

# Refereed Articles

## TRADITIONALISM IN AUSTRALIA: AN OVERVIEW

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*This article provides an overview of the history of Traditionalism in Australia over the past 50 years, outlining its principle teachings, identifying and discussing key figures and their work and concluding with an assessment of the implications for Traditionalism of globalisation and the rise of the Internet, on which it has a significant presence.*

### Introduction

This article is part of a larger project that seeks to locate Traditionalism and other contemporary religious movements within an analysis of globalisation and its implications for religious traditions around the world (Bendle, 1998; 1999). For present purposes, it focuses on the history of Traditionalism in Australia, making only a few concluding comments on globalisation.

Traditionalism is beginning to attract the scholarly attention it requires. Aside from more general works on esoteric spirituality (for example, Faivre and Needleman (1995)) specific studies of Traditionalism include Rawlinson (1993; 1997), Borella (1995), Quinn (1997), van Egmond (1998), Sedgwick (1999) and Oldmeadow (2000). These provide detailed accounts that supplement the local material provided here, tracing the history of the various religious, metaphysical and philosophical traditions from which Traditionalism has emerged and providing critical and informed analyses that rescue the field from the popular accounts that have tended to trivialize it.

At the most basic level, Traditionalism is a metaphysical framework concerned with the 'transcendental unity of religions' (Schuon, 1984). It is a contemporary expression of a conception first proposed by Agostino Steuco, who was a bishop, Vatican librarian and representative of Pope Paul III at the Council of Trent. In his *De perenni philosophia* (1540), Steuco asserted that there is "one principle of all things, of which there has always been one and the same knowledge among all peoples, [a] perennial philosophy [that] reaches back even to the origin of the human race." (Copenhaver and Schmitt, 1992:185) In its contemporary form, Traditionalism derives from the metaphysical synthesis proposed by René Guénon in the 1920s, and

developed by Ananda Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and many others. Their formal religious allegiances, which they regard as essential, include Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Guénon posited “a Primordial Tradition, a body of the highest universal truths, or Principles...that lie at the heart of every authentic religion.” (Needleman, 1974:11) This *esoteric* knowledge at the core of the Primordial Tradition is seen as obscured by the *exoteric* dogma and practices of the various particular religious traditions, which must be penetrated in order to attain the Truth - *gnosis* - conceived as an immediate intuition of the divine. As Schuon (1984:9-10) puts it: “intellectual intuition is direct and active participation in divine knowledge...metaphysical certitude is absolute because of the identity between the knower and the known in the Intellect.” This *gnosis* is acquired through initiation under the guidance of a master. According to Mircea Eliade (1975:164), who was a bridge between Traditionalism and mainstream religious studies, such initiation produces “a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person...a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become *another*.” For Traditionalists, such initiation is made all the more essential by the spiritual crisis of the modern world, which involves a ‘falling away’ from the ‘one principle of all things’ under the sway of the *Kali-Yuga*, the ‘Dark Age’ of spiritual and social decadence identified by Hindu cosmology. Under the *Kali-Yuga* “humanity and society reach the supreme point of disintegration...property alone confers social rank; wealth becomes the only motive...passions and lust the only bonds...falsehood and deception the first condition of success...sexuality the sole means of enjoyment, while external, merely ritualistic religion is confused with spirituality.” (Eliade 1975: 68-9)

This perspective makes Traditionalism a fertile foundation for radical cultural critiques of Modernity, an important source of its appeal. Indeed, in his analysis of Guénon’s thought, Borella (1995:337-40) identifies it as the primary theme. In his study of Evola, Sheehan (1981:49) contrasts Modernity and Traditionalism as expressing two fundamentally different ways of viewing the human situation. The dominant Western ‘progress model’ deploys a *teleological* metahistory - a form of eschatology where humanity progresses through history towards its fulfilment lying ahead. The Traditionalist model deploys an *archaeological* metahistory - where our full humanness lies already achieved in the past, but forgotten and obscured, awaiting our remembrance of it.

