in her routine because "I was back every week [to the yoga class]". This *experiential unit* seemed to repeat and be repeatable. The first experience *of* and *in* a Kundalini yoga class also produced the attraction to get more of it. Indeed, her further involvement with the practice of Kundalini yoga was the outcome of her first encounter with the *experience of this practice*. This is explained in her first impressions about what she went through in the practice, as a form of *originary event*, which she deemed as something that was "bubbling up inside". It could be correct to say that somewhere inside Rachel there is an internal sensitivity that makes this type of practice suitable, and this is most likely behind her idea and attribution that the practice "works". There is an implicit causal correlation that is worth making more visible: the repetition of the practice of Kundalini yoga class and the subsequent effect brought about the disposition for more, since she achieved a positive internal feeling through *this* experience. However, this was not all she went through in her initial and increasingly repetitive *experiential affair* with Kundalini yoga, as I would call it. Further practice of Kundalini Yoga led her to face things that "weren't quite nice... quite true" about herself, she attested. This is an interesting point of inflection where she transited from emotional gratification (that was repeatedly sought through attending yoga classes) to a type of awareness about what was not entirely welcome or liked about herself. In other words, the habituation to the practice seems to have developed from experience, to a relation to herself where, however, the unpredicted effect of self-reflection produced something one could call *a crisis*. From that point she felt that she "didn't have any choice" in the face of what seemed to be evidence about herself and that she would rather "resist" or avoid. This psychological display that begins with an increasing need and desire to maintain the practice of 3HO, and gradually turns into an increasing "resistance" to it, is all related to the experience of feeling and seeing things in and about her. A further and more complex development was unfolding under her feet. Evidently Yogi Bhajan's mission of creating teachers made her think. In fact she followed the common path in 3HO until she found herself fighting the next steps, as Rachel said she "would fight not to be a teacher". This sort of initial *honeymoon* with an *original event* (the "bubbling up inside") produced what I call a more regular and *experiential*

affair that is sought in Kundalini yoga classes, and it later led her into an internal battle with herself not to commit to a deeper level with the teaching. But what was the fight for? Who was fighting? She deemed the conflict as the fight of the “ego versus soul energy”.

Theme 4: Struggle and Psychological shift. According to the experience and the views she presented, one can see that her development contains glimpses of a new sort of understanding or knowledge about her that she was able to “see”, and that was attributed to the regular practice of yoga and meditation. Because Rachel was a manager, she had a very busy life that led her to start and progressively dedicate more time to the regular practice of Kundalini Yoga and meditation. Without having much pre-knowledge or experience of yoga she commented that at some point she felt a sort of crisis based on a new personal scenario: what she was living in her life was challenged by the effects of the new practices and the effects she attributed to it. As she considered retrospectively,

“I see Kundalini Yoga as a catalyst, that is what I say to my students when they come ... it will really accelerate and support you physically, mentally, emotionally to be able to open up to what is inside you ... So it gives you an opportunity to really confront anything that comes to you and know that you can confront it and it is not going to kill you and it is just an experience...”

So evolution of her psychology led her to a decision: whether or not to become a yoga teacher. Evidently she faced a crisis of identity and a dichotomy regarding what was supposed to be done, and what was not the “truth” about her. As a result her pre-existing image of herself was in crisis and a new sort of evidence about her being in the world appeared before her eyes. She was unknowingly speaking about something which is, in religious studies, referred as to *conversion*, not in the sense of adopting a new faith, but adopting a new paradigm which put herself in the middle. This is a new personal profile emerging in her self-reflection deemed or associated with the impact of the emerging “soul energy” as opposed to her “ego”. The internal and psychological struggle between the two poles in tension can also be understood as a common tension in a process of conversion, the opposing forces between the old mundane personality versus the new personality deemed spiritual or religious. In her case the latter took the lead.

Most of the struggle was for her psychological and emotional, as one can witness in her narration. She was apparently dealing with the security of her mind in relation to what she thought she was (“soul energy” or “ego”) and therefore dealing with the direction to take according to what felt right. This led her to a second experience that happened to her when she was already *in* the active field of the 3HO membership. After doing a group meditation, “I got the most clear (sic) voice speaking to me [and I was] instantly in tears... I decided it was from Yogi Bhajan”. The message of this voice was “you can do it” she said. In other words, the event context within the practice of *a* meditation, brought about a sensory, audible experience, in which she heard a voice saying something deemed deeply and personally significant to her (“you can do it”).

This is something simple to understand as one can re-enact in the mind sounds and audible memories. For example hearing sirens in the war generated a state of anxiety and fear, and hearing them again much later could produce the same feelings. It is for this reason that I believe that in her previous encounters with Yogi Bajan she associated his voice with spiritual authority and wisdom, as she “decided it was from Yogi Bajan”. However, when she had this experience, she had not only immediately associated the experience with Yogi Bajan as the owner of the voice of the message, but she “decided” it was him. This situation might give one the space to ask, what does an experience give a person and what does a person give to it? A simple answer a scholar can provide is that an experience of this sort can give a chance for the deeming making process of the subject. According to her narration I can say that meaning is extracted from her previous knowledge associated and given to the fresh experience (Yogi Bajan was evidently associated with spiritual authority and wisdom). Her narration can also show that her experience gave her an audible mental impression (“I heard the most clear voice”) and then, soon after, she gave back to the experience a meaning attributing it to the founder of 3HO (“I decided it was from Yogi Bajan”). In this case her volitional faculty overtook any other faculty to interpret the event. This is an interesting strategy in the deeming making process. For her this event was a message coming to her with the voice of and from Yogi Bajan. Why? Because she “decided” it. But what was this voice like? What are the main event characteristics? She described the voice as having “such a sound” and “such a volume” that she “was almost on the floor” because it had “loudness in the tone”. It sounds like the attribution of *Tremendum et fascinans* that Rudolf Otto would refer to regarding the “numinous experience” of the Holy. Rachel did not think the most remarkable aspect was related to a divine or supernatural order of things, but rather how this experiential unit came to solve her personal struggle and shift her psychological state: “I became aware... I was unconscious... it just opened up anything and everything really... I allow myself”.

Theme 5: A voice deemed... This occurrence could be an expression of what I earlier called the *words of the experience* that is a collateral ascription attached to an experiential audible event made meaningful in the psychology of the experiencer. Let me approach some of the main characteristic of the attribution made to the experience of voice heard:

- “such a sound”
- “such a volume”
- “I was almost on the floor”
- “loudness in the tone”
- “You can do it”
- “I allow myself”

“Such” describes something that is somehow unique, different or *special*. The perceived extraordinary audible voice and the content of the “message” defied her capacity to control her own body to the extent that she “was almost on the floor”. In her way of deeming the experience one could also see the presence of a power energy that brought about a revelatory effect on her mind’s habitual process as it “opens up anything and

everything” in Rachel. In other words the effect of this audible event produced a reaction and a change in her normal approach to things that she care for. “Open up” is an idea that shows a lock or a block that ceases to exist. As for the message itself, “you can do it”, acted like a permission, after which she began to do and be in the world in a way she did not dare before (“I allow myself”). This seemed to have begun a new phase in her life. Like the pre-existing lock that I referred to above, the lack of self-permission was also a pre-existing condition that could be referred to as the *disposition of the attributor* that Rachel wanted to be rid of. Again, as it happened at the beginning of her practice, this peculiar experience produced a new sort of crisis of identity: “I really don’t know who I am”, she asserted, and then a type of psychological spontaneous healing took place as she commented. Naturally the crisis of identity led her to a further exploration and reformulation of her identity. She found herself in a new scenario in which external opportunities no longer seemed impossible, because “anything and everything” was “opened” to be explored plus she was “allowing herself”.

One of the outcomes of this and similar experiences was that she found that healing was a new field that came up (in her and for others) as an unexpected discovery. I will conclude by saying that due to this audible experience and its quality (“Such”... “volume, sound, and tone”) it reached deep enough into her, leaving a memory that *engraved* her psyche or mental architecture with a new idea that she *can do it*, implying a world of opportunities (anything and everything) that did not exist before.

Theme 6: The Technique and the Potential. The further explanation of what occurred in her experiences was phrased as that, “you get little glimpses... showing you the potential [because] we are more sensitive than in a movie”. The reference of the new understanding is due to the parts (“glimpses”) of what seems to be a personal and collective reality (“we are”). The truth however seems to be for her a “potential” to be addressed. In this view she mentioned “Kundalini Yoga as a catalyst to wake you up to your true potential”, assuming fully the ascriptions of Yogi Bhajan about the methods he taught and the purposes why he taught them. She further mentioned that the experiences have generated all the positive changes and possible development in her life. For this reason, it would not be wrong to say that the different experiences with their further crises have given her not only faith, but a strong certainty based on the experience of the system of Kundalini Yoga, meditation and their effects. I could not see in her any doubt about Kundalini Yoga, and she was rather enthusiastically convinced that Kundalini Yoga has produced transformations in her and will do the same in people that practice it. In her own words, “if you do it, it will accelerate and support you... to open up what is inside of you”.

So according to Rachel, what does Kundalini yoga do? Or what do the specific exercises do? For that she said, “Kriyas [are] to clear blocks”, a way to “get to a sort of place where you say ‘I am the master of space and whatever happens I am holding this posture’”. In this statement it is possible to find the psychology of how the deeming process of practicing a Kriya is presented. She expressed a sort of duality, as on one hand she can ignore the commitment of going through an intense practice (due to the implicit physical challenge) and on the other hand she is free to choose to have an experience

with the practice and challenge it *through* the Kriya itself. The psychology of this particular event (Kriya) continues, however, and then even though she does not mention it explicitly, there is a sense of achievement and she refers to the psychosomatic interrelation: “then pain dissolves... you become the observer”.

In these descriptions she brings up prescriptions to sort out different types of personal issues that she calls “blocks”. In this sense, the view of a blocked condition is radically different from the sinful or fallen condition of other religious traditions. In the 3HO context these “blocks” are understood as some kind of psycho-energy that is a knot in the body, in the chakras and meridians, which are to be removed with the tools of Kundalini Yoga (Kriyas). After all, her experience is deeming this practice as an instrument to which she ascribed (and prescribed) efficiency in doing the job of “opening blocks”. On the intimate level of her actual experience of practicing a Kriya of Kundalini Yoga, it arises to the surface in her narration that her experience induced her to face her blocks and to establish a conscious relationship with the part of the body affected by the pain or tension, so with this attitude the “block” could be released and then the psychosomatic interplay became a meaningful event with further personal connotations.

This psychosomatic release is seen as an event that provided an opportunity for her to feel a considerable increase in confidence (“I am the master of space”) in the (“potential”) forces that lay within her. But an emotional situation happened as well. The sense of personal achievement was present, but despite the fact that “most” of the effort was done by her alone, she acknowledged an extra aid that adds more endurance to her choice of doing the exercise that she attributed to, this is “...a bit of grace of God”. As she sees it, the process of the practice of a Kriya of Kundalini yoga involves a divine intervention in the form of the “Grace of God”. Is this, the practices prescribed, the way that some people in 3HO call upon God’s assistance? This assistance was for Rachel, “something else [that] comes to me”, but it comes along with the divine intervention she also sees in the field of the practice of Kundalini Yoga. She suggested that the completeness and integrity of Kundalini Yoga (“as taught by Yogi Bhajan” as it is referred to in 3HO) is crucially important in relation to how it will affect people. She represents and believes in the original form of Kundalini Yoga that Yogi Bhajan taught, but the line that separates the effort in the application of the human method (Kundalini yoga) and divine help that comes to aid (the “Grace of God”) was explained along with the paradoxical and contradictory idea of one having also the *knowledge* of the powerless nature of the human. For her the grace of God was “the beauty of knowing that you have no power and that everything is taken care of for you”.

Case 7, Hilde:

Hilde is a woman who was born in German, but she now lives in Italy. She is 38 years old with a background somewhat indifferent to religion. She is married to an Italian and she is the mother of one child. She works as a researcher in bioethics in at a University in Switzerland, but she lives in Italy. She has been practicing yoga for over 15 years and has been a Kundalini Yoga Teacher for the last 14 years. She is not part of 3HO

as an institution, but more into teaching Kundalini yoga and Meditation. She is not a trainer but she has taken all the education for a yoga teacher in 3HO (level 1 and 2).

Attributional Approach to Hilde's experience:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
<p>- "I was perceiving different things ... I realized immediately when the Nadis are opening. I did not understand ... And then the most impressive thing was the silence I gained, and it was like a silence..."</p>	<p>- "Afterwards [after Japa]. And in the silence "...that it is consistent that you can hold it and I realized when I was in a traffic jam" - "... or that when you recite after a while you can hold that silence and it is the same effect".</p>	<p>- "Yeah, I wouldn't say that nothing in Kundalini Yoga is a mys... or there might be points, but many things are not a mysterium (sic). It is a very clear, precise technology that leads to a precise experience; for me it is very scientific, all Kundalini Yoga ... I use experience in two different ways: one is more related to the teachings of Yogi Bhajan, more related to how yoga is and experience as a "jump point" when you open your awareness" - "I think it is the key point to the teachings ... Shunia [silence] was everything in it. For me Shunia, all yoga is pointing to Shunia, to lead you to Shunia. And all yoga starts from there" - "I never approach Sikhism as a religion. For me is a complete technology "</p>	<p>- "Japa for example, many of the Japas I did. They have this string impact in me. For example I read 125,000 times Japji, in 40 days, this means that you have to sit every day for five to six hours and there so many things that happened that I was not really aware before that happened through this process of this Japa and it was very intense".</p>	<p>- "Everything is experience and nothing. So I, myself, don't find it easy to... maybe I don't really have... maybe I cannot give a definition of it..." - "I can only retrospectively describe in the effect of it; as something that gives you a different view point on the things" - "... in the moment your perception changes, the perception and the interpretation of the situation changes. This happens through the experience, it is caused by the experience" - "I think the moment you talk about them they get flat. This is another characteristic of experience, you can never reach it by the words" - "... language is linear, structured and experience is not: language is coherent, experience is not coherent and any attempt to describe experience flattens what it is. I think this is why any mystical description... they are poetic..."</p>

Theme 1: Experience of perception v/s preconceptions. According to this informant, experience is a crucial matter in the teachings, since she sees this subject as the path to the right understanding and it demands proper presentation in order to convey the teachings with professionalism. However, when she speaks about

experience she said that, “everything is experience and nothing [is]”, and mainly through a retrospective reflection on the experiences she arrives at knowledge and insights. For her, experience is essentially concerned with the intelligent capacity of a human that learns from things inasmuch as he or she has experienced something. For Hilde, experience is seen as “something that gives you a different viewpoint of things” and the fundamental characteristic of the experiential is that it is defined or it happens within the frame of perception, or indeed is an experience *of* perception.

She said that by having the experience of things one can have a path or “a way” to avoid looking at the world through “preconceptions” and learn or know things by experiencing them directly rather than by studying what is preconceived about them. The opposite to this, according to her, is to know something through the “preconception” or even more, through someone else’s “preconception”. This “preconception”, in simple terms, could actually mean *theory*. I think of that as a judgment or view that someone can have as theoretical knowledge of a given object prior to the direct experience of that object. Therefore, what I understood from Hilde is that if someone else adopts that *view, theory or judgment*, it becomes a preconception about the object, which has a different nature from the actual practical knowledge of the direct “perception” of that given object. This is connected to the idea she explained in regards to looking at reality through “social situatedness” (sic). She ventured to say that there are things that are happening and we do not have the chance to access them, in her own terms, “what really happens” is untouched because of “our web of interpretation”. In this expression she was equating “preconception” with “web of interpretation” as phenomena that take place in the intellect. These ideas of “preconceptions” or “web of interpretations”, according to her, do not really support the intellectual process of adapting the understanding to a given reality. In her reflection about the value of experience, she asserted that “... you never have access to reality through the mind, because mind is limited”. Her rather critical view of the intellectual faculty is based on her notion (or belief) that the mind is *per se* handicapped in accessing reality, and this explains why the mind would lean on the pre-established knowledge available, the one that is prior to the personal experience that they refer to.

But for dealing with this problem of not being able to access reality with the rational, lineal mind, she thinks Kundalini yoga offers a way to train the mental faculty for seeing things without the limitation of the mind. This is the reason why in Kundalini yoga, as she explained, there are no “mysteries”. In her view, the techniques lead to a precise experience that affects someone’s life and understanding in a way that “with yoga the web of interpretation becomes thinner ... and you can create awareness”. For her Kundalini yoga allows experiential type of knowledge that she deemed “immediate” and that is at the same time known “retrospectively” through interpretation. It would be correct to understand that in her belief Kundalini yoga can be considered a method that unveils unknown or mysterious things to the rational mind; and that this is due to the application of exercises that are considered defined, standardized and documented in the “teachings” and therefore the effects are clear and reachable. She said, “It is very clear, precise technology that leads to a precise experience; for me it is very scientific, all Kundalini Yoga”. This implies that the technique is believed to produce a shift in

perception, as if it moved from a sort of *contaminated viewpoint* (the “situatedness” (sic), the “pre-conceptions”, the “web of interpretation”, etc.) to a vantage point of perception in order to experience the “reality” directly. This form of interrelation between the informant and the world or reality is taken as “the only way” to really know, as she said, and it can only happen as an experience. What she is considering is that this approach gives a more accurate way (method?) to apprehend things, compared with the theories that are seen as mental procedures that impose a view (or theoretical frame) on reality. Then, further criticism towards conventional knowledge and language started to spring from her words. Experience as she sees it “escapes cultural bounds”, and everything that can be experienced like the “world”, “the other” or “yourself”, as she mentioned, is free from mind stuff and culture. For Hilde,

“... language is linear, structured and experience is not: language is coherent, experience is not coherent and any attempt to describe experience flattens what it is”

In other words, what could be understood as a *non-experiential worldview* (a pre-conception) is for her a limitation in a cognitive sense: it does not represent reality and it will be “flattened” by language if there is an attempt to convey it. What she referred to as “pre-conceptions” seems to be the concepts about an object that are prior to the experience of that object. The pre-conceptions seem to be more like an impediment in the quest for knowledge rather than a stage towards it.

Theme 2: Reaching reality: Perception and culture. But it must be noted that the cognitive and intellectual capacities are not altogether discarded by this informant, indeed to some degree the kind of experiences she has gone through in her life have led her to embrace their “interpretation” as she said. In her speech she refers to the experiences in her life as something meaningful, that have historical rationality because no random event happens “just because”, as she commented: therefore everything has or comes with an implicit logic. At the same time, all experiential units are connected by a given process of “interpretation”, as she asserted. It is necessary to frame or situate the events along with the worldviews altogether to make sense of them as a part of a historical process. In her view, Yogi Bhanjan’s concepts of experience meant a “jump point when you open your awareness”. In other words an experience is a sort of milestone in the progression of one’s *history of life events made meaningful*, as I think it can be understood. With this background it becomes clear that she believes that one has to “work for having an experience (sic)”, and that “at a certain point you have it”, as she concluded.

For this informant the approach to sensations is connected to the idea of perspective. The idea that the sensations and the senses are the best perspectives to interrelate with what she calls “reality” is comparatively quite opposite to the Cartesian idea that the senses deceive us. The approach of the interviewee about a sensory experience is fully opposite to the French philosopher, for whom rationality and thought are the root of being and reality (“*cogito ergo sum*”) and the senses deceive or distort the correct perception of a thing, the *res*. In other words, as Hilde thinks, contrary to Descartes,

“awareness” practically cannot be triggered or “opened” by anything other than a direct sensory experience, and by attaining a direct experience or perception of a thing, or “having an experience” to paraphrase Yogi Bhajan in his teaching, one gets to really know something. The goal of “opening awareness” gives the practitioner a sense of accomplishment of what really is.

What she conveyed in several parts of the interview is that reality is inaccessible to the mind. In this way she is very close to the opinion that characterizes certain events as a *mysterium*, as Otto once wrote. At the same time she said that in the way Kundalini Yoga works it leaves no room for mysteries since this “technology”, as she called it, works on enabling access to “reality”. If this is not a contradiction then it shows a paradox in a way that although the practice of yoga and meditation allows a person to have an immediate experience of reality, giving this person knowledge of reality, still one knows these experiences better through a process of interpretation, which is done retrospectively, as she explained. The idea of experience presented by Hilde showed awareness as something different from a *posteriori* interpretative construction about the experience: awareness seems to be a more direct and instantaneous grasp of “what really is”, whereas what she sees in the retrospective exercises of revisiting an experience is more like a *post-conception* based on one’s experience, which can eventually become a *pre-conception* for others. Coherent with this idea the interviewee was consequently critical of language as an effective way to convey a particular experience. She attested that talking about an experience makes it “flat”, deeming the communication of an experience as something which “you can never reach by the word”. Finally what Hilde is showing is that reality is in two ways unreachable by people: 1) reality can neither be “reached with the mind” 2) nor can it be reached “by the word”. An unmediated approach through a direct experience, untouched by pre-conceptions, and made meaningful through a retrospective interpretation, is “the way” to reach reality and achieve a clearer understanding of it.

Theme 3: A continuum or a jump. In spite of the previous attributions concerning how experience relates to the mind, the pre-conceived knowledge and the words, she offered a further description of the experiences she has gone through. However, instead of describing the event as Yogi Bhajan’s “jump point”, she rather conveyed another way to see the subject: as a “continuous flow of experience”. This was referred to the experiential of someone who is constantly relating to reality through “the flow of sensations” as Hilde said. It is possible to understand the ideas of “flow of experience” and “flow of sensations” as the united act where a person is a witness and *continuously* mindful of the ongoing development of life. This implies that the person is attentive, somewhat second by second, and sensing “myself”, “the world” and others” in each moment as she commented. A similar view was expressed by Hector. This sort of *mindfulness* in relation to the process of life is different from a singular and perhaps *more special* event that works as a *wake up call*, or as Hilde said, as it helps with regards to “opening awareness”. It might be correct to say that it is closer to a mental state where there is no *traffic* of thoughts through the *avenues* of the mind, so the absence of these thoughts, ideas, concepts or pre-conceptions do not disturb but rather allow the space for a continuum and undisturbed attention anchored in the mindfully-held

perception. Can this be possible? According to Hilde it is possible and she did go through this,

“I was perceiving different things ... I realized immediately when the nadis are opening. I did not understand ... And then the most impressive thing was the silence I gained...”

