

POWER TRIPS:
MAKING SACRED SPACE THROUGH
NEW AGE PILGRIMAGE

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Travel to sacred sites constitutes an integral part of New Age spiritual culture. As a largely middle-class phenomenon, New Age travel shares much with the culture of twenty-first century tourism, but it differs in key respects. Some scholars have argued that New Age spirituality is a form of 'self-spirituality', an expression of the trend within advanced capitalism to commodify everything and convert it into a marketplace of choices for individual consumers (e.g. Bruce 1996; Heelas 1992, 1996; Johnson 1995; Lasch 1980; Urban 2000; van Hove 1999). This chapter will examine the phenomenon of New Age pilgrimage at a prominent centre of New Age activities, the town of Sedona in north-central Arizona. By comparing it with tourist activities more generally in the Sedona area, however, we will see that despite some overlap, New Age approaches to space, place, landscape and nature depart markedly from the tourist commodification of landscape that analysts have identified as part and parcel of consumer capitalism. Such a comparison sheds helpful light on the ways in which New Age spirituality both reflects and contests popular understandings of the relationship between self and the natural world.

It should be mentioned that not all spiritual travellers to Sedona and other New Age sites identify themselves as New Age. Such recognised New Age hubs as Sedona, Glastonbury in southwest England, and others, are notable by the overlapping and mutable nature of religious and spiritual categories (see Bowman 2000; Ivakhiv 2001, 2003; Riches and Prince 2001). They have become hubs of spiritual creativity, where New Age adherents mix and mingle with Neo-Pagans, extraterrestrial 'contactees', Theosophists, occultists, liberal Christians, and others, resulting in a hybridisation and cross-breeding of alternative spiritualities. Due to the prominent role of New Age discourse in the pilgrimage activities at these places, however, what emerges from this mix could justifiably be considered a form of 'New Age culture.' Let us begin by examining the geographical contours of New Age culture.

Pilgrimage and Sacred Geography in New Age Culture

As a phenomenon that began within western metropolitan centres, the 1960s counterculture was conspicuous in its tendency to move away from those centres, whether in a relocation 'back to the land' or as a more ephemeral drift to places of exotic allure or vague spiritual import. Of the first group, many rural communards eventually returned to the cities, but a significant minority stayed on and dug their heels into the land. For some, the rural communes and intentional communities which emerged and grew in the 1970s were seen as places in which the practical implications of the 'new consciousness' could be worked out; and over the years surviving communities organised themselves into networks, such as the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, the Alternative Communities Network in Britain, and the International Communes Network. By the mid-1970s, the more explicitly spiritual or New Age communities, such as Scotland's Findhorn Community and India's Auroville, had begun expressing the vision of a neo-monastic communitarianism, consisting of 'centres of light' linked in a network that would provide the infrastructure for a 'new planetary culture' (Spangler 1977; Thompson 1974). Countercultural historian Theodore Roszak (1978) compared the present period with the waning decades of the Roman Empire, and saw this new communitarian "monasticism" as a tested historical model for the "creative disintegration of industrial society", a model which "illuminates the way in which the top-heavy and toxic institutions of an exhausted empire were sifted down into civilised, durable communities where a vital, new sense of human identity and destiny could take root" (1978:289). To this day, Findhorn, Auroville, Tennessee's The Farm, and numerous other intentional communities interact with the broader culture in a dialectic which helps to sustain New Age and alternative spirituality (e.g. Popenoe and Popenoe 1984; McLaughlin and Davidson 1986; Fellowship for Intentional Community 1995).

At the same time, the countercultural movement to rural and non-metropolitan areas closer to home (for instance, to places in the US southwest, northern California and the Pacific northwest states or, in Britain, to southwest England and Wales) began turning into a broader pattern of 'counter stream migration' consisting mainly of middle-class urban expatriates looking for quieter, safer, and more 'natural' havens for relocation. Fuelled by environmentalist discourse and imagery, effective real estate marketing strategies, and the geographic imperatives of

the global tourist economy, the culturally produced nostalgia for rural or natural places has dovetailed with the New Age search for natural 'power,' resulting in the growth of such New Age hubs as Santa Fe and Taos in New Mexico, Sedona in Arizona, Asheville in North Carolina and Glastonbury in England. Among its results are the environmental and social stresses accompanying such growth.

The second line of geographic mobility within the New Age and countercultural milieu, since the late 1960s, has been that cantered around places identified as generically more spiritual or sacred than the urban industrial West. Romanticisation of the non-West, particularly India, Bali, and Central and South America, grew with the rising popularity in the 1960s of books by such authors as Hermann Hesse, Alan Watts, and Carlos Castaneda. Travel to sacred places around the world became a staple of the Western hippie seeker's itinerary in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Already in the late 1960s one can find the idea that a network of 'power places' is spread out across the planet. British mystic John Michell's 1969 book *The View Over Atlantis* served as an influential clarion call expounding such a vision and eliciting a movement of 'Earth mysteries' research and travel (Ivakhiv 2005). By the mid-1970s, a variety of guidebooks had appeared for the growing number of New Age pilgrims and travellers (e.g. *Spiritual Community Guides* 1972–1979; *Pilgrim's Guide to Planet Earth: Power Places* 1974).

