ON THE WAY FROM BORDER CONFLICTS: 
TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN RUSSIA

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One of the recent attempts to define Transpersonal Psychology (TP) was made by a well-known practitioner in the field, Mariana Caplan. “Although Transpersonal Psychology is relatively new as a formal discipline […], it draws upon ancient mystical knowledge that comes from multiple traditions. Transpersonal psychologists attempt to integrate timeless wisdom with modern Western psychology and translate spiritual principles into scientifically grounded contemporary language.”¹ It’s exactly the concern with spirituality which makes the definition of TP so difficult, because everybody seems to interpret spirituality in one’s own way nowadays and there hardly will ever be consensus reached on it. As for the goal of TP the same author says: “Transpersonal psychology addresses the full spectrum of human psychospiritual development—from our deepest wounds and needs, to existential crisis of the human being, to the most transcendent capacities of our consciousness.”² Evidently, such a wide scope doesn’t make it easier to define TP. However, if we try to put it into historical and cultural context of the last three decades of the 20th century things become more understandable for us.

TP started to form in the United States in the 1960s as an outgrowth of humanistic psychology. However, it became obvious very soon that there were differences between them. Humanistic psychology was oriented towards self-actualization but transpersonal psychology was aimed at the achievement of ultimate states of consciousness.³ In other words, it wanted not only to study mystical experience but also to participate in it. As the founder of the Transpersonal Psychology Association (TPA) Anthony J. Sutich readily admitted, the therapist or counselor in the new field was supposed to be on his (her) own spiritual path.⁴

The founding fathers of TP (Anthony Sutich, Stanislav Grof, Ken Wilber

² Ibid., 231.
and others) often cited among their predecessors William James, but if the latter in his famous Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) researched the mystical states empirically, they insisted on these states being experiences of ultimate personal truth and based TP on this ontological ground. It is this peculiarity of TP that let Wouter J. Hanegraaff define it as “an openly religionist psychology” and include it in his study of New Age movements.5

Hanegraaff also writes that TP is divided into practical and theoretical parts. The former explores altered states of consciousness and the latter makes “cartographies of consciousness which distinguish a hierarchy of levels of the psyche.”6 Psychoanalysis, behaviorism and humanistic psychology explore the lower layers of the psyche and TP studies the highest one where transpersonal experience takes place. This hierarchy allows TP to position itself as a synthesis of western science and spiritual wisdom both of oriental and occult origin. Such image of itself is typical for the New Age movement as a whole and it makes obvious its inherent ties with TP.

These ideas let TP find its place alongside traditional branches of psychology. However, at the same time, they put it into a precarious situation on the border of science and religion. For more than forty years, its adepts have been talking about the coming of the new paradigm where this border will not exist any longer, but it still does. And it creates a lot of theoretical and practical problems for them.

A few years ago a group of leading American transpersonal psychologists quite openly discussed their difficulties.7 The major ones had to do with TP relationships with traditional psychology and society and culture at large. Were they right in fighting for a place in the American Psychological Association (APA)? Alternatively, would the niche of spiritual coaching or even religious ministry be better suited for them? Some of the participants of the conversational forum have chosen the latter, and they seemed to be quite content with it. This debate made obvious two things. First, American transpersonalists still find themselves in the situation of a border conflict. Second, political and cultural pluralism of American society helps them to deal with their problems. In Russia, the situation of the border conflict was less obvious in the first decade

6 Ibid., 51.
of TP’s open existence in the 1990s, but now it is getting more evident than in the US. It is exactly the growing deficit of political and cultural pluralism in Russia, which makes the conflict stronger.

From Underground to the “Romantic Period”

TP found its way to Russia soon after its inception in the United States. In the very beginning of the 1980s Michael Murphy, the founder of the Esalen Institute and one of the godfathers of TP in California, came to the USSR and discovered that New Age there was in full bloom. However, it was mostly underground as the atheist communist ideology did not like Soviet people to have mystic experiences and altered states of consciousness. However, it did not prevent Murphy from meeting some of its representatives. He shared his impressions with the New Age Journal on his return back home. Murphy spoke about “the cultural awakening” very similar to that in the USA but somewhat quieter and about “the developing subculture” much involved with esoteric religion, new kinds of psychotherapy, alternative medicine, flying saucers and parapsychology. Murphy made a few trips to the USSR and discovered that “the developing subculture” also numbered some people in Soviet academic circles.

He made friends with a dynamic young man named Joseph Goldin whose title sounded typically for the huge Soviet bureaucratic machine—Scientific Secretary of the Commission for the Complex Study of Man. But in reality his commission was a cover for a group of intellectuals who studied semi-officially what they dubbed “hidden human resources.” Their very eclectic field of study included such things as “psychology of creativity, cybernetics, sexology, architecture, film, music, nontraditional healing, parapsychology and sports performance.” The goal of this research was to demonstrate that the supernatural did exist whatever materialistic communist ideology had to say on this subject.

