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### ABRACADABRA! POSTMODERN THERAPEUTIC METHODS: LANGUAGE AS A NEO-MAGICAL TOOL

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**Abstract:** This paper argues that a new genre of therapy has appeared in the arena of contemporary spiritual alternative healing, which expresses an outlook never-before-seen in the history of medicine: postmodern therapy. Postmodern therapeutic methods (PTMs) express a popularization of postmodernist philosophy in regards to language's role in the therapeutic process, expressing a novel cosmology. These methods are illustrated in the paper, and then analyzed in comparison to two other groups of methods: traditional/occult magic, and modern medicine. Finally, PTMs are characterized as neo-magic, bearing features similar to modernistic outlook on the one hand, and features similar to pre-modern magic outlook on the other hand. Thus, these new outlook demonstrate a double appropriation and rejection of perceptions viewed as contradictory – traditional magic and secular science.

**Key words:** CAM, Healing, Therapy, Modern philosophy, Postmodern thought, language, magic, spirituality, alternative spiritualities, New Age

„There are only two things in the world – nothing and semantics.”

(Werner Erhard)

Is there anything novel about novel therapeutic methods, such as the utilization of “power words” (e.g. Klingler 2013), or are they recycled forms of ancient methods? Is there something different about current therapeutic methods, such as Gendlin’s *Focusing* (1978), or are they modern methods that resemble other modern psycho-therapeutic tools? The following paper will argue that a new genre of therapy has appeared in the arena of contemporary spiritual alternative healing, which expresses an outlook never-before-seen in the history of medicine: postmodern therapy.

## 1. Alternative spiritual healing and Postmodern Therapeutic Methods (PTMs)

Complementary/Alternative Medicine (CAM) is an umbrella term for an eclectic variety of hundreds of therapeutic methods from many different sources, practiced alongside conventional medicine.

For the purposes of this study, we shall concentrate on a particular group of innovative CAM methods, while presenting a comparative analysis between this group and two other fields of therapy methods: traditional and modern. My argument is that *the innovative group shows a unique postmodern spirit that is different from its predecessors and draws its inspiration from a popular understanding of postmodern discourse*. To conveniently convey this comparative analysis, three “ideal” and distinct groups shall be addressed (though this division does not comprise of all existing therapy methods, and although such a division is a coarse generalization, required to clarify the differences between the three groups):

1. **Traditional therapy methods** – This group refers to various traditional, religious/magical pre-modern methods, such as mystical amulets or hermetic occultism.
2. **Modern medical methods** – This refers to Western-scientific methods, formed in the modern era/time, such as allopathy and surgery. Modern Western methods that the medical establishment has rejected were excluded, such as chiropractic or Bach flowers.
3. **Postmodern therapeutic methods (PTMs)** – Focused and elaborate on later. As stated above, this group will not include every novel or non-establishment therapy method,

but to point at an emerging and expanding body of innovative therapy methods that share a unique and fascinating characteristic.

PTMs first appeared in the 1960s, alongside the forerunners of postmodern philosophy, such as Derrida and Foucault, and the counter-culture movement. Ever since, PTMs have been culturally linked with the alternative-spiritual arena that increasingly thrived from the second half of the twentieth century to this day, first under the term “*cultic milieu*,” and later as the New Age movement. “New Age” is an umbrella term for a wide range of phenomena – groups, methods, beliefs, events, discourse. One of the major themes of New Age spirituality is healing, which is perceived, in fact, as redemption. The holistic perception of body-mind healing is a major topic within this cultural sphere, and an abundance of therapeutic and theoretical approaches are suggested towards achieving it. The very use of the term “healing”, rather than “curing”, is an aspect of this sub-culture’s different and unique worldview, which advocates a holistic outlook on body-mind, as well as a harmonistic view of science and religion (Hanegraaff 1998, 42, 119ff).

