

# LOHAS and the Indigo Dollar: Growing the Spiritual Economy

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**ABSTRACT:** It is well documented that alternative spiritualities can be commercialised and commodified. My aim in this paper is to extend this further by identifying how LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), which describes a multi-billion dollar marketplace in the United States, seeks to consciously grow the spiritual economy to unprecedented levels. I then provide an example of how this consumer-focused logic is expressed by integral theorist Ken Wilber, resulting in what might be called the “indigo dollar.”

**Keywords:** LOHAS, spirituality, late capitalism, integral theory, Ken Wilber

It is well documented that alternative spiritualities can be commercialised and commodified (Aldred 2000, Carrette and King 2005, Ezzy 2006, Heelas 1999, Possamai 2003, Rindfleish 2005, Roof 1999, Waldron 2005). My aim in this paper is to extend this further by identifying how LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), which describes a multi-billion dollar marketplace in the United States, seeks to consciously grow the spiritual economy to unprecedented levels. It does this both by selling spiritual products and, more importantly, by co-opting spirituality into its “values” to further generate revenue, resulting in increased acceptance of the transparent commercialisation of the spiritual. I then provide an example of how this increased acceptance manifests in the work of integral theorist Ken Wilber, who sells a range of spiritual products and services resulting in what might be called the “indigo dollar.” My aim here is not to belittle the spiritual experiences sought in the LOHAS marketplace, rather, following Jeremy

Carrette and Richard King’s Marxist analysis of the spiritual marketplace, to “challenge constructions of spirituality that promote the subsuming of the ethical and religious in terms of an overriding economic agenda” (Carrette and King 2005:4). Acknowledging that “spiritual materialism is not the same as spirituality” (Gould 2006), the concern is precisely for those in the LOHAS marketplace who are, quite literally, in danger of being sold a false idea: that growing the spiritual economy is the same as spiritual growth.

## LOHAS and the Spiritual Economy

LOHAS is an acronym for *Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability*. The term was coined by Gaiam (Nasdaq: GAIA), a highly successful media company known for producing yoga DVDs (Gaiam 2009). The LOHAS marketplace comprises five key segments: sustainable economy, healthy lifestyles, alternative healthcare, personal development, and ecological lifestyles (Peterson 2008), and is inspired by the

findings of Paul H. Ray's (2000) book, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World*. Ray identified Cultural Creatives as constituting around twenty-five percent of the population in the United States. Their main concern, as the label suggests, is creating a new culture based on values reflecting ecological sustainability, authenticity in personal and public life, women's issues, looking at the bigger picture, and spirituality. Ray argued that Cultural Creatives were an influential but largely invisible demographic, spanning the full spectrum of age, race and income. LOHAS made the Cultural Creatives visible.

Spirituality is a core part of LOHAS and falls within its market segment of "personal development." The term "spirituality" is subject to a broad array of interpretations, often offset against the more dogmatic constructions of "religion." Serving, for example, as a relatively specific contemporary definition, Robert Forman's (2004) "grassroots spirituality" seeks to be as inclusive as possible of many spiritual constituencies on their own terms, and suggests it "involves a vaguely pantheistic ultimate that is indwelling, sometimes bodily, as the deepest self and accessed through not-strictly-rational means of self transformation and group process that becomes the holistic organization for all life" (51). However, the "vaguely pantheistic ultimate" is too specific for the LOHAS demographic, who are part of the "spirituality revolution" defined by a broad spectrum of alternative spiritualities largely focused on the "subjective turn" away from transcendent sources of significance and authority towards the internal (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:6). In this context, (alternative) spirituality is best understood as being concerned with Sandra Schneiders' (1989) "horizon of ultimate value" (684).