The significant event that she highlighted was related to a “silence gained”, a silence that she also defined as “presence minus interpretative mind” and referred to as a “state of intuitive awareness”, recalling Yogi Bhajan’s lexicon. The perceptions she had brought to a particular aspect within the “continuum” of “perception” that she deemed as “nadis”, the yogic/Ayurvedic channels of energy in the body which are sometimes seen as equivalent to the Chinese energy channels called “meridians”. She stated that the descriptions of these sorts of things are not coherent, as I already said that for her words cannot reach them, and any attempt to have a deeper narration about this kind of subject was rather deeming it not as a logical thing, but as something that can only be described in a “poetic” way. Recalling poetry as the most natural or appropriate fashion to express experiences appears to be a way to solve an eventual reluctance to speak about personal things that are not so clear or eventually shareable; the nature of the things at stake might be already difficult to make intelligible as she said “experience is not coherent”, so any attempt to explain what is not conceived as coherent might easily lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretation. In this way, the use of the yogic philosophy of the “chakras” and “nadis” could serve as a simple reference, image or symbol that has the potential to represent what she perceived.

Nonetheless, the aspect of “silence” was the most relevant for her to mention. She conveyed silence as a state of continuous experience, a sort of mental mood that was distinguished from the *jumping-point-single-event* of Yogi Bhajan. Silence was an experience in itself. As one can see, these two types of experiences still bear the key mark that is embedded in of the 3HO notion of experience: “awareness” or “a state of it”, which I suggest understanding this “silence” as an *experience of perception of no sound* in which the mind hears no thought or activity and is reduced to an apparent soundless mood. The intellectual tendency, in this context, is deprived of its interpretative impulse and reasoning, which in turn seems to be the key to why the mind could turn into a “continuum” passively witnessing “reality”. “Silence” should be understood as a mental mood that has a motionless attention, a steadiness in relating to the perceived phenomena, and it is believed to have the potential to enhance sensory perception, which in turn supplies with more vivid perceptions and impressions of everything.

Theme 4: Mantra repetition. Our dialogue derived to address her notions related to the practices in 3HO and how they feed the experiential dimension of the life of a persona. In this respect she attested that for her “Japa is essential” (mantra repetition) and that the Kundalini Yoga Kriyas “can also do the thing”. Her overall view of the practical side of the organization and the teaching of Yogi Bhajan was, like with other informants, “technical” and the nature of these teachings was considered being based

on the effects and procedures of this type. For Hilde, “It is a very clear, precise technology that leads to a precise experience; for me it is very scientific, all Kundalini Yoga...”.

Similarly her opinion about “all techniques” was showing that the constituents of 3HO practice were all

“interconnected [and] there are physical, psychological or intellectual and subtle effects ... are all completely intertwined”

In this sense “Japa”, the meditative form of repeating the verses or words from Sikh scripture, was also deemed as a “technology”. For her the religious side of these teachings was something she “has never been interested [in]”, so she followed her natural interest and a personal approach to Sikhism in which she saw Guru Nanak as someone who prescribed formulas to produce effects “in whomever”. She saw the devotional aspect as an effect rather than a reason for this practice. In her case *devotion* appears as an *attributional conclusion* rather than as an *attributional disposition*. In her account the reference to the repetitions of “Shabads”, the mantras or hymns written by the Sikh Gurus, was taken in the traditional technical sense and the religiosity of the hymns of the Sikh Gurus was diplomatically bypassed. Her actions and experiences in her own view were not religious. This is a relevant statement to contextualize the phenomenon, since in 3HO the practice of the techniques includes (or should include) the recitation of Guru Nanak’s Japji on a daily basis. In this sense she commented that,

“For example I read 125,000 times Japji, in 40 days, this means that you have to sit every day for five to six hours and there so many things that happened that I was not really aware before that happened through this process of this Japa and it was very intense”

In the context of the Yoga Festival the Japji is recited every morning and to the observer scholar the phenomenon could be associated with a devotional act. Phenomenologically, the devotion is somewhat evident, although the underlying intention and understanding is, or might be, very “technical”. For Hilde, the only way to relate to this was by deeming it differently and considering herself a practitioner of a technique and not a “devotee” or “believer” of a religion. Thus the phenomenological implication is that even if the actions can be categorized as religious, it must be done by contextualizing the etic/emic encounter of horizons, since the attitude of the performer of the action can be far from religious. Therefore the way to deem the approach as different from religious must be accounted for to help understanding. At any rate, in no way are the elements at stake seen as religious devices by her: Nanak’s knowledge of sound has to do with a technical insight into states of the mind *made word or sound* rather than a devotional act of worshipping God. However, she considers devotion an effect of practice, and in adopting this kind of practice the practitioner is in a process that *could* lead to devotion. She asserted that, “When you enter the process ... the process controls you” and thus you can find “something beyond you” which is a tacit reference to the idea of an agency *deemed special*. However, she stated that she is not

yet “at the stage” of identifying it with any specific religious agency, although one could understand that the “efficiency” attributed to the system to “do the thing” deemed special sooner or later involves the *experience of devotion*. The various “effects” are based on the idea of a paradoxical empowerment through the practice: paradoxical since “it controls you”, and for the power to be effective it must be derived from a convergence of practical knowledge that is combined “technically” rather than *supernaturally*. Her description suggested that the reason why the exercises and techniques work is because of their “interconnection”.

To sum up, the deeming of her experience as a “process” is a key to understand Hilde’s descriptions. She mentioned it as a “process” of personal development involving perceptual skills related to “reality” that have the central aim of developing “awareness” in order to live a life free from distorting pre-conceptions. This “process” is related to the idea of a “path”, where one’s capacity and power is to experience, and it is enhanced by one’s dedication to apply the “technology”, which requires no explicit acknowledgement of a supernatural agency. For her, what is the essence of what takes place in this process is a *natural* “opening of the consciousness” through applied techniques. In engaging this process a part of this implies realizations of many sorts. A further realization of something that is “beyond” appears as an effect of a technical application of yoga and mantras *as* tools. In other words, “devotion” is a possible step in the process of the practitioner, but according to her *this effect* is an experience that will probably come “later”.

Case 8, Geert:

Geert is a man born in Eindhoven. He is a freelance cook in Amsterdam. He is 43 years old and divorced with a young daughter. He has been practicing Kundalini yoga for over 3 years and as a teacher he has an experience of at least 3 years. He considered himself a searcher and ventured into the New Age field before Kundalini Yoga. He is not a trainer, but he has completed all levels 1 and 2 education in Kundalini yoga teacher training.

Attributional Approach to Geert’s experience:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
- When doing yoga, “grief or pain or total joy or despair” - “I had this sense like, like I fell apart or something. It was a very deep, profound experience that I’ve only had before when I was doing drugs or something, like all the	- “... for me every time when I do yoga, for me yoga, a Kriya is a total	- “I think experience is the only thing you can really learn from, I mean you can read things, you can hear thing it can touch you but	- “we did the “Meditation week” [part of the Kundalini Yoga teacher	- “ [experience is] where you really, really go into a process and experience all the details of the process and then experience what it does to you inside, how you feel if something happens or how you feel when you do something, how do you feel when somebody is doing whatever...”

<p>rubbish fell away and I saw really within and I saw that my identity fell apart, I saw some kind of picture with colors and I thought “oh yeah that is me, and the green is this and the red is that and the yellow is that and I was looking at it and then suddenly all the color fell down and I felt “oh my God, I am dying ... it was totally real, but it was spiritual but it was also very happy ... I felt really free and because of that I would say it was really a spiritual experience”</p>	<p>experien ce” - “... during the level 2 [of the Kundalini Yoga teacher training]”</p>	<p>you really have to have an experience to know, to really know what it’s about so yeah I totally agree with it...” - “In my youth I used to say, “I can tell you everything, but you always need to experience it” ... I need to know by really feeling it, this is my way, I am not sure if it is everybody’s way”</p>	<p>training, second level] and we had this day, we did only meditati ons, we were blindfold ed and not to speak and at the end of this day when we were in a specific meditati on...”</p>	<p>- “the experience still last but of course, you get to be back normal, for what normal is...” - “I think it is the accumulation of all the teachings I have received until now ... because of all the exercises and also because of hearing this all over and again and again, in this moment that I had this experience” - “it remains in me very vivid, it feels very much of me this experience, I everyday try to reconnect to this feeling, because when I was in this experience I had something in me saying “yeah I am going to stay like this forever” you know, “I got to keep it”, but ... yeah, I am just slipping back to normal...”</p>
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Theme 1: Experience as a school. In the view of this man the subject of experience is a central aspect of the learning process of his life. He considered experience the essential learning process of life because, according to him, it is “the only thing you can learn from”. In his understanding of this subject he commented that,

“In my youth I used to say, ‘I can tell you everything, but you always need to experience it’ ... I need to know by really feeling it, this is my way, I am not sure if it is everybody’s way”

For him, knowing was deemed as a matter of *feeling in depth*, as he said that one really “go[es] into a process and experiences all the details ... what it does to you inside...”. From my point of view his idea of experience includes an element of detailed attention, as in mindfulness, to everything that is happening *to* and *within* the person. It is worth noting that this is a familiar idea that was also expressed by some other informants: the attention seemed to be a key *disposition of the attributor* who engaged in every act as a self-observation. In the case of Geert this approach is attributed an explicit quality as an educative force that seems to disclose inner knowledge and “all details and the inside” world, as he commented.

The exercises of Kundalini Yoga are deemed as a “total experience” by the informant, and although he attested that despite the fact that “I can’t tell you everything”, the coherence of his speech highlights immediately that “you always need to experience it ... [because you] know by really feeling it...”. Under the light of his ascriptions, it would be correct to refer to the exercises in Kundalini Yoga, in particular to what he refers to as a *Kriya*, as an intentional act chosen to give the practitioner the opportunity to trigger

several states or experiences that lead to knowledge within himself. This is perhaps the reason why the person might feel an enhanced or even altered perception of himself through the experiences, as he commented. In this mechanism of yoga practice and the experiences that he attributes to it, he has the disposition to deem the experiential events he goes through in a meaningful way. In other words he willingly practices because these experiences teach him something, although, as it has been shown in the other cases, they are challenging experiences at the same time.

The ideas he presented appear to imply that there is a psycho-somatic view that is the reason why he does what he does and is also what he relates to *during* these experiences themselves; in other words his mind and his body are perceived to enter a relationship that he seems to hold with *special* attention because it is potentially meaningful, and because he can then “really know”. There is no other agency and he does not think that the interplay invokes any external influence. He meditates, feels, sees and knows, to put it simply. This interplay is seen as adequate grounds for “real” knowledge that is concerned with personal information and is itself a “path”. For him, “this is the way”, as he remarked.

Theme 2: Psychological shift. When he shared some aspects of an experiential event when he was meditating for a full day he spoke about a “sense” in which he felt “like falling apart...”.

For Geert, the intense meditation practice had reached *a peak* and at first this rather uncomfortable situation of “falling apart” was not associated with a positive state or a spiritual process. His mind and himself were at odds with the experience. And what happened next? At that moment the experience was rather paradoxically frightening he said, and he thought “I am dying” while the experience was taking place. But then in a second thought he communicated that the whole experience was a “... profound experience that I’ve only had before when I was doing drugs”. The referential frame did not become religious or associated with “the teachings”, rather he deemed the event correlated to his previous experience with using drugs. This is an interesting testimonial that would confirm the teachings in 3HO. It contributes because the information brought forward by him was probably based on or was comparable to some kind of psychological or emotional allurement or even hallucination that he experienced earlier in life. Yogi Bhanjan used to speak about getting “high” organically with Kundalini Yoga. Let us remember that The House of Representatives of the USA Congress declared that Yogi Bhanjan,

“Recognized immediately that the *experience of higher consciousness* that many young people were attempting to find through drugs could be alternatively achieved through Kundalini Yoga” (Congress Resolution p. 2 *my italics*).

Geert’s testimonial confirms this. The context of the experience the informant is referring to during this interview happened to him in an intensive course of meditation during Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training (Level 2). A positivistic view of the element of meaningfulness contained in his deeming making process marks a distinctive feature

ascribed to the experience. As he mentioned, the practice of meditation was done during the whole day and this context and practice is attributed as the conditions that provided the direction to explore his interior dimension.

The way Geert explained this event can be understood as a type of *meditative catharsis* as I would suggest calling it, because as he commented, “I saw within... my identity fell away... [and then] oh my God I am dying [after] all rubbish fell away ...”. Evidently I cannot access the experience or even imagine what was it all about, but it could be elucidated that this event allowed him to gain a different perspective of himself. Indeed, from the vantage point of the time of the interview he then attested that, “I saw things about myself, how they really are ...”. Through this inner experience that happened while he was meditating he gained a view of himself that earlier was unknown.

It could help the understanding of this issue if the object of his experience is actually considered to be himself, within his mind, and, his “sense” of himself. Without wanting to engage the object of his experience, it seems to be possible to understand that through the event he narrated, he gained a more direct contact with some unknown areas of his life and personality. Therefore his experience of an intense personal psychological event, contained an evident link to the core of his identity. In this experience about himself and his mind what seemed to be at stake was a sense of survival; this survival is possibly related to his known psychological architecture or the self-understanding he had at that moment, which the experience challenged. The description provided by the informant showed that in his experience he is observing what he considers himself and that at a certain moment he is able to contemplate his own “identity” with an inedited clarity and shape, saying, “I saw some kind of picture with colours and I thought “oh yeah that is me, and the green is this and the red is that and the yellow is that and I was looking at it”. For him this was something totally new, but it was comparable with the “effect of drugs”. Then he recalled that the “rubbish” he saw, which I understand as the parts of his mind and personality that he assessed as *dysfunctional* or *false*, started to be overcome as the emergence of a new shape of identity was seen and experienced. In this event he faced the fear of dying since the observable self or personality he knew suffered an internal experiential upheaval. He says, “then suddenly all the colour fell down and I felt “oh my God, I am dying ... it was totally real”.

My arguments to express it as a *meditative catharsis* are 1) it is meditative inasmuch as the attributor context was in a day of practicing the meditation as the activity of the day, so he and his peers were engaged and immersed 2) From a phenomenological perspective I can argue that the informant was performing meditation and that the act conditioned the disposition to the experience, and 3) I refer to it as catharsis because there is an explicit statement in which he refers to cleansing or purging (as “all rubbish fell away”), which is a key defining factor in the experience he is deeming¹²¹.

¹²¹ In Greek the word *kátharsis* means “to clean”, “to purge”.

Theme 3: The emergence of a new view. As the description continued, he said that the act of meditation produced a lucidity that lasted a night. He characterized this aftermath as an- “amazing, profound, most deepest (sic)” experience and that he viewed the occurrence of this state as an arrival towards “beyond the normal” world. However, his ability to verbally refer to more details about that event was challenged as he asserted, “I don’t really know” when reflecting that what was all about. Nevertheless according to him it was possible to ascribe the event within the frame of “a spiritual, happy experience”. After all for him the “sense of dying and falling apart”, brought about the ideas of spirituality and happiness to his deeming making process:

“It was spiritual but it was also very happy ... I felt really free and because of that I would say it was really a spiritual experience”.

Why, after all, does he deem the experience in this way? The words he used to describe his experience give the impression that he was dealing with a challenging experience that he did not anticipate or knew (except in association with the use of drugs) and he did not know very well how to describe it in a new fashion other than by using the nearest jargon (like drugs, spiritual and happiness). However, he then asserted with confidence that what he felt and saw “was totally real”. The arrival to lucidity within the experience itself was triggered by the practice of meditation, according to his ascription, which allowed him to witness something like his own self-image and mind, both together transiting from unwanted conditions of “falling apart” and “fear” to a “profound” and “happy” state of mind. The way he addressed his experience is comparable to the description of Otto’s numinous experience (*tremendum et fascinans*). The elements of *mystery*, *awe* and *unknown* in Geert’s story are, however, experiences which coexist with the elements of *personal conviction* that the experiential unit was *real and* that they show a *reality* within. He did not doubt what happened, but he did not entirely know what it was. The overall event, however, impacted him with regards to his personality as he seemed to have experienced a moment of a deep realizing introversion.

A comparative perspective can allow the understanding to find the clues of his ascription, inasmuch as “the freedom” he referred to seems to be taken as one of the arguments he used to deem the experience “as spiritual”. This experience and the freedom helped him to reach something “beyond” the limitations or contractions “of this world”. This can be compared to another type of experience that bears some resemblance in the effect produced. Bearing in mind the theological implications and the differences in the disposition of the attributors, the case of Saint Paul’s biblical account which, in similar terms, also manifested the similar conviction that *veritas liberabit vos*. Although Paul’s experience was not sought, the sense of arriving at a *truth* that produced a determining transformation is comparable in both cases. In both cases I see the element of *freedom* as the result of seeing something (initially light in the case of Paul and shapes and colours in the case of Geert), and both cases were then deemed in a fashion that is interior and *spiritual*. According to Geert it was “spiritual” since it went “beyond” the world and the result made him relate to it as a liberating moment in his life.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that the informant's spontaneous comparison of the experience with drugs, gives a hint of the type of *consciousness* that was probably acting at the moment of the experience. According to this type of ascription one could think that he could have been in what is referred to as an *altered state of consciousness*. This is common to some meditative or mystic experiences as well as to the experience induced by some legal or illegal drugs.

Additionally it is worth saying that he deemed as (older) limitations, inhabiting inside of him, the conditions related to an enculturation introduced to his life by the people and environment around him. This is important because the experience altered his historical consciousness and made him feel a release from the internal limitations of the past. This externalized source of limitation was deemed as "...these voices [that] get inside and they criticized you" and qualified this aspect of his mind calling it "the censor". It could be said that a process of socialization had shaped his moral of what to do and what not to do and that had remained as a fresh memory. This, I think, was the source of the "voices" that abounded in his inner world. For this informant the experience gave him the absence of a sort of psychological coercion, and with it the chance to think of it as an indicator of a new perspective in his life, "yeah I am going to stay like this forever ... I got to keep it [the experience]", he said and wished. According to him this new perspective is in fact the core effect of the experience; the dispersion of his psychological misconceptions about himself and about his identity, the sense of liberation from external/internal limiting control and the achievement of connection to himself as he naturally feels he is. For him the experience was intimately rewarding, "I felt really safe ... it was real and in connection ..." he commented.

Theme 4: The cause is the sum. When he was asked if he could explain how this event took place he said that the reason for this event was the "accumulation of teachings" that he had received and practice he had done through the years, "because of hearing the teaching all over again and again" and also "because of all the exercises" he had practiced. In this *a posteriori* reflection he described a process of gradual *accumulative* progression, very much in consonance with the process of acculturation and socialization that I spoke of before, in relation to the limitations he described that were "released" through the experience. In the case of the causes of the experience, he attested that the exposition to the worldview and prescriptive frame of the "teaching" of Yogi Bhanan and the "practice" of the methods he taught are syndicated as the conditions and causes why he went through this experiential unit. In order to understand the interplay of conditions correctly it is necessary to look at these two types of actions, such as reading (the teachings), and practicing (the exercises) as the building blocks that he deemed to have paved the road that led him to the experience I call *meditative catharsis*. This event and the two main pillars that he identifies as the building blocks that led him to it made him state that the theory or literature about experience was confirmed, in his words, "yeah I know what they are talking about". It is necessary to add that his basic focus in relation to the literature was the "Self-help" and "personal development", as he said, and the study of these topics acted as the immediate stimulation that made him go through this process according to the worldview and practice in 3HO. In relation to the parts that construct these teachings

and practice he commented that his interest was initially in yoga since it gave him a practical tool to “develop”, but at the time of the interview his interest had started to grow towards the Sikh religion.

The reflection of Geert made him conclude that the experience became a referential memory and that, “every day I try to reconnect to this feeling”. This built up a new attitude that repeats itself in his memory. When he goes through similar experiential events he deems them “glimpses” of this one crucial experience. For him these “glimpses” became an inspiration in his path. The self-evident consequence is that the event he shared left a memory in the form of a feeling which can also be considered a trace that the interviewee tries to re-encounter or at least remember “every day”, as he said. It might also be sensible to say that for him this experience became an historical moment in his own history of “personal development”. At the same time this experience made him say that he felt that he did not want anything else (“I want to stay like this forever”), which implies the paradox that no further development is sought and that the history of his search and personal development had apparently reached an end or a sense of permanent fulfillment. This experience made him feel transformed for good.

Case 9, Ruth:

Ruth is a woman from the Netherlands who has some unfinished studies in philosophy and psychology. She came from a family that was mainly agnostic. She is 50 years old and divorced from a yogi of 3HO; they did not have children. She has been in the 3HO for 20 years and is a Lead Trainer of Kundalini Yoga (both Levels 2).

Attributional Approach to Ruth’s experiences:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
- “... I just cried and cried and cried. I felt really like coming home ... I felt aligned ... I felt so touched and thought “this really gave me a horizon” and something to look for...” - “I noticed that I was very much in the silence, in the	- “at some point I came to the Yoga Festival” - “1980 ... I moved into the ashram.” - “in Assisi”	- “From the question it sounds like spiritual was unusual (laughter)” - “... that is what I am experiencing more and more and this sense of unity becomes bigger, but it doesn’t come in this flash experiences, it	- “There was one moment when we were in the sadhana and I think we had to sing “Ad Gure Nameh” - “... then when I got there in this Yoga Festival, I met Yogi Bhajan one year before	- “I could deeply believe and feel aligned like there was some kind of aim of life, some kind of aim of life... things that I couldn’t really feel that was worth to put my whole life into it, so I started to live in the ashram” - “I don’t think that just chanting Ad Guru Nameh was all, I went 1 year before and I meet Yogi Bhajan, the whole 3HO ... it was the whole thing that finally culminated into this moment [experience]” - “I don’t put the significance in one experience it is more the growing curve, maybe I can say

<p>sense of non-separation I was more connected to in a very calmed way..."</p>	<p>- "Re Man... (meditation)"</p>	<p>comes gradually" - "My aim is to live my destiny, to serve..." - Experiences are "... part of the development as much as the meditation that I do or all that, whatever kind of courses I go, like this one, so it is all connected, I have not come in this life time to be liberated or anything like that I also don't mind..."</p>	<p>... at that Yoga Festival"</p>	<p>it, 'curve of experiences' that I find very significant (laughter)" - "I got much happier that is why I joined this club, after I've met Yogi Bhajan, this yoga, I started doing yoga every day, I became significantly more happy (laughter) that is why I stayed with it ... I am more happy and at the same time I have this sense that I am doing something useful in some way. That is what keeps me here" - "I very much like when I started these things about being honest and being graceful... I liked that he [Yogi Bhajan] had this capacity to do his personal sacrifices in order to stick to what he believes and what he wants to deliver. It is like that Yogi Bhajan wanted to deliver a certain thing in a certain way and he never stepped aside of that and that touched me a lot".</p>
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Theme 1: Finding home. For this woman her first participation in the European Yoga Festival was an altogether "moving" experience.