Is New Age a postmodern spirituality? Is alternative medicine postmodern? These issues have been discussed in many studies that have yet to provide a definitive answer, giving only partial answers from various limited outlooks, that show the postmodern (or, alternately, the modernistic) characteristics of these phenomena (e.g. Heelas 2016). This paper, too, will not provide a definitive answer to the question. Instead, it will endeavor to assert that a certain innovative group of alternative spiritual therapeutic methods reflects the emergence of a postmodern manifestation of therapy. We shall clearly witness how ideas from postmodern philosophy, in their popular applied form, are embodied within these novel therapeutic techniques or within the spiritual-alternative healing theory or cosmology that explains the therapeutic act in itself. Thus, although these methods do not cover the entire field of alternative medicine or alternative spirituality, they demonstrate a new and distinct trend that is novel both in concept and in therapeutic techniques. The focus in PTMs is on the role of language in the therapeutic process, and actually in the cosmological perception of the therapeutic theory.

## 2. Theoretical Review – The Power and Role of Speech in Therapy

### 2.1. The link between the word and the world

My argument is that PTMs should be seen as a popular expression or implementation of postmodernist philosophy, particularly regarding language and its role in the therapeutic process. In order to establish this claim, *the role of language in the therapeutic process* will be examined in three cultural contexts: the pre-modern magical cultural context, the modern medical context, and the context that constitutes the object of this paper – (a portion of) the contemporary arena of alternative spiritual healing, namely, PTMs.

The relationship between language and reality, signifier and signified, word and world, is significant in determining the role that speech has in the therapeutic process. Before describing how novel alternative medicine views the connection between words and therapy, I will provide a general overview of three different perspectives regarding the relationship between things and their names: language as natural-essentialistic, language as conventional-reflective, and language as creative-playful.

First, a description of the *magical perspective*, widespread in various religious traditions, will be provided. The well-known anthropologist, Sir James George Frazer (1990), claimed that savages were completely unable to distinguish between words and the things they represented. Accordingly, the magical perspective sees names not as mere markers, but as tangible parts of the thing itself. This view is linked to the idea of language as natural – namely, as expressing the nature of reality. Therefore, a marker, be it made of letters or sounds, has not only a direct, causal connection to what is marked, but also the power to affect it, just like an amulet that is connected to the essence of the reality that it affects.

For example, the essentialist perception of language manifests in Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. According to Kabbalistic traditions, the letters of divine speech that created the universe are found within creation, and they are what gives creation life. If the letters were to evaporate from the world, the world would dissolve (Idel 1992).

Despite the significant differences between various magical traditions and approaches, it is possible to generalize by describing a magical pre-modern approach that sees a close essential connection between words and the world – a view that was widespread in many religions worldwide. This view was also typical of the occult sciences during the Renaissance, as shown by Brian Vickers (2003). They, too, saw language as natural and as an expression of the nature of reality.

The proponents of the New Sciences during the Renaissance opposed the magical-occult stances, as did the Modern scientists, with even greater

force, seeking to “cleanse” science (Vickers 2003). The same tone of coarse generalization used for the magical viewpoint, will be used when describing the *modern secular-scientific perspective* as the expression of an opposing position. Modern science separated words from the things in the world, and promoted an autonomous perception of language (Foucault 2002). Various processes of separation governed the modernist and scientific spheres, including medicine reshaped in the spirit of modernity (Foucault 2012), however, here we shall focus on the issue of language and its relation to the world.

Modernity views language as conventional — in other words, as stemming from an arbitrary social convention pertaining to names and words, in order to enable communication. According to this view, there is no connection between the words and the reality they represent, nor do letters have any meaning (by neither form nor sound). Language is a painting of reality in conventional symbols. Ferdinand de Saussure, a known representative of the approach that views the linguistic signifier as arbitrary and conventional, distinguished between three layers: language (the sign), human awareness (the signifier), and the ontological reality (the signified). In his approach, language reflects reality — as a conventional mirror. Magicians would accept this view in regards to secular languages alone, as opposed to sacred ones. For example, Jewish mystics viewed Gentile languages as secular, unlike Hebrew (Idel 1995). In contrast, secular modernists applied the secularizing outlook to all languages.