"Ultimate values" function as shorthand for spirituality and is implied via interpretations of "values," "sustainability," "ethics," "well-being" and so forth. However, while these allusions can be vague, the spirituality message communicates clearly enough: when profiled in *Newsweek*, for example, LOHAS consumers were described as "21<sup>st</sup> Century New Agers" (Waldman and Reiss 2006). Spirituality is certainly prevalent among the consumer magazines in which *LOHAS Journal* suggests producers adver-

tise: *Alternative Medicine; Body & Soul; Experience Life; Healing Lifestyles and Spas; Vegetarian Times; Optimum Wellness; Delicious Living; Better Nutrition; VegNews; Yoga Journal; Yogi Times; Plenty; Organic Lifestyles; Sunset; Spirituality and Health; Mother Jones; Ode; Utne* (LOHAS 2008c). Depending on how strict one is in defining spirituality, one could probably expect to find regular spiritual articles in the majority of these titles; indeed one could argue that spirituality, along with food are the prime common denominators.

The LOHAS employment of the spiritual is intended to reflect consumers' desire to bear witness to their spiritual values while making purchasing decisions. However, the importance of spirituality within the LOHAS marketplace can also be viewed via a more worldly lens. First, spiritual products are simply another market that can be expanded and exploited. Second, a co-option of spirituality by LOHAS as part of its "values" lends credibility to its overall mission to make money, which might otherwise be looked upon unfavourably by some consumers. The point of LOHAS<sup>1</sup> is to learn how to "communicate with" (i.e. "sell to") consumers who fit the LOHAS demographic (French and Rogers 2006). LOHAS business argues that it serves a "triple bottom line" (Elkington 1998) of "people, planet and profit" which measures a business's or organisation's success not just by its financial performance, but also its environmental and social performance. Allusions to spirituality lend more emphasis to people and planet in this formula. However, the LOHAS marketplace is clearly focused on profit, demonstrated by the following outline of LOHAS business values.

*LOHAS Journal's* fundamental premises for values-driven business are higher productivity and profitability among employees who work in a company they "believe in," and loyalty and forgiveness from customers who appreciate a company's dedication to both their product and community (Warwick 2008). The result of these values is the

1 This paper would have benefited from reading The Natural Marketing Institute's, *The LOHAS Report: Consumers & Sustainability*, which contains a section on "The Role of Religion and Spirituality." Unfortunately the report costs \$4000 [[http://www.nmisolutions.com/r2\\_07\\_toc\\_lohas.html](http://www.nmisolutions.com/r2_07_toc_lohas.html), accessed 28 December 2009] and was thus beyond my reach.

“sustainability” of business (the insured longevity of profitability). The use of the word “sustainable” when actually meaning “continually profitable” is an explicit example of LOHAS co-opting language to serve its own financial ends.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, all three aspects of the triple bottom line are referred to in these values, but profit remains the chief focus. In much the same way, when discussing clean technology, *LOHAS Journal* is less interested in what this means for the planet and more focused on “a compelling investment opportunity” (Propper de Callejon et al 2008).

A clear formula can be identified in the presentation of LOHAS values-driven business, framing business opportunities first by “people and planet” and then by “profit.” For example, *LOHAS Journal* highlights Organic Bouquet, a green alternative in the “\$19 billion dollar US floral trade” (Spiegelman 2008). This producer partners with charitable organisations such as Amnesty International and in doing so trades upon what can be described as their “credibility asset.” Of this partnership, Amnesty’s Executive Director claims both “share the goal of improving the lives of and securing justice for people throughout the world.” But the Organic Bouquet profile concludes with what we can only assume is the “bottom triple bottom line,” noting the company has “created the market for organic fresh cut flowers.” Making such purchases then becomes the method by which consumers are encouraged to play their part in solving the world’s problems: buying on certain credit cards can be a “force for change. ... for you and for the planet” (LOHAS 2008b).<sup>3</sup> So much emphasis is given to “people and planet” that it becomes easy to forget the “profit” altogether, resulting in paradoxes which enable *LOHAS Journal*, with its focus on selling possessions, to quote the Dalai Lama’s criticism that “In our increasing materialistic world, we are driven by a seemingly insatiable desire for power and

possessions” (Lupberger 2008). This quote demonstrates both how profit is obscured within LOHAS, and how spirituality (in this case personified by the Dalai Lama) is employed in this process.