"... I just cried and cried and cried. I felt really like coming home ... I felt aligned ... I felt so touched and thought 'this really gave me a horizon and something to look for...'"

After about 20 years from the moment of this interview she still remembers that she "felt so touched" by being at the Festival for the first time and everything she was doing there. Everything she experienced there gave her "a horizon" for her whole life until the present, and she reaffirms this for the future. Her disposition was clear, she was in a search and it was during one of the morning practices, in the *sadhana*, when she was chanting the "Aquarian mantras", that she started to cry in a way deemed special. Being "touched" by that moment and that practice was attributed to the feeling that she experienced of "coming home", as she commented. This experience of the mantras and the group singing together gave her the feeling that she had found something crucial in her search. What was it she found? The experience itself? A hint is perhaps contained in the psychology of her words, since the experience at the Yoga Festival was "uplifting", and out of this "I could deeply believe" she said. Maybe she was feeling down, maybe she had lost faith, but the experiential unity made her feel "touched". It is perhaps the indifference or disbelief that contrasted to the feeling of being "up-lifted" that changed things for her. The Yoga Festival was attributed as the crucial moment and environment in her having this experience within which *sadhana* practice is deemed the immediate trigger.

According to Ruth the experience within the 3HO setting of the Yoga Festival, the morning sadhana and also the presence of Yogi Bhajan were all important ingredients to make her feel that she had found something she could believe in. This event, together with the belief it brought about, made her feel “aligned to ... [and an] aim of life”. She said that she found a purpose; she found something she could integrate into her life.

The different occurrences at the Yoga Festival stimulated her to choose to affiliate with 3HO because it was “worth putting my whole life into it, so I started to live in the ashram”. The event at the Yoga Festival triggered in her a mode of living that seemed to bridge her expectation and her aims as she had an experience of 3HO. In other words, the whole environment, the practices, the chanting and the presence of the founder of the organization all stimulated her in such a way that the *collective effervescence* of the Yoga Festival awakened in her a sense of familiarity (“coming home”), a consonance with the 3HO goals (she felt “aligned”), and an acceptance of the organization’s view of a future (“horizon”) and an awakening sense of faith within (“I believed”). This single but determining emotional reaction arose in her, unfolding her mind and her heart along the path of 3HO and Yogi Bhajan. Her first experience among and of the 3HO community created the bridges to believe in that type of life and values, which manifested in the almost immediate impulse to affiliate with the group and move to live in an ashram, which was the core life experiences of the yogis of 3HO in the 1970s and 1980s.

Theme 2: The community life. In her view the experience did not ultimately arise because of the mantras she sang, but came from “the whole 3HO”, as she specified. It is interesting to pay attention to her understanding of the subject of the experiential, because although this single experience was seemingly determined for good, in theory a single experience is not as significant for her as the “curve of experiences”, as she called them. For her, the experiential unit was only a single point in a larger and more meaningful progression of experiences. The settings and arrangements at the 3HO Yoga Festival, her meeting with Yogi Bhajan and everything there seemed to touch her heart from all corners. She felt touched as never before and she referred to this event, suggesting that the timeline of experiences in plural is what she deems relevant. She deemed the subject of experience not as a single experience but as a sequence of experiences acting together, and all together she deemed with a meaningful significance. She depicted the subject as a *cycle of events*, which one can say produced periods of *emotional upheaval* as I think it is appropriate to call them. Following the informant’s criterion, it is correct to say that a single event becomes relevant not in itself, but in relation to the larger intended aims implicit in the deeming making process and in relation to the perspective of time that allows them to be combined *a posteriori*. What she also seems to be implying that joining the lifestyle of 3HO gave her the experience of embracing a sense of mission or purpose. The conversation somewhat showed that before that she was not experiencing what really mattered to her and it was as if her real life started from that day.

But this particular event of 3HO was further deemed in the following terms: “I was very much in the silence, in the sense of non-separation, I was more connected ... [to the] opening of the heart”. The content of this experience relates to her intimate world as a place of “silence” which is associated with the idea of “non-separation” and emotion (“heart”). But what could “silence in the sense of non-separation” mean? One could argue that by looking at it from the opposite phenomenon of noise (or any audible internal sound or even events stored as audible memories including thoughts, feelings or imagination), it can be taken as an inner form of restlessness in the mind or some kind of emotional numbness. *Noise*, in this sense, is like a disturbance for embracing life, others and feeling closer, whereas it is reasonable to say that a quiet or harmonious environment would eventually support empathy and proximity. However, as I understand it here, noise as a form of inner turmoil could have supported a preconditioning feeling of separation and lie behind her limited “heart” connection to things and people. Silence on the other hand might have removed the inner turmoil, the feeling of distance and therefore made everything feel closer and connected. What she also seems to imply is that there was a dynamic of her mind and heart that seemed to change, with the latter being enhanced by silence and the former being more dominant when she is not “in the silence”. At the same time the “separation” and “connection” can be referred to the level of relationship, not only with herself but also with the world and people around her. She deemed the heart or emotional aspect with regards to how it changed towards an “opening”, and this seems to be the key aspect in the attributional process of deeming her experience. In other words, she started saying that 1) she felt “touched” that something reached her, and then 2) the distance was covered and she felt “connected” and “close”. By using this terminology she then naturally arrived at a key official stepping-stone-*feeling* of the organization, as she said that she 3) “got so much happier” and that was why 4) she took the decision and “joined this club”. So from “touched” to “connected” to “close” to “happier” to “joined”... This is all deemed in accordance with an intimate vision (seeing the “horizons”), and a relational feeling (being “at home”) as the experience of being at the Yoga Festival started to unfold decades ago...

Theme 3: The unfolding of the path of Unity. As she attested, the whole experience gave her happiness and purpose and from there onwards she said, “I am experiencing more and more” of that. This is linked to the previous notions. The experiences are not different in quality but are rather deemed as coherent, qualitatively bigger and quantitatively repeatable in the timeline (as in a “curve of experiences”). In this sense the first feelings of being “touched”, “connection”, “happiness”, “purpose”, “opening”, etc. are re-addressed in a way I would call teleological. For her there is a coherence as everything seems to be guiding her on a clear journey as she deems that the “sense of unity becomes bigger”. No substantial change, but an increase in quantity or an expansion of the quality of “unity”. This is referring to the idea of both life and belonging to a group with which she feels united. To see the experience this way she commented that the development “comes gradually” and supposes an *a posteriori* deeming making process of consciously interrelating and integrating experiential units into a large coherent life event. One could notice that in her narration the encounter with the 3HO community and their way of being in the world fulfilled her personal

expectation regarding her own life (in relation to the world and people around her). The two greater changes are that this made her *believe and* made her *happier*. In some ways the two parts of this story, the individual and the group, are deemed to match perfectly. The atmosphere, worldview and lifestyle promoted by the 3HO community, as well as her *untouched* inclinations, had a similar kind of “horizon”, so this explains why she felt “aligned”, as she felt an external thing stimulating her internal convictions. The two parts, individual person and collective context, seemed to harmoniously come together from the very first moment they met.

A distinction must be considered in relation to the sense of “unity”. The progression, as I wrote above, is qualitatively the same, but just bigger and that there is a quantitative change in it (the “experiencing more and more” of this type of unity) as well as a quantitative tendency towards growth (“the sense of unity becomes bigger”). These two statements, (“experiencing more and more” and “the sense of unity becomes bigger”), are probably showing that the *ethos* of 3HO was progressively recognized and embraced by her. Also, she had encountered various people in 3HO and gradually found herself becoming closer (“connected”) with them. It is worth mentioning that, as diverse as the international European community might look from the outside, the 3HO community present at the Yoga Festival forms a uniformity of practice, dress, aims and code that helps to create intense empathy as well as contact points among those with similar inclinations. In a way, as it was expressed by the Coordinator of the Yoga Festival, this is one of the reasons why this event exists, and why they speak of the “3HO family”. This is deemed along the lines of the organization’s and Yogi Bhajan’s worldview, which sees the human being and the world as creations that are intrinsically *one* phenomenon. 3HO’s task is to recreate that *oneness* in experience and in consciousness.

Theme 4: Connected and serving unity. As a consequence one could consider that her sense of “connection” and “unity” is in itself the main outcome of her experience and search. However, the central aim she referred to is to “live my destiny [and] to serve”. Destiny and service. From the point of view of the participant observer, it is important to say that this informant appears to have a very active stand in 3HO. This explains why she spoke about Yogi Bhajan and brought him up as an example. For her,

“... I liked that he [Yogi Bhajan] had this capacity to do his personal sacrifices in order to stick to what he believes and what he wants to deliver. It is like that Yogi Bhajan wanted to deliver a certain thing in a certain way and he never stepped aside of that and that touched me a lot”.

This statement proves that she ascribed him the capacity that exemplified and lived up to the aims that she herself connected with. The community of 3HO can be taken as an extension of the coherence of “horizons” that she saw and joined. Her views about engaging her life “with this club”, as she put it, shows that out of the encounter with 3HO she found the language and the ways to develop and manifest what was already in her (as a *disposition of the attributor* or as a latent intention). To “live the destiny” and “serve” are in the explicit teaching and public discourse of 3HO and that is what her experiences among 3HO gave her. All this made her believe... she had a pre-existing or

altogether learnt and fresh *disposition (of the attributor)*, and through this first experiential encounter *in situ*, the horizon and meaning were brought from within herself to the surface or in front of her eyes. I tend to think that both happened together. The context of 3HO was attributed as an external causality regarding why her inner feeling was aroused, as she felt “touched” and through the “silence” she could feel “aligned” and then see a promising “horizon” to nourish in her the idea of “unity” and “service”. Ultimately that is why she “joined the club”. She disclosed something in that context and then she *married* that context that “opened” her. It seems also fair to remember that in her speech Yogi Bhajan acted as a determining role model in her “process” and “curve of experiences”, so she could find the human model for *how* to develop her “destiny” and “serve” what she could at last “believe” in.

Case 10, Sara:

Sara is a woman, originally from the USA, who moved to Spain two decades ago. She is 54 years old and is married with no children. She has a degree in Communication and Political Sciences. Although she had a strong protestant family background she made her way to 3HO when she was a teenager. Since 1989 she has taught yoga, although for the last 40 years she has been in 3HO. She is a Lead Trainer in Kundalini Yoga (both levels).

Attributional approach to Sara’s experiences:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
- “I suddenly felt my solar plexus open, it was just like pupp! and I felt united with the everything, everything, united with the everything, and it produced such a sensation of love within myself”	- “I had done sadhana, my morning practice and then I took a nap, someone in the room was playing a CD by Singh Kaur – beautiful music-“	- “experience exists in the heart, it involves emotions whereas philosophy doesn’t necessarily involve emotions, it involves logic, deduction, and those kinds of things. We are moving into the Age of Aquarius and the Age of Aquarius is going to be based on us dealing with our emotions” - “the practice itself, right, it is very difficult to read a book and have an experience. So an experience is something you have to produce within	- “I was 16 years old, I had done sadhana , my morning practice and then I took a nap, someone in the room was playing a CD by Singh Kaur – beautiful music-”.	- “it affects you glandular system, right, and your glands are all those things that produce emotion, though emotion comes directly from the soul and then your glands follow that” - “I could not refute that and that made me conscious that this was the way, that that was my way, that was my path. It is something you cannot refute, because you can say “oh I like these people I like to tie a turban or I like Kundalini Yoga, but I don’t like this other, etc, etc”... but when you have a personal experience of that kind the logic does not play a part in that and that is something that you cannot turn your back to ... it made me commit to it” - “yoga moves this energy, yoga moves the consciousness, but you need something else

		your physical body, internally and that is why Kundalini Yoga deals with energy, moves energy within you, it moves the consciousness, it affects the consciousness and it works a lot with meditation and meditation is something that it is internal”		that will produce what we call devotion and devotion produces spirituality ... And the Age of Aquarius is about spirituality ... [and Yoga and Sikhism] both of them are based on that, on experience” - “Kundalini Yoga is about experience, when you have experienced something then you know that that is true, not from logic, not from deduction and not because someone told you, but because you have felt it, because you have experienced it” - Experience is “something that happens within you, inside you”.
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Theme 1: Experience of Emotions. According to this Kundalini yoga teacher “philosophy exists in the mind, [and] experience exists in the heart”, what supposedly means that experience is something that is located or reaches the core of a human, whereas she is somehow contrasting this with philosophy, which is located more in the periphery of the mind. In this approach she went further to deem emotions as “a way that our soul has to connect with us”. This interviewee placed in the soul the agency referred to as the *searcher* rather than thinking of it as something to seek. This one can consider a paradox. According to her, the soul is the *searcher* which has a way to *find the person* and this is through the action or effects of emotions. The soul “uses emotion” to *connect* with us. An *ordinary* view would consider that emotions might rather make us more passionate and instinctive rather than spirituality conscious. However, for Sara, emotions are seen as a sort of *bridge* in which the mundane personality, with its mind and body on one side, can join together with the soul or spirit on the other. In order to understand this perspective, one has to conceive the experience of the soul as something beyond one’s domain. This is implied in her idea. The agency that searches is ultimately that unknown and it has to become known with what is familiar with us, emotions. In other words the normally deemed *sublime dimension of the soul* can only be experienced when it *releases* feelings that the person can notice and act upon. This is how her deeming making process of experiences is constructed and the way emotions are to pull the attention of the person towards the soul. The sublime dimension shakes the gross dimension of the person with the help of the emotions, one could say. And then when the personality is *poked* with emotions coming from the soul we get a spiritual experience.

In this interface of soul-emotions-person she situated Kundalini Yoga because, according to her, Kundalini Yoga “is about experience, when you experience something then you know that that is true”. This is because she deemed Kundalini Yoga as the practice that *produces feelings* so the soul can express itself. According to her, the “experience is something that you have to produce within... internally”, attributing efficiency to the system of Kundalini Yoga with regards to creating the conditions for the interface soul-emotions-person. In other words, what she is saying is that the production of experience within is the business of Kundalini Yoga. The way she

expresses the subject matter contains a common 3HO notion that is a criterion to validate authentic or true knowledge. This criterion, as I presented in the second part of this study, is based on the experience of that knowledge. It therefore seems fair to say that her words reflect that no other action can compete with the experiential way of verifying the *truth*. Furthermore, the rationale seems to be the following: by producing experiences that are brought about by deliberate yogic acts, which bring about a feeling, the soul and its truth can speak to us. This experience could then be understood as *the* stimulation of the soul in order to release feelings and is an attribution to the practice of Kundalini Yoga. Furthermore, according to her, the yoga practice “moves energy” and “affects consciousness” and she compared the state of consciousness to being “like taking drug, but in a natural way”. When the effect of yoga and meditation is compared to that of drugs, it probably supposes – as it was described in a previous interview – that it generates an alteration of the regular functioning of the psyche, the body and the perception, altogether performing differently, although “naturally” as she highlighted. These types of *altered states of mind* that yoga produces would happen, following Sara, in relation to the *feelings* experienced that are coming from the soul and made visible by the “glandular” release, as she suggested.

However, Kundalini Yoga is not to be understood independent of the “user”; the system together with one’s “own devotion”, is the combination that triggers the “glandular system” as she said. The glands are the physiological location that the teachings of Yogi Bhajan have syndicated as the parts that produce hormones and therefore experiences that have an emotional connotation or mood. According to Sara, the element of “devotion” is a special kind of condition or predisposition of the experiencer, something that must be at work to produce experiences. For me this corresponds with the *disposition of the attributor*. This is the opposite idea to what a previous informant commented (Hilde), in which devotion was an effect of the practice and not a part of it. For Sara the practice plus devotion are the causes of this interplay of the soul-body-person, because then “those things produce emotion, though emotions come directly from the soul”. So could one think of the human *glands* as the “Minister” of the soul? Sara sees devotion as a condition and not as a consequence of experience. In other words, one has to have a sort of base emotional state of devotion for having an experience as a feeling – supported by glands – that comes “directly from the soul”. In addition, it is an interesting affirmation to express that emotions are seen in their direct link to the soul in particular when the common approach gives emotions a less spiritual status compared to visions, insights, intuitions or contemplations. This is not the case here; emotions are an authentic delivery from the soul. The view that this informant seems to be considering sees in emotions a state of mind and consciousness which appears to be an authentic, unmediated feeling beyond the expression of social manners or cultural forms that could harness the internal feeling from being made explicit. It is not the feeling *about* the soul, but it is *of* and *from* the soul, I would consider saying, and it is mediated by the glands of the body that Kundalini Yoga claims to stimulate. In this way an emotion is not taken as a sudden reaction that happens due to an inconsequential life event, but rather in this context it is deemed as a manifestation of a deeper reality within a person and is therefore attributed to the soul, mediated by the glands and produced by the practice. After she spoke about the idea of the

experience of emotions and soul, she then described an event she went through at the beginning of her journey in 3HO. Her experience is perhaps the main material to arrive to those conclusions.

Theme 2: The irrefutability of experience. One day she took a nap after sadhana and during that she said, “I felt my solar plexus open [and] I felt united with everything”. The combination of the aftermath of sadhana and sleep must be seen as a relaxing moment, the *event context*, which is quite often the panorama seen in the fields of the Yoga Festival after sadhana. Some participants take a nap after the intense and long morning practice and perhaps also after a short night of sleep. It looks like a time for resting and invigorating the body. This was the situation she was in, while she was listening to the background music created by a famous musician within the 3HO “folklore”. Then the experience of the perception is expressed and associated with a complex web of intersecting nerves located in the abdomen that is medically referred to as the celiac plexus and is associated with the stomach, diaphragm, viscera etc. However for this interviewee the experience was the *opening of the solar plexus that* “... produce[d] such a sensation of love ... I could not refute that”. From this event she said she felt a form of awaking as she commented that it “made me conscious ... [and] that was my way” and that it generated a larger impact in her life: it “made me commit”, she stated. The perceived *irrefutability* of the event convinced her about the way to go on with her life making her acknowledge her “path” when she was only around 15 years old. Ever since her involvement with 3HO has become deeper. “Love”, “commitment”, realization of her “way”, all deemed as the intersection of nerves, “the solar plexus”, “opened” and made her feel “such a sensation of love...”

Theme 3: Technology and energy. In the dialogue that followed there was an important consideration that came up, which actually explains the general tendency of why from the practice of Kundalini Yoga the practitioners tend to move towards 3HO’s Sikhism. As she affirmed, “Yoga is not a path, it is just a technology”, meaning that it “moves prana ... vital force” and also “moves the consciousness”. In order to understand the implication of this perspective I consider it necessary to approach some aspects of the traditional view of the Indian Philosophy about yoga. As addressed in the previous chapter, the tradition of Yoga is recurrently seen as a *darshana*, a vision, a worldview and a path in itself, as an independent path for spiritual liberation and realization. In this tradition, yoga is a path, but in the lexicon of this informant yoga is not considered a path. Why? And what is yoga then? For her, as for some 3HO people, Kundalini Yoga is deemed as part of the larger path, as the “technological” aspect of it. The path is all the teachings, obedience to the teacher (Yogi Bhajan), all the lifestyle and all the practices, all the precepts for individual and social application and what 3HO ascribes great significance, when this is all wrapped with an unshakeable commitment. In fact, to approach Sara’s ascription correctly, I would present an example based on informal conversations held with other members of 3HO during the field research. I compare this with a colloquial event: the functioning of the car. The car needs energy, which does not imply any ethical concern regarding the car. The fundamental criterion is concerned with the car’s performance and not if it is used to drive children to school or if it is driven by a criminal gang that plans to assault the National Bank. To understand this I can say

that to properly make the car function it needs 95 octane, 98 octane or diesel. This is the fundamental energy it needs to run. Likewise in the human body one can understand that the body is like a car and that it certainly needs *energy*. What the informant calls “prana” is the type of energy that is deemed appropriate for the human body (this according to Indian 3HO’s and this informant’s philosophy). Viewed in this way the system of yoga is like a sort of tool for the maintenance of the body and mind together, as well as a type of “service” for the anatomical, immune, glandular or nervous balance. In this way the view that yoga is a technical device allows us to see its relation with the human, who is independent of other dimensions like existential, ethical or eschatological ones. Although Kundalini yoga provides a connection to the soul as it stimulates experiences as she said, this does not seem to constitute an authentic path. These existential, ethical or eschatological elements together constitute “the path”, of which yoga is just a part, according to this informant. What seems a bit puzzling in this approach is that although it does not constitute a path in itself, yoga “moves the consciousness” as she attested. That is perhaps the reason why a good number of 3HO members stay closer to the system of Kundalini Yoga and the “technology” of it, rather than reach the field of the Sikh religion. Could it be that Kundalini Yoga moves the consciousness once and then it becomes ineffective? Or is this informant implying that once the practice is abandoned then religion as a path must come into the picture? For her Yoga moves the consciousness and energy, and according to the standard definition of Kundalini Yoga by Yogi Bhajan it is “the yoga of awareness”. Is that the aim expressed in the idea of reaching Universal Consciousness? It is clear that consciousness is a cardinal aspect in all the constituents of 3HO and it exists embedded with the experiential dimension which provokes it, awakens it, expands it, etc. In doing so the endeavor of the development of the spiritual consciousness with yoga is apparently considered a path in itself by some members of 3HO. However that is not the case with this informant as Yoga is deemed more as a tool (“technology”) than as a path. Let me try to explore why.