The power place idea fermented for two decades within the hippie and New Age counterculture, but it was finally launched into popular consciousness with the Harmonic Convergence of August 1987. Projected to be the largest simultaneously coordinated act of prayer, meditation and ceremony ever to take place at sacred sites throughout the world, the Harmonic Convergence was an overt manifestation of the New Age movement's incipient millenarianism. According to its primary instigator, art historian José Argüelles, the dates 16–17 August 1987 were supposed to mark the synchronous occurrence of several significant events, including the beginning of the final 26-year period of the Mayan calendar's 5200-year "Great Cycle", the "dancing awake" of 144,000 Sun Dance enlightened teachers, a "grand trine" in the astrological fire signs and the first time since the early 1940s that the seven planets have been so closely aligned, and a galactic "calibration point" allowing for the anchoring of divine energy into the power points of the planet for their subsequent transmission through the "planetary grid system" (cited in Buenfil 1991:177–8; Dame-Glerum 1987a:A3). Argüelles called for 144,000 people to meditate, pray, chant

and visualise at sacred sites and power spots throughout the world in order to launch the 25-year transition into a New Age of peace and harmony. Convergences, including celebrities like Shirley MacLaine, John Denver, and Timothy Leary, gathered at places as varied as Sedona, California's Mount Shasta, Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, the Black Hills of South Dakota, New York's Central Park, Glastonbury and Stonehenge, Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Pyramid in Egypt, and Mount Olympus in Greece, to celebrate the event and to "create a complete field of trust by surrendering themselves to the planet and to the higher galactic intelligences which guide and monitor the planet" (cited in Buenfil 1991:177–8). As the list of Convergence sites suggests, New Age spirituality envisions what could be considered an 'Eliadian' geography of nonhomogeneous space, marked by special places (hierophanies, kratophanies; see Eliade 1959:20ff.) which stand out as especially important, meaningful or powerful. These places can be distinguished between natural and cultural sites, and I will examine each of these categories in turn.

The first category includes mountains, unusual rock formations, spectacular lakes and canyons, falls and hot springs, and other natural landscapes which are characterised by some outstanding quality, as seen, for instance, in the examples of mounts Shasta, Fuji, and Kailash, the Sedona area of Arizona, the Haleakala Crater in Hawaii, and Lake Titicaca in Peru. These are places where the power, vitality, or sheer otherness of nonhuman nature seems obviously present, places where the Earth seems to speak, relatively unobscured by the din of modern civilisation. Such places are believed by many to harbour 'Earth energies' of some sort—energies which are thought to be beneficial and health-promoting in their effects and catalytic to spiritual growth.

If such places are obviously valued for their natural features, others, such as Stonehenge, Machu Picchu, and the Great Pyramid of Gizeh, are clearly valued for their cultural monuments, built structures, and age-old human uses. The connection between the two kinds of sacred sites, for many New Age devotees, is that the latter are believed to have been constructed in coordination with the natural energies represented by the former. In other words, ancient cultures, such as the megalithic monument builders of the British Isles, the temple builders of Mesoamerica and the Near East, prehistoric 'Goddess cultures,' or the legendary civilisations of Atlantis and Lemuria, are thought to have constructed their own monuments on powerful 'energy points.' According to different accounts, ancient peoples either intuitively per-

ceived these Earth energies or they practised a proto- or quasi-scientific geomancy based on Earth energy alignments which follow geometrical patterns or form planetary 'energy grids.'

In the growing body of popular literature on such power spots, these landscapes are seen as places of personal transformation, and pilgrimages to them are considered a tool of such transformation. The majority of such 'power places' are located away from major urban centres. The cultural sites are generally associated with cultural traditions that are thought to be sufficiently older than and different from western modernity such that they come to represent an alternative to the disenchanted West. As such, cultural power places fall readily into the tradition of what Donald Lopez (1995:261) has called romantic orientalism, by which places like India, Bali, and parts of South America are imagined to be more authentic, representative of timeless tradition, sacredness, and spiritual wisdom. Such places are seen to offer restoration and salvation to the progressive, rational, but despirited West, and their cultural representatives are generally expected to conform to the images we westerners have created for them, whether that be as noble savages, bearers of traditional wisdom, or mysterious sensualists (see Mehta 1991; Bartholomeusz 1998; King 1999).

Photography and the New Age Gaze

There is a fine line between pilgrimage and tourism, and as this line is a mutable and socially constructed one, it may be preferable to write the two together, that is, to speak of pilgrim-tourists. After all, the same people can at times, even by their own criteria, be tourists travelling to see and experience something that they can take back with them, in the form of photographs, stories, or experiences, to their home place; and at other times be pilgrims, genuine seekers open to spiritual encounters which may transform them in the process. The movement of pilgrim-tourists over time, however, has given rise to an international New Age infrastructure, a network of healing and retreat centres, retreats, spiritual communities, and places of New Age commerce. Just as travel books and tours produce what John Urry (1990) has called a tourist gaze, so New Age pilgrimage guidebooks and sacred site tours have produced a certain New Age encounter with the landscape, which includes a New Age gaze, but, as will be shown below, which is always more than a mere gaze.

But let us examine what a New Age visuality might be. Photographer Courtney Milne's lavishly produced and beautifully photographed book *The Sacred Earth* (1991a), with a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, exemplifies what could be called the Earth cathedrals genre of visual representation. Milne's five-year odyssey to sacred sites on seven continents was instigated, according to the author, by a 'mysterious-looking document' called *Revelations from the Melchisadek Priesthood*. This book by New Age author Robert Coon describes 'The Twelve Sacred Places of the Earth': Glastonbury, Ayers Rock (Uluru) in central Australia, Haleakala Crater in Hawaii, Bolivia's Islands of the Sun and Moon, Palenque in Mexico, the Great Pyramid of Gizeh and Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, and the mountains Tongariro (New Zealand), Shasta (California), Kailas (Tibet), Fuji (Japan), Table Mountain (South Africa), and the Four Sacred Mountains of Bali. This list echoes and overlaps with others which are readily available in numerous books and on countless web sites devoted to sacred places, power spots, Goddess sites, and the like.¹ For New Age Earth pilgrims, who consider the Earth itself a potent and divine being, such places are Gaia's theophanies, and pilgrimage offers access to the power and spiritual secrets they hold.