LOHAS attempts to consolidate these “values” by surrounding them in a veil of “authenticity” (LOHAS 2008a). LOHAS does not offer much context for what it means by authenticity. However, the drive toward authenticity is typically seen as a response to the three core malaises of modern society: “The first fear is about what we might call the loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons. The second concerns the eclipse of ends, in face of rampant instrumental reason. And the third is about a loss of freedom” (Taylor 1992:10). By alluding to authenticity, LOHAS appeals to an intuitive desire to mitigate this societal malaise, deflecting attention from its core financial business to one of ultimate concerns. At the same time, securing its morally privileged position of incorporating such ultimate concerns, LOHAS criticises those who appear to have no authenticity: Identifying the recent explosion of LOHAS awareness in Japan, *LOHAS Journal* worries that Japanese consumers are “being showered with flashy information and advertising gimmicks that lack any authenticity and instead prey on the pure popularity of the term” (Kunita 2008).<sup>4</sup> For LOHAS, authenticity is vested with a certain capital that its member organisations can trade upon, even if those members do not immediately appear to be in the business of mitigating societal malaise: the 2007 LOHAS conference literature refers to members such as Ford, Unilever, Boeing, Toyota, Nestle and Walmart (LOHAS 2007).

2 Of course, one can be well aware of all the dangers outlined in this paper, yet still reach a more generous conclusion concerning LOHAS. In her doctoral thesis about LOHAS, Monica Emerich (2006) argues that its treatment of sustainability is akin to religious, concerning itself with the “purpose and meaning of life” and being “articulated through a moral and ethical code” (9).

3 This was no doubt the inspiration behind the “enlightenment card”: “Introducing a credit card for people who wish to make a difference in the world,” operated by LOHAS pioneers Gaiam [http://www.enlightenmentcard.com, accessed 28 December 2009]

4 Not only is there a certain audacity about claiming LOHAS is beyond “flashy information and advertising gimmicks,” there is also a whiff of racism in suggesting that the Japanese market “where consumer fads burst onto the scene and fade just as quickly” is somehow less able to grasp the subtleties of LOHAS than that of the United States. Indeed, Western Imperialism is another theme that raises its head in the LOHAS market. For example, the Fairmont Hotel and Resort group writes about its “environmental stewardship program” [http://www.lohas.com/journal/fairmont.html, accessed 28 December 2009] in countries such as Kenya and Mexico (see Nash 1989). Following the old phrase “selling ice to Eskimos” one Taiwanese magazine editor says LOHAS can teach the Taiwanese how to live better, “Our ancestors lived simply and in harmony with nature. It is part of Chinese philosophy. LOHAS provides the opportunity to show this to the younger generations in a trendy and fashionable way” [http://www.lohas.com/Taiwan, accessed 28 December 2009].

Following this theme of authenticity, Paul Ray's company, Integral Partnerships, which develops his theories about the Cultural Creatives, describes what he calls "authentic power," which builds upon spiritual awareness and is part of "an emerging wisdom culture" (Ray 2008). This concept has gathered some momentum and Ray is now one of the "mystics without monasteries" at Wisdom University where he serves as Director of the Institute for the Emerging Wisdom Culture (Wisdom University 2008). The question is, why is the "authentic" commercial co-option of the spiritual accepted so uncritically within LOHAS, a demographic identified, driven by and including many very intelligent and spiritually sincere people just like Paul Ray? Numerous persuasive arguments claim that alternative spiritualities function freely in a context of late capitalism – characterised by a shift from production to consumer capitalism – (Carrette and King 2005; Ezzy 2006; Heelas 1999; Possamai 2003; Roof 1999; Waldron 2005), so in this sense LOHAS is simply perpetuating the norm. Carrette and King argue that the "consumer world of 'New Age' spirituality markets 'real,' 'pure' or 'authentic' spiritual experiences, but these are manufactured worlds that seek to escape the 'impure' political reality of spirituality" (83). I want to add an extra dimension to these arguments in relation to LOHAS, one that comes unwittingly from Ray himself in his report *The New Political Compass* (Ray 2003).