The hermeneutic challenge for scholars seeking to understand Traditionalism - including those who might feel they grasp such notions intellectually - is to seek to comprehend how the contemporary world looks if *this* is the paradigm from within which one views it. Traditionalism “implies a very specific vision of nearly everything, and it is a fundamental idea that cannot be used ‘a little’ because it implies so many values and criticisms.” (Lipse, 1977:266) It is a style of thinking that requires what Nietzsche termed a ‘transvaluation of values’. In history, there is regression not

progression, devolution not evolution. Contemporary reality is perceived as decadent at its very core and the only tenable response involves individual spiritual transformation through a return to the Primordial Tradition. As we shall note towards the end of this paper, it is this 'politics of cultural despair' (Stern, 1965) that has contributed to a surge of interest in Traditionalism amongst militant groups opposed to globalisation.

## Traditionalism in Australia

In Australia at present, the leading Traditionalist scholar is Kenneth (Harry) Oldmeadow, who came to Traditionalism via Needleman's compendium *The Sword of Gnosis* in the 1970s and later completed a Master's dissertation on Schuon and Traditionalism at Sydney University in 1982, which is still being cited in works on Traditionalism today (Sedgwick, 1999). Oldmeadow is based at LaTrobe University Bendigo, which possesses a small but committed community of scholars sympathetic to the Traditionalist perspective. Indeed, a good deal of the undergraduate program in the discipline of philosophy and religious studies there is concerned with Traditional understandings, particularly of the Western heritage. Oldmeadow has written many articles and his book *Traditionalism* (2000) is, along with *The Only Tradition* by William Quinn (1997), one of the two best English-language overviews of the movement available. Both of them present Traditionalism in the context of a critique of the modern world - following the predilection for culture-critique that characterizes Traditionalism, although Oldmeadow disassociates himself from the reactionary politics that characterize some Traditionalist works. Moreover, in addition to such expository works, Oldmeadow and other Australians have also produced notable publications by applying Traditionalist insights to specific areas, for example, contemporary spirituality, art, architecture and Aboriginal spirituality, as we shall discuss later.

The earliest manifestation of Traditionalism in Australia is detailed in a valuable history of the circle surrounding the poet Harold Stewart in Melbourne in the 1950s provided by Peter Kelly, who participated in the circle. Stewart was a co-conspirator with James McAuley in the famous 'Ern Malley' literary hoax that was perpetrated in 1944 to draw attention to the perceived vacuity of modernist poetry (a proto-Traditionalist motif) but instead backfired and made a literary name for the non-existent 'poet'. In the 1950s he continued as a poet in his own right and also became a translator of Japanese *haiku*. Kelly recalls the vibrancy of a small but important circle of intellectuals who were prepared to explore what was then the vanguard of thinking about the potential contribution of non-Christian religions and non-Western cultures. Such efforts can be comprehended as determined attempts to construct a spiritual identity in a society shifting away from its British and Western European origins. Stewart eventually responded to this situation by moving to Japan in 1966

where he lived until his death in 1995.

Stewart was the leader of a 'study group' who met at the Norman Robb Bookshop in Little Collins Street, "one of the few venues in Melbourne where one could find texts on Vedanta, Taoism, Buddhism, comparative religion and philosophy, yoga or art-books on Chinese and Japanese painting." (Kelly, 1998:12) Stewart himself had avidly read Guénon's works as they were translated in the 1940s and formed the group in 1952 to discuss religion and spirituality with a focus on the traditionalist works of Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Schuon. It lasted until 1963 and such longevity is remarkable for a group of intellectuals concerned with such matters. Members would lead the discussion on the basis of translations of articles appearing in *Etudes Traditionnelles* that Stewart imported from France. At other times, the views of Guénon and Coomaraswamy about the *Kali-Yuga* encouraged the wholesale dismissal of modern Western culture. This was "both exhilarating and disconcerting. One could consign whole epochs to outer darkness," and "this 'orthodoxy' tended to be adopted also to literature and music by some 'hard-line' members of the group." (20) On the other hand, the reactionary politics implicit in much Traditionalism had little appeal, although they effected McAuley, who had been influenced by Guénon and Coomaraswamy before becoming a convert to Catholicism in about 1952, and subsequently one of the leading conservative thinkers in Australia. Nevertheless, the group entertained the Traditionalist notions that "the modern world appeared to be headed on a collision course for self-destruction: Guénon's theory of metaphysical entropy made it seem inevitable." (23) Similarly, Coomaraswamy's dismissal of post-Renaissance art as decadent encouraged a turning towards Asian art within the group.