Milne describes his thinking during his odyssey: "Was I at this sacred spot as a pilgrim to meditate or as a photographer to get the job done? As the project progressed, however, I realised that I had been training myself for years to meditate, not by sitting in the lotus position with my legs crossed but by looking through the viewfinder at the exquisite shapes and forms and letting the 20th century evaporate from my consciousness" (1991b:42). Curiously, this passage suggests that his dependence on twentieth century photographic equipment has also evaporated from his consciousness, allowing him access to an authentic nature undefiled by modernity, a timeless nature that exists outside of history and safely beyond the reach of the social world with its industrial as well as its touristic encompassment of ecosystems and natural places. And it allows him to equate the twentieth-century technological activity of picture-taking with the 'timeless' activity (or non-activity) of meditation.

¹ E.g. Rufus & Lawson (1991); Bryant (1991); Devereux (1992); Joseph (1992); Swan (1990, 1992); McLuhan (1996); Leviton (2002); and <http://www.sacredsites.com/manu/Intro.html>.

Yet, photography has been one of the primary ways in which such places of power have become established as magnets for the very modern activity of tourism—a complex of activities that some claim have now become the world's largest single industry. In a rapidly expanding global economy, tourism constitutes one of the main engines of economic growth for numerous countries, regions, and cities, and it is becoming more so for the kinds of non-urban centres that dominate Milne's and others' lists of sacred landscapes. Within the amorphous networks of New Age spirituality, power places become known in part through word of mouth, with seekers and travellers exchanging travel tales among themselves, but in part also through tourist marketing and the reproduction of images. The role of photography and visual imagery in the development of a New Age sacred geography can hardly be denied; in fact, it is doubtful whether 'New Age nature religion', with its emphasis on Gaia and her power places, could have emerged were it not for the by-now ubiquitous image of the whole Earth as seen from space. To the extent that New Age sacrality both relies on and contributes to the commodification of a landscape, it would seem to be complicit with the economic processes of consumer capitalism. To gauge the extent of this complicity, let us first examine the role of visual representation, and specifically the representation of natural landscapes, in the commodification and appropriation of the natural world for the projects of capitalist enterprise.

Several cultural historians and philosophers have argued that visual perception has been hegemonic among the senses in western modernity. As Martin Heidegger (1977) argued, our ocular centric age had turned the world into a 'picture' and thereby made possible the conquest and transformation of nature into a 'standing reserve' to be surveyed, unlocked, and transformed into usable energy and profit. The dominant modes of Western modernist visuality, according to cultural historians, have been rooted in Cartesian perspectivalism, the tradition according to which a coherent, distinct subject gazes out at an empirical, discrete object, with no inherent connection between the two and neither changing in the process of seeing or being seen (e.g. Rorty 1979; Bordo 1987; Jay 1994). In the Cartesian relation, the seeing subject is active, viewing the objects of the world on his or her own mental representational screen, whilst the object seen is passive, simply there to be viewed. In the words of historian Martin Jay, the ascendancy of classical linear perspective in the Renaissance meant that the 'participatory involvement of more absorptive visual modes

was diminished, if not entirely suppressed,' and the gaze fell on objects of desire 'largely in the service of a reifying male look that turned its targets into stone' (Jay 1992:181).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European and Euro-American artists and critics elaborated several distinct visual modalities atop this generally Cartesian substrate of perspectival landscape art. In representing the landscapes of the American West, in particular, American artists made extensive use of the magisterial gaze, a mastering and panoramic view from on high, which constructs nature as scenic vista and spectacle, to be gazed at and admired for its sweeping visual beauty and to thereby be possessed by its viewer (Boime 1991). The late nineteenth century opening up of the West by the railroad companies was facilitated by the landscape art, photography, and literature that served to romanticise the western landscape: while, on the one hand, the photography of Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson, and others, served to sanctify the landscape, on the other, it was both a necessary prelude and a strategy by which the railroad companies and real estate and mining entrepreneurs colonised the land and opened it up for the extraction of its resources (e.g. Dorst 1999; Rothman 1998; Snyder 1994). In today's global economy, non-urban areas have frequently already been divested of their resources, or, alternatively (as in the western United States and Britain), resource values have plummeted as new resource frontiers have been opened up in parts of the world where labour is cheaper and laws more flexible. Tourism has consequently become a popular solution for such places as Sedona, Santa Fe, Aspen, and other hubs of the American 'New West' (Riebsame and Robb 1997; Rothman 1998; Campbell 2000), while an analogous 'manufacture of heritage' has been occurring in Britain and parts of Europe.

