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**Meta-Modern Culture:  
The New Age and the Critique of Modernity**

**Thomas Arthur Haig**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Communication Studies**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
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Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**August, 1991**

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## Abstract

### Meta-Modern Culture: The New Age and the Critique of Modernity

Thomas A. Haig

In this study, I identify and distinguish the principle rhetorics of the New Age and locate them in relation to postmodern theory.

The rhetorical narratives of the New Age movement represent non-Western and pre-modern spiritual practices as solutions to the crises of modernity by redefining them as "metaphysical technologies" that can "transform" consumer lifestyles. Thus, whereas the term "New Age" is commonly thought of in relation to a movement, I demonstrate that consumer marketing has emerged the predominant rhetoric that interpellates New Age subjects and communities.

Although New Age consumer culture is typified by a critique of modernity based on practices of appropriation, these practices do not lead to the rejection of the modern project, and instead serve as the dynamo for a new form of "progress" on a relocated, "spiritual frontier." For this reason, I argue that New Age culture is not adequately explained by the term "postmodern." Instead, I propose a concept of the "meta-modern" to describes the paradoxical attempt in New Age culture to reproduce the trajectory of modernity by appropriating traditions marginalized by modern "progress." I conclude that New Age consumer culture relocates, rather than transcends, the crises of modernity.

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## Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction .....	1
2.0	Movement or Market?: The Competing Ideologies of the New Age .....	8
2.1	Media Representations of the New Age Movement .....	11
2.2	The Emergence of New Age Marketing .....	23
2.3	Utopia for Sale: The Rhetoric of the New Age "Lifestyle" .....	36
3.0	Narratives of Transcendence: The Rhetoric of the New Age Movement .....	40
3.1	The New Age Narrative: Transcendence as Socio-Cultural <u>Renovatio</u> .....	46
3.2	The "Aquarian Conspiracy": An Ambiguous Ideological Subject .....	69
4.0	"Meta-Modern" Culture: The New Age and the Critique of Modernity .....	78
4.1	The New Age Body: Retextualizing Consciousness .....	83
4.2	Travels in Meta-Modernity: The "Spiritual Frontier" of the New Age .....	98
5.0	Conclusion: From "Frontier" to "Homeland" .....	115

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Everything is forgotten in a world frozen into a commodity; its having been produced by human beings becomes cut off, wrongly remembered, added on and equated to the objects-in-themselves as being-in-itself. Because the objects have frozen under the light of reason, because they have lost the illusion of being animated, what animates them, their social quality, becomes reified as natural-supernatural, as a thing among things. (Adorno, 1974b: 8)

Interpreting the rising fortunes of modern occultism during the early 1950s, Adorno contended that, far from inexplicable, the rise of interest in "archaic" belief systems, as modernity was reaching its apex, made perfect sense. It provided yet more evidence of a highly contradictory reality -- the "dialectic of Enlightenment" he and Horkheimer had already proposed -- that was distorting liberal capitalism into an economically rationalized, yet socially irrational, totalitarian system. The fetishization of commodities, as well as the hyper-efficiency and extreme specialization of modern social relations, had bred a "profusion of particulars" (Buck-Morss, 1977: 73). As a result, the social totality presented itself to the individual in an increasingly irrational and mysterious fashion. Modern occultism, in Adorno's view, had arisen as a form of "semi-erudition" (Adorno, 1974a: 23), a "pseudo-rational" short-cut that re-established a mythical -- and ultimately totalitarian -- relationship between particulars. Newspaper horoscopes, his main example, pointed to an extreme alienation of subjectivity --

individuals so out of touch with themselves and their (real) relation to the social totality that they were susceptible to believing that interplanetary exchanges of energy determined social relations.

Fredric Jameson has argued that in the 1990s Adorno's negative dialectic, despite its limitations, can serve as a "corrosive solvent" in a late-capitalist world that appears increasingly seamless, timeless, and impenetrable. (1990: 249) I present this dialectic as a starting point for a study of New Age cultural formations because they represent an increasingly important yet often inscrutable way in which late capitalism is lived.