Murphy, his energetic friend Jim Hickman and Joseph Goldin, who had a real gift of convincing hardened Russian officials to participate in his wildest projects, started the exchange program between Esalen Institute and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. “We bring Soviet scientists over here and take American scientists over there,” explained Murphy to an overwhelmed American journalist in an interview. “The Soviet buzz-word is ‘hidden human re-

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sources’ and ours is ‘human potential’ [...] There's ESP, mystical experience, bodily transformation and evidence of super-normal capacities that the culture simply defines out of existence.” An official Soviet atheistic materialism “defined it out of existence” in a more ruthless way but it may have made Russian scientists more open to new vistas of spiritual realm than their American colleagues. The forbidden fruit is always sweeter.

When the communist regime started to erode in the second half of the 1980s the idea of synthesis between Western science and spiritual wisdom became rather popular among Russian intelligentsia. Those who read Samizdat translations of the works by Grof, Wilber, Charles Tart and other American transpersonalists were eager to see their idols alive and the changed political situation made it possible. In the Easter week of 1989, Michael Murphy brought to Moscow Stanislav Grof and his wife Christina who held a short seminar on holotropic breathwork. They developed this technique as an adjunct to medical use of LSD but when the latter was forbidden the former became an independent way of access to alternative states of consciousness. This group method included hyperventilation of lungs by intensive breathing accompanied by tribal and meditative music and self-expression through drawing. Soon after the visit, two books by Grof were officially published for the first time at the Academy of Sciences Publishing House in a limited edition of five hundred copies. It was a real break-through. The underground period of TP in Russia was over and the first leaders of it made themselves known to a wider public.

Among them was the well-known mathematician Vasilii Nalimov (1910–1997), who worked in the academician Andrei Kholmogorov’s team. In his youth he belonged to the underground esoteric group of Russian Templars and was imprisoned in Stalin’s camps. He always combined his scientific research with spiritual quest and when TP came to Russia, he was one of the first to cooperate with it. Nalimov co-authored with his wife Zhanna Drogalina an article on the closeness of their views to TP. He also published his articles in the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* and in spite of his advanced age actively participated in TP international conferences and symposiums.

11 The term “holotropic” is derived from two Greek words—“holos” (whole) and “trepein” (to turn to something) and might be translated as “moving to wholeness.” Holotropic Breathwork is a method of psychotherapy that combines ancient yoga practices and modern research in human consciousness.
Meanwhile a younger generation of Russian transpersonal psychologists came to the scene. One of its leaders was Vladimir Maikov. He graduated from the prestigious Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology in 1980, but went on with his post-graduate studies at the Institute of Philosophy, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, where he got his Ph.D. in 1988. Alongside with his official education he got involved in 1980 into transpersonal studies in the underground Moscow group Kontext under the leadership of Vitalii Mikheikin (1938–1990). The members of the group translated for Samizdat the books by John Lilly, Carlos Castaneda, Ram Dass, Chögyam Trungpa and Stanislav Grof and “learned spiritual and transpersonal practices” from them.13

In the spring of 1990, Maikov with some of his friends founded the Russian Association of Humanistic Psychology and became the vice-president of its transpersonal section. “The romantic stage” of TP in Russia started, as Maikov and one of his close associates Vladimir Kozlov called it later, probably meaning their youthful enthusiasm for it.14 In the summer of 1990, Maikov went to the United States and visited the major centers of TP there. The close cooperation between Americans and Russians resulted in two conferences in 1991 and 1992. The American side was represented by the well known Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center in San Francisco. It was at this time that Maikov began to take holotropic breathwork lessons under the guidance of Stanislav and Christina Grof and became a certified instructor of this transpersonal discipline.

The “romantic period” in the history of TP in Russia can be characterized by two major features. First, American TP literature was translated and published profusely. Sometimes the quality of translations was good (as in the publishing project Teksty transpersonal'noi psikhologii initiated by Maikov) but more often, it was rather poor. There was a huge demand for things occult in the 1990s and translations of TP works were practically lost in “the spring torrents” of occult and esoteric books of all kinds, which filled the shelves of Russian bookshops. Russian readers interested in the supernatural did not differentiate between these books. Secondly, the New Age movement presented in Russia by such centers as “The Way to Oneself” (Put’ k sebe) practically merged with TP, selling its books and holding seminars on its practices. On the one hand, it made the TP approach widely popular (the journal Put’ k sebe was published in more that 100,000 copies), but on the other hand, the public image of it became rather


14 Ibid., 151.
vague. This vagueness was exacerbated by the fact that numerous psychic healers and magicians of all kinds freely used TP literature and practices to make themselves look more “scientific” and respectable.15