Indeed, for most members, the response to 'the crisis of the modern world' was to turn East and inward in search of a viable spiritual identity. Kelly (1998:20) details how the circle looked to the spiritual resources possessed by Asian civilizations, drawing upon Coomaraswamy's books on aesthetics: *The Dance of Siva* (1924); *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934); and *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (1956). In addition they sought "to adopt a spiritual practice within one of the traditions and, preferably, to practise one of the traditional arts or crafts as a form of asceticism." (24) The overriding problem - which was never properly resolved by this group - was that of initiation and several members went overseas on such a quest. Meanwhile, Schuon was establishing his ascendancy in London and elsewhere, and Stewart came to feel that Traditionalism was becoming "a kind of 'front' for Islamic Sufism. As his natural inclinations were for Taoism and Buddhism he found this trend alarming." (28) Moreover, the Traditionalist journal, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, was assuming the authoritarian air that characterized it until its demise. Ultimately, key members of the Melbourne group made their choice for East Asia, exploring the work of Sri Ramana Maharishi and especially Buddhism in various forms, with Stewart approaching the Traditionalist Marco Pallis (who was a Buddhist) for assistance in finding an appropriate school in Japan, which he and Adrian Snodgrass visited in 1961. Snodgrass went also to Europe, met the leading Traditionalists, Martin

Lings and Whitall Perry, and had an interview with Schuon in Zurich. The venture was not a success and he had no further contact with the European Traditionalists, turning his energies to aesthetic work, focussing on Asia. Other members however did take the Sufi path, while one took up membership in a Greek Orthodox community. After the dissolution of the group, members went into architecture, the arts and elsewhere, while others continued to meet on their own until the late 1960s. James Crouch, a notable local Traditionalist published a bibliography of Guénon's work in 1990 and went on to study Coomaraswamy.

The Bookshop group knew of no similar Traditionalist group in Australia during its eleven years from 1952-1963, although there were individuals, especially in Sydney who did make contact. Kelly (1998:38) suggests that other groups appeared as the cultural revolution of the sixties got underway.

The sixties (c.1965-74) was a key period in the penetration of Eastern traditions into the West. There were many guru-figures and followers associated with Muktananda, Meher Baba, Sri Sivananda-Rita, Krishnamurti, Hazrat Inayat Khan (the founder of the Sufi Order of the West), or the Gurdjieff/Ouspensky legacy of teachers, etc. Again a key role was played by esoteric bookshops like The Source Bookshop, off Little Collins Street and the Whole Earth Bookshop in Bourke Street, which for several years sold cheap American editions of otherwise unattainable books, including Traditionalist texts. For our present purposes, authors who had a considerable impact included Aldous Huxley with his compendium of *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), Indries Shah with *The Sufis* (1964) and Alan Watts, whose *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961), and *The Way of Zen* (1957) were much discussed amongst psychology, social work and education students at Melbourne and LaTrobe Universities, and elsewhere. Watts made extensive use of Guénon's work in *The Supreme Identity: An Essay on Oriental Metaphysic and the Christian Religion* (1950), adopting the 'table' of relationships that appeared in Guénon's *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta* (1945). Watts listed eight works by Guénon and six by Coomaraswamy in his annotated bibliography and the whole book is coloured by their cultural pessimism. He also cited Guénon and Coomaraswamy in *Beyond Theology* (1964) (as well as the Australian Raynor C. Johnson, as we note below). This popular interest built in turn upon an unfocussed interest in 'the East' represented, for example, by the notable success since the mid-1950s of the books of 'Lobsang Rampa' (Cyril Hoskins), especially *The Third Eye*, and the continuing interest in Beat writers like Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg and Gary Snyder who popularized Eastern religions, especially Zen. The Transcendental Meditation of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was also becoming prominent. Added to this was the continuing presence of Carl Jung as a master thinker who straddled psychotherapy, mythology and religion, and the major impact of the Anti-Psychiatry Movement, represented by people like R.D.Laing (*The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*), who also explored eastern spirituality and 'higher forms of consciousness'.