A personal experience comes to mind. In the early '80s, I occasionally shopped at a local food "co-op"; this was the kind of store you could "join" and get a discount if you volunteered several hours a week filling bulk bins with organic soybeans and cleaning the blackstrap molasses dispenser. The prevailing rhetoric of food co-ops was that they served as alternatives to supermarkets, which were seen to be alienating and mercenary, proferring over-processed, chemically-adulterated food and promoting a culture of wasteful consumerism. Wandering into the same store sometime in the late '80s, I found that it had mutated into a health food emporia: at twice the price, you could have the "natural" equivalent of everything the supermarket had to offer, from whole corn flakes to gourmet ice tofu to



organic potato chips. A special counter was devoted to natural cosmetics and toiletry items, while on one side a huge magazine rack was filled with "New Age" books and magazines. These offered numerous ways to "work on yourself" or get in touch with your "true identity" by learning the secrets of a plethora of spiritual/metaphysical practices, from astrology to Zen buddhism. Actually, the promise was even greater: by embarking on a "spiritual journey" and "transforming" your lifestyle, you could help to usher in a fabulous New Age in which your life would become rich and meaningful and the world a veritable utopia.

Of course, on one level this experience points to a larger cultural shift that, beginning in the 1970s, saw collective movements increasingly displaced by an individualistic consumer culture. The appropriation of pre-modern and non-Western spiritual practices is also hardly remarkable, being relatively common in Western cultural history. What stands out as different, however, is the incorporation of these practices into the framework of a consumer lifestyle. The rhetoric of the New Age natural food store I encountered was that a "transformed" consumer lifestyle could be a new form of progress: by means of an eclectic spirituality that is up-to-date yet refuses the conventional boundaries of the modern, you can transcend and resolve the complexities of contemporary life and move on towards utopia.

Adorno's dialectic serves to draw attention to the paradox inherent in this new rhetoric of progress: the very source of advance -- metaphysics, spirituality, non-Western traditions -- is that which has been marginalized by "progress." However, to conclude that this represents an increasing mystification of social relations -- a return to the repressed irrational -- would be exceedingly hasty. Eagleton observes that, perhaps as an overreaction to fascism, Adorno had a propensity to "misrecognize the specific power structures of liberal capitalism" (1990: 61) such that he saw as precursors to totalitarianism cultural phenomena that had very different social and political implications. His insistence that somewhere behind mystification lay the "real" social relations invokes a theory of ideology that, in the wake of post-structuralism and postmodernism, seems untenable.

Before we begin speculating on the implications of New Age culture, however, we face a problem of definition. "New Age" is an exceedingly ambiguous term. Sometimes associated with the counter-culture of the '60s and '70s, it has in the past decade come to signify at one and the same time an ill-defined movement and a proliferating market of consumer products and services. Studies of New Age culture are practically non-existent, and as a result, the "New Age" phenomenon has not yet been defined as an object of study. One reason for this dearth of literature may be that

academics have tended to regard the New Age movement with incredulity, if not scorn. Cultural and media theorists may have avoided it because, unlike popular culture which is fashionably seen as empowering, New Age culture comes across as narcissistic, middle class self-delusion -- Adorno's "semi-erudition."

Operating in somewhat of a critical vacuum, I have located this study at the juncture between cultural studies and critical rhetorical theory, both of which understand ideology not as a negative category -- to be penetrated in order to expose the underlying reality -- but as a characteristic of all social discourses; in short, a theory of ideology as "productive" in that it generates subjectivities and socio-cultural formations. My objective has been to identify and distinguish the principle rhetorics of the New Age and examine how they interpellate subjects and serve in the construction of cultural formations. Because New Age rhetoric invokes a critique of modernity, however, and many of New Age cultural practices could be interpreted as postmodern, I have also attempted to locate them in relation to theories of the postmodern.

In Chapter 1, I undertake to define the "New Age" phenomenon as an object of study. In examining an apparent contradiction between the New Age movement, originally an oppositional and anti-consumerist formation, and the expanding New Age consumer market, I identify New Age

marketing as a rhetoric distinct from and discontinuous with the rhetoric of the New Age movement. I propose that the movement and market can be understood as competing ideological formations.