The subtitle of Ray's report gives an immediate indicator of why LOHAS remains largely politically unchallenged: *The New Progressives are In-Front, Deep Green, and Beyond Left vs. Right*. Ray's political compass shows, pointing west, fifteen percent of voters who are "standing pat on the left modernist liberals." Pointing south are nineteen percent of voters who are "profits over planet and people business conservatives." Pointing east are twenty-one percent of voters who are "longing for the old ways cultural conservatives." Pointing north are a runaway forty-five percent of voters who are "in front on big, emerging issues: cultural creatives, new progressives." Ray begins his report with the question many want answered: "How can progressives actually win in the face of the right wing political juggernaut, composed of big money, big media and religious right shock

troops?" (Ray 2003:3) Ray then notes that while the majority of voters are facing north progressives, "83 percent of them reject any identification with the left." To engage these voters (and, presumably, consumers), Ray argues for the need to move beyond concepts of "left" and "right."

Ray defines "the left" variously as "conventional left politics—big government paradigm," having a "tight focus on programmatic ideas" and having once provided the forum of progressive issues (Ray 2003:1, 3, 7). No doubt Carrette and King's (2005) critique of the overriding economic agenda of contemporary spirituality – which underpins the present analysis – would also fall into Ray's definition of the left. However, those (old) leftist progressive values do not disappear on Ray's compass. It is now the new progressives who "own" values such as, "ecological sustainability, women's issues, consciousness issues, national health care, national education, and an emerging concern for the planet and the future of our children and grandchildren" (Ray 2003:5), but identifying with the left is nevertheless unacceptable to them, being reminiscent of an "impure" political reality." Whether or not one agrees with Ray's argument that the alternatives between left and right are less meaningful now than ever before, I suggest that in order for LOHAS to appeal to the new progressives with their suspicion of the left, it has jettisoned one of the most explicit characteristics of the left: its economic/class analysis.

Ideally, this abandonment of a leftist economic/class analysis would be replaced by something appropriate to the perceived values of the new progressives, however this is not the case. As a result, the LOHAS consumer can identify with those standard liberal values but without any of the economic awareness about what is needed to manifest them. This lack of awareness is filled with the only alternative left on the table: the late capitalist status quo. Some residual leftist understanding is alive in LOHAS, thus the need to rebrand late capitalism to something less unsavoury: conscious capitalism; triple bottom line; social profit. Monica Emerich (2006) writes about a performance at a LOHAS conference by Joan Baez, during which she looked rather bemused. "We are a greed society and the rich are going to have to give

to the poor. I believe you are here to address this” (3), Baez tells the attendees. Baez should indeed look bemused, because behind what was no doubt a completely sincere statement was probably the realisation that the economic-political territory she was used to inhabiting was not just different at the LOHAS conference, but absent. The conference had no interest in Baez’s “leftist” values, rather a desire to trade upon her “authenticity.”

### Ken Wilber and the Indigo Dollar

I want now to provide an example of what spirituality can begin to look like in the absence of a suitable economic analysis, and once sincere spiritual seekers have become desensitised to the co-option of spirituality by late capitalist tendencies, whether conscious or otherwise. The example is the recent trajectory of Ken Wilber’s “integral spirituality.”

Wilber’s (2000) aim is to construct “a world philosophy. ... one that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world’s great wisdom traditions” (xii). He hopes to achieve this task by identifying the developmental nature of human evolution. Wilber categorises evolution in various ways which echo those of Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser (1985), who suggested evolution unfolded via the following stages: “the archaic, magical, mythical, mental, and integral” (42). Wilber develops other models including the “Great Nest of Being” following: matter/physics, biology/life, psychology/mind, theology/soul, mysticism/spirit (2000:444) and also the stages of egocentric, ethnocentric and worldcentric (2006:6). Wilber argues each level of evolution “transcends and includes” the previous level, thus honouring the partial truth claims revealed within them rather than negating them. Wilber also builds on the visually attractive colour stages of spiral dynamics developed by Don Edward Beck and Christopher C. Cowan (1996), which he has recently adapted to his altitude colour chart (Wilber 2009a). This chart, pegged to Gebser’s categories for example, has the archaic as infrared, magical as red, mythical as amber, mental as orange, and integral as indigo. Spiritual development, for Wilber, involves rising in altitude up the colour

chart, transcending and including the lower levels, until reaching the fully integral (nondual) awareness of indigo. A person’s developmental progress can be charted on the integral map which is called AQAL, an acronym for “all quadrants, all levels.” The quadrants show “the inside and the outside of the individual and the collective, and the point is that all 4 quadrants need to be included if we want to be as integral as possible” (2006:23). AQAL is basically a highly developed schematic for what we generally understand as “holistic.”