This in turn raises the issue of drugs and especially hallucinogens like LSD - or

what Theodore Roszak (1970:155ff.), in his literally 'definitive' book, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, called the 'Counterfeit Infinity'. Counterfeit or not, profound psychedelic experiences had a major impact which led many people to explore mysticism, as Huxley had done in *The Doors Of Perception* (1954). This provoked R.C.Zaehner's book *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (1957), which gave an unintended academic profile to psychedelic mysticism and stimulated the spiritually curious. It also provided one of the first extended discussions of Traditionalism in such a context (Zaehner, 1957:30ff.). For many, LSD led via circuitous paths to an interest in Traditionalism, as a form of intellectualization of their experiences. Interest in mysticism and psychedelics sometimes took cultic form, including one group based outside Melbourne that emerged in the 1960s and later became notorious as 'The Family', at the centre of which was the charismatic Anne Hamilton-Byrne and the retired academic Raynor C. Johnson. The latter had become a major authority on the relationship of science to religion and in comparative religion, taught courses with the Council of Adult Education, and published many books, including *Watcher on the Hills* (ie., the Dandenongs in Victoria) quoted by Watts, and *Imprisoned Splendour*, his major work, which was thoroughly Gnostic in orientation. This was a large, resourceful and influential group, aware of the Traditionalist perspective, and one whose story still remains to be told. Another key text at this time was Jacob Needleman's study of *The New Religions* (1970:213-4) which covered Traditionalism in its Sufi manifestation. Needleman later edited *The Sword of Gnosis* (1974) which introduced many people to Traditionalism, including Oldmeadow.

The sixties was obviously an excellent period for the emergence of interest in new spiritualities and Traditionalism was as much a *critique* of this unfocussed enthusiasm as a symptom of it. This is nowhere better exemplified by the fact that it was the leading academic Traditionalist scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who was invited to Australia in 1970 to deliver the Charles Strong Memorial Lecture in Comparative Religion. His paper "Sufism and the Perennity of the Mystical Quest," had a considerable impact, presenting for the first time in such a prestigious Australian context the central conceptions of Traditionalism. Nasr (1972:20) specifically addressed the dangers of the 'counterfeit infinity', raising the key Traditionalist notions of the importance of the world religions, the esoteric *gnosis* they share, and the need for proper guidance and initiation:

Only a true mysticism that comes from God through one of His revealed religions can render the mystical quest successful. Only a path that comes from God can lead to Him and only such a path can guarantee the soul's final beatitude and union with the One. Only traditional authority can protect the soul from the great dangers that lurk upon the path of him who wishes to climb mountains without a guide and without following an existing trail. The end of one path, of true mysticism, is the absorption of the soul in its divine prototype; the end of the other, the pseudo-mysticism so rampant today, is the dissolution and decomposition of the very substance of the soul.

The problem, as Harold Stewart and his friends had found earlier, was the availability of suitable guides. These seemed necessary, but as Nasr emphasized, great damage could be done by persons prepared to exploit the trust of others. This issue of authentic initiation never seems to have been resolved in the Australian context, although there were figures who were prepared to be at least mentors of those seeking entry - if not initiation - into the wisdom of the world's traditions.