I examine the rhetoric of the New Age movement in Chapter 2, in an attempt to explain how New Age marketing emerged as a competing, and ultimately predominant ideological formation. I examine the rhetoric's narrative of cultural rehabilitation, which represents non-Western and pre-modern spiritual and cultural practices as solutions to the crises of modernity. I also examine the way these practices are redefined as "metaphysical technologies" and presented as a means for "transforming" consumer lifestyles, such that lifestyle become the locus of the socio-cultural rehabilitation proposed by New Age rhetoric.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the cultural formations that have emerged within the New Age market. Although New Age culture represents a critique of modernity typified by practices of appropriation, pastiche, and bricolage, I argue that the term "postmodern" is not adequate to explain these practices. In an attempt to explain the dynamics that distinguish New Age culture, I propose a concept of the "meta-modern." This concept serves to demonstrate that, rather than representing the rejection or critical destabilization of the modern project, New Age appropriations primarily serve to retextualize experiences

of the body and consciousness, and become the dynamo for a new form of "progress" organized around a conception of consumer lifestyle. As a result, far from transcending modernity, New Age "meta-modernization" merely relocates its trajectory and its crises.

I conclude that a critical response to New Age culture must primarily contest these meta-modern strategies of cultural appropriation.

CHAPTER 2  
MOVEMENT OR MARKET?:  
THE COMPETING IDEOLOGIES OF THE NEW AGE

In the April 1991 issue of Body, Mind, and Spirit, the largest circulation New Age periodical in the U.S., editor Paul Zuromski wrote that the term "New Age" was dead. Because the term had become a target for detractors, Zuromski argued, it was no longer in the interest of those committed to New Age ideals to continue to identify themselves with it.<sup>1</sup> Zuromski has not been alone in his rejection of the term. Joy Jacot, organizer of the "Whole Earth Expo," the largest New Age exposition in the United States, stated in November, 1990, that the term "New Age" had "served its time" and no longer befitted a movement that has come to emphasize practical "therapies and devices to make modern life more bearable."<sup>2</sup> As early as 1988, the directors of the New Age Publishers and Retailers Association (NAPRA) observed in their annual report that sincere New Agers -- those interested in the "progress of humanity" -- had begun to distance themselves from the term.<sup>3</sup> At around the same time, a number of "New Age" musicians began publicly disassociating themselves from the

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Alexander Blair-Ewart, "Publisher's Notes," Dimensions VI (4), April 1991, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Trish Hall, "As the New Age Ages, Practicality Wins Out," New York Times, Oct. 28, 1990, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Jones, "New Age Backlash?," Publishers Weekly 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, p. 54.

label because of its negative connotations.<sup>4</sup>

Even those who maintain allegiance to the "New Age" label have responded to the dubious connotations with which it is frequently associated.<sup>5</sup> A prominent New Age publisher, J. P. Tarcher, uses the slogan: "Where New Age is a long term commitment, not a marketing scheme."<sup>6</sup> Citing an "excess of low-quality material" and eroding credibility, NAPRA has called for its members to "develop the [New Age] field into a long-term enterprise" by re-emphasizing the New Age ideals of

understanding, awareness and acceptance of the notions of human and global transformation . . . peaceful human interactions . . . more responsible stewardship on our planet.

NAPRA's appeal to a set of "original" values suggests an attempt to distinguish what is "authentically" New Age from an ostensibly parasitic market that, since the mid-1980s, has been stigmatized by rampant commercialism, "crackpots," and unflattering media coverage.

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<sup>4</sup>David Fricke, "New Age, Old Hat," Rolling Stone 489-90, Dec. 18, 1986 - Jan. 1, 1987, p. 98. See also John Zinssner, "Music to Buy Books By," Publishers Weekly 231 (15), April 17, 1987, p. 42.

<sup>5</sup>Otto Friedrich, "New Age Harmonies: A strange mix of spirituality and superstition is sweeping across the country," Time 130 (23), Dec. 7, 1987, p. 69. Harvey Wasserman, "The New Age Movement: The Politics of Transcendence," The Nation 241 (5), Aug. 31, 1985, p. 148.

<sup>6</sup>Advertisement in Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>John Bethune, "New Age: Still Glowing," Publishers Weekly 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, p. 22.