Theme 4: Religion, Yoga and values. What are the reasons this informant sees to deem Kundalini Yoga as technology and not a “path”? In her view “religion provides a set of values which is something necessary to take you to humility”, and that is why the Sikh religion “fills the missing part of the path”. In other words, the path is not complete without Sikhism and yoga, according to her, does not have the set of values needed. Going back to the previous comparison, the same way as a car will not go anywhere if there is no fuel (energy, understood as prana on the human level), the car is not properly useful if no destination is set. One must be “taken to humility” as she said. A path is seen as a more *complex formation* in which cultural elements guide the way. According to this informant, the Sikh religion would be something comparable to the axiological guidance on the journey and Yoga would just provide a practical tool for it. Sikhism as understood in 3HO is comparable to the GPS or navigation system for the car’s use.

This view is perhaps very common in 3HO. Those in the leading positions seem to be Sikhs and that could respond to the trust that the collective gives this *complex formation* and its set of values. At the same time the traditional view of yoga as a *darshana* that seems to be ignored by Sara does contain ethical concerns at the very first steps of the

practitioner's journey. In the "Aquarian Manual" that is used to train professional Kundalini Yoga Teachers there are some references to the "Yamas and Niyamas", which are these first steps of the eightfold system designed by the Philosopher of yoga Patañjali. In the "Aquarian Manual" these two first steps are briefly referred to as,

"The base of the eight-limbed path are the *yamas* and *niyamas*. *Yama* is choosing to practice moral restraint in external interaction and *niyama* is observing daily practice designed to clarify the internal relationship to the self" (Bhajan 2003, p. 44)

From my point of view and based on the panoramic view of 3HO literature, the existence of the ethical dimension in Kundalini Yoga is present; however, the *gravity* of the Sikh axiology in this respect is *heavier* and more *gravitating* than the one of Yoga. In other words the axiological component of 3HO is mainly taken from the religious lore of Sikhism, which provides more elaborated values and examples of "humility", as the informants asserted. Following the interviewee's description it can be said that Sikhism is for 3HO the counterpart of Kundalini Yoga, which on one hand gives the human, the ethical, and the soteriological view; whereas Kundalini yoga in 3HO, on the other hand, barely seems to contribute to these subjects because it is about a technological device that "moves the energy" and "consciousness". This view is already present in the founder's view in the early 1971. He said,

"The yam's and niyam's are up to you. The other six stages of this divine science: asanas, pranayam, dharana, etc. are all taken care of in a Kundalini Yoga Kriya! We are tapping through consciousness to the supreme consciousness (Bhajan, 2003, p. 30)

Theme 5: The input of Sikhism. So with Sara I can see that both her own experience and the founder's message are integrated and explained, and she gave some additional details about how Sikhism partakes in the 3HO path. She added that the contribution of the Sikh religion to the frame of the 3HO path is in the way of living, the universe of teachings written in the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh Holy book, and the historical archetypical profile of the Sikh Gurus. These elements were added to the ethical content of Sikhism, which she considered the most relevant aspects that construct the "path". In this sense, what can also be seen and understood is that yoga is not as strong a tradition as Sikhism is in the eyes of this informant and perhaps the majority of people in 3HO. Sikhism in general was shaped as a strong social, political and cultural identity and that is based on a well-organized faith, with a central temple in Amritsar and a well delimited and respected succession of Gurus. For the Sikhs to belong to this ethos entails following a uniformed Sacred Scripture that has a more-or-less common history and an agreed validity. Not only this, Sikhs also pass similar kind of respect, admiration and event worship to the scripture. This is the Sikhism that gives 3HO the backbone of its confidence and collective stability as it brings people together as a community and *sangat* (deemed in 3HO as "spiritual community"), which brings about the neutralization of strong individualism. It also perhaps counteracts the lack of humility as *seva* (deemed in 3HO as "self-service") is a key practice in Sikhism that is transversally integrated into

3HO's lifestyle. This is the view that this informant is committed to as she is a Khalsa and a senior member of the European Khalsa Council.

Theme 6: Reconsidering religion as science. According to this informant Yoga had gone through changes and that now it was "available to the masses". Earlier in time yoga, she said, "was just considered faith or just tradition ... now it is coming to science". When saying "science" she is probably assuming the classical naturalistic view that science is a reliable knowledge that can be logically and rationally explained because it knows things and their causes. In her idea of "faith" and "tradition" there is a suggestion that they could be associated with inexplicable phenomena that only "faith" or the power of "tradition" could explain. In other words, the earlier practice of yoga she deemed as a "faith" or as a "tradition" was not a matter of tested ("scientific") knowledge that the yogis "scientifically" understood, rather it was the type of knowledge known through *faith* and trusted as *tradition*. What is also implicit in her attribution to yoga is that the truth of science is "irrefutable", as she commented about her early experience. As scholars know, all phenomena that science knows can be repeated because they have a universal validity. So, according to her, earlier in time only a specific type of person knew or had access to yoga. For Sara now science has become common knowledge with a universal language. The mainstream can relate to it, and since yoga is "coming to a science" as she said, mainstream people without faith and people who are somehow caught in postmodern anti-religiosity can find their way to practice yoga too. This idea of the informant can be interpreted as a phenomenon of *democratization of the practice of yoga*, as I would rather call it. When this is seen in the context of the European Yoga Festival it even makes more sense to understand the subject in that way. Access to knowledge and democratic society make those things that were the field of a few the field of many. That would explain why the interviewee sees the evolution of yoga from a moment of more religious influence and less scientific support to the situation nowadays where yoga has less religious influence and more scientific support. Indeed, for Sara the key element that has changed in yoga is that "Yoga has been decoded and people have started to understand" it as she commented. In other words practice based on faith and tradition has given space to a practice based on science and knowledge.

In this view of evolution of yoga there is, according to her, a contribution from Yogi Bhajan, because he "introduced mutations in yoga", as she asserted. In this sense she mentioned the music, the field that can actually best link the mantras and Shabads with the Sikh constituent. One idea emerges with this consideration and this is that, despite the fact that teachings that he passed down are not supposed to be altered, as Yogi Bhajan repeatedly said, she made explicit something that is evident to the outsider observer. These changes are evident in terms of how Kundalini Yoga relies to a considerable extent on recorded music, a thing that was not possible in the times when electricity and electronic devices did not exist. Some of the music is also very electronic and even strident for a sensitive ear. What would explain the reasons behind this change is the mastery of Yogi Bhajan as believed in 3HO. In 3HO he is seen as a "spiritual scientist" with the knowledge and capacity to introduce these "mutations". This implies that, for Sara, he knew what he was doing, because he was the master. In this condition

he was seen not only as *the* master, but as an authoritative source of change that brought a technology which produces “irrefutable” experiences, Sara said. Yogi Bhajan is considered in 3HO to have the *skills* and temperament to produce a shift in the perception of yoga, from being viewed as a religious type of practice towards yoga as a scientific and technical procedure. In her final consideration about the experiences, the informant expressed the perspective that the common ground where Kundalini Yoga and Sikhism meet is the experiential dimension, estimating that all experience is based on the application of the constituents of Kundalini Yoga and Sikhism in 3HO.

Case 11, Antonella:

Antonella is from the north of Italy. She is single and 41 years old. She is close to her Catholic family, but she does not have children of her own. She has studies in Physics and received a Doctoral degree in that field. Although she comes from a Christian background, she found her way to Sikhism, and eleven years ago she began the practice of Kundalini yoga. She is a Professional Trainer (stepping into Lead Trainer).

Attributional Approach to Antonella’s experience:

1. Event characteristic	2. Event context	3. Disposition of the attributor	4. Context of the attributor	5. Attributional conclusion
<p>- “something in me was deeply vibrating very much in the body, very much shaking my passion, very much connecting my brain... every part of me, so it is hard to describe it really ... stays as a continuum is a sense of peace, peace with myself as sense of contentment also, that I don’t feel I need anything else really... it is like peaceful within, a sense</p>	<p>“meditations on the Naam on the Shabd” - “when I listen to him, when I watch videos of Yogi Bhajan’s teachings”</p>	<p>- “that happens every time really when I go to the Gurdwara ... I value, you know, being in the presence of the Guru; I feel that potent aspect of the vibration of the Naam” - “I do need to go back to the Guru again and again. It is not something that is done once and it is done forever, but</p>	<p>- “when I met Sikhism through Kundalini Yoga I thought “okay, it is not a religion” so “be careful” then without even knowing where I was going to, I went to the Gurdwar for the first time I sat down and I</p>	<p>- Experience is “something to do with the global participation of the being. So it is the global participation of the being in the meeting with God”. - “through the vibration of the sound current, all these parts that tend to be disconnected can actually connect and come back together. It is like when you are drumming to call people from all the village something like that you know, something in me was getting the beat and everybody in me was saying “oh, oh what is that?”. So this was the experience I had”. - “I have learned the depth of Yogi Bhajan’s teachings when I combine the experience I have from them with the experience I have with the Guru, you know, I really understood Yogi Bhajan’s teachings when I had these experiences so then I put them together”. - “... The sense of connectiveness (sic) that you can reach. If you have found a way to connect within yourself, then you find the same connectiveness (sic) can be</p>

of being at home” - “I have the feeling of ‘listening to a Shabd’ that vibration of the voice and that penetrating beat”		I know that there is a place where I can go and that is totally real”	started listen to the Shabad”	anywhere, it is not the form that matters, it is the essence and the essence is the same, the purpose is the same” - “A part of the experience is really lonely, really, it is really an experience within it is me within me ... the lonely time of the experience something is really ... shape-changing within me, it is melting and ... in that part of the experience when I need to be removed from the contact with people, something in me is kind of alchemically reshaped quite deeply and it is painful at times. But then it means having something else to share from the human experience and that comes out in any contact.” - “When the consciousness changes and changes in a kind of irreversible way... once you have seen a piece of truth; you have seen it, there is no way you can hide it, you can’t hide from it and pretend you don’t know (laughter) or you don’t feel it”
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Theme 1: Experience of God. In her conception, the experience she thought of was deemed as the “global participation of the being in the meeting with God”. The “being” she spoke about indicates the human entity and the notion of “global” was mentioned in the sense that a human is composed of several parts – the body, the mind and the emotions, as she commented. In her experience the parts come together and in that way, “for me experience has to be global it has to include all aspects”.

In the first words of her interview it can be seen that she chose a more theological and mystical language to deem her notion of experience, restricting the idea of experience to a complete (and multifaceted) *ontological* encounter with God. This view of the experience has the implicit idea of holism, in other words, it is deemed a sort of holistic experiential phenomenon. This is probably formulated in these terms because it brings together the interrelation between the parts of a person. In some way the informant is ascribing the experience in similar ways as it is commonly understood in the etymology of *religare* as the binding of one human “being” with itself and with another divine being¹²². The interviewee has the expectation that an experience “has to be global”, as she affirmed. The way to present this attribution of the experience is conditional (“it has to...”), and it therefore permits the control of the subject in relation to the object of

¹²² *Religare* is commonly seen as been constituted by the prefix *re* (“again”) and the root *ligare* (“to connect, to bind together”). Religion has etymologically and commonly been understood as a “re-connection” or as “binding together” of two or more agents. Other interpretations of *religare* have been developed and one of them, with Cicero, considered that *re* was the prefix of the root *legere* (to read, to trace) and not *ligare*. Therefore, from this perspective, *religio* meant the action of “re-reading” or “to retrace” from the religious traditions of the Romans.

experience, understanding that the total or global person is one who experiences “the meeting with God”. Partialities do not seem to be considered; *all or nothing* can be said.

Theme 2: Sikh practice. When she started reporting the event she went through, she referred to her first encounter with the Shabads, the Sikh recitation of the hymns of the Gurus. In some ways her description of the feeling is similar to the previous informant as Antonella said,

“Something in me was deeply vibrating very much in the body, very much shaking my passion, very much connecting my brain... every part of me, so it is hard to describe it really ... stays as a continuum is a sense of peace”

These were the terms she used, although she did not have a very fluent description (“It is so hard to describe it really”), but the quality of feeling or sense seemed to be very important, as it was with Sara, the previous informant. Antonella’s previous knowledge or understanding leads her to say that, “... through vibration of the sound current, all these parts that tend to be disconnected can actually connect”. Her explanation is linked to the repetition of the Shabads (understood in 3HO as “sound current”) or the Sikh practice of Nam Simran¹²³. This practice produced these three key characteristics: “vibration”, “globality” and “connection”, as she commented. Although she showed insecurity in the capacity for conveying her experience linguistically, she referred to this as “vibration” and as something out of her control. She then used an analogy, “like when you are drumming to call people from the village ... something in me was getting the beat and everybody in me was saying: ‘ho, what is that?’”

In her deeming making process she attributed the experience to the Sikh referential practice and the Sikh spiritual agency, as she said that, “being in the presence of the Guru; I feel the potent aspect of the vibration of the Naam”. There are seven elements in these descriptions that are to be highlighted:

- a) That the experience is complete (“global”) and it involved every part of her,
- b) That the experience is deemed to be an experience of “vibration”;
- c) That there is a difficulty in delving into the details of the experience itself,
- d) That there is a hint that shows that she felt an attractive force (“like drums”) that was later referred to as the “potent aspect of the vibration of the Naam”
- e) That she had no control over this situation
- f) That the agency was superior to her will, because it “moved” everything in her, and
- g) This agency is not other than the” Guru and his Naam” as she attributed.

In this sort of *mystical vibration*, as I propose to address it, one have to bear in mind the antecedent that she defined herself as a “warrior”. If one consider this, it would be

¹²³ See part II

correct to say that these “drums” and “vibrations”, deemed as coming from a spiritual source, relaxed her and soothed her temper, perhaps anxiety, and psyche. In other words, this experience induced an internal feeling of ease. There is an ethical dimension attached to this event. She attributed to the effect of this experiential unit the achievement to “fight without anger”. Besides this ethical implication that is related to her ways of proceeding in life and with the world, another effect takes place in her intimate emotional life. She commented that she developed a relationship with the Guru and that is why she said, “I need to go back to Guru” because the relationship between her and the Guru was “totally real”. This reveals that the link to the figure of the Sikh Guru gave her a perspective that is often referred to as a *longing* in 3HO. This *longing* seems to be the main feeling that the experience brought about and, as her words revealed, it was the feeling that moved her and brought her closer to the spiritual agency of Sikhism.

Theme 3: Re-enacting syncretism. This informant reflected on the teachings of Yogi Bhajan and the link between her experiences. She mentioned that,

“I learned the depth of Yogi Bhajan’s teaching when I combined the experience I have of them [practices] with the experience I have with the Guru ... I put them together [and that] the vibration [of the Guru] permeating all Yogi Bhajan’s teachings”

In her explanation she says that she did intellectual work (“I learned”, “I combined”, “I put together”) to associate the two fields that are implicitly taken as different fields; one is the field of her experiential contact with the Guru through the Shabads and the other is her practice of the methods of Yogi Bhajan of Kriyas and meditation. For her the two fields are distinct on the surface, but the “depth of the teachings” of Yogi Bhajan partakes of the *Guru’s vibration* and vice versa. This deeper unity is made clear when she said, it is “hard to separate them ... it is hard to make it into different boxes”. In order to understand this, it is important to see that she is referring to two practices that lead to experiences that in her way of deeming them have a common denominator; “vibration”. Vibration *is* the underlying experiential common quality which is the same. At any rate, this vibration comes from the Guru, she said. But when she listens to Yogi Bhajan she is “listening to the Shabads” too that is “permeating all Yogi Bhajan’s teachings” and all the teachings together are “... that current”, she attested. One thing can be noted; her theological and first description of an experience of “meeting God” was the focal point from which she unfolded a more elaborated and culturally complex concept of the Sikh Guru’s presence *in* the teaching of Yogi Bhajan. It should be noted that this transition from simple to complex happened at the same time as the transition from a more general divine agency (“God”) to a rather specific form of divine agency (Sikh Guru) took place.

Theme 4: Perennial origin. Her feelings are from that point onwards expressed in Sikh religious terms, as she manifested that the devotional dedication to her relation to the Sikh Guru was a necessary action for “not losing that peaceful connection”. In that relation she said she found a place of intimacy free from anger. Some evidence

emerges from her words that show that the phenomenological event of listening to the founder of 3HO became not different from the experience of listening to the Shabads. The significance of this is that she is using the terms *current* and *vibration* as synonyms implying that she sensed the same type of sounds and that the feelings associated, made the words of the Guru (Shabads) and the voice of Yogi Bhajan, seemed to be the same¹²⁴.

According to her reflection the different philosophies or practices share a “sense of connectiveness” (sic), “essence” and “purpose”. In this perspective she recalls an idea that is present in the reflections of the German Theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose “sense of Infinity” is the starting point of “his” religion. The view of Schleiermacher is very close to what the informant is addressing, because when she conveyed her first experience, she did not find a language to express it and it was conveyed as a “feeling”. Only afterwards did the language and associations refer to the experience and acquire a more complex shape. Towards the end the informant’s explanation finally absorbed the core views of Sikhism to conclude the attributional process.

She suggested a complementary idea, however. In her words there seemed to be the strong conviction that there is a common origin in the different religious and spiritual expressions, which is always associated with the perennialist characteristic of the New Age as well as the Sikh creed, *IkOm Kar (Ek Ong Kar* as rendered in 3HO), *One God, One Creation*. She actually refers to this using a mystical language and frame of ascription, and sees the essence in terms of “getting in touch with God within ... finding the sense of wholeness”. In that way this event and this experience is consequently deemed as an internal occurrence and ultimately, I can argue, as a form of mystical experience. She completes these ideas by saying that “all the paths are actually equal, they are not different”, and she stated that she viewed these experiences as an inter-related connection between yoga practice, meditation and listening to the Guru’s banis (understood as the *words of the Guru*). In an expression of religious acceptance, she then related to other beliefs with openness and respect saying “that (Sikhi) language speaks to me better, so I can hear it better”, suggesting that the language of Sikhism is not better *per se*, but is the distinctive way she can arrive at the same purpose.

Theme 5: Emotions driving the path. In another part of the interview the informant mentioned the ordinary emotional experience of “heart-breaking” to convey something comparable to the experiences deemed with a spiritual significance. For her the “heart-breaking” episodes in her life were placed along the lines of the experiences of the vibration mentioned above. In her speech the core reflection about “meeting with God” and the “connectiveness” (sic) she gained was associated with sentimental events on the level of human relationships. All these kinds of experiences also produced a repetitive pattern to seek them again. In fact, her description of this showed a clear association between Guru and relationship, “Every time my heart was broken ... [there was] a chance to open up the shell of the heart ... [and] I volunteer again and again” ...

¹²⁴ See Table 12: Teachings of Yogi Bhajan according to 3HO and the Shabads of Sikh Gurus according to Yogi Bhajan; in which the words of the Sikh Scriptures are seen in relation to the words of Yogi Bhajan, yielding a result that is again implicit in this informant’s reflections.

Likewise to refer to her feeling for the Guru – she always felt like going back to the Sikh Guru “again and again”, she said. Her mystical relation to the Sikh Guru and other serious relationships have a similar impulse. The characteristic that is repeated in these two different types of relationship shows some of the emotional flavour (Catholic? Mystical? Italian?) and her engagement with the Sikh Guru. There is a personal driving force and a personal longing that keeps pulling her towards that specific religious scripture, the words coined in it (the Shabads), the vibration contained in them (the “Naam”), the “global” experience of “vibration” that it produces, and the aftermath of calmness, peace and contentment she mentions.

I would suggest that it is appropriate to understand her experience in the dynamics of personal intimate relationships and with an intense content of emotional life. For example, on one level she attested that “a part of the experience is very lonely ... within ... within me” and that this condition pushes her to “... move out and stay with me”, meaning to seek solitude and stay apart. Let me stay with this idea. The experience she is sharing about this “vibration” brings about a sense that fills and calms her internal reality, which in turn impacts the relationship with the external world. In doing so she is tacitly suggesting that she has to re-integrate the features and effects of these intense emotional events within her life, which demands removing herself from social contact. It is almost a “heart-breaking” situation, she said, which demands the re-thinking, healing and reconstruction of her personality. Moreover, experiences of this kind not only have to be integrated, but they also are “shape-changing” too, as she commented. The dynamics of her life after one of these events carry some elements that move in the axis of *integration* and *transformation*. According to her, the subject of change is “consciousness”. In other words, the form that changes in her is ultimately her self-awareness, as she expressed that “something deeply changed in consciousness”. But these changes happen as the aftermath of a *mystical vibration* similar to the “breaking of the heart”.

Then a new phase begins; she comes back from her distance from people to restart “teaching and sharing” as the direct way to channel these life experiences. For her all that is taking place in these changes is doing it “... in a kind of irreversible way”. Why would a vibration and a sense of wholeness do such a thing? The answer could be contained in the emotional intensity that she ascribes to these events. The events she refers to have an evidently dramatic content, in which, perhaps, the main reason behind them is their effect in “shaping” her as a self-conscious being. In a sort of conclusion, she said that “once you have seen pieces of the truth; you have seen it”. In other words the changes she has gone through are perceived to be unidirectional occurrences with a revelatory content; “pieces of truth” that have the force of an uncontrollable variable that move her forward, develop her, and at the same time create conflicts. This is something she feels and that she cannot ignore. She concludes these reflections by referring to the *disposition of the attributor*, saying that somewhere in this process “you have opened up to that”. This shows that in the case of Antonella there is a clear,

intentional and deliberate “choice” to go through this as many times as it could happen... “again and again” as she said¹²⁵.

15. Conclusions

How do members of 3HO attribute the experiences they have?

One of the purposes of this study is to discover if the experiential dimension deemed by Yogi Bhanjan revealed dissimilar and original approaches or rather, views that were coherently continuing the founder’s perspective when the deeming process about experiences was made by 3HO informants who have had *unusual sensory experiences*. The first conclusion I can draw is that the experiences that the informants shared were deemed in such a way that rather than having disruptive elements in relation to 3HO’s general worldview and lexicon, they were conveyed according to the characterization outlined by Yogi Bhanjan. Although there are some nuances I will soon address, I can say that the general way the informants’ own experiences were ascribed explicitly kept to, if not the three-fold shape of integrating the 3HO components, then at least the view of an inseparable whole, the sense of “confluence” of traditions or, as I would rather say, the 3HO’s *syncretic* shape (“as taught by Yogi Bhanjan”).