The postmodernist thinkers emphasize language’s power of creation as an author of reality from a cultural and psychological perspective. Postmodernist speakers emphasize the limitation that language (as a cultural expression) imposes on consciousness in the process of comprehending reality and in expressing it. It is not the language that reflects reality, but reality that teaches us about the language that created it. If modernism perceives language as a kind of mirror that reflects reality, then postmodernism breaks that mirror: it understands reality as created by language, and draws attention to the role of language as narrative rather than as a tool of pure intellect (Rorty 1979).

The doubt surrounding words’ ability to objectively reflect reality contributes to the postmodernist undermining of the concept of rationality, and reduces it to a mere cultural context. Moreover, in the postmodern condition, each text’s act of interpretation expands ad infinitum, by way of deconstruction, which seeks to dismantle, again and again, the link between the signified (reality) and the text, in order to illustrate that the signified is unattainable (Derrida 1976).

Dealing with the concept of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “language-game” (Sprachspiel), conveys the stance that favors remaining in the linguistic plane over dealing with the ontological reality. Questioning our ability to recognize the ontological reality as it is (and, to put it more bluntly,

questioning ontological reality's very existence) leads postmodernists to take an investigative path that differs from the modernist one — instead of clarifying what exists in the world, they deal with the cultural choices of describing and shaping reality. Since human consciousness as expressed through language reflects no more than our cultural limitations regarding the known reality, language shapes our experience of reality. Thus, it is believed that we may never know reality as it truly is.

In summation, the relationship between language and reality is different in each of these three approaches, as is the role of human perception. While postmodernism is busy dealing with the limitation that language imposes on humanity's ability to know reality, magic views language as a tool for recognizing reality as is. In modernism, our intellect perceives the ontological reality, and translates the knowledge it contains into words that have the power to reflect reality, while the postmodernist view emphasizes the contribution of various mediators in the epistemological and discursal processes. The magical view believes in the existence of an objective reality knowable through a tradition of truth, while modernism believes that reality can be known via the intellect. Postmodernism casts doubt upon the existence of objective reality, and emphasizes words' power of creation toward constructing reality. Both postmodernists and practitioners of magic emphasize language's power to create. The latter, however, subject this power to the true sacred language, while the former retain a secular, modern doubt regarding the existence of a natural language.

PTMs reflect the unique complexity of postmodern thought, as demonstrated in the following.

## **2.2. The therapeutic act and the role of language**

From an anthropological perspective, therapy can be viewed not only as comprised of the means to heal illness, but also of the means to give illness a cultural form and a name (McGuire and Kantor 1988). Therefore, if we go back and examine the three perspectives described above regarding the link between language and reality, and examine the therapeutic methods that each adopts, we will be able to see the parallels between the therapeutic methods and healing processes on the one hand, and between the views that we described, on the other. The three different outlooks will also be expressed through the various explanations for therapeutic success or failure. Accordingly, we will undertake a comparative examination of the role of language in the healing process.

According to the magical approach, language has a direct influence on the reality of illness or health. The use and changing of names, uttering incantations, writing certain letter combinations on amulets, reciting narratives – are all causally linked to what happens on the ontological plane. Failure to heal may stem from a mistaken understanding of the reality which leads to choosing the wrong therapeutic tool, such as words

unsuited to the reality (e.g., mispronouncing the name of a demon), or the unprofessional use of the language (such as misspelling a sacred name) used as the therapeutic tool.

By contrast, modern medicine uses language in healing solely to mediate communication and to *reflect* the diagnosis, namely, the ontological reality. While mislabeling a disease could lead to a medical failure, this failure would result from a miscommunication or a misdiagnosis of the reality *reflected* through the linguistic labeling. There is no direct link between the language and the reality of illness or health. The name of the drug or the medical procedure, too, should not affect the result of the treatment. (As to some pivotal implications of the new studies about placebo effect, concerning this last point, it is useful to have a broader philosophical-historical perspective, which cannot be developed here. (See Davidovitch 2004).