Sedona as Tourist Site

Located part-way between Phoenix and the Grand Canyon, the small town of Sedona and its surrounding area attract some four to six million tourists a year. Sedona has also for decades been a hub of New Age activities, including the home base of a number of spiritual groups (such as the Aquarian Concepts Community, Eckankar, and the Aquarian Educational Foundation) and a large community of psychic channellers centred around the magazine *Sedona: Journal of Emergence* (Ivakhiv 2001). Its famous red rock landscape is highly photogenic, its 'imageability'

being evident to visitors at least since 1895, when archaeologist Jesse Walter Fewkes described its rock formations as “weathered into fantastic shapes suggestive of cathedrals, Greek Temples, and sharp steeples of churches extending like giant needles into the sky”, adding that, “This place, I have no doubt, will sooner or later become popular with the sightseer” (cited in Rigby 1979). By the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood had begun to make use of that landscape in its mythic portrayals of the American West; to date, over sixty feature films (including *Broken Arrow*, *Johnny Guitar*, and *Billy the Kid*) have been shot here. The town is nestled in the ‘red rock country’ formed by erosion of the Mogollon Rim, the 1000ft (300m) high escarpment that makes up the southern rim of the Colorado Plateau. Reddish brown and vermilion, copper, orange and magenta sandstones and shales have been sculpted by wind and water here into spectacular mesas, buttes, spires, columns, domes, and arches. With such dramatic visual possibilities, the engine of the town has become the demand to produce, stage-manage, and market visual pleasure, and the town has been successfully sold as an upmarket destination resort, a picture-postcard haven for exurban second-homers, retirees, and tourists.

One of the most effective marketing tools for the selling of Sedona has been the slick and glossy full-colour publication *Sedona Magazine*. Filled with full-page picture-postcard photographs of red rock scenery, resorts and subdevelopments, golf courses, and advertisements for art galleries (with their characteristic Native American and southwest kitsch), the magazine, sold at newsstands across much of the United States, attempts to elicit a kind of open-jawed excitement in its target audience. The back cover of a typical issue can be taken as an example of its visual strategy. It features the caption “A.H. . . isn’t this why you came to Sedona?” above three rectangular-framed, wide-angle images of high-contrast reddish rock formations majestically looming above a forest-green landscape and set against the blue and grey of the sky. Each of them presumes a viewing subject positioned magisterially well above ground level at a panoramic distance from the monuments portrayed—three windows onto a scenic landscape viewed from an invisible panoptic location hovering in mid-air somewhere above Sedona. The advertisement is for Casa Contenta, “Sedona’s premier residential community”, yet there is no residence in sight nor any sign of human habitation at all. Clearly, this is one reason why people come to Sedona: to see views that can only be captured by camera—in fact, the redness of the landscape is often accentuated through the use of

colour filters—because they carefully omit the signs of human activity that have made them possible. The advertisement, like numerous others, offers a promise that effaces its own materiality, a God's eye view from everywhere and nowhere, and the prospect of living in a place uncontaminated by living itself.

In this sense, Sedona falls squarely into the tradition of the magisterial and panoramic gaze—nature as a sublime object of desire to be gazed at, possessed and savoured. Among visitors this gaze becomes effected through the taking of photographs, while among those who stay it mediates the buying and selling of real estate. Indeed, this imageability has become part of the defence of the red rock landscape against further development. A proposal to build a bridge over Oak Creek at a place called Red Rock Crossing—considered necessary by many to deal with the traffic of some 16–20,000 cars per day passing through the centre of town—has been vigorously contested by environmentalists who argue that such a bridge would destroy the beauty of the 'most photographed spot in Arizona.' Red Rock Crossing runs directly below a rock formation known as Cathedral Rock, a highly distinct signature monument that graces photographs, postcards, and tourist brochures for Sedona more frequently than any other. This photogenicity argument cuts to the heart of the paradox of the American West: it is a kind of reversal of the landscape's role in the creation of that mythic West, with its image now become part of its own defence against further development.

Sedona as Sacred Site: Vision, Compulsion, and the Invisible

Sedona's New Age or metaphysical community, one of the most concentrated of such communities in North America, has been growing steadily since the late 1950s, but this growth accelerated dramatically after psychics Dick Sutphen and Page Bryant publicly identified the area's power spots or 'vortices' in the late 1970s, and especially following the Harmonic Convergence of 1987. The community includes a variety of psychics and spiritual counsellors, therapists and alternative health practitioners, and others who have left behind better-paying jobs and lives elsewhere and taken on whatever work they can find in the retail or service industries. Local New Age authors and tour guides tout the vortices, describe the extraordinary experiences they and others have had at them, draw up maps of the 'interdimensional landscape,' and encourage visitors to partake of them as well.

The role of visual imagery in New Age pilgrimage has rarely been studied. Perhaps the best known example of a case where an image of a natural landscape formation has been instrumental in attracting spiritual seekers to that landscape is, oddly enough, to be found in a Hollywood movie, Steven Spielberg's 1977 blockbuster *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The film portrays a number of seemingly ordinary citizens dreaming or otherwise receiving visions of a monument which, on an inner compulsion, they then seek out. The monument turns out to be Devils Tower (Bear Butte) in Wyoming, to which the seekers congregate in time for the descent of the benevolent and godlike extraterrestrial mothership. Mirroring the film, the visual spectacle of Sedona's landscape has had a similar effect on many of the New Agers whom I have interviewed there. Many reported arriving in the area because they felt a strange connection to the landscape: like the characters in Spielberg's movie, they followed some inner compulsion, a feeling of being irresistibly drawn to Sedona, or obsessing over it after they first heard about it or saw photographs of the area (see Dongo 1988; Ivakhiv 2001:187ff.; and Bowman 1993 regarding the same trope in Glastonbury).

This trope of inner compulsion is one that is found throughout New Age discourse. The New Age travel magazine *Power Trips* opens up a panorama of possibilities to its readers. In an article entitled 'How to decide which place you should visit', editor Robert Scheer writes:

Suppose you go to a travel presentation where you see several hundred slides, taken at twenty different sites in a dozen different countries. It's likely that one or two pictures will really 'jump out' at you. They may seem especially interesting, or beautiful, or dramatic. Perhaps you'll feel 'shivers' when you see them. If this happens, you're getting a signal about where you need to go.