The Export Package

The “romantic stage” of TP, with its obvious danger of getting lost among the numerous Western imports in the field of popular spirituality, made its Russian leaders look for their own identity. They attempted to discover a TP lineage in the history of Russia. In his essay published in the International Journal of Transpersonal Studies Maikov made a short sketch of such lineage. He discovered three layers underlying Russian transpersonal tradition: a) Shamanism, b) Celtic paganism, and c) the modern layer.16 The modern layer is divided into seven areas: Orthodox hesychasm; Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age; Theosophy, founded by Elena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891); Anthroposophy; writings of Lev Tolstoy and Fedor Dostoevsky; the teaching of Georgii Gurdjieff (1866 [?]–1949) and, finally, Russian Cosmism with Nikolai Fedorov (1829–1903), Konstantin Tsiołkovskii (1857–1935) and Vladimir Vernadskii (1863–1945).17 Maikov also mentions some names of those who carried transpersonal tradition in the dark night of Soviet oppression: Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), Aleksei Losev (1893–1988), Merab Mamardashvili (1930–1990), Aleksandr Piatigorskii (1929–2009), and Vitalii Mikheikin.

This lineage of Russian TP raises many questions. It is clear why the author mentions Shamanism and paganism. The shamanic experience represents the most ancient and direct way to altered states of consciousness (ASC)—the major object of study and practice of transpersonalists all over the world. More or less the same goes for paganism with its ecstatic rituals. But why include these things present in many other parts of the globe in the Russian transpersonal tradition? There is nothing particularly Russian in it. However, Siberian shamans and exotic pagan rituals are part of the image of “mystic Russia” abroad.

The tradition of hesychasm is also not of Russian but of Greek origin. It is rather the heritage of Orthodoxy and can be practiced by Orthodox ascetics

15 Ibid., 153.
16 Frankly speaking, I do not know about any vestiges of Celtic paganism in Russian culture but the author might have meant Slavic paganism.
anywhere. The most well known Hesychastic exercise, “the Jesus prayer,” called sometimes “Orthodox yoga” is indeed associated with Russia in the West due to the anonymous Russian book of the second half of the 19th century, translated into English almost a century later and popularized by J. D. Salinger in his novel *Franny and Zooey*.

Theosophy is a typical product of the Western occult revival of the 19th century and the Russian origin of one of its founders did not influence its teaching very much. However, the name of HPB (as Blavatsky is called by her adepts) is indeed well known in the West as an example of the enigmatic *l’Âme Slave*. As for the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, it has not very much to do with Russia, though some of the great Russian writers and actors were involved in it. The names of Andrei Bely and Mikhail Chekhov come to mind, the latter being well known in the United States as the acting coach of many Hollywood stars.

The first impression one gets from this lineage is its arbitrariness but then a certain logic of it becomes clear. Those who are included into it are popularly associated with Russia in the West. The names of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy certainly fit into the picture as well as such names of Russian religious philosophers as Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov who were exiled to Europe by Bolsheviks and became famous there. Georgii Gurdjieff (though not Russian, he was half-Armenian and half-Greek) is one of the best known Russian gurus in the West. Russian cosmists like Vernadskii are mentioned on many name lists popular in the New Age movement. As for the names of those who held the banner of TP in the Soviet years, the choice of some of them follows the same logic. The philologist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, whose works on medieval “carnival culture” are translated into many European languages as well as the indologist and dissident Aleksandr Piatigorskii who immigrated to England in the 1970s evidently reveal the author’s personal taste. (The expert on Greek and Renaissance aesthetics Aleksei Losev, and the Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili were very popular among post-War Soviet intelligentsia). The name of Vitalii Mikheikin, practically unknown either in Russia or the West, is included because he happened to be the one who acquainted the author with TP.

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The conclusion seems to be clear. Whatever the author’s intentions were, the lineage looks as if it is meant for foreign readers, its conscious (or subconscious) purpose is to present an export package of Russian TP. It is hard to believe that Maikov wanted to introduce the Russian version of TP to Western customers who have plenty of their own teachers. The reason seems to be that Russia’s image as a mystical “land of wonders” plays a certain role in the modern New Age mythology. We might compare it with the roles Egypt and India played for the 19th century Western occult revival. It is exactly how many Western transpersonalists look at Russia nowadays and what makes people like Michael Murphy and Stanislav Grof come to Russia repeatedly. It is not accidental that Russian transpersonal psychologists being loyal followers of their American “gurus” look at Russia through their eyes. However, it does not help much to root TP in Russian culture.