Postmodernism claims that we cannot recognize ontological reality, whether because of our inability to approach the essence of things without mediators that distort rather than reflect reality, or due to a lack of ontological certainty, or due to the absence of the essence of things. Since language is all we know, in case of illness we can only turn to *language* to clarify the context of the illness's existence. How was it created? Under what conditions is healing feasible? What is the essence of the illness, and how can it be healed or disposed of? Creating change in the conversation so that the illness cannot exist within it, or making a creative interpretation or a modified alternative story, are tools for transforming the linguistic reality (which is also the only reality that is familiar and accessible to us) into one of health.

### 3. PTMs – detailed examples

According to the above logic, PTMs work as follows: they call the existence of a necessary ontological reality into question, namely, a reality that cannot be changed by changing the story. At times, they even cast doubt upon our ability to reduce the ontological reality down to a “real” or inevitable verbal description. Therefore, they seek to find the source of the disease within the patients' *language*, which stems from their cultural environment, moral assumptions, and individual-social patterns of belief. It is assumed that the discourse that the patients adopted or developed enabled the illness' existence. In this sense, these are postmodern methods (and, of course, we are dealing only with a specific narrow aspect of their postmodernity, namely language).

Since every verbal description of reality is flawed, the description of the problem, or the illness, cannot be true. This premise opens the door to shape reality freely, with a creative, empowering and healing story. Therefore, speakers of PTMs – as well as of New Age – also encourage us to creatively shape reality in our minds and in the way that we speak, out of

the assumption that reality is nothing but a reflection of our decisions and beliefs. Accordingly, they claim that it is possible to obtain anything — achieve financial abundance, love and even immortality, and heal every disease. Words that have been carefully examined and selected are, therefore, potential therapeutic tools.

In some PTMs, the patients are offered therapy consisting of affirmations that confirm that wholeness and health do exist. These affirmations are not an attempt to *fight* the illness, but rather to *re-create* the desired reality by repeating a sentence until it becomes true within the patients' reality and becomes a part of their worldview — namely, of their world. Indeed, in this view, reality is individualized. For example, the spiritual teacher, Louise Hay, who creates and develops these kinds of methods, says that she had healed herself of a cancer which her medical doctors claimed was incurable. She suggests that her readers choose positive stories and affirmations to reap the maximum benefits of their free will. Their will, free of the chains of reality, is utilized for the purpose of shaping their own world.

Gerald Jampolsky also offers a therapeutic technique that uses a combination of choice and language: guided visualization. He writes as follows: „[...] W]e are never really seeing or hearing [reality] as it is; we are just seeing fragments of the present through the tons of distorted old memories that we layer over it. [...] We can choose our own reality. Because our will is free, we can choose to see and experience the truth. [...] W]e must [...] refuse to be limited by the [...] questionable “realities” we have adopted from our culture. [...] O]ur minds have only the limitations we place on them [...]. When we use words such as *can't* and *impossible*, we have imposed the limits of a fearful past on ourselves” (Jampolsky 1979, 18, 21).

The above mentioned techniques posit the power of language to create and change reality. Language was not the techniques' exclusive tool; rather, it expressed a practical tool for changing the *consciousness* or *belief* that were interlaced with language (or another, visual, symbolization). Other sophisticated PTM techniques, by comparison, use language as a tool intertwined with *experience*, whose purpose is to influence the experience of disease. If the previous methods operated under the assumption that reality is nothing but a product of our consciousness and belief, and therefore, that language serves as a tool for changing consciousness and hence reality, the methods outlined below lean on the belief that our language reflects not reality, but rather our subjective experience of it. Accordingly, the therapeutic method uses the tension between language and experience, whose purpose is to influence the *experience* of, rather than the *reality* of disease (which some postmodernists have given up hope of discovering, in any case). In these approaches, the therapeutic goal is to enable and reinforce the reality of the illness' “evasion” of linguistic labeling, by focusing on investigating



and reshaping the individual's experience of reality.