"New Age" first became popular during the 1970s as the byword of an informal social movement that embraced "alternative" lifestyles based on holism, naturopathy, spiritual exploration, and environmentalism. Excessive media hype and unrestrained commercial exploitation are frequently blamed for having ruined the credibility of the term.<sup>8</sup> It is tempting to explain the emergence of a booming New Age consumer market during the 1980s as the corruption of a movement that was originally -- and in retrospect, paradoxically -- in revolt against consumer capitalism. Historically, critical cultural theory has often invoked a theme of market "corruption," particularly where working class and local, indigenous cultures have been transformed by the incursion of mass-marketed consumerism. However, such analyses tend to degrade into nostalgic post mortems of displaced, ostensibly pristine cultures, while ignoring or oversimplifying the precise relationship between marketing, consumption, and culture. (Tomlinson, 1990: 16-17)

This is not to suggest that the distinction between a New Age movement that dates back to the '70s, and a

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<sup>8</sup>In a survey of New Age community members appearing in Dimensions, a Toronto New Age monthly, most respondents expressed doubts about the viability of the term "New Age" because of negative media coverage and over-marketing. See "Do You Belong to the New Age Community," Dimensions VI (4), April, 1991, pp. 12-13. See also Jones, "New Age Backlash?," p. 54; Allene Symons, "Inner Visions", Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 77.



consumer-oriented New Age market that emerged in the '80s, is unimportant. On the contrary, one of the principle questions that I wish to address is why a movement that was once characterized by its opposition to dominant scientific, cultural, economic, and political systems appears to have devolved into a market that bolsters the status quo. I will begin by examining the ambiguity of the term "New Age" -- the problem of pinpointing what it "means," ie. to what ideological, cultural, and economic phenomena it actually refers. Presumably, the abandonment of the term by some members of the movement suggests that there has been a significant ideological shift. As a preliminary step towards identifying the reasons for and implications of this shift, I will turn to the allegations that media "hype" has destroyed the integrity of the term "New Age."

#### Media Representations of the New Age Movement

"New Age. Maybe you've heard the phrase, but like a lot of people, aren't sure exactly what it means. That's because it means a lot of things. It's a loosely knit movement that mixes everything from mysticism to music to medicine. Some of the things you are about to see may strike you as strange. Critics of the New Age call it a lot worse than that. But true believers say New Age is entering the mainstream and helping Americans cope with modern times."

- Dan Rather<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Excerpt from "Secrets of Sedona," the March 27, 1991 edition of the CBS news magazine, 48 Hours. Sedona, Arizona, has become a magnet for the New Age movement; New Agers claim it is surrounded by "vortexes" of metaphysical "energy." The town is home to a large New Age community, and attracts large numbers of New Age tourists who come to "absorb" spiritual

Media representations of the New Age include, but cannot be reduced to, sensationalist coverage of fringe New Age practices and beliefs.<sup>10</sup> For the most part, media coverage has tended to represent the New Age movement as an innocuous curiosity, advancing cultural, socio-economic and/or geographic explanations for the movement's appeal. The New Age movement is most commonly interpreted as the "mainstreaming" of the 1960s counter-culture, whose "fringe" ideas, particularly the belief in holistic medicine and occult or metaphysical phenomena, have gained widespread acceptance.<sup>11</sup> The apparent continuity between counter-culture and New Age is at times used to downplay or even dismiss the movement on the basis that there is really nothing new about it.<sup>12</sup>

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energy from the vortexes.

<sup>10</sup> This analysis is based on a sample of 53 articles from Canadian and U.S. newspapers and magazines, as well as two television programs, covering the period 1985 to 1991. Although this sample includes a significant number of visual images, I have based my analysis on written and spoken text. I will examine visual representations in greater detail in the final chapter of this study.

<sup>11</sup> See Richard Blow, "Moronic Convergence: The moral and spiritual emptiness of New Age," The New Republic 198 (4), Jan. 25, 1988, p. 24; Fergus M. Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults", New York Times Magazine, May 1, 1988, p. 37; Murray Campbell, "Welcome to the New Age," The Globe & Mail, June 9, 1990, pp. D1, D8; Ken MacQueen, "New Age Nirvana: Some say minds are so open in B.C. that everything falls out of them," Montreal Gazette, June 30, 1989, p. B6.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich, "New Age Harmonies", p. 72; Fricke, "New Age, Old Hat," p. 98.