TP as a New Profession

TP, being by definition a synthesis of spiritual wisdom and Western science, tried also to find its Russian identity as a legal branch of scientific psychology. In 1991 a close associate of Vladimir Maikov, Vladimir Kozlov, who was a professional psychologist by training, read a course of lectures, “The theory and practice of TP”, for the students of the Psychology Department at the Iaroslavl’ State University. The department approved the course and TP was officially included into an educational system of the USSR. Kozlov also held a session of holotropic breathing at the university as a practical seminar for his students.19

In the end of the 1990s Vladimir Maikov, Andrei Gostev, Evgenii Faidysh and Nikolai Kudriashev trained a group of ten transpersonal psychologists at the “College of Psychology” in the “Institute of Psychology” of the Russian Academy of Sciences. They became the first students who got higher TP education in Russia. In the spring of 2002 groups of TP followers in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Iaroslavl’, Novosibirsk, Taganrog and Rostov-on-the-Don decided to found their professional association. In May 2002, the constituent conference of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy (ATPP) took place.

The number of professional organizations of TP began to grow in Russia: “The Institute of Integrative Psychology” led by Vladimir Kozlov in Iaroslavl’; “The Foundation of Transpersonal Psychology” of Faidysh and Gostev in Moscow; “The Transpersonal Institute” of Maikov also in Moscow; “The Baltic Asso-

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19 Maikov, Kozlov, Transpersonal’nyi proekt, 152.
ciation of Transpersonal Psychology” in St. Petersburg and many smaller local organizations. They publish professional journals, hold domestic and international conferences and participate in other academic activities. However, the process of TP’s integration into Russian culture as a solid science has been coming across serious difficulties lately and the criticism of it by traditional psychology becomes stronger.

In the 1990s, Western transpersonalists coming to Russia were surprised and delighted at the reaction of Russian scientists towards TP. I have already mentioned Michael Murphy’s optimism, but Stanislav Grof also fell in love with Russian openness. In his interview to a popular Russian website Pravda.ru he favored the Russian TP situation above the American one:

Another reason for growing popularity of TP in Russia is that under Soviet power psychology and psychiatry were permitted only a small number of philosophical approaches, for example, those based on Ivan Pavlov’s works. When the old system fell, a spiritual vacuum has appeared and Russian specialists were sincerely eager to follow the last achievements in the consciousness studies. That is why there are much more scientists in Russia who accept TP than in American universities where departments of psychology have been filled with conservative supporters of biological, neo-Freudist and behaviorist approaches. I felt this during my trip to St. Petersburg in the summer of 2001.”

However, Grof was angered and disappointed when the respected Moscow newspaper Kommersant published an article on him, calling him “the father of psychedelic revolution” and stating that, he “continued experiments with psychedelic preparations in cancer patients and narcotic drug addicts (...) as an underground activity.” The Russian journalist Alena Antonova confirmed, “He has been in Russia several times but these were private visits, because many of Grof’s treatment methods are illegal in our country and they attract the interest of the special services.” As it is well-known, Grof used LSD as the instrument of reaching ASC quite legally during his psychiatric research in Czechoslovakia and at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore and replaced it with the holotropic breathwork method when the powerful hallucinogen became an illegal substance in the US. As for his trips to Russia, they were quite official and it was the Ministry of Health, which invited him. It was the article’s

reference to “special services” whose influence was becoming stronger after Vladimir Putin’s ascent to power that was symptomatic. The political climate in Russia was changing rapidly.

In modern Russian history short intervals of political and cultural freedom used to change into longer periods of authoritarian rigidity. This pattern started to reappear again when Putin’s Ordnung replaced Gorbachev’s perestroika and Yeltsin’s democracy at the very end of the 1990s. Cultural change accompanied the political one. The non-rational wave of mysticism, which fascinated Murphy, Grof and other American transpersonalists in new Russia and made them nostalgically remember the years of their countercultural youth, has changed for a different mood. The rationalistic ethos began to dominate in official Russian culture and academia was eager to pick it up. That is why the spirit of acceptance of TP by academic Russian psychology, which surprised and delighted its Western adepts, was replaced by criticism. The attempts of Russian TP to achieve professional recognition were consequently snubbed.

The Stigma of Pop-psychology

In January 2007, the corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the deputy director of the Institute of Psychology of RAS, Andrei Iurevich, published an article in one of the most respected academic journals Voprosy psikhologii.22 It was analyzing a phenomenon which the author, one of the leading Russian scientists in the field, named “pop-psychology.” He regarded it as a new way of interaction between psychological science and mass consciousness. In his opinion, it was as different from academic science as from psychological practice. At the same time it was based on both, plus two other sources—esotericism and common sense. One of the leaders of TP in Russia, Professor Vladimir Kozlov, was put under scientific scrutiny in the article as the typical representative of pop-psychology. He was not happy with it, as the response on his personal website has shown.23

The major feature of pop-psychology, according to Iurevich, is the complete lack of borders between scientific knowledge verified by empiric experience and things, which have nothing to do with it. The author admits that in our time of postmodernist methodologies, scientific criteria are becoming less rigid, but pop-psychology is too “omnivorous” even for this situation. Pop-psychology