The assumption that words are never capable of wholly portraying reality has various applicable results. One is the belief that since every verbal description of reality is flawed, the description of a problem or illness doesn't have to be the truth (and in certain doctrines cannot be real – e.g. Schucman and Thetford 1996). The following quote from a conversation between the facilitator at an EST workshop and a farmer who attended it, shows this method's postmodern view of language:

“That's why Ah find all the word business Ah been hearing in here a lot of manure.” “It is manure. Everything I say is manure. I've warned you about that several times, haven't I?” “Y'have?” “I've said don't believe a word I say.” “Then why do you say them?” “Why do you pump dirty water from a pond and squirt it into a stable?” “To clean out the shit.” “Well guess what? That's why I have to pour words at you assholes...” (Rhinehart 1976, 30)

Werner Erhard, EST founder, claimed repeatedly that “there are only two things in the world – nothing and semantics”. In yet another scene in the workshops the instructor explains: „[...] these are only words [...] Why do you grant the words the power to make you an effect. [...] here is no difference between fuck and spaghetti. [...] They're only words. The difference is the significance you add to them” (Gardner 1989, 304). Similarly, in a physical context, the use of words allows us to philosophically challenge the reality of pain, then to ignore the reality of pain, and finally, to make the reality of the pain disappear. This position expresses a *psychologization and rationalization of magic* – in other words, an understanding of the reality and of the magical process, as psycho-social rather than ontological.

Werner's perception of the annihilation of reality, is linked to his experience of enlightenment, during which he experienced the void. It was then that he realized that he himself was the creator of his own thoughts, beliefs and emotions. He wished to give the participants in his workshop a similar experience. Since reality is accessible only through a consciousness shaped by individual experience, the way to heal is by using the individual's authority in determining the content of their consciousness in the most flexible, liberated and creative way, and thus – to change reality. This paves the way to a free shaping of reality by means of a creative, empowering, and healing narrative. The workshop proposes coming in direct contact with the experiences, without the mediation of words, through the void, assuming that this self-observation and exploration technique leads to the disappearance of imperfect reality, disease or pain.

This technique is practiced using increased verbalization – the use of verbal descriptions of troubles, pains and frustrations so as to challenge first their veracity, and then their reality/existence. The workshop practices verbal therapy that focuses on physical pain in order to make it

vanish completely. The person experiencing the sensations translates them into various images (color, odor, quantification) that receive a detailed verbal description that gradually leads to their disappearance. Since words necessarily fail to describe reality, the patients' descriptions of the illness are used to deconstruct the link between them and reality again and again, while modifying the descriptions of the illness until it completely disappears in the patients' description of their experience of reality. A similar technique was practiced in "I Am" workshops – the use of awareness concentration to treat physical pain and make it gradually disappear, while verbally describing it *in precision*: the workshop guide's directive was to find the precise wording for the sensation of pain, its exact location, its intensity, form, etc. Then to repeat the description, each time correcting the wording until, finally, the pain lessens and even disappears (Grove 1998).

The insufficiency of words in describing a reality of hardship or disease, also used in the therapeutic method known as Focusing, is highly similar to the pain-disposal technique mentioned above. The Focusing method was first developed in the 1960s by Professor Eugene Gendlin of the University of Chicago, who explains that *the body* reflects reality in a way that is different from, and better than, words. Since words and intellectual thought are limiting, misleading, contradictory and deviate from the truth, they also prevent healing. (Gendlin is obviously aware of the postmodern philosophical context from which he draws inspiration for the creation of his own philosophy and method. See e.g., Gendlin 1991.) This innovative approach differs, of course, from both the magical approach and the modernist approach presented above, in regards to the relationship between language and reality. The Focusing method is based, in the first stage, on an experiential, physical identification of a vague sensory reality, and in the second (not final) stage on an attempt to find a suitable verbal description for it.