It happened for one man when he was simply walking down the street one day, not thinking about going anywhere. He was walking by the window of a travel agency when a poster in the window caught his eye. It was of the giant stone statues on Easter Island. He suddenly felt an unexplained urge to go to Easter Island. Even more amazing, a short time later, he happened to receive a free airline ticket to South America! Taking advantage of this remarkable serendipity, he went to Easter Island, where he received a message telling him what direction his life should take.²

² <http://www.newagetravel.com/decide.shtml>.

Power places serve here in a fashion analogous to that of a deck of Tarot cards or some other divination method. A certain few may be selected for you; you may get an inner impulse or intuition from glancing at one—and, voilà, you know where you must travel. The ‘free airline ticket’ may seem a little unbelievable, but it does allow the question of cost to go unasked.

Once drawn to a particular place, what do New Age tourist-pilgrims do there? Manuals for New Age pilgrimage provide a plethora of suggestions and advice for pilgrims, detailing not only the places to be visited, but the activities to be performed and attitudes to be cultivated in the process. The more conscientious guidebooks advise extensive preparation and a certain etiquette, generally involving some form of purification or ‘clearing,’ assessment of one’s motivation, and a general sense of humility and respect. Many recommend asking permission of the spirit of the site or engaging in dialogue with its invisible guardians. Some writers advocate specific methods of altering one’s consciousness, including fasting, meditation, ritual drumming and movement, dreamwork, trance induction, or the use of psychoactive plants, in order to facilitate attunement or interfacing with the Earth or the spiritual beings associated with the place. And following whatever ritual or attunement the practitioner undergoes, most authors suggest some expression or token of gratitude before departing, whether it be leaving an offering of tobacco or sage, a few drops of blessed or pure water, a seed or flower from your garden, a crystal or attractive stone, or simply a prayer or ritual gesture.³

The notion of attunement is central to New Age pilgrimage, as is the belief in the efficacy of ceremonial ritual. The act of travelling to and performing rituals at sacred sites is often believed to have tangible effects on the sites and on the world at large. As many of these writings make clear, however, much of the desire motivating such pilgrimage is a personal one—the desire for experience, personal transformation or self-actualisation—which would seem to support the claim that New Age religion restricts itself to a self-centred spiritual individualism. Visiting sacred sites, however, is for many pilgrims only a beginning or a punctuation mark in a more extended life-pilgrimage. There

³ Other such guidebooks include Corbett (1988); Joseph (1992); Swan (1990, 1992); Kryder (1994); LaChappelle (1988); Johansen & Barclay (1987); Dannelley (1991); Pettis (1999); Leviton (2002); and <http://www.sacredsites.com/manu/Intro.html>.

are those for whom such places become so important that they leave behind their former places of residence and resettle closer to their 'elective Centre.'

In the case of Sedona, pilgrim-tourists (and spiritual immigrants, since many who begin as pilgrims or tourists have ended up relocating there permanently) engage in a variety of individual and collective activities that serve to reinforce their claims about the landscape's sacrality. These activities include hiking or walking the land and repeatedly visiting specific locations with spiritual intent; cultivating a state of psychic receptivity while there through meditation, visualisation, chanting, chakra activation, invocation or channelling of guides or spirits; the arrangement of stones or rocks in circular medicine wheels (modelled after Plains Indian practices) and the conducting of ceremonies within them.⁴ Rather than being taken apart after use, as some claim would be a more traditional practice, medicine wheels in Sedona are often left in place after their use, and sometimes tobacco, coins, pine cones, or other personal offerings are left behind as well. Such medicine wheels seem to be built for three main purposes: to mark out the place as sacred (which could be seen as a territorial claim or type of religious graffiti); to facilitate the prayer, meditation, or ritual performed within them; and to effectively harmonise with or channel the natural energies believed to flow through the landscape. As an example of this third goal, a large medicine wheel on public land outside Sedona was built repeatedly, even after being dismantled by US Forest Service rangers, in order to "heal a broken ley line", in the words of one of the leaders of this action.

Aside from these more focal practices, pilgrims' sacred site encounters involve an array of background activities and perceptual interactions with the landscape, associated with the movements and physical exertion needed to manoeuvre their way through the topography on the way to a sacred location; the changing visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinaesthetic stimuli at different stages of a pilgrimage route or climb; the colours, shapes, textures, and other physical qualities of the landscape; the temporal or durational factor, as pilgrims undergo the process of journeying, expectation and desire, encountering a site, performing a

⁴ Space does not allow me to delve into the vexed issue of the non-Native 'cultural appropriation' of Native spirituality, though such appropriation is widespread in Sedona. See Rothstein in this volume; Ivakhiv (2001:178–9, 193–7, 278–9); and Taylor (1997), for discussions of these issues.

ritual or attunement, and returning home; and all of these factors and qualities and their experiential and interpretive results as they develop over daily, seasonal and annual cycles. Over time, the experiential and interpretive data acquired through such activities is collected and sedimented within the interpretive communities for whom the place is held to be sacred. As such a community becomes more firmly anchored within the landscape, its interpretations take on an increasing matter-of-factness for its members, which they then pass on to New Age culture at large, with the incentive of boosting Sedona's destination value among potential New Age tourists and visitors.