While Paul Ray employs the term “integral culture” in regard to the Cultural Creatives, he does not mean quite the same thing as Wilber. While all integralists are Cultural Creatives, all Cultural Creatives are not integralists. Wilber argues that Ray’s identification of some twenty-five percent of the American population being Cultural Creatives is a measure of green altitude, not integral (Wilber 2009b). Wilber claims green altitude, typified by the academy and political correctness, resists the integral because its radical pluralism and phobia of hierarchies are incompatible with the integral ranking of transcending and including. However, because altitude is developmental, all people must progress through green before they can become integral (culminating with indigo). According to Wilber only two percent of the population is integral, which represents about ten percent of the multi-billion dollar LOHAS marketplace. For much of his career Wilber resisted the typical glories of the spiritual guru, opting instead to remain largely secluded in his writing. But in recent years he has come out of his shell to market a variety of products and services designed to facilitate the developmental journey to indigo, and in the process has created an elite sub-segment of the LOHAS market: the indigo dollar.<sup>5</sup>

The indigo dollar started rolling in 1998, with the founding of Wilber’s *Integral Institute* (I-I), intended to promote his vision of an integral worldview. I-I’s history claims that Internet entrepreneur Joe Firmage “announced that ‘there is nothing anywhere in the

5 Indigo also resonates with another alternative spirituality phenomenon of the “indigo children,” a generation of young children popular in the spiritual marketplace purported to be in possession of paranormal gifts. See Carroll and Tober (1999).

world that is doing what Integral Institute is doing,' and then promptly donated a million dollars in cash."<sup>6</sup> No doubt Wilber genuinely considered the funding of the institute as a wonderful opportunity to share his integral vision, but in a few short years Wilber's dry, pseudo-academic writings had been repackaged for a consumer market. We will not know until either Wilber or one of his inner circle publishes a full account of the development of I-I whether the centralising of the indigo dollar was a conscious shift on behalf of Wilber, having had a taste of "a million dollars," or whether it was down to the business advisors that almost inevitably came attached to such a donation. Whichever way, the I-I and related websites are now a storefront for the integral consumer.

Even a cursory examination of the I-I website can identify how much it borrows from business in its presentation of a spiritual worldview. I-I is a branding machine, underpinned by its "Integral Certification... Powered by AQAL" (Wilber et al 2007:12). Like any commercial operation, I-I has built a proprietary wall around its spiritual products. Numerous phrases are trademarked on the I-I *Integral Life Practice Starter Kit* website: Big Mind™; 3-Body Workout™; 3-2-1 Shadow Work Process™; AQAL™; a product that comes at a mere \$249 (Integral Life Practice:N.d.). Nor is the term "spiritual products" one projected on to Wilber from an interpretive-critical perspective. At the time of writing, Wilber's most recent email newsletter carried the subject line "Ken's Newest Product - Now Shipping!" which announced the launch of *Essential Integral*, again priced at \$249 (Core Integral 2010).

Other marketing strategies play into the hands of instant demand consumerism. Wilber's integral practices are packaged like convenience food to appeal to the busy consumer with scalable life practices whittled down to "1-minute modules" (Integral Life Practice: N.d.). Wilber's book *Integral Spirituality* reads suspiciously like a catalogue for I-I products and services, which are referred to on numerous occasions in the text, including various URLs to I-I websites and a

whole chapter on *Integral Life Practice*. This is exactly the type of commodification Carrette and King write of, identifying the selling off of "ideas and claims to authenticity in service to individual/corporate profit and the promotion of a particular worldview and mode of life, namely corporate capitalism" (15).