Gendlin (1982, 35) writes: "A felt sense, being larger and more complicated, is almost always unclear – at least until you focus on it – and almost never comes with a convenient label." Gendlin explains the therapeutic stages, which include alternately focusing on the body's sensations and on speech: one should "avoid forcing words into the felt sense" (ibid, 55), but continue trying to find the right words to describe it. Once the speech has successfully and fully matched the sensation – that is, when there is a match between speech and reality – a "shift" takes place, and the sense changes: a verbal expression that is the perfect match for the physical sensation is called "a handle", and it can give you "only a small bodily shift, just enough so you can tell the handle is right" (ibid, 56). In other words, the true match between words and reality is always elusive: either the words are not appropriate for reality, or when we perceive reality by means of words, reality eludes us. That is why the patients must modify their description of the physical sensation, which is

supposed to reflect the reality of the disease/problem. “We do not control when a shift comes. (That is ‘grace.’)” (ibid, 59). As the cycle of these actions repeats, the pain or discomfort is slowly released, gradually dissipates, and at the end of the process either the person finds a solution to their illness, or the illness disappears.

#### 4. The wider cultural context of PTMs – Discussion

##### 4. 1. Beliefs and concepts in alternative spiritualities

New Age spirituality, or more generally - alternative spiritualities, is the cultural context in which PTMs appear. This broad framework, the boundaries of which are vague, contains doctrines, concepts, values, norms and practices such as those mentioned above. New Age makes healing its topmost priority, and emphasizes magic in every aspect of day-to-day life and in its cosmological outlook (Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, forthcoming). While most New Age teachers are neither philosophers nor experts in the Continental argot à la Derrida, they do know its popularized version and have internalized it towards forming of a therapeutic rationale.

Without detailing and exemplifying from New Age literature, we indicate that two ideas are characteristic of the PTMs and the general alternative spiritual context in which they appear: skepticism regarding the existence of an obligatory objective reality, and the use of language as a creative tool for shaping the desired reality (of health). Nevertheless, despite the commonalities, there are also variations and differences between the various approaches within this framework. Some assume that words *do* reflect reality well enough, moreover, that they *create* it, thus language can be used to create a reality of health. Others assume the *opposite* – that words can never reflect a complex experiential reality; thus, they resort to techniques involving language and experience to show the constant gap between language and reality. Both groups conclude the therapeutic process with verbal confirmation of a reality of health.

Since language constitutes a kind of objectification of reality, it seems autonomous and awe-inspiring. Therefore, a story or a word are a kind of portable charisma. Ritual words constitute an embodiment of a coercive power (McGuire and Kantor 1988, 228, 236). In PTMs, this power is used in service of the individuals and their empowerment, alongside a theory that empowers this action, seeing in it a potent act of creation within the individual’s power. It is also worthy to mention that self-empowerment – even deification – lies at the heart of alternative spiritualities (Hanegraaff 1998; Heelas 2016). Accordingly, the individuals become fully responsible for every aspect of their lives, including their diseases and health (Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, forthcoming).

#### 4.2. A triad comparative analysis of word-and-world in the therapeutic process

We have presented three philosophical-cultural archetypes that give rise to three different therapeutic methods: the traditional, the modernist and the postmodernist. After introducing PTMs and elaborating on their cultural context, we shall compare between them and the therapeutic methods that stem from the two other cultural systems.

In the traditional magical outlook, therapy makes significant use of language. For example, in Jewish mysticism, the very shape of the Hebrew letters, their sacred combinations, and the secret names that are written down or uttered, sacred myths and narration – are seen as possessing healing powers (as well as powers of creation or destruction). Using these powers requires precise professional knowledge, knowing the true and proper names, and possessing the abilities of the keepers of the tradition (Idel 2012). On the other hand, in postmodern healing, the individuals are called upon to interpret their subjective experience, and in fact cannot be healed by anyone but themselves. When they express their words, and tell their story, the acts of verbalization and speech result in self-healing.