As we see, New Age pilgrimage places a high premium on openness to signs or signals, perceptions, and intuitions, and it is this quality of encounter that makes New Age pilgrimage a different form of place practice than the Cartesian relationship embodied in photography, sightseeing, and other forms of commodification. In the debate over Red Rock Crossing, New Agers raised a very different kind of argument to the conservationists' argument that the place should be saved because it is, among other things, the most photographed place in Arizona (or in the southwest). For New Agers, Cathedral Rock and Red Rock Crossing are among the most potent of Sedona's energy vortices. New Age author Richard Dannelley has written that, "[W]e must do everything we can to make sure that this bridge is never built... Cathedral Rock is sacred and a highway through this area can not be allowed. *Cathedral Rock is an ascension point*" (Dannelley 1993:62, italics in original). Dannelley continues, "Placing a metal bridge over Oak Creek at this place would also interfere with the spiritual energy that flows along the creek," (idem) and, "many people, myself included, have encountered Angelic entities in this area" (ibid.: 54). Another prominent psychic, Page Bryant, informed her readers that "two magnificent Archangels stand guard over the 'entrance to the inner sanctum'" at Red Rock Crossing, and that this spot is the only 'magnetic vortex' in the area and thus vital to the energetic balance of the landscape (Bryant et al. 1991:13). For another local spiritual group, the Aquarian Concepts Community, Red Rock Crossing is nothing less than the axial power point on the Earth's surface.

The New Age community, in fact, shows a profound distrust for visual representation. Instead, it valorises the invisible and interdimensional landscape. New Age activities are directed less at gazing onto an objectified landscape and more at listening, receiving, channelling or tuning

in to voices or signs that lurk hidden behind the observable façade of the landscape. Many of Sedona's more prominent channellers are regularly featured in the locally based *Sedona: Journal of Emergence*, which has become one of the leading media for channelled spiritual writings in North America. The magazine features a streaming heteroglossic stew of millennial prophecies, astrological predictions, and spiritual and personal advice penned in quasi-scientific jargon by channels with names gleaned from science-fiction (Kryon, Vywamus, Zoosh, the Galactic Council), romantic fantasies about Native Americans (Red Cloud and the Council of Eight), angelic personages, and even 'Mother Earth (Gaia)' herself. *Journal of Emergence* bills itself as presenting "the latest channelled information on what to do as humans and the earth move from the third to the fourth dimension—how these energies affect you and the earth".

The ambiguous notion of energies plays a crucial function within New Age discourse, serving as a kind of conceptual glue that binds alternative and non-western physico-medical theories, ideas inherited from late nineteenth and early twentieth century spiritualism and metaphysical religion, the post-1960s vocabulary of humanistic and consciousness psychology, and an imagined future in which advanced technology is reconciled with earthly and cosmic ecology. The connection between energy and rocks is one that has been especially pursued within New Age thought, particularly during the crystal craze of the 1980s, and the two together constitute a type of 'New Age sublime' that is readily found in Sedona's looming ancient rock formations. That red rock landscape often serves as a background—but in some cases the foreground as well (e.g. Bryant et al. 1991)—for the communicative productivity of Sedona's psychics, yet these voices show little interest in the monumental visuality splayed across the pages of the business community's (rival) *Sedona Magazine*. The few photographs to be found in *Journal of Emergence* tend to be grainy, black-and-white images of inscrutable lights in the sky, mysterious 'flying disks' captured on film surreptitiously in the night sky, and other signs of meaningful life beyond the visible spectrum. The channellers portray the landscape as redolent with invisible and mysterious, but psychically perceivable activity, filled with energy portals and interdimensional doorways, dissemination points, stargates, spiritual presences and alien beings. In contrast, then, to the dominant representations of Sedona, this landscape harbours far more than the eye can see, making up a neo-magical universe in which

particular locations (canyons, rock outcroppings, and so on) correspond to specific stellar constellations, cosmic forces, chakras and body parts, elemental qualities, and spiritual states.

Textual Production of New Age Sacred Space

To better grasp this neo-magical cosmos, let us examine Richard Leviton's book *The Galaxy on Earth: A Traveler's Guide to the Planet's Visionary Geography* (2002). The book is by a prolific writer on Earth mysteries, and is an encyclopaedic compendium of information on fifty-six sacred sites culled from a tremendous variety of sources liberally mixed with the insights and imaginings from the author's own visionary experiences at the sites or in meditation over the meanings of the sites. The book presents a most impressively wide-ranging synthesis of New Age views on sacred space. Leviton's theoretical tool-kit is a voraciously eclectic mixture of mythology and mysticism from several of the world's religious and mythological traditions; ideas taken from occult, esoteric, theosophical, metaphysical, astrological, and medical-spiritual traditions; the work of writers, scholars, and scientists, including Mircea Eliade, Henry Corbin, Gershom Scholem, Ananda Coomaraswamy, James Lovelock, Doris Lessing, and numerous others; writings and speculations on sacred geometry, sacred mathematics, and related fields; and New Age cosmological theories about galactic connections between the Earth and Sirius, the Pleiades, and other constellations, star systems, and galaxies. What Sedona's channellers are groping towards in their visionary encounters with the red rock landscape of Sedona, Leviton attempts to do, with rather greater erudition, for the entire planet.