23 V. V. Kozlov, “Nekotorye uтоcheniia: akademicheskia, prakticheskaia i pop-psikhologiia,” www.zi-kozlov.ru/articles/1144-pop
finds a place not only for doubtful psycho-technologies like Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), but for all kinds of esotericism. Pop-psychologists do not hesitate to place such concepts as “chakras”, “karma”, and “aura” alongside scientific data and do not consider whether there is any reality behind these concepts. The lack of borders results in texts scientific in form but very strange as far as their content is concerned. The author gives many examples of this approach taken mostly from the works by Vladimir Kozlov. The phrases such as “holotropic states of consciousness let us get the experience of eternity and immortality” can hardly be called scientific, in his view.

Pop-psychology does not bother itself with differences between myth and science because its major goal is not scientific but practical. It wants to make itself attractive for clients and help them solve their psychological problems by any means. That is why it is so universalistic. Pop-psychologists easily break barriers between different academic schools and include esoteric elements into their synthesis. However, such an integrative approach demonstrates the absence of a critical position. The scientific method is based on the Cartesian credo—“doubt everything”—but pop-psychologists, so Iurevich, definitely prefer Paul Feyerabend’s one—“anything goes”.

The “cognitive omnivorousness” of pop-psychologists makes their writing style a mixture of science and fiction where phrases like “the universe is pregnant with human consciousness” (this is borrowed from Kozlov’s texts) are common. They also love to refer to their personal experience, which is replete with spiritual revelations and extraordinary states of consciousness. These people look more like showmen than scientists, concludes the author and it is not surprising at all, as showmanship is a major feature of modern civilization.

Iurevich states that he does not want to stigmatize pop-psychology as a new type of obscurantism and degradation of science. He even tries to find in it some positive sides like making psychology popular among a wider public. Iurevich admits it can give help when its practitioners share with clients the real fruits of their self-reflection (that is why he names common sense among pop-psychology sources) but his general conclusion is far from optimistic. Making pseudo-scientific concepts out of mythologems is no good for modern Russian society as irrationality is widespread there as it is. “Pop-psychology facilitates ‘belief in everything’ and it is a very dangerous state of mind because it opens limitless possibilities for manipulation of the mass consciousness.”

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25 Ibid., 11.
26 Ibid., 13.
However, Iurevich thinks that the direct confrontation of psychology with its pop-version will not be useful for the former. Parapsychology is another marker and the attitude to it should be definitely negative, as science cannot share any ground with “pure mysticism.” However, pop-psychology being a mix of science and esotericism is a very interesting phenomenon of modern civilization and should be studied as such. Psychology should know what is going on in people’s minds; it is its job after all.

But the role of a guinea pig cannot be satisfactory for Vladimir Kozlov or any other Russian transpersonalist. They see themselves as leaders of psychology of the 21st century who will make it a great science of the future. In his response to Iurevich’s article, Kozlov shares practically all statements of his opponent but reaches opposite conclusions. The main goal of TP (Kozlov prefers to speak of integrative psychology as an advanced version of it) is to unite all branches of modern psychology plus esoteric and religious teachings, but it is far from being bad. Quite the contrary is true. We can properly understand human beings only as a whole, so that a holistic approach is the one that is needed. It is exactly integrative psychology that supplies one with it. Indeed, new psychology does not trust analysis, but this does not mean it is not scientific as the basic feature of the new scientific paradigm is synthesis. Moreover, integrative psychology is not going to discard the academic one because the latter also makes part of the synthesis. Kozlov finishes his response in that flowery style, which makes his opponent so uneasy:

If our mental glance is able to unite various psychologies into one mandala of science and all psychologists suddenly are filled with strength in order to overcome great opposites and their eyes become wide open for different interpretations of psychology’s subject as a child’s eyes are open to the doings of life, then we meet the (real) psychologist. And integrative psychology!27

Russian TP continues with its attempts to find a common language with academic science. In June 2010, the 17th World Transpersonal Congress took place in Moscow where Stanislav Grof was supposed to discuss the “new paradigm in science” with a Russian philosopher, Viacheslav Stepin. Stepin is not only a prominent thinker, he is also a full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and scientific head of the Moscow Institute of Philosophy. The discussion between one of the founding fathers of TP and a high level representative of Russian academic science was planned by the Congress organizers to underline the

27 Kozlov, “Nekotorye utochneniiia.”
scientific status of Russian TP. But academician Stepin didn’t attend the discussion. There was only one well-known Russian scholar, Sergei Khoruzhii, who participated in the work of the Congress. He is a world authority on hesychasm and combines it with research in mathematics, but unlike Stepin, Khoruzhii is not a functionary in academia. The attempt of TP to establish “an official dialogue” with Russian science seems to have failed this time.