I-I terminology makes those of a business and corporate orientation feel comfortable, thus making them more likely to purchase integral products and attempt integral development. Integral Sustainability Training is clearly orientated towards sustainable profits, resulting in "increased market share, superior retention, higher profitability, less risk, mitigated uncertainty in planning, and deeper traction for organizational strategy" (Integral Institute 2006). This echoes another of Carrette and King's observations that these supposedly transformative spiritualities bring about little in personal transformation, except perhaps increased efficiency and productivity at work (Carrette and King 2006:5-6). Confirming this, in an Integral Naked (I-I's media outfit) podcast, "The Future of Business is Integral" (Mackey 2006), John Mackey, Chairman and CEO of Whole Foods Market tells Wilber that integral business "is going to grow at an extremely rapid rate... and that it will out-compete anything else out there." Wilber agrees, claiming that integral people function ten times more efficiently than those at a lower developmental level. In another Integral Naked podcast, "The Higher Reaches of Success" motivational business guru Tony Robbins continues the process of normalizing large sums of money, informing Wilber that he sees no "separation between building a billion-dollar a year business and the spiritual drive to contribute" (Robbins 2004). Wilber (2006) continues his courting of corporations: referring to his AQAL model in a business context, he writes, "the quadrants give the four 'environments' or 'markets' in which a product must survive, and the levels give the types of values that will be both producing and buying the product" (29). So it should come as no surprise that Wilber's work has been picked up by numerous individuals in regard to work, business and management/leadership (Barrett 2006; Cacioppe 2000a, 2000b; Cacioppe and Edwards 2005a, 2005b; Edwards 2005; Küpers 2005; Landrum and Gardner 2005; Locander et al

6 After research was undertaken for this paper, Integral Institute revised its website. The original text is still available via the Internet Archive WayBackMachine: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070318010538/http://www.integralinstitute.org/public/static/abhistory.aspx>, accessed 28 December 2009. See also Howard (2005:389).

2002; Lund 2004; Pauchant 2005; Paulson 2002; Pielstick 2005; Reams 2005; Steingard 2005; Van Marrewijk 2003; Van Marrewijk and Hardjono 2003; Volckmann 2005; Warneka 2006).

Wilber goes further than simply talking in a corporate-friendly language: he also seeks to enclose the integral two percent of the population within an elite wealthy community. One of the Integral Naked podcasts is called “Entrepreneurial Idealism and the Integral Model” (Johnson and Wilber 2006) with Brian Johnson, certified “integral friend” and founder of the social networking site Zaadz which focused on “conscious capitalism” (Johnson N.d.).<sup>7</sup> The podcast introduction states, “Like Integral Institute, Zaadz is a gated community. . . . But wait! - isn’t that marginalizing, discriminatory, and elitist? Well, not really. If you join a country club, there are certain rules that you agree to follow.” Here I-I likens itself to both a gated community and a country club, simultaneously suggesting two things: first, that belonging to I-I is to be safely tucked away in an economically privileged community; second, that I-I is quite happy to articulate it as such, ignoring the economic realities that enable the existence of gated communities and country clubs.

Wilber and I-I have crafted different levels at which individuals can part with their money and join the integral country club: “You can donate to the Institute’s mission at any level of giving, but for those donors who seek to give through a formal program the Institute offers the Society of Fellows and the Society of Integrals.” Costs are \$1,000+ annual donation for the Fellows Society and \$10,000+ annual donation for the Integral Society. I-I is “assembling a new Board of Trustees drawn from our largest donors,” so it appears possible to purchase a governing position at the evolutionary edge of spirituality (Integral Institute 2009). The irony is traditional late capitalism, on which gated communities and country clubs are based, consciously feeds upon the labour of those outside the club. By ignoring this, I-I and Zaadz are exemplars of *unconscious capitalism*, a result, as mentioned above, of having no appropriate economic analysis within the allegedly “new progressive” politics.