Causality. One example of this is when they were asked about the causality of experiential events: all the informants that referred to causality agreed that not one aspect but the combination of the practices and the teachings in 3HO were the causes behind the experiences they had. The ideas they conveyed had a strong degree of resemblance like: “the whole package” (Gordon), “all the teachings and practice” (Javier and Rachel), “the combination” of techniques”, the “accumulation of teachings and practices” (Hilde and Geert) or the “whole thing” (Ruth). In other words, the people interviewed expressed that the prescribed practices and teachings together built the causal vector of their experiential units from where they draw not only practical reasons to explain what happened to them, but also the notions, symbols and feelings with which they deem their experiences. All these attributions of causality tended to maintain, confirm or reinforce the unity of the assemblage of the practices and teachings of 3HO. All the informants expressed in similar terms that the consequential experiential events had stemmed from their personal application of the complex composite of practices and teachings taught by Yogi Bhanjan. This implies that personal experiences were deemed in a fashion that unified the different complex formations (Kundalini yoga, Sikhism and the Aquarian Age) from which a sense of causality was borrowed, which permitted the unification of the self-image gained through experience and the knowledge gained *about* the cause within the formation.

Unity. When addressing the personal level of experiences that the informants had, this study found that even if distinctive expression and different

¹²⁵ Charles H. Long in *Significations* (1986), consider that “there is a compulsion in experience to seek expression. For the religious person this rupture from the ground of creativity elicits a response of intimacy and nostalgia” (p. 31)

analogies were embedded in the narratives of the different people interviewed, and different emphases showed differences in relation to the methods, practices and approaches in 3HO, the totality of the informants would opt to see an intrinsic unity in their experiences and their relation to the founder's synthesis of traditions and their methods. Some people would make an effort of logic or an act of volition to see it as a unity, for example Antonella: "when I had these [different] experiences ... then I put them together"; or for Rachel: "I decided that [the voice I heard] was Yogi Bhajan; and Sigrid: the experiences are due to methods and "it has all the same direction". All in all the informants eluded the position of inclining their preference or disengaging from the bigger formation the "the teachings" in a way that was different from the given syncretic formula of 3HO and Yogi Bhajan. Even if a person felt closer to some of the constituent parts and deemed them more appealing (like Sigrid, Antonella and Hilde for example), they still attributed that the different experiences "belonged together" and that they were, in a deeper sense, "the same" ones.

Sameness. Another feature has to be made explicit: whether the deeming of different events fell under a similar label of unity or sameness like actually "the experience is the same" (as it sounded on the lips of almost all the informants); or whether they all recalled a common aspect of the experiences such as "awareness", "reality" or "perception"; there was no expression or hint of variance in the personal deeming process that would use a frame of description different from the ones within the three-fold worldview in 3HO. As examples of this, I found some repetitive *marks* from the experience informants had that they deemed important regarding their own experiences. These same *notions, visions or feelings* often manifested as qualities *experienced in the experiences*, such as "reality" (Sigrid, Javier, Hector, Gordon, Rachel, Hilde, Geert, Sara and Antonella), "unity" (Sigrid, Javier, Hector, Hilde, Ruth, Sara and Antonella) and "happiness" (Sigrid, Michael, Gordon, Rachel, Hilde, Geert, Ruth, Sara, Antonella). These same *notions, visions or feelings* were commonly used by different interviewees, who also referred to them as "effects" that were caused by the diverse forms of practices and experiences they had.

From personal to intra-cultural. A further conclusive finding of this study shows that the deeming process of the interviewees evolved in the course of the interview inasmuch as they were all initially more "touched" by their experiences than analytically conscious of them. It was a general characteristic that their narration began with a rudimentary view of their own experiences, whereas complexity was gained progressively during the interviews. It came up that the general tonic of the deeming making process moved from more simple and unconfident language and vocabulary to express the experiences towards a more confident, fluent and complex-culturally-based description (with all of the informants). Despite the differences and somewhat initial ineffability of the narratives they all unfolded into a narrative that gained more of the characteristics of 3HO and the teachings of Yogi Bhajan. Although all the informants began from simple and concluded with complex ascriptions and attributions, the experiences and the insights about them were deemed in a way that either 1) developed their descriptive direction towards the "the teachings" of Yogi Bhajan or 2) gradually drew on the lexicon of the background traditions that flow into Yogi Bhajan's teachings.

In other words, the direction of the ascriptions evolved from a simple statement about *unusual sensory experiences* towards Yogi Bhanjan's synthesis regarding *some* of the elements of the synthesis that could be associable. Everything that was conveyed in a more elaborated way remained integrated within the intra-cultural notions of 3HO. No alien notion or extra-cultural aspect was deemed regarding the experiences the informants had. For example, no one spoke about *spiritual conversion*, an alien idea in 3HO, they rather spoke about "personal development", (spiritual) "process", "path" or "journey", deep "transformations" or life "changes" (all informants). None of them spoke of *enlightenment* or *salvation* – ideas that are absent in Yogi Bhanjan's vocabulary – but they rather developed the view of their experiences in terms of "expansion/awakening/development of consciousness", as well as a "seeing the reality", the "whole", the "truth", the "things", "life", the "world", "myself"... "as they really are"... (all of them). When I addressed their crucial experiences I found that they did not choose a different lexicon to express the effects of the experiences either. While, for example, a scholar of Religious Studies would deem their experiences as a *religious conversion* or *religious affiliation*, the interviewed members of 3HO felt that the experiences were rather the reasons "I stayed with the teachings" (Sigrid, Michael, Gordon, Geert, and Ruth) or "I joined the club" (Ruth) or "I stayed with the practice" (Rachel, Geert and Ruth), or "I chose my path/way" (Ruth, Gordon, Sara and Antonella). Another example of not leading the description into another lexicon is that none of the participants spoke about *mysticism* or *mystical union*, although that possibly would be how other religions or some scholars would deem a generic peak event of unity and wholeness that involves "God". The informants actually deemed *peak experiences* of these kind as "merging with the whole" (Hector), "connecting or connected to..." (In all the cases), "uniting with reality" (Sigrid, Michael, Hilde and Ruth) or as a "global participation in the meeting with God" (Antonella).

Life is to experience. Additionally, as I showed in the conclusions of Part II, the notion of experience deemed by Yogi Bhanjan fundamentally plays a role of producing a centrifugal impact in the movements' diversity of methods and realms of thought. This was found to be at work on a theoretical level and was confirmed on the experiential level. The experiences as deemed in all the cases were not presented in isolation to the rest of life experience or behavioral events, but they were seen as an integrated ongoing process that binds together life and their "spiritual" processes. For some of the informants *the experience* (in singular and abstract) is deemed as an ongoing event that constantly happens as "part of the journey", the "process" (of life), the "development" in which *the experiences* (in plural and concrete) manifest "a jump point", "curve of experiences", or the "gradual progression". All of the people interviewed deemed the experience and the experiences as meaningful events in relation to the "consciousness" or "awareness" they bring to life, which is also a key idea in 3HO and Yogi Bhanjan's precepts and legacy.

Integrating qualities. Another form of continuity or coherence came about *within* the individual accounts. It became evident that when an individual informant practiced different methods, the 'same' or 'similar' marks regarding the effects come up in different practices through his or her deeming making process. For example, while

the same person was in a Tantric workshop or meditating, or listening to or reading the *Shabads* or *Guru's bani* (the Sikh Sacred texts), and while the experiences were given different attributional cause, based on the different practices, the experiences were never given a different ascription of quality. In other words, even though different experiences might have been *caused* by a different aspect of the practice of 3HO, the experiences themselves did not have different qualities in the effects deemed. The different effects bore not only coherence, but they were also integrated *intra-personally*, within the person. This showed that the experiences were not only deemed in a way that maintained an integration within the personal story of one informant, but also different experiences in different practices maintained integration by deeming them with a uniform approach. In all the cases the informant always ascribed common qualities to different events experienced; for example, if the way to deem an experience was as the perception of "light", then all events coming in different contexts or from different practices were explained in the same terms, "the light is the same" (case or Ruth, whether it was in a Tantric Workshop or reading the *Shabads*), or if the effects affected "consciousness" or "awareness", then all the different experiences contained the same quality (in all the cases). It is worth noting that experience, either as a theoretical notion, in the practice of these interviewees or in the precepts they followed, appeared to always be deemed and integrated with the idea of "consciousness". This was a form of continuity that came about *between* the different individual accounts. Therefore, the ways that each informant deemed their experiences, I presume, was due to not only making coherent sense of all of them but also making sense according to the precept they had as previous knowledge ("confirming" the literature about experiences, for example). This also appears to be the case on the *inter-personal* level as the people interviewed kept themselves integrated within the inter-personal standard narrative of 3HO.

Dominating notion. So, depending on the main type of ascription or attribution chosen by the informant, the processes of deeming the events not only integrated the experience but also tended to be dominated by the notion chosen. One or two notions constructed the main foundation of the deemed narratives, encompassing with the same characteristics or effects a plurality of different practices and experiences. Different things were explained in the same way: for example different experiences produced "happiness" (cases Sigrid, Gordon, Rachel, Geert, Ruth, Sara and Antonella), or different experiences that brought about the feeling or sense of "unity" (all except Michael), or how various experiences brought people to "silence" (Hilde and Ruth), or how different events made an individual find "health/balance/cleanliness" (Michael, Gordon, Geert, Ruth and Antonella) etc. In conclusion, in the majority of the cases a dominating notion unfolded through the deeming making process of the experiences of different practices, which aids coherence on the level of the effect of various practices and also aids coherence with the deemed pre-established notions about the effects described by Yogi Bhanjan.

Authentication through experience. In the process of deeming their experience the informants, in the most of these cases, arrived at the conclusion that the teachings (precepts and theory) and what was written about the experience was

authentic (Sigrid, Javier, Gordon, Hilde, Gordon, Rachel, Geert, Sara and Antonella). In other words, there was an *attributional conclusion* that explicitly linked the experiences to what Yogi Bhanjan said and taught. However, it is necessary to highlight an interesting nuance: in their *attributional conclusion* some interviewed members conveyed that although the texts were authentic, they only show glimpses of what the experiences were really all about (Javier, Rachel, Hilde, Geert, Sara and Antonella). In one of these cases it was possible to witness that even the experiences present features that challenge the “experiencer” himself, because they could be “hard to believe” (Michael). In other words, what the experience showed, confirmed or authenticated was more than the informant could eventually handle. This might explain why, for all of the informants interviewed, the experiences had to be integrated into their lives once they had had them. This also showed that, for these members of 3HO, the views they held prior to the *unusual sensory experience* were challenged by their actual experiences, making them face their personal perspectives about themselves and the world and, in all the cases studied, led them to even reformulate or replace their pre-existing psychological and personal worldviews.

Committing experience. All in all, the experiences of these informants were deemed in such a way that it allowed them to find the evidence of what is written by 3HO about the experiential process and the idea of experience presented by Yogi Bhanjan. This acted as a reinforcement of the conviction to be part of or join 3HO. It is worth noting that this could have an enormous prospective repercussion, not only in their individual lives, but also in their social reach, because once they have had “them” or once people experience “awareness”, “reality” or “happiness”, the experiences seem to trigger in their minds an involving phenomenon. What happens after an experience takes place? In most of the case these events not only change the individuals in themselves, but also these experiences *induce* people to gain the idea or adopt the discourse that the experiences have to be shared (prescribed to others) through teaching (for others to re-experience them) or by “serving humanity”; this notion was present in all the cases except Sara. That is why the people that were interviewed deemed that, in some way or another, their experiences gave them an impulse to “commit to the path”, to “stay with the practice”, to “join the group” (all cases except Hector), or boosted their work as yoga teachers (Sigrid, Michael, Rachel, Hilde, Ruth, Sara and Antonella) and (or) produced a conclusive life event attributed to the idea that the practices, along with the experience as their effect, “work” (all interviewees except Hector who said “maybe”). The less theoretical a person was in the initial moments of deeming their experiences, the more they led the attribution towards declaring that the experiences revealed *a* or *the* “reality”, “whole” or “truth” about the world or themselves (in all interviewees, especially Michael who attested that with experience “you see ‘oh my God’, ‘what thing... oh my God’”) or that the experience was an “irrefutable” event (Sara). Finally, for over a half of the group, the experiential events were deemed as things that liberated them from some form of personal affliction or limitation (Sigrid, Javier, Michael, Rachel, Geert, Ruth and Antonella).

With these findings at hand it can be concluded that the fundamental ascriptions and attributions present in the deeming making process of all these informants are

associated with the idea that their experiences are a result of the application of the teachings and practices of 3HO and Yogi Bhanjan. None of them arrived at the events like the ones described by means that differed from those prescribed in 3HO or through causes alien to the ones found within the theoretical and practical construction of “the teachings of Yogi Bhanjan”. The experiences that were at stake were attributed to the path they have taken, maintaining integration, coherence and unity within the subjects who had them and their narratives with the institution they belong to and the movement’s worldviews. The efficiency of the prescribed methods in producing the experiences they claimed seemed to also play a major role in 1) affiliation to the organization, a commitment that not only means membership but also 2) adopting the “mission of teaching”, “serving” and “delivering experience” as well as 3) keeping to the lexicon regarding how the first attributor, Yogi Bhanjan, deemed the experiential phenomenon at large.

* * *

Although the study is delimited to the study of the experiences of 3HO specific members and it does not explore the projections of experience into ethics, behavior or social life, as it was above mentioned in the point number 2, the experiences in theory induce an attitude or tendency for adopting the “mission of teaching”, “serving humanity” and “delivering experience”.

The paradox of this consists in the fact that although those actively involved in the practice and teaching of Yogi Bhanjan know the importance of the experience for their individual development and strive to have it, at the same time this does not seem to be isolated as a selfish motivation. In other words, what could be leading towards the enjoyment of ecstatic experiences, as a form of “spiritual gluttony” as St. John of the Cross would deem it, is not, apparently, where the quest of experiences in members of 3HO end. At least as far as this data allows us to see it. In the cases of this study it could be observed that the issue of “mission” is explicit or implicit in all the accounts, whereas the issue of “service” comes in the deeming making process of, at least, two of the informants. As one of them said (Ingrid):

“I want to give people a better life and so I was always looking for a technique how I can serve the world and really make a difference and I think that is the other motivation why to stick with that practice, because I feel, yes, this is one way to achieve that goal”

This idea, I can say, is provided by the Sikh element in 3HO and the culture that Yogi Bhanjan transmitted. This notion of service is a particular, yet distinctive notion exported to all the West by the yogis and gurus coming from the East. As Walter T. Stace correctly pointed out,

“It should be noted in the first place that it has always been the habit of the Indian mysticism to attempt to pass on the torch from man to man through the instrumentality of gurus and ashramans (sic). In this way he seeks to show to

others the path of salvation which he has found. He is a teacher of what he conceives to be the good of life. This activity cannot be called selfish” (Stace 1960, p. 334-335)

And this is how the key members of 3HO, the Kundalini yoga teachers, are taught to act and how, in principle, they engage in social life: they teach and strive to deliver experience, they “seeks to show to others the path”. Although this is something I have been able to observe in my fieldwork, I consider that it is necessary to conduct further research to account and explore the different connection of the experience and the projections into ethics, behavior or social life, so for now, I must leave the issue open.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Reconsideration of Experience(s) in 3HO

16. Relation to Previous Interpretative Frames and New Horizons

Following the criterion of Ann Taves, this study has reconsidered the concept of “religious experience” and reframed it for the research purpose of encompassing how different *experiences were deemed* by eleven subjects in 3HO. Taves’ approach (2009, p. 14-16) has allowed this study to:

1. Sort out who is deeming things religious, spiritual or characterizing them as special and on what grounds,
2. Position experience, traditionally assessed as a central dimension within the study of religion, not as something that sets the study of religion apart from other humanistic forms of knowledge but rather puts it in close and direct relation to them.
3. Have an attributional approach which has given the chance to view different experiences — specifically *unusual sensory experiences* — as a part of the many special things that may be incorporated into the more complex phenomena we think of as “religions.”

This current study will now offer further consideration in the following three areas:

- The interaction between experience and a complex formation (religion or tradition),
- The interaction between social context and personal experience,
- The obsolescence of an ethnocentric analysis

16.1. The interactions between experience and a complex formation (religion or tradition)

Throughout this study I have gathered clear evidence that confirms how the interaction between the worldview of a complex formation and the deeming process of a person are interrelated. It is also possible to confirm that the deeming making process presupposed a known context or set of cultural notions that made it possible to deem experiences in a certain way. Contextualism or constructivism is an approach that supports the scientific study of phenomena deemed religious. An example of this approach, which was introduced earlier in this study, cited the Swedish academic Hjalmar Sundén, who recognized that the presence of a context that he deemed “religious”, was essential and necessary for him to be able to think in those terms. However, by deeming this phenomenon as *religious* experience his appreciation leaves little room for thinking of experience in another way without affecting the epistemology, he wrote “without a religious reference system, without religious tradition, without myth and ritual ... religious experiences are unthinkable” (Sundén in Wulff 2000, 426). Experiences in 3HO were all contextualized and understood within the frame of practice and worldview synthesized by Yogi Bajan and the three-fold realms of thought that are the pillars that support and nourish *his* teachings. However, it is also clear that it was through a deeming making process that the experiences gained the particular qualities ascribed and presented in this study. In other words, the experiences deemed by the informants *felt* or *seemed* like the cultural things of 3HO ethos *through* the progression of the deeming making process. Although the experiences did not automatically appear to be coming from preconscious soil alone, a preconscious element of ineffability appeared in some of the cases too. The experiences the informants dealt with were mainly perceptions that they deemed unusual or special and in some ways hard to describe with words. These experiences would only cross the threshold of their intimate psychology and the realm of perception to adopt a cultural shape, after they were deemed to the scholars interested in knowing more about them. At some point, the explanations were related to Yogi Bajan’s teachings and the complex formations of the traditions he blended and not only through the informant’s rational attributions and ascriptions, but also through the willingness to associate the experiences in a given fashion. Therefore the will, as showed in this study, played and plays an important role in the evolution of the deeming making process that begins in the intimate psychology of a person and arrives, as in these cases, at the shared inter-personal realm of the belief system of the group.

Thus most of the experiences, from being psychologically and personally meaningful *almost a priori* – this is *almost* right when they were experienced because they made sense within the life journey of the informants there and then – *also* became meaningful in the larger sense of a cultural formation as they were *positively* associated, by ways of attributions or ascriptions, to Kundalini yoga, Sikhism and the Aquarian Age as *a posteriori attributional conclusion*. Once an *originary event* of perception was challenged to fit the complex web of rationality and language, the deemed event assumed the 3HO elements “retrospectively”, as one informant said (Hilde). As in the majority of the cases, after this was done, the relationship between experiences and the

3HO tradition was progressively made more explicit (Sigrid, Javier, Michael, Rachel, Hilde, Geert and Antonella). Nevertheless, the informants reported that the experiential units, while they took place, were essentially experiences of perception that outwit the command of the logical mind. In other words, because of these types of experiential units, the experiences were then shaped accordingly and first associated with e.g. “abstract concepts” (Javier), “light” (Sigrid) or “vibration” (Antonella), and then later associated with 3HO’s theoretical complexity. This shows that there is a “bottom-up” influence as the psychological substance of the experience found a path through a deeming making process into the 3HO worldview. The main “bottom-up” influence in this deeming making process is found in the consideration that the informants shared, i.e. that what they knew before and what was written *about* experience was later deemed as a “glimpse” of what the experience really is once they have had one.

However, the type of interrelation and influence of the cultural context and individual life events in the deeming of experience is reciprocal here, and the “top-down” and “bottom-up” vectors are both present in the descriptions of the interviewees of this study. In other words, the influence *at the end*, as it appears in the evidence, is both “top-down” and “bottom-up”. As Ninian Smart (1970) estimated in this respect,

“...experience and doctrinal interpretation have a dialectical relationship. The latter colors the former, but the former also shapes the latter.” (p. 24).

This is explicitly present when the informants of this study reflected on how theoretical knowledge was experienced and confirmed through their singular experiences, which at the same time added to the former knowledge a singular perspective for deeming them. In these cases their views about their experiences would have enriched the “doctrinal dimension”, as Smart estimated, inasmuch as these singular views held by the people in 3HO, based on their own experiences *too*, are to be shared, to serve and be taught to others. This situation, in turn, has the potential to develop the notion, concept and precept of experience further into the future, perhaps having in the long run an impact on the “teachings” themselves or/and the “doctrinal dimension” as well. In other words, it is possible to say that these singular experiences not only “confirmed” but also “elaborated on” the general notions of experience in the “teachings of Yogi Bhajan”. It can be argued that the experiences they had did and will influence the conceptions of experience of the future generations of 3HO members through the process of passing “the teachings” on to the future teachers and members. *Passing the teaching on* is a task that is essentially, if not exclusively, entrusted to the Aquarian Teachers who study and experience “the teachings”. With the *behavioral events* in the background of these members, the teaching staff can “deliver” the experiences they have had and that they have previously “integrated” into their lives (as in the cases of Sigrid, Javier, Gordon, Rachel, Hilde, Geert and Antonella).

In relation to the interaction between cultural context and individual life events, it is worth noting the view of Steven Katz (1979), who understood that the relevance of pre-existing patterns of belief, the previous mental content (which I addressed as the *attributor’s disposition*), and the concepts and expectations in the subject’s

psychological and cultural context are all substantial for the type of event that can take place. As he wrote, all of the previous are “at work before, during and after the experience” (p. 27). Although Katz strongly highlights the importance of the context and became an advocate of the perspective known as contextualism, he still left room for a nuance in his theory which speaks of a “two-directional symmetry”, where “beliefs shape the experience, just as the experience shapes the belief” (p. 30).

Since 3HO and Yogi BhaJan have explicitly emphasized the experiential dimension – in theory and in practice – for nearly five decades, and since the evidence collected and analyzed here shows that this dimension is still a key factor both in literature and in private, I can confirm Smart’s expression of “dialectical relationship” and Katz’s expression of the “two-directional symmetry” as the most accurate theories to refer to, since the experiences deemed by the eleven members of 3HO in this study were built as expressions of a *reciprocal interaction* between the personal *unusual sensory experiences* and the complex formation known as 3HO.