New Age "mainstreaming" is also explained in terms of demographic shifts. Stressed-out Yuppies, calmed by the "undemanding" sounds of radio stations such as Washington D.C.'s appropriately named WBMW (the first New Age station in the U.S.), are regarded as largely responsible for the rising fortunes of the New Age music industry.<sup>13</sup> Media representations that stress a demographic explanation tend to identify the New Age movement as yet another fad of the aging, middle class Baby Boom generation. As they take over the socio-economic reins inherited from their parents, the Baby Boomers are seen to have begun applying their own religious ethos -- and in particular theories of "personal transformation" -- to the corporate culture they now, increasingly, control.<sup>14</sup>

These demographic accounts are frequently associated with analyses of the regions in North America where the New Age movement is most popular. A New York Times Magazine cover story equates "New Age" with the "thriving cults" of Colorado, and the article is as much a description of the state as of the New Age movement. Colorado's fascination with the New Age is attributed to a number of demographic and socio-economic factors: a "steady stream of spiritual immigrants" during the 1960s, the collapse of a regional

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<sup>13</sup>Blow, "Moronic Convergence," p. 26.

<sup>14</sup>Blow, "Moronic Convergence," p. 26; Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," pp. 37-8.

economic boom in the '80s leading to "social demoralization", and the state's traditional tolerance for unorthodox religion, anti-intellectualism, and millenarianism.<sup>15</sup> An article on British Columbia identifies that province as Canada's New Age "mecca," citing a similar tendency to embrace unusual belief systems and lifestyles.<sup>16</sup> California is widely referred to as the geographical birthplace of the New Age movement and chief exporter of New Age culture.<sup>17</sup>

The New Age movement is also represented as a response to social, economic, and/or cultural crises. In his book on the New Age revival of witchcraft, for example, journalist Kevin Marron argues that the contemporary popularity of pagan religions reflects a search for new values and beliefs in "response to the great crises that confront our times." Marron argues that the New Age movement promotes a "post-literate," non-linear spirituality that expresses a critique of technological society by "people who feel estranged by the anonymity of mass culture and long for the sense of community that they see as having existed in tribal

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<sup>15</sup>Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," pp. 38, 40.

<sup>16</sup>MacQueen, "New Age Nirvana," p. B6.

<sup>17</sup>Virginia Byfield, "New Age and Advanced Ed: A deputy minister brings cosmic consciousness to Alberta," Alberta Report 14 (21), May 11, 1987, p. 33; Christopher Lasch, "Soul of a New Age," Omni 10 (1), Oct. 1987, pp. 79-80; Marion Long, "In Search of a Definition," Omni 10 (11), Oct. 1987, pp. 160, 162.

societies."<sup>18</sup> Many media accounts invoke the notion that a spiritual "vacuum" or "distress" afflicts society, portraying the New Age movement as an attempt to address social ignorance about how to live in relation to nature by reviving "prematurely discarded traditions . . . about the meaning and purpose of life."<sup>19</sup> This search for meaning in life is often attributed to disillusion with materialism as the Baby Boom generation reaches middle age. The New Age movement is seen as the middle class equivalent to Christian fundamentalism, both of which are regarded as responses to a disenchantment with politics and a sense of spiritual emptiness.<sup>20</sup>

A second category of media representations portrays the New Age movement as a malignant threat that is, more often than not, inexplicable, incomprehensible, or incoherent. Some media accounts have highlighted the emergence of anti-New Age rhetorics as traditional religions, school systems, and the scientific establishment respond to the growing popularity of the New Age movement. Fundamentalist

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<sup>18</sup>Kevin Marron, Witches, Pagans, and Magic in the New Age (Toronto: Seal, 1989), pp. 15-16; 26; 35; 214.

<sup>19</sup>Lasch, "Soul of a New Age," p. 82; Byfield, "Society's 'spiritual vacuum'," p. 32; Chagnon, "Pour s'y comprendre: quelques jalons," Relations 515, Nov. 1985, p. 286.

<sup>20</sup>Symons, "Inner Visions," p. 77; Allene Symons and Barry List, "New Age Causes Growing Pains in General Bookstores," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 73; David Tuller, "New Age: An Old Subject Surges in the '80s," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 30.

Christians, whose anti-New Age protests are dramatic and at times violent, tend to be portrayed as the movement's arch-enemies.<sup>21</sup> Local parents' groups, notably in Colorado and Alberta, have also drawn attention in their struggle to halt the "incursion" of New Age beliefs and techniques into the classroom and maintain "religion-free" education.<sup>22</sup>

Coverage of the scientific response to the New Age movement has focussed on the formation of Skeptics' Societies whose members, mainly humanist academics and scientists, lobby for the "preservation" of rational thought and publicly debunk New Age claims that contradict scientifically-established fact.<sup>23</sup>

Much of the "bad press" given the New Age movement, however, avoids endorsing these counter-rhetorics and instead criticizes the New Age tendency to disrupt or ignore traditional boundaries of social, cultural, and political discourse. The movement is seen to be sponsoring a collapse in distinction between left and right-wing politics.<sup>24</sup> It

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<sup>21</sup>Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," p. 42; Allene Symons and Sonja Bolle, "Selling New Age at Sunlight," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 71; Douglas Todd, "New Age business means lots of \$\$\$," Vancouver Sun, Feb. 22, 1989, p. A12; "Secrets of Sedona," 48 Hours, March 27, 1991.