Kelly (1998:38) specifically mentions Ian Kesarcodi-Watson (1939-1984), who began teaching Indian philosophy and religion in the Department of Philosophy at LaTrobe University in 1974, as being "an enthusiast at one time" of Traditionalism, translating Guénon's *Studies in Hinduism* and contributing articles to *Studies in Comparative Religion*. Kesarcodi-Watson had studied philosophy at Melbourne, theology at Oxford, and religious studies at McMaster University. He received his Ph.D from Poona University in 1982. Bailey (1988:x) remarks that Kesarcodi-Watson's interest in "a cross-cultural study of religion, especially in what he believed to be each religion's mystical dimension...was sharpened by his adherence to the ideas of Ananda Coomaraswamy, F.Schuon," and other Traditionalists. Although this adherence faded in Australia as he set about developing an academic career, its central conceptions left its imprint on his outlook and teaching and a bound photocopy version of Guénon's *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* (which was otherwise inaccessible) became available in the LaTrobe University library at his instigation. He was still publishing articles on the decadence of modern thought in *Studies in Comparative Religion* in 1973, an indication of a high level of acceptance at the global centre of Traditionalism. Later, in an article on Wittgenstein and mysticism (1979:54) Kesarcodi-Watson also invoked Guénon's comment on the ineffable nature of the divine: "The highest objective is the absolutely unconditioned state, free from all limitation; for this reason it is completely inexpressible, and all that one can say of it must be conveyed in negative terms."

Kesarcodi-Watson had a significant impact, especially amongst students at LaTrobe University, many of whom were inspired by his enthusiasm and energy. A number subsequently chose to follow various Eastern religions, with some teaching in Steiner Schools around Australia. He also played a key role in setting up the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, and was on the editorial board of the *Journal of Studies in Mysticism*. He was also co-founder and co-editor of the journal *Religious Traditions*, which was published in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While not specifically Traditionalist, its editorial statement declared its objective to be not just "scholarly self-indulgence. We are concerned...not merely with knowledge of religion but religious knowledge," i.e., higher forms of wisdom or *gnosis*. It carried articles by Traditionalist scholars (for example, Nasr, 1978, 1979) and addressed issues of concern to Traditionalists. Nasr and another Traditionalist, Huston Smith (1976) were also on its Board of Consultants. Nasr's "Thoughts on the Human Condition Today" presented the familiar Traditionalist diagnosis of modernity, concluding that the future of mankind required "the continuing and ever-increasing

presence, in all human societies, of persons in harmony with the Real.” (1979:5) On the other hand, other scholars associated with the journal were critical of Traditionalism. Professor Eric Sharpe, for example, only seemed to soften his scepticism after Oldmeadow’s persistence finally succeeded in winning acceptance for his Master’s Thesis on Traditionalism at Sydney University in the early 1980s (Oldmeadow, 1982; cf., Oldmeadow 2000: 217; Sharpe, 1986:262, 265). Kesarcodi-Watson (1984) himself became disaffected from Traditionalism and just before his death denounced the authoritarian and feudal tendencies he detected in Coomaraswamy’s work.

The spiritual energy of the sixties left a considerable legacy but in the 1980s Traditionalism in Australia was marginalized academically and lacked a unifying centre, although Oldmeadow pursued his interests systematically. Other individuals remained isolated, or formed loose networks and transient groups. Some made trips overseas where they encountered the common tendency towards cultish adoration of guru figures, leaving some disillusioned. For example, there seems little doubt that the Traditionalist circle around Schuon in Bloomington, Indiana came eventually to exhibit such characteristics, as several Australians familiar with the situation attest. Sedgwick (1999) and Rawlinson (1997) go into this matter in some depth, concerned that Schuon departed from traditional Sufism by introducing elements from Catholicism, Native American spirituality and Tantra. Late in his life, Schuon developed a curious view of the Virgin Mary and expressed an “almost irresistible urge to be naked like her little child; from this event onwards I went naked as often as possible.” (Sedgwick, 1999:10) There are accounts of ‘Primordial Gatherings’ which depict an elderly Schuon in a state of semi-nudity at the centre of a circle of seminaked female disciples while his female consort “performs a sort of sacred dancing in the nude [and] also has a vision of sorts, in which the Sacred Name entered her body through her vagina...” (Rawlinson, 1997:522) ‘Tantric icons’ were also produced which represented Schuon and this woman as Jesus and Mary.