16.2. Interactions between social context and personal experience

Another aspect that stems from the previous points is related to the social dimension and how this is specifically linked to individual experiences. According to Durkheim (1915), religiosity was a communal phenomenon that gave the settings for stimulating an individual person with euphoria, feelings of wellbeing, happiness, confidence, inspiration, etc. Durkheim called this the “dynamogenic” function of religion and wrote that,

“The collective life excites religious thought because it gives rise to a state of effervescence, which changes the condition of the psychic activity. Vital energies are overstimulated (surexcitées), passions become more animated, sensations are strong: there are even some which are only produced at that moment. Man no longer recognizes himself; he feels transformed” (p. 151)

3HO’s communal life at the European Yoga Festival certainly provides and exerts this type of environment of influence, as many of the cases revealed to this study. This fits the criterion of this sociologist who explained it with more detail, saying that,

“...there is in us, outside us, religious forces that depend on us for their release, need us to call them into being: forces that we cannot but engender by the mere fact of coming together, thinking together, feeling together, acting together”¹²⁶.

In other words, this perspective recognizes that there has to be a disposition in the individual, which comes together with others to release what Durkheim deemed as “religious forces”. Clear examples of this individual disposition, that here I can call the *general disposition of the attributors in 3HO*, are present in the cases of Javier, Michael,

¹²⁶ Emile Durkheim, “Contribution to Discussion “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time”, in *Emile Durkheim* by W.S.F Pickering, in *Religion and Emotion*, Corrigan, John (Ed). Oxford, 2008, p. 442.

Rachel, Geert, Ruth, Sara and Antonella. The “coming together”, like in the European Yoga Festival, would work as the aspect that “engenders” these events making the social spheres a triggering for the individual experiences. Thus I must attest that the psycho-social atmosphere of the Festival, for almost any participant or *participant observer*, has an impact in the individual where it becomes evident that the collective “forces”, the “effervescence” and perhaps the “overstimulation” might be felt, experienced and therefore *deemed special*. The field of 3HO’s Yoga Festival and the collective force that it contains play an important role in determining, for at least eight days, the individual lives, daily routine and collective experiences of the attendees, at the same time as they “come together” to practice Yoga, meditate or recite the words of the Guru, all of which they attribute as efficacious means to their experiential goals. In this occasion the current profile and interplay of the individual and the social dimensions of the organization is manifested at its fullest.

Another aspect to consider in the social dimension is introduced by another sociologist (Wach 1944, p. 377): what he deemed as a “religious experiences” acted as “a mighty factor in establishing as well as destroying human associations”. This was thought in as much as the individual drive could clash against the principle of the collective. This *might* be the case in 3HO. Their experiences are prescribed in a specific way by means of Kundalini yoga and Sikh recitation or the repetition of mantras. At the same time, there is a specific repertoire of designations to experience: infinity, consciousness, grace, ecstasy, reality, life, oneness etc. I say *might* be the case in 3HO because, if one looks attentively at the repertoire in 3HO, one will see that the designations, although specific, are also loose enough to allow almost *any* association between one’s experience and the prescribed repertoire of Yogi Bhajan’s prescriptions. Similarly, the evidence shows that the achievement of any of these experiential qualities is always considered an outcome merit of the system (read “the teachings”) and therefore the deeming process, as showed above, reflects the will of the members to stay united, coherent and integrated within the social lexicon and the movement’s view.

In conclusion, through the current study it can be attested that when individuals *have had experiences*, they deem them in a way to 1) maintain a collective coherence that supports and confirms the value of the multifold group practices, since the behavioral events they go through are not deemed in a way that is disruptive to the group’s various practices and general approach, they also 2) frame their own experiential events to inspire those that have not had them, so newcomers can hear from more experienced members that they and anyone can have *these* special experiences and finally they 3) locate the individual experiential content at the core of the teaching strategy for the purpose of the service to others, so the individual experiences serve to “establish the human association” as well as institutional theoretical coherence (rather than “destroying human associations”, as Wach would call it).

16. 3. The Obsolescence of an ethnocentric perspective

The third aspect I wanted to address in this study is regarding ethnic viability. So far this study has provided enough data and evidence and elucidated key aspects about

experience in 3HO and specifically its relationship to the practice of Kundalini yoga. I can draw from this to form an argument about the obsolescence of the father of psychoanalysis Carl Gustav Jung's hypothesis about Kundalini yoga. He considered that,

“A European who practices yoga does not know what he is doing. It has a bad effect upon him and sooner or later he gets afraid and sometimes it even leads him over the edge of madness” (1996, p. xxx).

According to this study of experience in 3HO, the evidence shows that 1) the European interviewed in this study had some previous knowledge about what they were doing. There was a training process and a fairly wide frame of “teachings” related to Kundalini Yoga that some of them read before and all of them read during their education on Kundalini yoga teacher training, 2) the critical approach of Jung seems to have been based on the misconception that deemed yoga as an immobile and static cultural device and he did not have the possibility to anticipate how yoga and the culture where it was set can change how it is used. Jung rather anticipated that “in the course of centuries the West will produce its own yoga, and it will be on a basis laid down by Christianity” (Ibid p.xxx), 3). Not centuries, but only a few decades after he died, and not Christianity, but the original Indian background belief system (like Hinduism and Sikhism) made their way to reach Europeans and Westerners with Kundalini yoga¹²⁷, 4) Jung also thought that the *condition* of a European deprived him or her of a positive experience with the practice of Kundalini Yoga. In Jung's words he thought that,

“Therefore the yoga way or the yoga philosophy has always been a secret, but not because people have *kept* it secret. One cannot even talk about them, and of such a kind of are the experiences of Kundalini yoga” (1996b, p. 28 italics in the original)

In 3HO, and specifically with these informants, the general if not unanimous description they spoke about deemed these techniques positively safe and effective for gaining “health”, “happiness” and “silence”, among other things, and although the linguistic challenge in talking about their experiences was made explicit by some informants, the overall content of their accounts contains a valuable landscape of how psychologically, intellectually, socially and spiritually these experiences have impacted them and made them become Kundalini yoga teachers. Jung thought that, “...if the yogin or the Western person succeeds in awakening Kundalini, what starts is not in any way a personal development...” (p. 27).

Thus this study not only serves the academic community by addressing and correcting an scholar's a former view, but also provides a vantage point to contrast Jung's ideas as it addresses the experiences of the Kundalini yoga teachers and practitioners in Europe who have reported various significant personal experiences. Most of the cases in this study spoke about important life changes and developments, which were at times

¹²⁷ In recent times it is possible to see how certain practices have shown a concurrent turn to globalization and postmodernism and an intercultural exchange and syncretism as is the case of the organization founded by Yogi Bhanjan

challenging and which included personal transformations, deep journeys in the person's psyche, in his or her self-image, in the conception of reality and God, in the expansion of awareness and even experiences with chakras and the Kundalini itself. All these events and outcomes were deemed after the request to explain the experiential events these people had gone through. These informants sometimes spoke in evocative ways, but even though they were sometimes doubtful about their linguistic capacity to convey what they went through, all of them, from my point of view, offer material that can expand the scholarly understanding about the experiential dimension in a New Religious Movement that has Kundalini Yoga as one of the main individual and collective practices.

Jung held another presupposition about the Europeans, who he thought would not succeed with these practices, but rather the techniques would lead them "soon" to "feel obnoxious consequences ..." (p. 27). The corrigibility of his statements are at stake. This study shows evidence that all the participants interviewed had a background ranging from at least 3 years as a trained Kundalini Yoga teacher (*Aquarian Teacher*) to over 3 decades of experience practicing and teaching it. But what is legitimate in Jung's view that I did encounter, were the personal challenges and crises involving how to move on after an experience has taken place. Nevertheless, there is no finding that would show negative consequences that happened to any of these informants "soon" after – or later for that matter – when they began the practice. Although "crises" were present in most of the informant's journeys, nothing like "obnoxious consequences" were reported, let alone deemed, in a way that could show something like that type of experience. With all the informants except Hilde, the cases were deemed along the lines of a *transformative experience*, where the feeling of a hardship moment in life for the personality or the psyche occurred but did not reach or give any hint of an obnoxious event, effect or feeling that would raise concerns about their mental or physical health.

So what was Jung's fundamental limitation in addressing this subject? As I said above in the previous chapter, Jung's contribution was to present a subject that, in his time, was novel in the field of humanistic science, but along with his value, the fundamental imperfection of his thesis was due to, in my opinion, an ethnocentric bias. In another work, this shortcoming reveals itself:

"There are many kinds of yoga and Europeans often become hypnotized by it, *but it is essentially Eastern*, no European has the necessary patience and *it is not right for him...* a European can only imitate it and what he acquires by this is of no real interest" (1996, p. xxx, my italics).

The facts that this study has presented here are that 3HO has not taken centuries but only thirty to forty years to 1) get the recognition of the US Congress regarding the value of their experiences and 2) gather, at least once a year, over 2,000 Europeans that join together to practice Kundalini Yoga at the European Yoga Festival. It is worth mentioning again that between my first and last participation in the field research, from 2006 to 2011, the number of participants at the European Yoga Festival went from 1,350 to 2,242, while in the 1970s it began with a couple of hundred, as older members have

recalled.

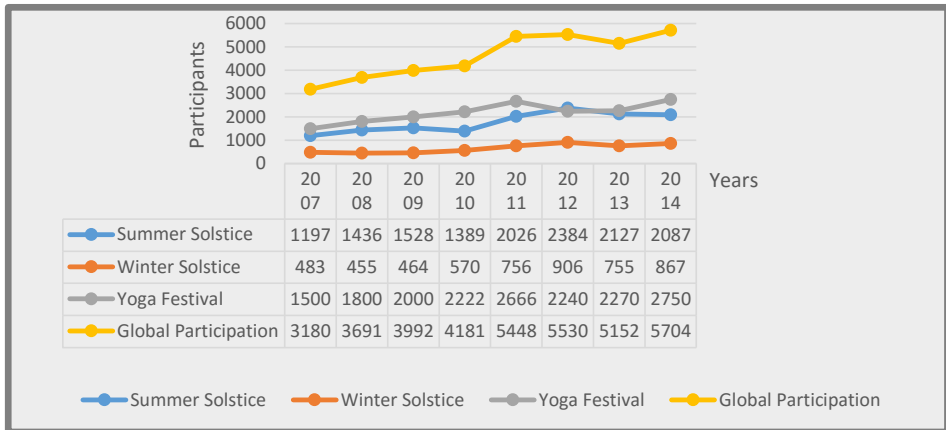


Table 20: Chart of the Participants attending the three major 3HO events in the West (Source of the Information in USA: *The customer service and registration department of 3HO*; Source of the information in Europe, *3HO-Europe Office*). In the course of the last seven years the global participation in 3HO annual events (top line) has grown from 3180 participants in 2007 to 5704 participants in 2014.

Alongside this, on these pages I have showed that 3HO started fundamentally with its focus on the yogic discipline of Kundalini Yoga and White Tantric Yoga, and it interested people because of the experiences that these techniques produced. The study has also showed that in most cases the practice and experience led the practitioners not to mix it with or turn it into Christianity, but to go along with the Sikhism embedded in 3HO, to the extent that many people at the Yoga Festival are still visibly embracing the orthodox Sikh Khalsa profile (this is also present in over half of the informants interviewed, like Sigrid, Javier, Michael, Hector, Gordon, Rachel, Ruth and Sara, while Geert felt more interested in Sikhism lately and Hilde felt she might be moving into that faith in the future). Furthermore, Jung did not have the evidence that has allowed this study to show that, after four decades, these teachings, techniques and experiences have slowly but steadily expanded across European countries, turning many of these ordinary practitioners into trained Kundalini Yoga teachers (Aquarian Teachers). We can conclude that contrary to what Jung said, this has happened despite:

- the cultural concerns that regarded Kundalini yoga as “not for westerners”
- the idea that this form of yoga will not work if it is aligned to a religiosity other than Christianity, contrary to Jung’s prediction that over the centuries Westerners would create a Christian form of Kundalini yoga
- his view that Europeans or Westerners would essentially encounter “fears”, “madness” or “obnoxiousness” is not showed in the data collected here; rather “the path” they chose, which was triggered by experiences, brought “happiness”, “liberation”, “peace”, “consciousness” and “personal growth”, among other things.
- the fact that although Jung conceived the experiences of Westerners with Kundalini yoga as having “no real interest”, it has nevertheless attracted

increased scholarship in the last decades¹²⁸.

17. Final Considerations

The study “3HO in the Light of Experience” is limited inasmuch as it does not fully provide a clear profile of a “distinctive 3HO experience”, an idea approached by C. Elsberg (2003). In her book she mentioned 3HO’s “distinctive experience” without defining or framing the idea (see Part I). But she considered it important to understand this aspect in order to see how the future generations in the movement would develop their participation in the Healthy, Happy and Holy Organization. Her approach is directly linked to my study because of my quest to look at the deeming of the experiential, which could depict a distinctive experience in 3HO and among its members. However, this study has perhaps gone at least one or two steps forward by distinguishing the roles that the notion of experience has in 3HO and how a group of members have deemed their experiences on the grounds of what was stipulated as *unusual sensory experience* happening to and in them. In addressing the task to elucidate more about the experiential dimension in 3HO, I have arrived at two clear points:

1. *Concerning informants*, the way experiences are deemed and how people relate to them, serve the interviewees in various socio-institutional manners by linking them to:
 - a) The organization’s precepts,
 - b) The organization’s path and prescribed practices
 - c) Yogi Bhanjan’s legacy and mission

Because in their view the experiential dimension has *integrating, connecting and uniting* qualities that also serve them in personal and interpersonal ways. In

¹²⁸ Patrick Mahaffey (2005), who had already critiqued the author, considered that “Jung did not anticipate the degree to which yoga would take root in the West during the past thirty years. Millions of Americans and Europeans participate in yoga classes and there are thousands of trained yoga teachers in the United States and Europe” (p. 406). In a lecture given by Yogi Bhanjan in 1976 he addressed the cultural and ethnic aspects concerning the practice of Kundalini yoga by Westerners, as well as the experience prescribed and the growth of the organization. This offers an interesting *emic* view of the issue as he said, “When I went back to India where I lived for 39 years, the one question everybody asked was, “What are you doing in the United States? Why are you teaching them those techniques and meditations?” All my friends were upset. They did not believe Westerners –particularly Americans- were suited to the inner knowledge and discipline of yoga. When I told them Americans have the potential to experience the Infinite, they said, “Oh no, no!” ... Since I came to the West the 3HO family, students of Kundalini Yoga, has grown to a very powerful organization of people around the world. We have thousands of people who practice the techniques and enjoy the elevated awareness it brings ... There is another side to this that is historical and cultural which you will not understand. Kundalini Yoga has never been taught publicly before. Many yogis have a sense of national and racial loyalty” (2003, p. 26)

terms of personal and interpersonal relationships the deemed experiences and their effects stimulated people's bonds:

- a) *Within* a person and *between* people in general,
- b) *Between* "the teachings" and the practices they follow, and
- c) *With* the historical agents of development of the movement, this is *between them*, "the lineage" (the *old members* of 3HO or/and the *Golden Chain*) and the *new comers* (students) of the organization.

2. *Concerning 3HO distinctive experience*, the study arrived at the finding of clarification not of a "distinctive experience" but of a *common distinctiveness about experiences*, throughout the collection and the analysis of the data *about experiences* and then the identification of regularities in the deeming making process of experiences, both in the literature and members of 3HO.

Towards a common distinctiveness about experiences: "experience works"

Since the experiences that other people have cannot be addressed directly, the strategy here was to approach and identify a *common* form of distinctiveness for all the variety of experiences deemed in this study. For this purpose some further distinctions could be made regarding the experiences in 3HO:

Firstly, it is worth remembering that, as William James wrote nearly one hundred years ago, scholars in the field of Religious Studies are addressing "varieties" of experiences. In the case of 3HO, even though I addressed it as an intra-cultural study, a degree of *variety* is still visible within the movement, which is a complex formation of a three-fold realms of thought that blends counter-cultural, Eastern cultural and Western cultural notions and also presents the various personal inclinations and national backgrounds of the people deeming their experiences. Their experiences had different overtones and while people's inner experiences are not accessible, the manner they deem their experiences, is. The quest, then, was to elucidate from the approach of this study the various experiences as deemed in 3HO that might connect and bear a *common distinctiveness about them*.

Secondly, through the examination of the experiences of this organization (considered in the precepts and the people deeming them), this study found a distinctive common feature *about* experience as an encompassing associative feature and this was that: *experience works*. About this I found that:

- This common feature either explicitly repeats or is implicitly contained in 3HO and Yogi Bhajan's notions and conceptions, and in one way or another in the informant's *attributional conclusions* of their deeming making process.
- This common feature provides the experiential *raison d'être* in a practical and theoretical sense, and it can be expressed in the form that "experience works" (as explicitly verbalized by Rachel).

- This does not say what 3HO's distinctive experience is all about, but rather tells why 3HO tacitly or explicitly (or both) prescribes a practice, and why a group of 3HO vanguard members (the teachers) embody and continue to consider it central.
- Whether it is according to 3HO public sources, Yogi Bajan's lectures, "the teachings" as they have been passed on or the members interviewed here, experience is an aspect of the path or journey that they will not downplay or ignore. Why? Because all the deeming processes from different sources agree on the idea that going through a life event (as common as their lifestyle or practices, or as uncommon as the outcomes of *unusual sensory experiences*) as prescribed, *works*.
- In their view, regarding their aims and the means of achieving them, the journey of "experience works". In other words, an important entrance to the path, a safe route on the path and an irrefutable indication that a goal has been achieved is made possible when some kind experience takes place.

Thirdly, through this study a contribution has become available when facing the additional challenge of identifying a "distinctive experience" by using the attributional approach. This study gains a new understanding of 3HO's chosen subject by showing the value of Ann Taves's theory of ascription and attribution, which is central to the deeming making process. At the same time, this research shows *a common feature about the experiences* within 3HO's universe, people, teachings, theory and practices. The agreement in 3HO on the efficacy of the path and practices is tacitly, but most of the time explicitly, passed forward in the practical notion that *experience works*. As Taves explained it,

"... the practices constitute the linkage between the point of origin and the goal, practitioners must agree that the practices are capable of doing so – that is, that they are efficacious" (p. 48).

Therefore, on the base of an *emic* account that shows that *experiences work*, it is possible to build an inter-subjective consideration or *etic* perspective to understand 3HO's *distinctive* stance on the experiential dimension. This study arrived at the evidence that there is a theoretical (given by the precepts) and a practical agreement (given by the group practice and individuals' attributions) concerning the efficacy of this path based on the ascription that *experience works*.

Fourthly, this could certainly have many implications, but there is one social implication that is necessary to address here. Joachim Wach investigate the social aspect of religions and asked, "If there is a common root in religious experience" (as there is in the experiential dimension as deemed efficacious in 3HO), "What are the natural and adequate forms by which it [the "religious experience"] can be organized?" (Wach 1958, p. 333). In other words, how would a human association deal with *these* experiences? A possible answer is certainly contained in this study inasmuch as there is a way that 3HO, Yogi Bajan and the teachers have emphasized and promoted the idea that practice, "sadhana", and the path ("the dharma") are configured for unfolding a distinctive mission which is to embody and transmit the message of "the Age of Experience or Age of Aquarius". This takes a specific form in 3HO. In order to organize

the experience, which in 3HO is deemed as “to give an experience” or “to deliver experience”, *their* distinctive strategy for dealing with it is rooted in the belief and the conviction of its efficacy, i.e. that *experience works*. In Wach’s view one can understand the reason why the majority of the members of 3HO interviewed could be socially inclined to what some of our informants expressed as “joining the club” or “committing to the path”. In this sense Wach says that, in relation to experience and further development in a group,

“... who shows a natural tendency toward a capacity for religious activity may enter upon a training or develop this potentialities and either partly (i.e., for a time) or exclusively devote himself to them” (Wach 1958, p. 333)

Some facts expressed by Wach need to be highlighted because 3HO has not only organized the experience by teaching about it and “delivering it”, it has also created institutions and a mechanism to do it systematically and internationally. In 3HO the followers are educated to have what Wach deems as “a capacity for religious activity” or what in this research is referred to as an *experience deemed religious or special*; therefore, through education or intense practice the members of the movement seem to be able to either *discover a “natural tendency”* (Wach), *awaken it* or eventually *gain it*. The attitude transmitted in the precepts that Yogi Bhajan taught becomes a *disposition of the attributors* to commit to develop their potentialities and to devote themselves to that development, “either partly”, as in the annual Yoga Festival, or “exclusively devote himself to them” (Wach) by e.g. following the path of the “Aquarian teacher” education (or Kundalini Yoga Teacher Trainings). These events or the education are in themselves behavioural events with a special significance and *they also “work”* to expand “the teachings” and advance people’s spiritual development provided there is dedication, deemed in 3HO as “commitment” and “discipline”. As Ann Taves (2009) wrote,

“For a path to be path, however, practitioners must also agree on *means* that they consider efficacious for getting from where they are to the goal. We can characterize the means of getting to the goal – the thing that people do to get there – as practices. The distinctive feature of a path is the linkage between the practices and the goal; this linkage is constituted when people ascribe efficacy to practices relative to a goal” (p.47, Italics in the original)

That is why 3HO has a strong belief in educating people – it is a distinctive feature of the movement, which was once considered and for many is still seen, as the educative branch or arm of Sikh Dharma – and through their education they have institutionalized the method “to give” people experience.

Fifthly, the central precept for 3HO education is that the students shall have the experiences prescribed to them, so, in my opinion, the legacy can stand the challenges of globalization, secularism, logic and cultural difference. This way the message would *work*, provided the accent is on the experiential value of the journey. This seems to be

the reason that it is crucial for 3HO members to gather in order to develop the experience of “group consciousness”, as shown in the former chapters. The aim in 3HO is not to exclusively empower the individual experience, but to also empower the group experience, as happens at the Yoga Festival and all the activities there. Certainly the “devotion” to the training of these abilities or the “faith” attributed to the practices are not an exclusive phenomenon restricted to 3HO. These are aspects of a wider phenomenon deemed as religious post-modernity and one of the types of spirituality of our current times¹²⁹.