<sup>22</sup>Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," p. 42; Byfield, "New Age and Advanced Ed", p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Cheryl Cornacchia, "Shirley, you jest!: Ghostbusting author takes on New Age," Montreal Gazette, May 29, 1989, p. D1; Weatherbe, "Skeptics tackle the New Age," p. 28.

<sup>24</sup>Friedrich, "New Age Harmonies," p. 72.

has also been censured for promoting "moral relativism"<sup>25</sup>, "ad-libbed" belief systems<sup>26</sup>, and a "lax standard of truth."<sup>27</sup> New Age followers have been reproached as "altered states junkies"<sup>28</sup> who "shop among an eclectic blend of pseudo-science . . . and magic"<sup>29</sup>, treat spiritual experiences as "collectibles"<sup>30</sup>, avail themselves of a "smorgasbord of techniques and beliefs, a spiritual stew of 'isms'"<sup>31</sup>, and construct their world-view from "bits and pieces".<sup>32</sup> The indiscriminate eclecticism of the New Age movement is seen to lack staying power because it "fails to provide a coherent explanation of things"<sup>33</sup>

The fact that the New Age movement has enough consumer clout to support a booming market in metaphysical

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<sup>25</sup>Weatherbe, "The skeptics tackle the New Age," p. 28.

<sup>26</sup>Barol, "The End of the World (Again)," p.70.

<sup>27</sup>Lasch, "Soul of a New Age," p. 82. Similar remarks are found in Stephen Dale, "Journey into the New Age Mind," This Magazine 24 (2), Aug. 1990, p. 13; and Katherine Lowry, "Channelers," Omni 10 (1), Oct. 1987, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup>Lowry, "Channelers," p. 48.

<sup>29</sup>Byfield, "Society's 'spiritual vacuum'," p. 32.

<sup>30</sup>Long, "In Search of a Definition", p. 160.

<sup>31</sup>Campbell, "Welcome to the New Age," pp. D1, D8.

<sup>32</sup>Cristina Garcia, "And Now, the 35,000-Year-Old Man," Time 128 (24), Dec. 15, 1986, p. 36. Similar descriptions can be found in Lasch, "Soul of a New Age," pp. 80-82; and Martha Smiglis, "Rock Power for Health and Wealth," Time 129 (3), Jan. 19, 1987, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup>Lasch, "Soul of a New Age," p. 80. See also, Campbell, "Welcome to the New Age," p. D8.

paraphernalia is, in turn, interpreted as a sign of underlying social malaise, excessive gullibility, and tasteless navel gazing. One of two scenarios is commonly invoked to defend this argument. In the first, New Age "mainstreaming" is depicted as the corruption of a once-innocent counter-culture that has abandoned its critiques of consumerism, technocratic science, and big industry, and embraced a neo-conservative culture of greed. Excessive commodification of spiritual and psychological technologies is seen to have destroyed the challenge that New Age culture originally presented to the mainstream.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, the New Age movement is seen to imperil the mainstream, "oozing towards the centre of North American culture" bearing the threats of cultural "lobotomization," unrestrained narcissism, social inaction, and addiction to "false visions" of self-understanding.<sup>35</sup> New Age marketing is portrayed as the invention of manipulative promoters

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<sup>34</sup> Stephen Dale, for example, remarks that "...today's New Age, far from offering alternatives to obsessive materialism - has instead degenerated into smug apologia's for yuppie gluttony and greed." See "Journey into the New Age Mind," p. 13. Also, Patricia Orwen, "Cashing In on the New Age," Toronto Star, Feb. 25, 1990, p. B1. The theme of commercial corruption dates back to the '60s counter culture. Theodore Roszak decried the effects of "commercial verminization" in The Making of a Counter Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Bronwyn Drainie, "New Age promises it all: from spiritual bliss to a great body," The Globe & Mail, July 29, 1989, p. C3.