During the 1980s certain bookshops continued to disseminate Traditionalist ideas, particularly the Theosophical Society Bookshop in Russell St Melbourne which then possessed a number of staff with an extensive knowledge of Traditionalism. The Theosophical Society library also had a lot of Traditionalist literature. Another resource was The Dawn Horse Bookshop in Little Collins St, Melbourne, which featured a large and well-thought-out ‘syllabus of essential works’ on metaphysics and spirituality that included many Traditionalist works. This bookshop was run by the local devotees of ‘Da Free John’ (Franklin Jones, aka ‘Heart Master Da Love-Ananda’ aka ‘Bubba Free John’, etc.) who were quite knowledgeable, although they and the bookshop disappeared in the late 1980s, after Jones had a near-death experience and his cult faced legal action in the USA. In 1987 a program on the New-Right in France and Italy was aired on Radio National and featured an extended treatment of the Italian Traditionalist Julius Evola, provoked by the intense scholarly interest in his work that was then appearing overseas (Sheehan, 1981; Farraresi, 1987). Evola’s

works, for example, *The Metaphysics of Sex*, were also coming out in translation to join those of Guénon, Schuon and Nasr. Other Traditionalist works were also steadily appearing and taking their place in the amorphous ‘New Age’ sections of bookshops around the country.

Traditionalism seeks to encompass vast expanses of sacred time and space and this makes it a perspective of particular relevance to Australia, where eons of time are etched upon vast landscapes. Consequently, as the 1990s began, several significant Australian Traditionalist works were published that sought to come to grips with Aboriginal spiritualities that reflect perhaps 60,000 years of habitation across this continent (Oldmeadow, 1990; 1991; Cowan, 1989). Oldmeadow’s study of the ‘religious tradition of the Australian Aborigines’ concluded that it “enshrined *a sense of proportion and an ordered scheme of values and priorities* which gave precedence to the demands of the divinè, which stamped everyday life with a sense of the imperishable, and which afforded humankind an ontological dignity all but impossible to recover in [the modern] world.” (Oldmeadow, 1991:188) Similarly, local Traditionalist scholars have responded to Australia’s geographical location in the Asia-Pacific region. The Australian scholar Adrian Snodgrass, who was part of the Stewart circle, produced several major works: *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (1985) and *Architecture, Time and Eternity: Studies in the Stellar and Temporal Symbolism of Traditional Buildings* (2 Vols.) (1990). The latter analyzed the relationship between the architecture of the Indian, Chinese, Islamic, Christian, Greek and Roman traditions and the underlying metaphysical first principles of their civilizations. Snodgrass applied Guénon’s theory of correspondence and harmony, displaying “a reflection of principal unity in the multiplicity of the manifested world.” (Snodgrass, 1990:40; cf. Snodgrass, 1985; 1998). Such works were notable additions to the Traditionalist corpus.

## Contemporary Aspects of Traditionalism

Overall, the extensive literature of Traditionalism is now widely available and it can boast an exemplary scholar in Nasr, who is the subject of a forthcoming edition in the prestigious ‘Library of Living Philosophers’ series. It is the focus of substantial academic scholarship, and there are many institutions committed to advancing its cause (for example, The Seyyed Hossein Nasr Foundation, Institute René Guénon of Traditional Studies, The Foundation for Traditional Studies, The Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, etc.). There are publishers specializing in Traditionalist works (for example, World Wisdom Books, SUNY Press, Inner Traditions International, etc), and journals publishing Traditionalist articles (for example, *Sophia*, *Entheos*, *Esoterica*, *ARIES*, *Sacred Web*). All of these are available to Australian Traditionalists.

Traditionalism also informs the radical spirituality of people like Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey), who seek to reclaim the desire “for humanity, for love, for tolerance, for beauty,” that has been submerged within the Traditionalist project by

what he calls the ‘hyperauthoritarianism’ of the ‘guru-prinzip’ (Wilson, 1993:112-3). Such revisionist responses seek to promote the formation of networks of people who pursue spiritual transformation in self-reliant and self-initiated ways, seeking interpretations of the ‘divine laws’ of the various traditions that emphasize the positive aspects of human desire and love. A notable recent Australian example of this approach by a scholar who had a significant interest in Traditionalism is Jim Wafer’s work on homosexuality in Islam (Wafer, 1997a; 1997b).