Sixthly. Could the ideological background of Westerners, in itself saliently rational, have undermined the absorption of Yogi Bhanjan’s message that in itself sounds more intuitive and incongruent with Western idiosyncratic logics? Perhaps Yogi Bhanjan first thought that not everyone can understand a foreign philosophy, or perhaps he did not want to get into metaphysical intricacies, or maybe an oriental language could have brought troubles in understanding the message, or the look of an exotic turbaned guru (even if he or she is from Western society) might have not, in the long run, attracted people to his message. These might be the reasons he chose to put the emphasis on experience, because eventually almost everyone can “feel” and “perceive” and therefore relate to the benefits of an intense practice, one that is presented and deemed efficacious. If this is the case, one can say that someone with a personal experience of the kind Yogi Bhanjan spoke about can easily accept the distinctive feature that in 3HO *experience works*, and from that point onwards the decision to “join” the movement and “serve”, “share” and “deliver” these experiences would only be a matter of personal choice.

And finally, as it was noticed by Radhakrishnan, the phenomenon of experience or religious experience, as he deemed it, has for people “a self-certifying character [because experience] carries its own credentials” (1972, p. 23). This connection between experience and qualification seems to be present in more or less degree in the psychological horizons of the leading members of this organization. 3HO, as shown in this study, is a movement that encompasses teachings, practices, life-style and aims that are deemed efficacious to lead the members to some kind of *inner* or *spiritual* experience and life development. A “certification” is in fact achieved when some of the members accomplish the educational stages through the Teacher Trainings which bestow qualification not only regarding their knowledge, but also the standard experience of their graduated instructors and teachers. Within the different mechanisms of education, in group practices and gatherings, people often report they have had some kind of *unusual sensory experiences*, which according to the findings here, were always attributed causes and ascribed qualities cognate to 3HO and the teachings of Yogi Bhanjan, at the same time as they were explicitly or tacitly associated to the simple notion that *experience works*. Whether it was in the entrance to the life in

¹²⁹ According to Paul Heelas (1996), “... the idea that one can go [to workshops or seminars], to change for the better, has become so widely accepted that it might be said that our culture amounts to “the age of training”. The new Age thus also belongs to modernity in that faith is placed in the efficacy of specified practices” (p.169)

the movement or already within the committed journey in its path, they agreed:
experience works.

18. Glossary

A

Aquarian Age: The Age that according to Yogi Bhanan started on 11 November 2012.

Apana: In yogic philosophy, the aspect of human bio-energy that releases waste from the body

Amrit: 'Spiritual Nectar' in the Sikh tradition. Also the sweet drink that represents it in the Sikh baptism

Arcline: The halo around the head that in 3HO is seen as the energetic projection and protection of the psyche

Ardas: 'Prayer', also the traditional form of prayer in the Sikh ceremony.

Asana: 'Posture' or more precisely yogic posture. The 1st limb of the eight-fold part yogic tradition

Ascription: the way to stipulate something's quality (qualities) or feature(s).

Attributions: the way to consider the causes of a given phenomenon.

Atma: 'Soul' or 'Self'.

Aura: Also referred to in 3HO as the 'Electromagnetic field' of a human. It is supposedly the energy emanating from a person.

Awareness: Also equated with consciousness, is one of 3HO's core ideas associated with experience. It is the mindful condition of having special knowledge that is more than intellectual and it is a quality and goal of spiritual progression.

B

Bana: The traditional Sikh apparel. In 3HO the white clothes that includes the turban, both in men and women.

Bani: 'Word' or the words contained in the Sikh sacred texts.

Banis: The traditional daily prayers of the Sikhs.

Bhagavad Gita: The Hindu scripture part of the Mahabharata. For yogis it is a traditional source that refers to yoga, the Self and liberation.

Bhakti: 'Devotion' or devotional approach to the divinity.

Brahma: 'God', the Creator God of Hindu Trimurti.

Breath of Fire: A stimulant breathing technique common in Kundalini Yoga

Buddhi: The illumined aspect of mind as it is conceived in 3HO

C

Chakras: The vortex of energy center of energy and consciousness supposedly along the human spine.

Cherdi/Chardi Kala: The state of elevated spiritual experience in Sikh teachings

Crown Chakra: Also referred to as the 10th gate or the 7th Chakra in 3HO. It is located at the top of the head. See also Chakra

D

Deeming: The encompassing term to refer to ascriptions and attributions that people make

Dharana: 'Concentration', the 6th limb of the eight-fold part yogic tradition.

Dharma/Dharm: Roughly understood as 'spiritual path' that implies the following of precepts, practices and spiritual or religious goals

Dharma, Sikh: The religious organization created by Yogi Bhajan that encompasses the Sikh teaching as interpreted by him.

Dhiana/Dhyana: 'Meditation'. The 7th limb of the eight-fold yogic tradition

E

Ego: The false personality or mundane psychological construction that works as one's identity in the world.

Electromagnetic field: see aura.

Etic: the concept used by anthropologists to refer to the approach and narrative of those they study.

Emic: the concept used by anthropologists to refer to the approach and narrative they have about those they study.

Experience: A life event that someone or a group goes through, a behavioral event.

Eye, Third: The spiritual eye supposedly located in between the eyebrows.

F

Formations, simple: a simple ascription plus any precepts or prescriptions (practices) added to it.

Formations, composite: a composite ascription plus any precepts or prescriptions (practices) added to it.

G

Golden Chain: The spiritual tradition in Kundalini Yoga. It is considered to support and connect the generations of teachers and students unto infinity

Golden Temple: Also known as Harimandir, it is the main Sikh shrine located in Amritsar, India. See also Gurudwara

Gurbani: The words of the Guru, more specifically the written words in the Sikh sacred literature.

Gurdwara: 'The Guru's Gate'. The Sikh shrine or place of worship.

Gurmukhi: 'from Guru's mouth', the script in which the Sikh holy text is written.

Guru: 'Teacher'. He who takes from the darkness of ignorance ('Gu') to the light of knowledge ('Ru').

H

Heart Center: Also referred as the 4th Chakra in 3HO. It is located at the center of the chest. See also Chakra.

Humanology: The name under which Yogi Bhajan taught the teaching about male/female relationships, conception, birth, parenting, life cycles, death etc.

Hukam: 'Command' from the Guru or the Sikh holy scripture.

I

International Kundalini Yoga Teachers Association (IKYTA): The organism within 3HO that preserves the standard of the teachers and supports them in their work

Initiation, Self: The approach of Yogi Bhajan to the process of his students. Every student of Yogi Bhajan had to initiate himself in the spiritual journey.

J

Japji Sahib: The preliminary text of the Sikh holy scripture. It is written by Guru Nanak and is recited daily in Sikhism.

K

Kakaars: The five symbols of the Sikh Khalsa order.

Kanga: Wooden comb; one of the symbols of the Sikh Khalsa order.

Kara: Steel bracelet; one of the symbols of the Sikh Khalsa order.

Karma (Karam): The Indian conception of action leading to reaction or causes leading to effects.

Katcheras: Sikh Cotton underwear wore by a Khalsa; one of the symbols of the Sikh Khalsa order.

Kesh: Long, uncut hair; one of the symbols of the Sikh Khalsa order.

Kirtan: Devotional singing traditional in all of India and Indian traditions.

Khalsa: The baptized Sikhs who are “pure” in their relation to the Sikh Guru.

Khanda: The double-edge symbolic sword of Sikhism.

Kirpa: The single-edge sword carried by a Khalsa; one of the symbols of the Sikh Khalsa order.

Kriya (as in Kundalini Yoga Kriya): The yogic exercises that Yogi Bhajan taught to his students.

Kundalini: The Indian notion of the divine potential in a person, coiled at the base of the spine and full of power.

Kundalini Research Institute (KRI): The organization within 3HO that deals with the sources, education and standard teaching of Kundalini Yoga.

L

Langar: The free kitchen established by the 2nd Guru of Sikhism.

Life-stories or Janam-sakhis: The hagiography of the life of the founder of Sikhism.

M

Mahabharata: The Hindu classical epic of the first millennium B.C.

Mahan Tantric: The Master of Tantrism as understood in 3HO. Yogi Bhajan claimed to be the last in the White Tantric Yoga tradition.

Master: The one who has achieved mastery of time and space as understood in 3HO.

Mantra/Mantar: A word or group of words with spiritual qualities.

Mediation: One of the central practices in 3HO for developing mental capacities.

Mool or Mul Mantra: The first description and verse recited by Guru Nanak.

N

Naad/Nád: The mystical sound behind Sikh mantras or Shabads; also referred as the “sound current” in 3HO.

Naam: The ‘name’ which refers to the ‘identity’ of the divine being.

Nadi: Channel of energy in the yogic tradition; equivalent to the concept of meridian in Chinese medicine.

Niyama: The yogic ethical restraints. The second limb of the eight-fold yogic tradition.

O

Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō: The opening mantra that is used to begin a Kundalini Yoga session. It is supposedly 'connecting' people to the Golden Chain.

P

Patañjali: Author of the "Sutras of Patañjali". A Indian philosopher of yoga from around the second century AD.

Piscean Age: The precedent Age before the Aquarian Age.

Prakriti: The Indian concept of creation as a material phenomenon.

Prana: It is regarded as vital energy in Indian philosophy.

Pranic body: According to Yogi Bhajan the dimension of the human that consists of the element prana.

Pranayama: The yogic method of regulating the breath that carries vital energy. The 4th limb of the eight-fold yogic tradition.

Pratyahara: The yogic method of retraining from sensory organs; the 5th limb of the eight-fold yogic tradition.

R

Raag: Old Indian musical composition. Also the compositions laid out by the Sikh Gurus in the Sikh holy text.

Radiant body: According to Yogi Bhajan the dimension of the human that consists of the sum of all humans dimensions together.

Root Chakra: Also referred to as the 1st Chakra in 3HO. It is located at the base of the spine. See also Chakra.

S

Sadhana: Spiritual practice

Samadhi: The yogic method and achievement of absorption or united state with the divine or self. The last limb of the eight-fold part yogic tradition.

Sangat/Sat Sangat: Community of the same spiritual tradition.

Sat: Truth, essence or self.

Seva: Selfless service.

Shabad/Shabd: The lines or literally composition in the Sikh holy texts.

Shakti: Divine power or female divine power. An Indian goddess who represents the principle of female power.

Shunia: 'Zero'. Emptiness or silence. A concept used in 3HO for denoting a state of meditation/mind.

Simram: 'Remembrance'. The Sikh practice of attentive and uninterrupted meditative state.

Siri Guru Granth sahib: The Sikh Holy Scripture bestowed with the Guruship by the last of the Sikh Gurus.

Siri Singh Sahib: Title of Yogi Bhajan as the highest religious authority of the Sikh Dharma.

Subtle body: According to Yogi Bhajan, the dimension of the human that consists of an etheric element that encapsulates the soul.

Sutra: 'Thread'. A condensed literal statement that contains spiritual insight.

Syncretism: Treated here as a neutral term to denote the combination of different traditional constituents that form a new unity for scholarly research.

T

Tantra: An ancient religious belief and performance from India that worships the female power of Shakti and seeks unity with it through tantric practices.

Tattva: 'Element' of Indian philosophy, such as earth, water, fire, air, and ether.

Teacher, Spiritual: The impartor of experience and example to progress along the inner journey to God.

Ten bodies: According to Yogi Bhajan, the dimensions of the human that exist in the world.

Throat Chakra: Also referred to as the 5th Chakra in 3HO. It is located at the throat. See also Chakra.

Trimurti: The equivalent to a trinity in the Hindu religion.

U

Udasis: A sect or religious group characterized by being ascetic and yogic practices. The son of the 1st Sikh Guru joined and led this group in the 16th century.

V

Vedas: The ancient Indian texts containing the quintessential knowledge of the Hindu cosmology.

Vedanta: The knowledge contained in the Upanishad.

W

Warrior, Spiritual: The Sikh model that began with the 6th Guru and was fully accomplished by the 10th Guru of Sikhism.

White Tantric Yoga: The version of tantric practice taught by Yogi Bhajan.

Y

Yamas: The yogic ethical principles. The first limb of the eight-fold yogic tradition.

Yoga: 'Union'. A path of practices and principles that leads to the aim of unity.

Yogi: The one that practices yoga or has achieved a unitive state.

19. Appendices

A. *Religious Experience in classical religious studies*¹³⁰

In order to study 3HO's experiential dimension we could trace the development of the subject of *experience* in Religious Studies from the initial stages. This approach to the development of the notion of *religious experience* is done historically. The motivation of having this wider scholarly perspective on religious experience and the different notions of experience that academics have used is to provide us with the theoretical debate that preceded the approach how *experiences are deemed religious*. In the next few pages there is a description of the subject of religious experience and the main theories, paradigms and their representatives. This description also considers the main method that each writer or theory has utilized to approach religious experiences, and our quest is to address them in a critical fashion to be able to assess their relevance for facing 3HO experiences and how these theories shed light to discover the roles that experiences can have and the links to the attributions that 3HOers assign to their experiences.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (d.1834), besides being considered one of the founders of modern philosophical hermeneutics, understood it as "the art of avoiding misunderstanding" (in Gadamer, 1989, p. 185) He is acknowledged to have applied the hermeneutical methods to religious phenomena. His contribution to the reflection on the study of religion and the experiential aspect is associated with an emphasis on the subjectivity of the phenomenon. This approach serves to focus on the relevance of individual experiences in shaping religion.

In his analysis of Christian theology and in his philosophical stand, Schleiermacher is rooted in the tradition of the 18th century and the Kantian legacy about knowledge being limited by categories of understanding and sensory experience. According to Schleiermacher, one cannot reduce religion to an ethical, aesthetical or metaphysical dimension as Kant did. Kant views religious beliefs as an outgrowth of the moral sphere. For James Alfred Martin "Kant's religious experience is the experience of duty as a sacred obligation" (Eliade, 1987, p. 325). On the contrary Schleiermacher wanted to uproot religious life from ethical experience and reductive views so it could be considered as having a distinctive and an autonomic character. The two main works where he develops his theories are *On Religion* (1799) and *Christian Faith* (first published in 1821).

Schleiermacher's famous definition of religion as a "feeling of absolute dependence" (*Christian Faith*) opened the field of analysis to the level of feeling of an intimate experience. Although he did not use the technical term religious experience he posited the discussion on this aspect of the phenomenon of religion. This central idea develops

¹³⁰ Classical perspectives are those research perspectives that are regarded as paradigmatic for the study of religious experience, those considered authoritative approaches that have not lost their value and are still references to quote. This criterion is based on Jacques Waardenburg's reflection about the classical studies of religion. (Waardenburg, Jacques 1960. p. VI)

towards the term religious experience in the later analysis of Schleiermacher's work (see Wilhem Dilthey and Hans-George Gadamer). As J. Mariña noticed, "the feeling of which Schleiermacher speaks is not an empirical feeling aroused by an object given to the senses" (Mariña 2008, 459), but a transcendent object, God. From his Christian theological view, the infinite God can only be known if *experienced*, through God-consciousness (Mariña, 461). For Schleiermacher,

"It is possible to give a non-religious explanation of the sense of absolute dependence; it might be said that I only means the dependence of finite particulars on the whole and on the system of all finite things, and what is implied and the center of reference is not God but the world. But we can only regard this explanation as misunderstanding. For we recognize in our self-consciousness an awareness of the world, but it is different from the awareness of God in the same self-consciousness" (1963, p. 32.2)

He understood the core of religion as an intuitive and personal unmediated feeling of the infinite, so "Religion is the miracle of direct relationship with the infinite; and dogmas are the reflection of this miracle". The experiential dimension taken as a scholarship account and reflection is in Schleiermacher's reflection an important attempt to see religion as an individual "sense and taste of Infinity" (Schleiermacher, 1988, p. 103). His perspective was hermeneutical and based on methods of text analysis that started to build up a safeguard around the uniqueness of the religious experience and the impossibility of its apprehensibility by scholarly methods of research that have troubled academia for almost two centuries. Another side to his argumentation is concerned with the terminology Schleiermacher uses that cognates Yogi Bhajan's ideas of Infinity and Experience, since 3HO's founder said that "God is not a phenomenon, he is infinite... Something must be done to experience the infinity in this finite form. In this finite form the body has been given to you to experience infinity... " (Bhajan, 1977, p. 76, 109)¹³¹. It is useful to make this association for the understanding and comparing of a phenomenon seen by a Christian theologian which resembles the one of a new current religious movement.

William James (d. 1910) studied the phenomena of experience in his book *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). He was trained as a medical doctor and he held the stand of a physician. His method, however, was influenced by his theory of philosophical pragmatism. James's focus of analysis was on experiences. In his work he explained and judged the significance of different religious experiences. For James, all religious experiences have a physical root and "scientific theories are organically conditioned just as much as religious emotions" (p.36). His approach can be understood as naturalistic, meaning that there is a natural explanation to this type of experience. His quest was indeed the issue of explaining religious experience in naturalistic terms. Nevertheless in the perspective of Carrette, James cannot be categorized as a materialist because he is not reducing the phenomenon to the body, "but is grounded in the body and determined by cognitive-social dimension" (Carrette, 2008, p. 424-429).

¹³¹ "When you say cosmic consciousness, you mean God. When you say universal mind you mean God. There is no difference, there is just the difference in expression" (Bhajan 1977, p. 73)

As an attempt to label religious experience James's opinion was that it "probably contains nothing whatever of a psychologically specific nature" (James 1990, p. 27). This approach has a direct resemblance to the notion in 3HO that the methods that they teach are bodily based of spirituality¹³². James's chief topic was concerned with how to understand the unseen world and how people stand in relation to it (Proudfoot, 2004, p. 31, 32), he was searching for anything that could serve as an anchor for the analysis of datable experiences reported in autobiographies and journals.

For James, religion, was "the feelings, act and experiences of individual men in their solicitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine" (James 1990, p 34). This definition shows the understanding of religion in the classical sense, but it contains the ascriptive seed in so far as it integrates what people "consider divine". Like Schleiermacher, James was sure that "feeling is the deeper source of religion, and philosophical and theological formulas are secondary processes, like the translation of a text into another language (p, 431). Interpreting this is a result of the imperfection of the human condition and the need to be "saved from our wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers..." (p. 498). The anticipation of the cognitive stand is already with James as he thinks that "there is a state of mind, known to religious men, but not to others" (p. 64). For James the preconditions for "personal religious experience has its roots and center in mystical states of consciousness" (p. 229). Altogether the medical background and the approach of James do not deal with how the experiences are interpreted and generated into meaningful narratives. These conceptions, like others of James, stemmed from his Protestant background (see Hollinger 2004, 11, Niebuhr 1985, 359-360; also in Proudfoot 2004. p 11). William James is considered the first thinker that gave the term religious experience a technical use and who saw already at the beginning of the 20th Century the relevance of these experiences in a wider disciplinary context (Taves, 2005, p 7740). For William James the study of religious experiences was not as fruitful as he wanted and it remains close to the idea of exclusiveness of the religious experience to the religious minded-person, unless...

"In all sad sincerity I think we must conclude that the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experience is absolutely hopeless (...) If philosophy will abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly transform herself from theology into science of religions, she can make herself enormously useful" (p.355)

Emile Durkheim (d. 1917) being a sociologist, grounded his work on ethnographic research and analysis of field work material. He published *Elementary forms of Religious Life* (1915), wherein he studied Australian aborigines and explored, among other things, the major functions of religious life. In this regard he considered religion a communal fact that provides a euphoric good feeling, as well as happiness, confidence and well-

¹³² "The physical body is a temple. Take care of it. The mind is energy. Regulate it. The soul is the projection. Represent it. All knowledge is false if the soul is not experienced in the body" (Bhajan, 1977, p. 183)

being in life. He called this the *dynamogenic* function of religion. Although he did not utilize the term religious experience, he admits in direct reference to his contemporary William James that “religious beliefs are based on a specific experience whose demonstrative value is in a sense no way inferior to that of scientific experiments” (p. 146). The experiential/emotional functionality of religion is developed in his theories of *collective emotion* and *collective effervescence*. In relation to religion, his focus of interest was the *collective experience* rather than the individual one; for him religion is a product of the collective mind, because,

“The collective life excites religious thought because it gives rise to a state of effervescence, which changes the condition of the psychic activity. Vital energies are overstimulated (surexcitées), passions become more animated, sensations are strong: there are even some which are only produced at that moment. Man no longer recognizes himself; he feels transformed” (p. 151)

His main theory is that the social environment is the locus where the genesis of religious idea can be found (p. 218-219). There is a catalyst event in the social life that causes religious force to emerge in the individual, as Durkheim believed. This theory is doubtlessly significant, because it highlights an aspect that 3HO gives a lot of importance: in order to attain “Universal Consciousness”, which is understood as attaining God-realization, the normal process implies that it is first necessary to expand it through “Group consciousness”¹³³. For the sociologist it is necessary to consider that,

“... above and beyond all the dogmas and all the denominations, there exists a source of religious life as old as humanity and which can never run dry; it is the one which results from the fusion of consciousness, of their communion in a common set of ideas, of their co-operation in one work, of the morally invigorating and stimulating influence that every community of men impose on us (...) there is in us, outside us, religious forces that depend on us for their release, need us to call them into being: forces that we cannot but engender by the mere fact of coming together, thinking together, feeling together, acting together”¹³⁴

In another sense, Durkheim’s understanding of the *intentionality* of the gathering was the key aspect that gave these gatherings religious distinctiveness. No gathering would produce religious effects, rather “the sentiments so roused must be fixed on an object or concrete objects which symbolize them” (Durkheim in Pickering, p. 450). This view germinally refers to the immediate environment where religious experience takes place and how people’s explanations automatically fix the experiences and the symbols together in the process we refer to as deeming. In this sense, we can trace in Durkheim the seed of the collective act of deeming things religious, which not only provides the

¹³³ In the conception of Yogi Bhajan, “Individual consciousness will refine you, group consciousness will expand you, and universal consciousness will redeem you to infinity” (The Teaching Of YB, p. 162)

¹³⁴ Emile Durkheim, “Contribution to Discussion “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time”, in *Emile Durkheim* by W.S.F Pickering, in *Religion and Emotion*, Corrigan, John (Ed). Oxford, 2008, p. 442.

perspective on how groups stimulate religious or spiritual experiences, but also the basic mechanism they use to deem the experiences as such.