7 Johnson has since gone on to sell Zaadz to Gaiam, which eventually discontinued the social network..

Wilber discusses the topic of money and spirituality at some length in an essay entitled, *Right Bucks* (Wilber N.d.). He makes several questionable turns in this essay, which is essentially a theological justification of cash. First he notes how money was demonised by Buddhists, “without exception these early Dharma traditions, East and West, were (and still are) stamped with a disdain of money, of food, of sex, and of women” (Wilber N.d.:5).” Immediately, Wilber sets up an ostensibly liberatory project, three-quarters of which (food, sex, women) sounds perfectly reasonable: he wants us to believe the liberation of money and women are comparable. He then appeals to the “Nondual revolution, introduced in the West by the brilliant Plotinus and in the East by the remarkable Nagarjuna” (5). Here we are told that the nondual tradition embraced the manifest as an expression of spirit rather than rejecting it as evil. We are now being led to believe money (manifest) is an expression of spirit. Wilber argues, “this nondual orientation involved a profound re-evaluation . . . of the ‘sinful’ nature of money, food sex (and women)” (7); the nondual is not anti-money, it is in favour of “appropriate money, appropriate bucks” (8). Wilber continues to talk at some length about the liberation of women, as if inseparable from the liberation of money, consistently ignoring the fact that food, sex and women are of a natural order whereas money is not: money is merely a social or government fiat. If we can put aside this dishonest correlation between money and women,<sup>8</sup> we are left with the idea of “right bucks”: money is ok, as long as it is treated appropriately. Again, this sounds quite reasonable, as long as some agreement can be made about what is appropriate. Are the gated community and country club appropriate?

Wilber’s connection of women and money in this essay is an interesting one, and offers some insight into the appropriateness of Wilber’s economic analysis. Elsewhere, Wilber (2000) offers a highly problematic presentation of women via a very selective reading of feminist scholars, which results

8 Ray makes a similar bid here, suggesting the new progressives are “about women’s values and concerns coming forth into the public domain for the first time in history,” again implying that having a problem with the logic of the new progressives is somehow having a problem with feminism (Ray 2003:8).

in a gender parity of 60/40 (male/female) as well as an essentialised understanding of gender and the depoliticisation of patriarchy (Gelfer 2009:103-115). It is up to the individual to decide if Wilber's idea of appropriate bucks is comparable to appropriate gender parity. In *Right Bucks* the only sensible monetary question that remains for Wilber is how to share the Dharma with those who cannot afford it, and he claims to be fond of charges being pegged to a sliding scale. However, he notes, "unfortunately it is rather hard to apply to seminars and retreats and other Dharma events, because the bookworking is so complex" (Wilber N.d.:15). Certainly, there are no sliding scales for any of the products and services available on the I-I website, except those relating to how much one is willing to donate to I-I.<sup>9</sup> Wilber has anticipated such criticism with his creation of the "mean green meme," which would say that green consciousness, which has yet to reach integral, will seek to pull down integral efforts for transformation, in this case lacking the developmental abilities to appreciate and realise the nature of "right bucks." Clearly, indigo consciousness is also prophetic.

### Summary and Conclusion

LOHAS represents a multi-billion dollar marketplace in the United States focusing on five key segments: sustainable economy, healthy lifestyles, alternative healthcare, personal development, and ecological lifestyles. LOHAS business argues that it serves a "triple bottom line" of "people, planet and profit" and in doing so is based on "values." Spirituality plays a significant role in the LOHAS marketplace, accounting for much of the "personal development" segment. LOHAS seeks to grow the spiritual economy by selling spiritual products and services. But LOHAS also engages with spirituality at a deeper, more disturbing level. By co-opting spirituality into its values, LOHAS trades upon the "authenticity" of the spiritual in order to serve its "bottom triple bottom line" of profit. In this way spirituality then grows

the LOHAS economy. Because this operates in a transparent and unapologetic fashion, and because its ostensible values of "sustainability" appear reasonable, the connection between the commercial and the spiritual becomes normalised.

Once this connection has become fully normalised, spiritual consumers come to expect spiritual products to be sold to them, and their expectations are met. Examples are the products and services promoted by Ken Wilber and Integral Institute, which constitutes a sub-segment of the LOHAS marketplace focusing on higher, indigo consciousness and, consequently, the "indigo dollar." Following LOHAS with its proliferation of books, DVDs and workshops, I-I packages and sells spiritual products and services in a way that appeals to people who operate within a commercial environment. Indeed these products and services seek to aid the consumer's operations within a commercial environment by generating increased efficiency and better strategies in the workplace. Wilber also seeks to normalise the connection between the commercial and the spiritual by providing a theological justification for money in his essay *Right Bucks*.