With the advent of the Internet, Australia, like all other countries, has become almost entirely porous to information and the distinction between ‘Australian’ and ‘other-national’ forms of Traditionalism has begun to break down. The Traditionalist presence on the Internet is substantial, as Sedgwick demonstrates on his Web site, ‘Traditionalists on the Web’ (<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/MSedgwick/>). He identifies more than twenty important Traditionalist groups that have a presence on the Web, along with more than forty that are influenced by Traditionalism in some way. Aside from many sites associated with key people already mentioned in this article (Guénon, Schuon, Evola, etc.), the Internet is also home to Traditionalism and Metahistory (<http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/traditionalismandmetahistory>), and Living Traditions (<http://www.angelfire.com/journal/livingtraditions/intro.htm>), which has Australian email and postal addresses.

Of particular interest is the association of contemporary Traditionalism with anti-globalization movements, reflecting at the level of spirituality the dialectic through which “our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalisation and identity.” (Castells, 1997:1) While the centripetal forces of globalisation centralize economic and political power in accordance with various universalist principles there is a world-wide countervailing centrifugal reassertion of cultural, religious, ethnic and nationalist particularisms under the banner of identity politics (Bendle, 1999). Castells has analysed numerous social movements, including fundamentalists, militias and cults. In the case of Traditionalism, it is a central tenet that humanity in the present *Kali Yuga* has moved into a state of decadence, losing contact with the most essential Truth about its own nature and role within the universe. Both its spiritual and human identity are at risk. This Truth is seen as lying at the esoteric core of the major religious traditions of the world, but it is precisely these particular traditions that are threatened by the universalising forces of globalisation. One response has been a reaffirmation of a communitarian ethic informed by the Traditionalist critique of the modern world. Alain de Benoist, a French politician and intellectual, is the most prominent figure associated with the mobilization of Traditionalism in political opposition to globalisation. He decries the dissolution of communities, secularisation, the disenchantment of the world, social atomization, materialism, rationalism, nihilism and decadence. The modern world is a realm of distraction, diverting humanity from its essential identity and denying it the authentic existence that can only be pursued by embracing Traditionalist insights. He cites Guénon: “If all men understood what the modern world truly is, it would cease to

exist.” (De Benoist, 1993-4: 88)

De Benoist (1993-4; 88) remarks that the opposition between Traditionalism and the modernist ideology of progress is total, but symmetrical and inverse. Indeed, in schematic terms, it could be said that globalisation and Traditionalism confront each other as opposing forms of totalising world-views; the former believes that humanity is to be unified within a capitalist world-system that is liberal and secular in ideology and towards which history is inexorably heading; while the latter believes that humanity was once unified around a common allegiance to a primordial Truth, which is spiritual in essence and from which it has fallen away. In this sense, Traditionalism constitutes a ‘spiritual counter-globalism’ with a role in the identity politics that are shaping world history.

Consequently, Traditionalism has a major presence on Web sites opposed to globalisation, including, for example, New Resistance (<http://resist.gothic.ru/english/english.html>), based in Russia but with links to dozens of other groups all over the world, including Australia. It lists some 110 sites, grouped under ‘Traditionalism/Metaphysics/Philosophy’ (23 sites), ‘New Left/Communist/Anarchist’, ‘Radical Right’, ‘National Bolshevism’, etc.. It operates under the patronage of the Arctogaia Association (<http://www.arctogaia.com/public/eng1.htm>) - “the main Traditionalist structure in Russia,” which has a geopolitical vision of ‘Motherland Russia’ that is profoundly influenced by Traditionalism, which is seen as possessing a perspective on the metaphysics of history and civilizations that is particularly relevant to the future of the largest country on earth. Associated with these sites is Arya Ksatriya (<http://aryaksatriyabooks.bizland.com/index.html>), whose name invokes the Hindu warrior caste. Another link is to *The Scorpion*, a militant New-Right “magazine of metapolitics and culture...opposed to modernism and globalism.” ([http://www.stormloader.com/the\\_scorpion](http://www.stormloader.com/the_scorpion)) We might also cite Conservative Revolution (<http://www.geocities.com/CapitalHill/6824/index.html>) which claims links to all major European countries and Australia. Notably, the New Resistance site also offers links to 30 heavy metal music sites, including Achtung Baby, Blood Axis, Grey Wolves, and Russian Gothic Project. It is indicative of the cultural and political changes underway that there should be a penetration of Traditionalist influence into such a fundamentally important area of contemporary youth culture.