Rudolf Otto (d. 1937). The study of *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) is Otto's most important theological and (proto) phenomenological work of the 20th century. Erik Sharp considers it mandatory reading for any students of comparative Religion (Sharp 1986, 161). In his book, Otto speaks of the *numinous* which is only possible to apprehend by the direct and unmediated experience. The nature of the numinous, according to Otto, is a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. With his approach he undermined and defied the methodological perspectives of humanistic research. The feeling of the numinous does not derive from any other temporal feeling or source, it is a *Sui Generis* category, he wrote. Otto was critical of reductionist and overly rational approaches from scientific methods. He said that "once it has been grasped that *qâdosh* or *sanctus* is not originally a *moral* category at all, the most obvious rendering of the words is "transcendent" ("supramundane")" (Otto.1958, p. 52). As Schleiermacher did, Otto was also refuting the Kantian moral and reductive understanding of religion. For Otto there was also a cognitive element in relation to the experience of the numinous; for him, the sense of the numinous is a mental state and the only way to become acquainted with what a religious experience stands for is by evoking it: it must be "awakened in the mind" (p. 7). He explained that,

"Whoever, on the other hand, penetrates to the unique center of religious experience [numinous experience], so that it starts to awake in his own consciousness, finds that the truth of these intuitions is experienced directly, as soon as he penetrates into their depths" (p. 57)

He thinks that it is possible to see that the *numinous* attracts and appropriates meanings that derive from the social order and standard of goodness and justice. These ideas come to "charge" the numinous with ethical connotation so "holy becomes good", yet he speaks of this as the process of rationalization and moralization of the *numinous* (p. 110). His investigations move the grounds of rational approach to the irrational dimension, since the numinous "issues from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses" and, he pointed out, they "are not perceptions at all" (p. 113). To conclude, "the absolute exceeds our power to comprehend: the mysterious wholly eludes it" (p.141). Again associated with Schleiermacher's thought, Otto thinks that a religious person is able to understand the numinous because it "becomes intelligible and recognizable to the religious consciousness" (p. 166). As Otto believes, the soul's faculty of *divination* (with receptive and interpretative capacities) is how the numinous can be intuitively grasped (*Ahndung*).

According to Leon Schlamm, one of the most important commentators of Otto's work, the *Idea of the Holy* is to be free from the authority of other rational or scientific methodologies. Similarly, Melissa Raphael well highlighted that Otto's explanation of experience lacks contextuality and it "is socially and historically disengaged" (Raphael, 1997, p. 7).

Both Schleiermacher and Otto make religious experience the foundational act of religion. They developed from their schematic analysis the critical defense of the objectivity and irreducibility of religious experiences. An experience, in other words, is religious by its own nature and can only be grasped through religious mechanisms. This author provides the arguments to address religious experience religiously. This is to apply the criteria of reductionism to experiences that by nature are seen (deemed) religious and therefore to exclusively address them with a religious attitude and mentality. This author is perhaps the strongest representative of the “Sui Generis” approach in which the access towards religious experience is locked for non-religious approaches. This approach generated the main debate about the methodological implications to study religious experience in a scholarly way and circumscribe the core of the debate to the idea of whether *these types* of experiences are intrinsically religious or made such a posteriori in a process of interpretation. The perspective of the current study in relation to 3HO experiences – the way they are accounted and not what the ultimately are – generates an alternative path to understand the phenomenon. For now, let us see how Otto’s understanding inspires and passes to another sociological perspective, which differs substantially from Durkheim’s.

Joachim Wach (d. 1955) is one of the most important historians of religion who contributed with a sociological perspective to the investigation of this phenomenon. His main work in the subject of religion was *Sociology of Religion* (1958, first published in 1944). In this book, religious experience was understood in Ottonian terms as an “experience of the holy”. Wach’s aim was “to illustrate the cultural significance of religion, but also to gain a new insight into to the relations between the various forms of expression of the religious experience, and eventually to understand better the various aspects of religious experience itself” (p. 5). He later suggested that religious experiences “were a mighty factor in establishing as well as destroying human associations” (p.377). In his conviction of the natural religious faculty of the human (*homo religiosus*), he anchored his analysis on the religious experience that he thought to have an objective character, that would “ultimately defy any attempt to describe, analyze, and comprehend its meaning scientifically” (p.14). His stand reduced the object and subject of experience to an intrinsic religiosity (the *religious experience* belongs to the *homo religiosus*). As Jacques Waardenburg commented, Wach sought to produce a “systematic typological understanding of religious phenomena and took as its base religious experience” (1999, p. 487). Wach considered it interesting to see “the saga of religion as an “adequate manifestation and expression of religious experience”, sketching it in three phases (creation and destruction; conservation and revolution; reformation and renaissance) (1958, p.17). He went further:

“Religious experience does not readily yield to overt and unambiguous expression; yet, on the other hand, only through the forms which this experience gives itself will it be possible adequately to trace and understand its character” (p.14).

Again, the “Sui Generis” theory claims the domain for itself and in doing so it impoverishes any other human approach to religious act if it is not faced by means of a

religious act itself. In this sense Wach claimed that a genuine religious experience was grounded in “ultimate reality” (p. 32-33), which provides the criteria of genuine theological grounds or mystical practice. He approached the expressions of the religious experience through the following categories: the doctrine (p. 19-25), the cult or practice (p. 25-27) and sociological (collective) expression (p. 27-34). By doing this he arrived at the conclusion that “no age, no country, and no people seem to have lacked such experience altogether; the variety in the forms of its expression is bewildering” (p. 375, 376). As we can see, much of his metaphysical base is indebted to Otto. He understands the experience in a theocentric way for a functional purpose, and this is “wherever such expressions are genuine, they are meant not to serve external ... but to formulate and perpetuate man’s deepest experience, his communion with God” (p. 376). Joachim Wach taught at the University of Chicago from 1946 until he passed away in 1955; he passed down his chief concept to his main heirs and successors, Charles H. Long, Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mircea Eliade.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (d. 1975) is one of the most famous Indian scholars in Comparative Religion. He was also President of India in 1962-1967. He is considered one of the main builders of the bridge that connects the studies of eastern and western religions and philosophies and in this regard we regard him as a valuable Indian academic insider in the phenomenon of experience. As an academic, most of his understanding is inspired by Western scholars like Henri Bergson and William James among others (Halbfass 1988, p. 398; Sharf 2000, 273-275). In this way, *Radhakrishnan’s* contribution to the theoretical approach of current research on SHO is especially relevant because along with his scholarship, he has an Indian perspective in viewing and addressing the topic of experience. In other words, as well as having an academic approach, the insights that this author presented are strongly rooted in the perspective of the Indian worldview and, as we will see, these insights provide an opportunity to shed light on key elements and phenomena related to the experiential in SHO.

Radhakrishnan’s two main works in which he analyzed religious experience are *The Hindu View of Life* (1927) and *An Idealist View of Life* (1929). In both of these books he examined the subject of religious experience and highlighted the relevance of an intuitive thinking in opposition to merely rationalistic approaches. In *Hindu Way of Life* he defined religious experience as the “presentment of the real already influenced by the ideas and prepossessions of the perceiving mind” (p. 19) in this sense, he wrote, “the religious seer needs the help of the imagination to express his vision” (p. 21). The act of the imagination is in essence an act of interpretation that supposes a set of notions, memories and worldview that serve the “seer” to express his experience. In his own words,

“Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outer expression to inner realization. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience. It is the insight into

the nature of reality (*darśana*), or experience of reality (*anubhava*)” (p.13)¹³⁵

It is worth clarifying that Radhakrishnan uses as equivalent terms “religious experience”, “intuitive knowledge” and “spiritual experience” (Halbfass, 1988, p. 381)

In *An idealist View of Life*, he wrote that religious experience has “a self-certifying character ... it carries its own credentials” (p.13). This aspect of experience illuminates an important feature of the experiential events and impact that they have in 3HO members. A characteristic of experience seems to be that it can qualify the experiencer, the one who has it, and in 3HO these characteristics might introduce us into the roles of experience (p. 122-125 of this thesis).

In another way, Radhakrishnan’s concern was to investigate the nature and content of the religious experience, in this sense he wrote that “if experience is the soul of religion, expression is the body” (p. 70) and he asserted that “theory, speculation, dogma, change from time to time as the facts become better understood. Their values are acquired from their adequacy to experience” (p. 70-71); so what can be noted from this statement are two fundamental ideas: That experience is a cardinal core that articulates different phenomena considered religious. But what does this author understand by experience? In this work the author defines religious experience as “a type of experience which is not clearly differentiated into a subject-object state, an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man’s nature, but his whole being seems to find itself” (p.72). Nevertheless, he repeats the idea that, “there is no such thing as pure experience, raw and undigested. It is always mixed up with layers of interpretation. The alleged immediate datum is psychologically mediated” (p. 78). This idea of the mediacy/immediacy of the experience, as we will see in the next pages, has been a central focus of debate in recent years, a starting point for the method and approach. In one sentence, in the alternative to seeing experience as something that has gone through a process of attributions and ascriptions we find ourselves able to release our research from entanglement with the debate about the nature and purity of experience (“Sui Generis approach”) versus the cultivated and interpreted condition of experience (embodied in different responses against the “Sui Generis” view, such as the contextualist, cognitive and other approaches described in this chapter).

As for Radhakrishnan, he is associated to the idea of a *perennial philosophy*, a term coined in the 16th century by Agostino Steuco (*De Perenni Philosophia Libri X*, 1540). Later on the term was used by Gottfried Leibniz, but it was popularized in the 20th century by Aldous Huxley in his book of the same name (1946). This philosophical view interprets different traditions and religions as an expression of a common ground of reality. All forms of religions, Radhakrishnan thought, were expressions of the common

¹³⁵ The term *darśana* comes from the etymological root *drś* “to see”, interpreted as “direct experience”. *Anubhava* etymological meaning is “deeply become unto” interpreted as a state of awareness. These two concepts that anchored in the Indian cosmogony are cognate with Yogi Bhajan’s view on reality and intuition: “All humans beings intuitively know what is going on. The difference is, some can record it and some cannot” (Bhajan 1997, p. 174)

ground of religious experience, which positions him within the “Sui Generis” approach. According to Radhakrishnan, Hinduism contributes with a valuable insight and example. He believes that in the midst of religious diversity, religious experience is the universal core and the key factor of religion and religions (very similar to Yogi Bhanan and 3HO criterion, as we will see in Part B). In his terms, “the intellectual accounts become barriers to further insight if they get hardened into articles of faith and forget that they are constructed theories of experience” (p. 94).

Mircea Eliade (d. 1986) is a remarkable example of fruitful and leading interpretative work in the field of religious study. In the footsteps of Wach his consideration of the human being as *homo religiosus* led him to interpret religious phenomena through the criteria of the *sacred* and the *profane*, rather than as religious experience itself. However, his book *The Sacred and the Profane* is to some extent built on Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* in that he assumed a perspective that shows how religion comes from the experience of the sacred, the term he often used as a synonym to religious experience (Taves, 2005, p 7743).

In *Patterns in Comparative Religions* (1958), he analyses the hierophanies and understands them as an historical phenomenon that shows certain common characteristics. This is important because Eliade seemed to consider that religious experiences have some coherence, denying that “every religious experience whatsoever is a unique and never-to-be-repeated incident in the working of the spirit. The greatest experiences are not only alike in content, but often also alike in their expression” he thought (p. 3). However, he evocatively underlines that in trying “to grasp the essence of such a [religious] phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the Sacred” (p xi). This irreducibility of the experience echoes the *Sui Generis* character that Otto considered in his work, terming it the “numinous experience”. In these two cases of approaching the subject experience, the experience as such is protected from the onslaught of logic and leaves no room for approaching it in any other way than religious.

Ninian Smart (d. 2001) was a renowned scholar who contributed to shape the field of secular study of religions. He became famous by defending the scientific approach to religious studies and helped the formation of departments in many public universities in Europe and in the United States. His theories in the field of religious studies are very profuse. He wrote about experience in his classical work *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1970) where he referred to the methodological challenge of facing the ground to focus the analysis of a religious experience, since “...there is a special difficulty, however, undertaking a description of religious experience. We have to rely upon a testimony of those who have the experience and their reports must be conveyed to us either by telling or writing” (p. 23). This view guides the humanistic endeavor to study religious experience and is applied in Part C of this study. He also pointed out that “...experience and doctrinal interpretation have a dialectical relationship. The latter colors the former, but the former also shapes the latter” (p. 24),

claiming that “the factor of religious experience is even more crucial when we consider the events and human lives from which the great religions have stemmed” (p. 22).

For him religious experience refers to,

“... a specific range of experiences which are religiously important, such as Saint Paul’s on the Damascus road, or a pious person’s inner recognition of an answer to his prayers (...) a religious experience involves some kind of “perception” of the invisible world, or involves a perception that some visible person or thing is a manifestation of the invisible world” (p. 28).

With this explanation, Smart infers that a religious experience is a general term for several different phenomena which stand in front of (but not only) two main levels: 1) a special *perception* (in relationship to the 2) *invisible world* (or its manifestations in the visible world). This approach leaves no room for the scholar to partake in the observation of the experience as it is implied that the world as we know it or see it is not within the range of the object of the religious perception. This view does not take into account the monism of some religions like Sikhism, in which all is seen as the manifestation of the “One Creator”. This view of seeing the world as a manifestation passes to 3HO, since Yogi Bhanjan taught that one has to “see God in all, otherwise one will not see God at all”. This last statement opens the door to take everything as a religious experience, as far as 3HO is concerned.

But in his essay *Understanding Religious Experience* (1979), Smart deals with the subject of the interaction between the researcher and the believer, and distinguishes *existential understanding* (first-hand experience of the subject) from *theoretical understanding* (second hand account of the inquirer) (p. 10-11). Therein he mentioned the context of the tradition, saying that although “we should start with the tradition in pinning down religious experience; we should not confine religious experience to this area” (p. 11). This suggestion is applied in this study case (Part B).

In the final remarks of Smart’s book he underlines that,

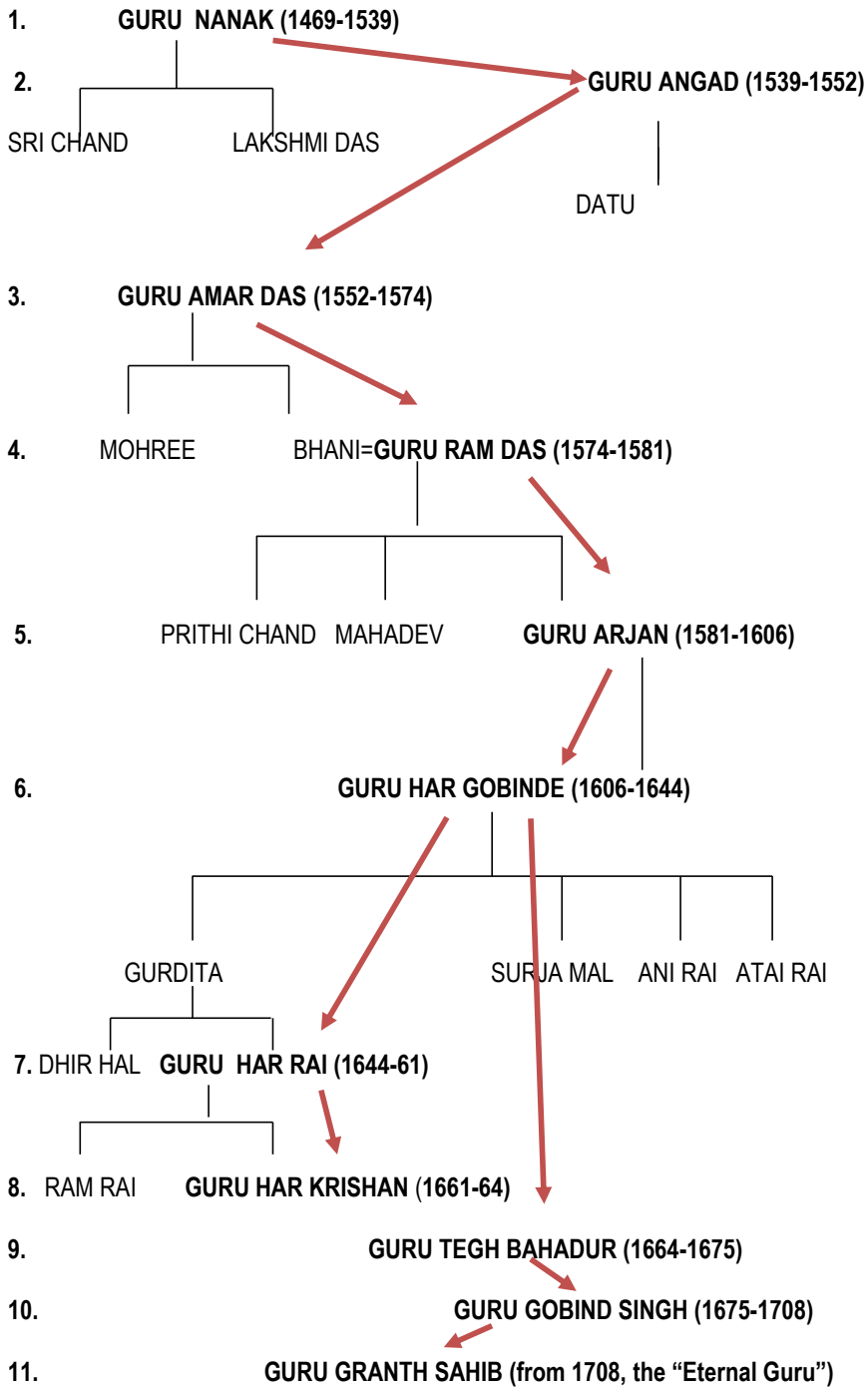
“We are not in an area of “neutral” investigation ... For what is often forgotten is that we have a long and delicate path to pick before we are really in a position to make evaluation; and that path is phenomenological. it means that we must be able to disentangle varieties of religious experience, have a nose for degrees of interpretation in their descriptions [from the believers behalf], see what they mean existentially, place them in their living context and so on” (p. 20)

In the *Dimension of the Sacred* (1997) he criticizes the idea of the cultural reduction of religious experiences by drawing on the example of sexual experience, writing “do we doubt that the basic sensations are alike? They are not wholly determined culturally” (p. 169). Smart noticed how relevant these experiences were in developing the work of the subjects, since “inspirational experiences helped to shape the careers of Isaiah, Paul,

Arjuna, Muhammad, the Buddha and many others in the history of religion” (p. 166). This aspect of experience could be seen as a fundamental role of experience that stimulates 3HO’s most committed members to “shape careers” in the path.

Other important ideas were presented in his book, among them we can identify that: there are “relative degrees of interpretation” (p. 170) and that shamanism is “a major form of religious experience and practice” (p. 190), which again is based on his definition of religion as a perception of the invisible world; and also *healing* is a “form of religious experience” (p. 193). As a final consideration, Smart thinks that “core-type religious experiences are intrinsic to the human psyche in some way. They can flourish or not flourish in differing conditions” (p. 177).

B. Succession of the Guruship and regnal dates



C. The Sikh token introduced by the Sixth Guru, the Khanda, deemed in 3HO as the “Adi Shakti”



In it is possible to see the one two-edge-sword in the middle, representing the unity of the force of God masculine and the circle in the centre that is an ancient Indian symbol of the female for (*Shakti*), the *chakra*, infinity with no end nor beginning. In either side of it there are two swords (or *kirpans*), one that represents the temporal power (*miri*) and the other that represents the spiritual power (*piri*). The two *kirpans*, *miri* and *piri*, are the symbol of the balance between the temporal or political authority and spiritual authority, respectively. The *miri/piri* concept laid down the foundation for the introduction of the ideal of the Sant-Sipahi (Saint-Soldier) in Sikh religion. Therefore the “martial race” view only considers the sword as militant elements, emphasising the *miri kirpan* without noticing the symmetrical significance of the other sword or *piri kirpan*, the one of the spiritual warrior.

20. Portraits of Festival



Figure 1. "Guru Ram Das Gurdwara" was the name given by Yogi Bhajan. Photo by the author.



Figure 2. Wedding Ceremony. Photo by the author.



Figure 3. Yoga and meditation practice in the "Big Top". Photo by the author



Figure 4. Chateau Fondjouan and 3HOers after strenuous exercise. Photo by Viriam Kaur



Figure 5. Miscellaneous Products from the bazaar.
Photo by the author



Figure 6. Sikh-related products from the bazaar.
Photo by the author.



**Figure 7. Board announcing workshops, therapies, trainings, retreat and related activities offered by 3HO teachers and healers
Photo by the author.**



**Figure 8. Place for massages, and alternative therapies
Photo by the author**

Mantras at the “Sadhana field” and their meaning as rendered in 3HO:



Figure 9 (Left up). The “Adi Shakti Mantra” translated “One Creator Created this Creation. Truth is His Name. Great beyond description is His Infinite Wisdom” (Bhajan, 2003, p. 152)



Figure 10 (Right up). “Wha Yantee, Kaar Yantee”, translated, “Great Macroself. Creative Self. All that is creative through time. All that is the Great One. Three aspects of God: Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh (Shiva). That is Wahe Guru” (Ibid, p. 152)



Figure 11. “The Mul Mantra” translated as “One creator, Creation. Truth Identified (Named). Doer of Everything. Fearless. Revengeless. Undying. Unborn. Self-illuminated, self existent. Guru’s Grace (gift). Repeat (Chant!). True in the beginning. True through all time. True even now. Nanak says truth shall ever be” (Ibid, p. 152)



Figure 12. “Sat Siree, Siree Akal”, translated, “Great truth. Respected Undying. Respected undying. Great Deathless. Great deathless. Truth identified (Named). Deathless Image of God. Great beyond description is His Wisdom” (Ibid, p. 152)



Figure 13. “Rakhe Rakhan Har”, translated, Thou who saves, save us all and take us across. Uplifting and giving excellence. You gave us the touch of the lotus feet of the Guru, and all our jobs are done. You have become merciful, kind and compassionate and so our mind does not forget Thee. In the company of the holy beings you take us from misfortune and calamities, scandals and disrepute. Godless, slanderous enemies –you finish them in timelessness. That the Great Lord is my anchor. Nanak, keep firm in your mind, by meditating and repeating His Name. All happiness comes and all sorrows and pains go away” (Ibid, p. 153)



Figure14. “Wahe Guru Wahe jio”. “There is not real translation for it, though we could say “Wow, God is Great!” or “Indescribably great is His Infinite, Ultimate Wisdom”” (Ibid, p, 143)



Figure 15. “Guru Ram Das Chant”, translated, “Wise, Wise is the One who serves Infinity” (ibid, p. 84)

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