The verbal effort in modern healing is quite “transparent”: the physician reaches a diagnosis and reflects it in words, suggests medical procedures and mentions the conventional name. The confidentiality and the professionalism of medical language (as opposed to magical) are perceived as solely a technical matter. Language indicates only the reality that has been diagnosed, and if an alternative conventional word for the illness or an alternative name for the medication had been chosen, it would have had no significance. However, PTMs seek to identify the verbal originator of illness, since language is the source of reality. Some will go even further, saying that reality exists only in language and therefore has no objective existence. Thus, changing the language will generate a new creation, as is required for healing.

### 5. Conclusion: PTMs as neo-magic

PTMs do not come with a label. It is this paper that proposes a label for them. They also do not differentiate themselves from other fields. On the contrary: their adaptation to the popular-postmodern discourse as well as their psychologistic character allows for their easy absorption into broad cultural contexts (Ruah-Midbar 2006, ch. 3). New Age spirituality’s growth also encourages the penetration of PTM ideas and techniques into the mainstream, and into established institutions such as religion, medicine, education and business (e.g., Heelas 2016). Considering the easy assimilation of postmodernist ideas into Western mainstream culture, the success of PTMs is not surprising.

At first glance, it is possible to err and regard PTMs as a regression from the modern view to the traditional magical one (Wilber 2000, 256-273). Still, our analysis led us to observe that PTMs are not pre-modern but rather postmodern; resisting the modernist approach does not lead back to the traditional approach, but rather to the formation of a novel approach that never existed before in regards to the role of language in the therapeutic process.

The intimate relationship between signifier and signified in the traditional magical view was one that reflected substance. The estranged relationship between them in the modernist view was one that reflected an arbitrary convention; and the relationship between them in postmodernism is one of creative causality. While the adoption of magical and shamanic approaches in New Age thought seems like a return to the past, what is actually taking place is a re-invention of tradition (Lewis and Hammer 2007). PTMs reject the modernist criticism of magic, but not in order to go back and adopt magic as it used to be, but rather in order to reinvent it. As demonstrated, the neo-magical therapeutic method differs from traditional magic; it is new and original.

PTMs do not see language as natural or assume that reality is objective or necessary. Instead, they accept the modern, secular view of language as conventional. However, they combine a magical insight about language's power of creation, and claim that language conventions are, in fact, what *creates* reality. Like traditional magic, PTMs do not distinguish between physical and psychological – or mental – reality (including illness), but adopt a holistic perspective. According to their belief system, the collective convention can be broken by the individual, who can create reality anew. In PTMs, the modernist take on the arbitrary nature of the sign becomes a claim for the arbitrary nature of reality itself. In this way, PTMs perform a restoration of the faith in the creative power of language without restoring the essentialist view of the link between God, word and world, that exclusively attributes truth, knowledge and creation to God and God's formal emissaries. Language, therefore, has magical power and can affect reality, but no special knowledge is required to do so. The democratization of neo-magic attributes this power to each person in relation to one's own world.

In this paper, we have presented a course generalization of three supposedly diachronic, but in fact synchronic outlooks, that take place in contemporary culture: traditional, modernist, and postmodernist. We have focused on the question of relation between word and world, and its therapeutic implications. Naturally, as in every cultural system, the examination of one issue is situated within broader contexts, and a variety of other issues arose in the examination of this one – New Age's spiritual context, the holistic body-mind perception, and so on.

One such intriguing issue is the *double appropriation and rejection* of perceptions viewed as contradictory – *traditional magic* versus *secular science*. On the one hand, they are embraced and ratified, and on the other, rejected. This complex relationship is made perfectly clear by understanding PTMs' internal logic – the adoption of postmodernist discourse in its popular form.

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