A significant Australian site listed amongst the New Resistance links is *New Dawn* ([www.newdawnmagazine.com.au](http://www.newdawnmagazine.com.au)), a bimonthly magazine sold in newsagents that is the leading publisher of Hermetic and Traditionalist articles in the Australian popular market. Like the groups cited above, *New Dawn* opposes the ‘New World Order’ and the ‘Consensus Reality’ perpetuated by the dominant media. In November 2000 it began a campaign to develop an activist organization concerned, amongst other things, with globalisation, ancient civilizations, cultures and traditions, and radical spirituality. Its editor sees *New Dawn* as “a rallying point for Spiritual Revolutionaries,” and has found that its readership contains “nonconformist, renegade Christians, Muslims, and New Agers [who] are hyper-skeptical of the mainline media

and prefer to buy their reading matter at obscure bookshops.” ([www.newdawnmagazine.com.au/Articles/interview-editor.htm](http://www.newdawnmagazine.com.au/Articles/interview-editor.htm)) “What the world needs is a spiritual revolution so profound it will raise and expand the consciousness of humanity.” (*New Dawn* 62, Sept.-Oct. 2000: 2) *New Dawn* is linked with ‘Life Science Fellowship International’ based in Melbourne, which identifies itself as “a contemporary Gnostic spiritual community preserving a Tradition vouchsafed by the mystical societies and Orders of the past.” Accordingly, *New Dawn* (52, Jan.-Feb. 1999: 55-66) has published a long article, ‘In Search of the Secret School’, by the latter group, which cites Huston Smith, Schuon, Guénon and Evola. *New Dawn* has also published material by Hakim Bey on the concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones, and regularly reviews Traditionalist books.

For *New Dawn*, as with Traditionalists such as Guénon and Evola, the contemporary world is an intolerable realm of maya, illusion and manipulation. This view pervades its pages, but an excellent example - which once again demonstrates the penetration of Traditionalist views into popular culture - is a recent *New Dawn* article on the sci-fi film *The Matrix*, ‘Beyond Left and Right: Escaping the Matrix’: “in this era of globalisation...every-day media-consensus reality - like the Matrix in the film - is seen to be a fabricated collective illusion,” which demands a new politics of spiritual revolution involving arduous initiation, as the film emphasizes (*New Dawn* 62, Sept.-Oct. 2000: 47). As Evola argued, everyday life under the *Kali Yuga* is inherently transient, fragmented and forever unsatisfactory with the only viable response being an unending ‘revolt against the modern world’.

## Conclusion

In Australia, Traditionalism has had a significant presence for some 50 years. It has been frequently controversial but also offered direction for many people seeking spiritual transformation, while inspiring scholarship and debate in metaphysics, comparative religion, spirituality and aesthetics. At present the Internet is allowing its integration into broader international movements informed by Traditionalist perspectives, especially its critique of the modern world. Many of these movements are committed to the politics of identity and anti-globalization, advocating various forms of cultural and spiritual revolution. Indeed, the real significance of Traditionalism might well lie in the future rather than in the past, as it plays its part in the continuing geo-political unfolding of world history within the intense dialectic of universalism and particularism, sameness and difference, modernism and tradition that has been unleashed by globalisation. While Traditionalism may be entering a new phase, it is appropriate to recall the commitment and tenacity of those who have explored its teachings over the past five decades.

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