Leviton's basic model of sacred space is one which follows the Hermetic dictum 'As above, so below,' to which he adds "and in the middle too". He sees the Earth's sacred sites as patterned in a "planetary grid" which constitutes "an edited, condensed version of the galaxy" (Leviton 2002:18), with 85,000 different stars represented across the planet's surface. Correspondingly, "all the galaxy on Earth is but a magnificent planetary mirror of the spiritual organization of the human" (ibid.: 20). Leviton admits to the solipsism of his approach, which is consistent both with the Hermetic and Gnostic traditions and with the New Age focus on the self. As he puts it, "everywhere you go, it's you": "Remembering the Self is what the Earth's visionary geography facilitates for us. That's why it's here: to help us wake from this long slumber of forget-

ting,” and to allow us to “restore our full memory of our cosmic and spiritual origins” (ibid.: 20–21). The only references to a broader social community here are of galactic proportions: each of us is undergoing an evolutionary process, but we have guides ‘out there’ and ‘within’ to help us with our efforts and to help the Earth undergo its own evolutionary unfoldment. On the latter point, Leviton provides meditations which suggest that there are benefits to the Earth from what he calls “responsible sacred sites tourism”. One of these benefits is planetary detoxification, something that will supposedly occur automatically when we travel to sacred sites with right intent. But he also provides meditations which suggest to pilgrims that they “ask Gaia where it hurts” in order to find out what needs to be done, or at least what images we should be holding in our minds as we meditate and travel.

In the end, however, *The Galaxy on Earth*, like *Power Trips* magazine, serves mainly as a travel manual. And even if some of the travel is to be done in inner space, the book presumes a reader who is equipped to travel—that is, a westerner with the wealth and spending money allowing for travel not to one place, but to many. It also presumes the infrastructure that accommodates travel to these places, and it takes for granted the notion that the world is one’s oyster—a naturalisation of the sort of mobility that mirrors the mobility of capital in an age of liberalised and globalised, post-Fordist, flexible-accumulation capitalism.

Milne’s and Leviton’s photographic approaches to sacred space can be taken as emblematic of the two main tendencies within New Age sacred space discourse: the first, a visually-directed form of representation, shaped by late modern discourses of the beautiful and the sublime, but which acknowledges and even seeks for openings to sacred meanings; the second a form of representation that has abandoned late modern visuality altogether and has instead opted for a dense, neo-magical web of polyvocal narrative, multi-sensory exploration, and extrasensory gnosis.

We had earlier suggested that Courtney Milne’s desire to allow the twentieth century to “evaporate from [his] consciousness” resulted in a lapse of consciousness by which he failed to acknowledge his dependence on twentieth century technology, and instead was able to reify the sacred as transcendent and transhistorical, existing in some space beyond historical time and outside of society, an essentialised nature full of power and energy, but disingenuous, unreal, a kind of fantasy. Apart from the goals he sets for himself, however, a closer look at his

photography reveals a greater complexity. In fact, his photographs rarely fall into the tradition of the magisterial gaze. Flipping through *The Sacred Earth*, one gets the impression not so much of a planet for the taking, a storehouse of resources to be used by humans for our own ends, as of a planet that is very much alive and teeming with its own energies, possibilities, and mysteries. A large number of the photographs draw attention to Milne's techniques, his process of selecting a view, or the time and place of the produced image. And while the implied viewer of some of the images is located at the 'magisterial' location above and far from the focal object, in the case of many others, the viewer may be located astride the object (without much of a sense of separation from it), below it, or even caught within it, surrounded by an object that cannot be possessed but only entered.

In fact, much New Age practice reflects this desire to enter inside the energy centres of the Earth, a desire that sits uneasily alongside the project of sacred geometry and the numerous global grids that have been proposed to map out Gaia's energy fields (e.g. Becker & Hagens 1991; Walsh 1993). A closer examination of these discourses of Gaia, Earth energies, and sacred geometry, will provide us with a better sense of these tensions and ambiguities in New Age ideas of nature. 'Gaia' has become a provocative shorthand for a holistic theory of the biosphere, and, for the spiritually inclined, it is an image representing the divinity of the Earth. Many women have found Gaia to be an empowering image, while environmentalists have found it useful as a personification of a revalorised relationship between humans and Mother Nature. And yet, on some level, sex-typing the planet as woman and as mother could be said to reinforce the same basic stereotypes that have accompanied the modernist (and masculinist) domination of nature (e.g. Merchant 1990). The feminine is idealised yet remains passive, and humanity is still perceived as a masculine agent, a central nervous system (Lovelock & Epton 1975:306) or global brain (Russell 1984) to the unconscious, feminine body of the Earth. If the idea of Gaia suggests to some a need to care for our nurturing mother, androcentric attitudes have historically tended to promote a schizoid love/hate response on the part of the collective male-identified ego toward its mother. It is that mother, after all, whose overbearing presence constrains the growing adolescent and is rejected in the process of becoming a man. As monolithic as the proverbial mother-in-law, Gaia may not be an advance for a postmodern reconceptualisation of human-Earth relations.

If Gaia is meant to describe the Earth as a whole, the most common New Age trope which articulates the recognition of a local numinosity is that of Earth energies. Energy metaphors have their own history, having worked their way into New Age discourse in part from the spiritualist and metaphysical movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like other quasi-scientific jargon, they are intended to grant New Age discourse some semblance of authority, while their ambiguity makes for a polysemic applicability to nearly anything. The fact that the Gaia and energy discourses frequently accompany each other is a reflection of the ubiquity of alternative medical traditions within New Age thought. Chinese acupuncture, martial arts like Tai Ch'i and Aikido, unorthodox western systems such as polarity therapy and Reichian bodywork, and more recently popularised systems such as Reiki, all conceive of the body in energetic terms: a healthy body is one in which the flow of life-energy is unimpeded. If the Earth is identified as Gaia, then it is reasonable to suppose that life-energy flows through its body, and that there will be places, chakras or energy centres, where this flow is more intense and the energy more concentrated than elsewhere—Gaia's erogenous zones, so to speak.