A key similarity between LOHAS and integral products is the perception of the political domain, and the resulting economic critiques that flow from it (or not). While a number of LOHAS values are traditionally located on Ray's definition of the left, it seeks to appeal to consumers who do not identify with the left, and in doing so abandons one of its most identifiable features: its economic analysis. Wilber's integral theory performs a similar turn: while Ray views Cultural Creatives as "beyond left vs right," Wilber's nomenclature would "transcend and include" left and right. Wilber's assumption is that all the analysis and critique of the old left has been fully engaged, dealt with, and transcended. However, this is a problematic assumption.

As Douglas Ezzy (2006) notes in his analysis of the alternative spirituality segment of witchcraft, "Consumerist individualism does not operate by arguing against broader social, political or religious issues. It simply ignores them. As the consumerist self becomes focused on itself, these broader social and communal issues simply do not feature in the

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is a good deal of free reading material at Wilber's personal website [<http://www.kenwilber.com>, accessed 28 December 2009], and that of his publisher [<http://wilber.shambhala.com>, accessed 28 December 2009], and such is the repetitive nature of his books, one could get a firm grasp on his voluminous work without ever purchasing a book or visiting the library.



concerns of the consumerist individual” (27). While integralists would not see themselves as possessing the same worldview as witchcraft (firmly relegated to primitive consciousness by integral standards), there is a good chance consumerist individualism is still operational: in other words, they do not transcend and include the left vs right dichotomy; rather they ignore it. The net effect of this process is that both LOHAS and integralists have no functional political-economic analysis and adopt the only working economic model at hand: late capitalism, which becomes “spiritualised” and authenticated into “conscious capitalism,” thus consolidating the connection between the commercial and the spiritual. Wilber further silences a critique of capitalism by denying that there is even an alternative position to inhabit: one article is titled, “Like it or Not, You’re a Capitalist. But Are You a Conscious One?” (Parlee and Wilber N.d.).<sup>10</sup>

While it is both convenient and reasonable to argue that alternative spiritualities adopt a late capitalist position with their consumer focus, there are always degrees to which this happens. Returning again to Ezzy, we see that even within a focused constituency such as witchcraft, there can be varying positions: old-style Wicca is focused more on knowledge and gifts, whereas contemporary witchcraft has a greater reliance on the exchange of commodities within the consumer market (cited in Possamai 2003:41). While, then, some alternative spiritualities may be defined by a certain ambivalence towards the consumerism of late capitalism, the LOHAS position is explicit: not only a consumerism that co-opts spirituality, but a consumer-focused spirituality in itself.

Wilber takes the position of LOHAS further to a form of hyper-consumerism via the employment of corporate language, further spiritualised products and services, and the creation of an integral elite dwelling in ideological communities resembling spiritual country clubs. Wilber even steps down from his own indigo altitude to promote the products of those less

developmentally advanced. The Q-Link, for example, is a stylish pendant about which Wilber states,

This technology has been scientifically demonstrated to enhance the body’s ability to protect itself from harmful environmental radiation, and thus it helps to remove harmful influences on the organism’s health and well being. This technology therefore removes some of the blocks to inner transformation to higher and healthier states of being. [Q-Link 2009c]

Unfortunately, the Q-Link’s transformational technology is only available to those with \$99.95 to spare for the basic pendant, or \$1199 for the gold model (Q-Bling?), and another \$59.95 for Pet-Link, a pendant for animals (Q-Link 2009b). Anyone can partake in Q-Link business as the company “offers a variety of easy start business opportunities including Affiliate, Reseller & Licensing programs” (Q-Link 2009a). Assuming the Q-Link does indeed aid transformation to higher states of being, it remains a sad example of both LOHAS’ and Wilber’s commodification of spirituality: packaged, available to only those who can afford it, encased in gold, and an “easy start business opportunity.”

<sup>10</sup> This denial of the meaning of the transcended and included is employed by Wilber elsewhere: see Leon Schlam (2001) and George Adams (2002) in relation to the theme of non-duality, not to mention Wilber’s gun-sliding approach which seeks to intimidate his critics (Gelfer 2009:117-118)

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