It is clear that Russian TP nowadays finds itself in the situation of a cultural border conflict, which has become more severe lately. In the 1990s Russian transpersonalists were envied by their Western colleagues but in the 2000s the situation has reversed. American transpersonalists can afford to discuss their strategies about whether they should establish themselves in APA in a more formal way or try to find alternative ways of existence. In Great Britain TP has firmly established itself as a section within a professional body of the British Psychological Society. However, after the breakthrough of the 1990s Russian TP comes across difficulties as far as its professional status is concerned. Its area for maneuvering in finding a proper *modus vivendi* is definitely limited. Of course, there is a huge difference from Soviet times when the official ideology ostracized unorthodox views and repressed its adepts. However, the situation of TP is exacerbated by the fact that it is not only the rationalist opponents who criticize its esoteric leanings; the latter come under the fire of non-rational critique as well.

**The Monopoly on Non-Rational**

In its studies of mystical experience, TP covers a wide range of religious phenomena from archaic Shamanism to oriental religions, occultism and Christianity. Its basic methodological premise is the equality of all kinds of mysticism. The shamanic flight, Hindu yoga and *unio mystica* of St. Theresa are considered no different in essence as they all represent altered states of consciousness. Moreover, TP makes no difference between natural and artificial ways of getting ASC such as psychedelics, holotropic breathwork, rebirthing, etc. The leaders of TP do not conceal their negative attitude to organized forms of religion, which, in their view, always tried to limit the mystic search of their followers. Stanislav Grof insists on the difference between spirituality and religion. The former involves a relationship between the individual and the cosmos and is a personal thing. The latter is an institutionalized activity that relies on appointed officials who not necessarily have spiritual experience. That is why organized religion easily loses its spiritual connection and becomes an institution that rather tends to exploit spiritual needs rather than satisfy them.
It is quite clear that Grof’s attitude to spirituality is positive but that to religion is strongly negative.

Organized religions tend to create hierarchical systems focusing on the pursuit of power, control, politics, money, possessions, and other secular concerns. Under these circumstances, religious hierarchy as a rule dislikes and discourages direct spiritual experiences in its members, because they foster independence and cannot be effectively controlled.28

The leaders of Russian TP, as a rule, do not share Grof’s anti-clericalism openly but they include Orthodox mysticism in the lineage of Russian transpersonal tradition alongside with Shamanism, occultism and oriental religions. However, in the first decade of this century the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) began to strengthen its leading role in Russian religious life. It is ready, to a certain extent, to share its spiritual monopoly with other “traditional religions” (Islam, Judaism and Buddhism) but strongly opposes all kinds of esoteric and occult teachings. Under such circumstances, it regards a highly eclectic TP, regarding all things occult as a direct challenge to itself. It is not accidental, in my view, that it was not only academician Stepin who failed to appear at the last World Congress of TP in Moscow but also another scholar mentioned in its program, Oleg Genisaretskii. He is a well-known layman of the ROC and actively participates in its social and cultural activity.

The Orthodox critique of TP can be divided into two types -- fundamentalist and conservative. For fundamentalists, TP is an outrageous Devil’s attack on Russian culture, which they identify with the Orthodox tradition. It is a vanguard of dark forces, coming from the West, an enemy of all things good and should be eliminated without any delay by the Russian state and its glorious special forces.29 The conservatives’ criticism is more subtle. It might even recognize a limited therapeutic value of TP but it affirms at the same time that real Orthodox believers do not need it.

In his work “Religious aspects of Transpersonal Psychology of S. Grof” the archpriest Konstantin Gipp concludes that TP is “a syncretic religious teaching containing elements of oriental religions, occult doctrines, kabbalah, astrology, shamanic practices and also certain non-traditional kinds of Christian mysticism.”30

Consequently, from the Orthodox point of view, TP is to be divided into three parts. The first part contains ideas, which are unacceptable for an Orthodox Christian. They have to do with TP Weltanschauung. Above all, it is the monistic pantheism of TP, which posits the merging of the human soul with the non-personal Absolute as a goal of human life. The second part includes TP concepts, which can be interpreted within the framework of Orthodox teaching. For example, Jungian archetypes might be understood through the idea of anima mundi, borrowed by Orthodox theologians like Maximus the Confessor from neo-platonic philosophy. But a Christian believer should keep in mind that certain images awakened by TP practices are nothing else but daemonic temptations called 'seductive attraction' (prelest') in Orthodox ascetic literature.

And, finally, the third part of TP contains elements, which can be interpreted in Orthodox terms and be useful for Orthodox psychology. Grof’s concept of systems of COEX (condensed experience) is similar to the Orthodox one of passions and his teaching on prenatal states is similar to the Christian idea of original sin.