In its plurality, its suggestiveness and ultimate elusiveness, the notion of Earth energies has played an important function within New Age discourse. But it remains limited in its evocative capacity, suggesting as it does a physical universe uninhabited by beings or personal others. As such, it is vulnerable to the Heideggerian critique referred to earlier, insofar as it suggests that nature can be unlocked, transformed, and in the process subjected to management by some technocracy of, say, geomancer-engineers. This trend is especially evident in the notion of sacred geometry, which frequently accompanies the energy discourse (as we see in Leviton's book). The idea is that that Earth's energies are structured according to specific geometrical and mathematical patterns and formulas, and that the proper human relationship to them is to channel, manipulate, or work those energies in order to follow those patterns. Energy also suggests a kind of convertibility, whereby one form of energy can be transformed into another. In an unwitting example of such a conversion of energies, pilgrimage leaders Suzanne McMillan-McTavish and Glen McTavish, founders of Sacred Sight Journeys International, recount their several-year mission to complete a circuit of Transceiving Stations intended "to unite the Americas on the ley lines (Earth's energy grid) and assist the Earth in her ascension

through harmony, balance and stability” (McMillan-McTavish & McTavish 1994). By 1994, 44 of these stations had already been created, and 40 more were planned by the year 2000. After they were “given the word to move to Sedona”, Glen spent three weeks in Phoenix “taking an accelerated course to get an Arizona real estate license in order to sell vacation interval ownerships. Spirit had let us know that Glen’s mission had shifted after he had arrived in Sedona” (idem). The tour leaders continue, without a hint of irony, “Glen’s mission now is to move large amounts of financial energy and real estate (Earth energy) around to create the physical spaces for Suzanne to anchor the Light for Spirit to move into” (idem). Earth energy thus becomes real estate which becomes financial energy, all in an invisible circuit of flows and transformations (and see Mikaelsson 2001).

We see, then, that the desire to ‘get inside’ the Earth and explore its spiritual-erogenous potentials rests uneasily alongside the desire to survey the planet, map out its sacred locations and organise them into a comprehensive planetary energy grid, and channel those energies for one’s benefit. On the one hand, there is a willingness to submit to the planet or to engage in a planetary eroticism, humanity and the Earth partnered in some mysterious way. On the other hand, there is the desire to master the Earth intellectually, mathematically, philosophically, to map out the correspondences between its chakras, domes, and stargates, and the angelic, Pleiadian, and intergalactic overlords that run the cosmic biocomputer so much better, it seems, than our own scientists ever could. This entire project reflects a desire that was only rendered possible in the 1960s through the development of visual technologies that delivered us photographs of the Earth from space—visual technologies that were by-products of the space race, itself a product of the military race between cold-warring superpowers. With that space race over but other global divisions and threats looming large on the horizon, New Age pilgrimage can be seen as a kind of vote for globality, a desire for a global society at peace with itself, unthreatened by hostile social forces, environmental risks, or other fault lines of early twenty-first century civilisation. Such a globality is a promising vision, but without a recognition of its complicity in generating those very fault lines, an acknowledgement of its own dependence on global structures of inequality and uneven development, the vision remains a selective and incomplete one.

Conclusion

New Age pilgrimage thus represents a multitude of desires: to reach out towards Gaia's motherly embrace, to feel strange energies and open mysterious portals into the unknown, to map out the alternative universes exposed by New Age theories and gnostic insights. The sacred or visionary geography of New Age spirituality is in many ways novel in its embrace of a global, post-Apollo and post-Sputnik perspective. But its globality appears to seek a sacred geometry at the expense of the more mundane but ever-present geometry of power, in geographer Doreen Massey's (1994) terms, a geometry which keeps some locked into tightly bounded, highly localised relations of service, wage and domestic labour, to others. To the extent that tourism is now the world's largest industry, human society can be seen to be made up primarily of two classes, the tourists and their servants, with some overlap between the two in wealthier countries but with a clear dividing line in the developing world. There is, then, a political dimension that keeps disappearing in New Age discourse: who, after all, has the power to be tripping around Gaia's energy body, and who does not?

In this sense, the title of the New Age travel magazine referred to above (and of a book on New Age pilgrimage [Corbett 1988]) may be apt in more ways than one: New Age 'power trips' consist of trips toward power—travels to places that represent a New Age form of sacred power—and trips intended to gain power for the traveller, a form of New Age power which provides a sense of personal clarity and directedness with the ability to 'manifest' what one needs for one's spiritual life. But from a sociological perspective they are also trips that presume, require, and help set in motion a certain set of power relations—relations according to which certain people can travel where they desire, because they have the economic means to do that, because an appropriate infrastructure is in place for them when they arrive, and because their destinations (both the places themselves and the meanings they embody) have been incorporated into a system of economic exchange in which such 'power' can be identified, amplified, bought, sold, and transferred.

Hugh Urban (2000) has argued that New Age is "the spiritual logic of late capitalism". The example of New Age pilgrimage suggests that consumer or postmodern global capitalism may not have any spiritual logic. If it did, why single out New Age over the suburban mega-church phenomenon or any of a dozen other religious trends? Its logic is an

economic one, rather. New Age spirituality, it seems, is caught within that logic, but at the same time it seeks to escape or counteract that logic as when Sedona's New Agers attempt to prevent the construction of the bridge at Red Rock Crossing. New Age spirituality expresses a desire for a spiritualised globalism, a globalism that is vying with other, largely western-led globalisms to define the current or coming period of history. But as long as the more mundane geometry of power—the set of unequal power relations on which New Age economic and pilgrimage practices themselves depend—remains unacknowledged and unaddressed, it will likely remain a globalism for some but not for others.

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