All in all, the evaluation of TP by archpriest Konstantin Gipp is rather negative. He refers to Pavel Florenskii’s (1882–1937) belief, that spiritualism is a worse enemy of Christianity than positivism. The famous Russian theologian considered spiritualism to be an improved positivism, which used the same empirical method but accepted the spiritual dimension of life. However, its belief system was so different from Christianity that there could not be any reconciliation between the two. In the same vein, the modern orthodox critic regards TP as a combination of science and eclectic spirituality and finds irreconcilable differences between it and Orthodox faith.

Another Orthodox archpriest, Vladimir Parkhomenko, goes even further in his criticism of TP. He compares it to the Elysian mysteries of ancient Greece, which gave its adepts the mystical experience of death and rebirth close to that by experienced TP followers. Perhaps the latter would not object much to such comparison. However, they would hardly share the conclusion their Orthodox critic makes out of it; the Elysian mysteries gave way to Christianity because their knowledge of life and death was inferior to the faith in the resurrected Christ conquering death. “Transpersonal psychology wants to be called 'psychology of the future' but we can easily foretell that it will have the same future as Elysian cults of the past.”

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32 Protoierei Vladimir Parkhomenko, “Vozvrat k elevzinskim misteriam ili khristianskii vzgliad na
Father Parkhomenko ironically plays with the title of Grof’s major work translated and published in Russia, but the leaders of the ROC prefer action to irony and do not play games with their ideological opponents. Three years ago a group of leading members of the Academy of Sciences, including two Nobel prize winners, the late Vitalii Ginzburg and Zhores Al’ferov, signed a letter of protest against the clericalization of Russian society by the ROC. They addressed it to the then president Vladimir Putin but he did not respond. Instead, the newly elected patriarch of the ROC Kirill, a very able and strong-willed politician, made the Ministry of Education and Science introduce theology to universities as a scientific discipline. It was exactly the thing members of the Academy had been fighting against. Now academicians prefer to behave very friendly to the ROC and its influential head, making him recently the Doctor honoris causa of the Moscow Institute of Physics and Engineering, the chief Russian center of nuclear research. In the same vein, another member of the Academy, Vladimir Fortov, has declared recently that Church and science should fight together against parascience and occultism as a threat to both:

Church and science have a large field for cooperation. I mean fighting with mysticism, magic, sorcery, astrology, para-science, all those things that flowed over our society. People started to believe in primitive answers thrust on them by charlatans. In such matters church and science are of the same mind.

There are signs that the Russian TP community becomes aware of the situation and tries to find a compromise with the ROC. One of the leading Russian transpersonalists Andrei Gostev, who often represents Russia on international forums of TP and together with J.C. Tucker co-authors the Russian-American project “Zemlianin—The Emerging Global Citizen”, has been researching the ascetic heritage of Eastern Christianity for the last few years. Other Russian transpersonalists might be also interested in such things but they are just ex-
amples of mystic experience for them alongside the other ones. However, Gostev’s approach seems to be different. He treats Orthodox ascetic tradition as an exclusive one and admits that those altered states of consciousness that do not conform to it might be of danger to the patients. He also uses the Orthodox ascetic term *prelest’* for describing them.38 His approach seems to be closer to that of Orthodox critics of TP than to that of his colleagues. Of course, we can always say that it is not a compromise but a matter of faith and Gostev has simply converted to Orthodoxy. But, whatever his subjective motives might be, his exclusionary approach objectively makes a sharp difference with the inclusive ethos of TP.

The Escape into Popular Culture

The ROC’s monopoly on the non-rational is useful to Russian authorities. It corresponds to their ideal of “Law and Order”, which seriously limits political, cultural and religious pluralism in the country. The TP seems to fall easy victim to this lack of pluralism. Besides, its position on the very border of science and religion is rather suspicious to both secular and religious participants of the politico-cultural process. Under such circumstances, TP’s search for a proper place in Russian society becomes a real problem for it.

Meanwhile there is a large cultural area in Russia, which is practically free. I mean the domain of mass culture. It is based on the principle of entertainment and market laws govern it. In addition, it is very resistant to any kind of pressure. Lately the authorities have tried to control it in order to make it more decent, but all in vain. In the Soviet time things, which were rejected by the state used to go underground, now they tend to join the kingdom of popular culture. However, as they do so they become vulgarized and commercialized. This is what has been happening to esoteric and occult subcultures in Russia for some time, now it seems to be TP’s turn.39 This process is typical for the modern world in general, but in Russia it is sped up by the growing stiffness of official culture. The more TP is criticized by mainstream institutions, the more it is tempted to escape into the “free world” of popular culture, which accepts it gladly.

When one looks at the activity of Russian transpersonal psychologists nowadays one notices that the majority of them is involved in numerous seminars

and sessions, selling people all kinds of TP techniques. Pop-culture entertain-
ment presupposes a thorough knowledge of the public demand. Consequently,
Vladimir Kozlov has posted on his personal website a survey, asking the viewers
what they expect of him. In the period of half a year from September 2009 to
April 2010, he got the following results.

The majority of 27.7% want him to teach shamanic practices; 23.7% expect
to be taught different types of breathwork (rebirthing, vivation, holotropic
methods, free breathing); Buddhist meditation is demanded by 15.8%; art ther-
apy is asked for by 10.7%; 9.6% of the respondents look for body-oriented prac-
tices; 7.9% want to be taught dance movements; and, finally, 4.5% expect Kozlov
to teach them visualization techniques.40 The high interest for shamanic prac-
tices is shared by Russian occult milieu today, which means that the border
between occult practices per se and TP is getting more transparent now.

Other Russian transpersonalists follow Kozlov's example. The President of
Russian ATPP, Vladimir Maikov and his wife Kristina, hold a program of Grof
Transpersonal Training (GTT) in Moscow, teaching holotropic breathwork. The
price list is attached to the program schedule on the website of ATPP. The cost
of a one-day seminar is 2,500 rubles (about 84 US doll.), if prepaid, and 3,000
roubles (about 100 US doll.), if paid on the spot. For two-day seminars, the
prices are 5,000 and 6,000 (about 167 and 200 US doll.) respectively. Five-day
seminars cost 10,000 and 11,500 rubles (about 333 and 383 US doll.) These
seminars are held at clubs and centers such as “Loft, Open World” (Otkrytyi
mir), and “Sanskrit”. These are typically New Age places, which operate on a
commercial basis. For example, the program of “Open World” features such
popular offerings as yoga classes, shamanic practices, tea ritual lessons, Taoist
sexual practices for women alongside with TP sessions of all kinds. The ads for
these fashionable and entertaining activities are placed on a special page in the
popular Live Journal social network.41

The TP community exploits another mass fashion, pilgrimages to exotic
places which are becoming very popular among Russians. Consequently, the
leading Russian transpersonalists include TP into exotic package-tours. In the
summer of 2009 the project “Spiritual Wanderings” (Dukhovnyie stranstviia )
headed by Kozlov included trips to practically all places in Siberia highly valued
by occult lore from “places of power” in Altai (like mountain Beluha and Uimon
valley) to the “divinely pure” Lake Baikal. The professor taught practically every-

(accessed 24 August 2011).
41 www.open-w.livejournal.com/
thing during the trips from “archaic techniques of ecstasy” to the newest methods of “integrative psychology.” In his diary of the trips, published later on his site Kozlov, he admitted that the participants had to struggle with bad weather and overcome the temptations of good weather. Other tourist joys like feeling beauty of nature and developing real group spirit are also mentioned.\textsuperscript{42} It is obvious that exotic tourism as a popular cultural fashion proved to be a convenient means of escape for TP from its cultural border conflict with religion and science.

In 2010, Professor Kozlov provided his exotic tours with an international dimension. In February, his schedule included a 15 days trip to Sri Lanka, which cost each participant 1,850 US dollars. The program of the trip covered sacred Buddhist sights and was not very different from usual tourist tours to such far away and exotic places. TP training was to be conducted by Kozlov in the evenings and it is rather difficult to imagine how the exhausted tourists could follow the professor’s instructions. In April, another trip to Israel and Jordan was held, which covered practically all the tourist’s attractions of both countries.

The “Open World” club in Moscow also gives the public an opportunity to attend yoga classes in exotic surroundings. In May 2010, it was the Egyptian Red sea-resort Dahab. The trip to the Mount Sinai was also included in the package, which cost 11,000 roubles (about 370 USD).\textsuperscript{43} International trips with their obvious commercial element help New Age practices find a good niche in the domain of popular culture. Now TP follows suit and does it quite energetically. The price for such “spiritual packages” are not much higher than those for ordinary tourist trips and can easily compete with them. As for the Russian new rich they prefer to hire individual gurus and coaches.

As Russia has entered a period of authoritarian rigidity, the hopes of TP to become a part of academic science are thwarted and it is sharply criticized by the ROC, claiming the monopoly on all things spiritual while fighting the occult. Under such circumstances, TP looks for a new way of existence in the thick of popular culture. This latest period of its history in Russia resembles, to a certain extent, the situation of the 1990s in the sense that TP’s closeness to New Age and occult milieu in general is growing, but there is one big difference. In its romantic period, TP was much less commercialized and much more idealistic.


\textsuperscript{43} Maiskie prazdniki – yoga v Dahabe (www.open-w.livejournal.com/19443.html#cutid4) (accessed 24 August 2011).

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The same is true for Russian New Age and esotericism as well. Moreover, the “Cult of the Golden Calf” seems to attract more and more adepts in practically all spheres of Russian life.