cashing in on useless trinkets and beliefs.<sup>36</sup>

Whether they regard it as a curiosity or a threat, media representations of the New Age movement have tended to portray it as a problem to be probed and understood, and have continually demanding to know what, precisely, the term "New Age" really means. The theme of corruption is far from absent; indeed, it is the major preoccupation of many media accounts. But rather than "clarifying" the meaning of the New Age movement, such scenarios render the movement more opaque, dense, material. They interpret the proliferation of successful markets as an extension of the movement. The fact that media accounts represent the movement and market as a unitary phenomenon makes apparent why the growth of the New Age market has been perceived as a crisis by some adherents of the New Age movement. The collapse in distinction between the movement and market has left these adherents with the choice of strictly demarcating a boundary between movement and market, or abandoning the term altogether. What becomes apparent is that the term no longer simply invokes a discourse of alternative lifestyles or scenarios about the transformation of a diseased, fragmented world into a harmonious, holistic utopia. But rather than signalling the corruption of this earlier

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<sup>36</sup> See Fred Bruning, "Easy Solutions in the New Age", Maclean's 101 (13), Mar. 21, 1988, p. 9; Lowry, "Channelers," p. 150; Garcia, "And Now, the 35,000-Year-Old Man," p. 36; Weatherbe, "Skeptics Tackle the New Age," p. 28.

discourse, the development of a New Age consumer market can probably be better understood as a discontinuous historical event.

Michel Foucault defines an historical "event" as, variously,

. . . the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other." (1977: 154)

These definitions provide a framework for describing the relationship between the New Age movement, its media representations, and New Age marketing. The development of the market appears to have occasioned a reversal from socio-cultural criticism to neo-conservative individualism. Vocabularies of holism, self-transformation, and spiritual exploration have been appropriated by the market to bolster, rather than displace, the development of consumer capitalism. The alternative lifestyles promoted by the New Age movement, which in most cases promise delivery from injustice, domination, and self-destruction, appear to be leading, via the market, to the substitution of new forms of domination. It may not be an exaggeration to describe the emergence of New Age marketing as the "entry of a masked 'other.'" "

I do not wish to imply, here, that media accounts have served as some kind of obfuscating ideological screen concealing an underlying, more fundamental reality. The

confusion in media accounts between movement and market is not accidental. There is no line that clearly demarcates one from the other, and my stress on their distinction is, to some extent, heuristic. My intention is not to use this distinction, and the notion that New Age marketing "masquerades" as the New Age movement, to defend the purity of the movement. Instead, I wish to point to the discontinuity that New Age marketing represents -- the emergence of a new and distinct rhetoric articulated to new ideological, economic, and socio-cultural formations. This discontinuity has tended to go undetected because the dominant preoccupation, in both popular and academic<sup>37</sup> accounts, has been to explain the emergence of movement and

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<sup>37</sup>Media accounts appear to have followed academia's lead. J. Gordon Melton's The New Age Encyclopedia (1990) is perhaps the most comprehensive academic assessment of the New Age movement yet to be published, and although Melton briefly discusses New Age marketing, he focusses primarily on the New Age movement. Other scholars who have examined New Age related formations, such as Carl Raschke of the University of Colorado, and Canadians Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, also concentrate on explaining the movement. Raschke's most important work is The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1980). He is interviewed in Bill Barol, "The End of the World (Again): Preparing for the Harmonic Convergence," Newsweek 110 (7), Aug. 17, 1987, p. 71. Poewe and Hexham's book, Understanding Cults and New Religions, is discussed in Virginia Byfield, "Society's 'spiritual vacuum': Cults don't need to brainwash to fill a void, says a study," Alberta Report 14 (11), March 2, 1987, p. 32. A few scholars have considered the implications of the market, but usually in dismissive terms. Simon Fraser University psychologist Barry Beyerstein condemns the use of the term "New Age movement" as a "marketing scheme." See Steve Weatherbe, "The skeptics tackle the New Age," Alberta Report 15 (50), Nov. 29, 1988, p. 28.

market as a unitary phenomenon. A framework that accounts for reversals of force, the appropriation of vocabularies, and the emergence of new relations of domination suggests that instead, we should regard the development of New Age marketing as an "expanding production of discourses" (Foucault, 1980: 98) that has given rise to new formations. The apparent corruption of the term "New Age" has not led to its death, but to a redoubling of its rhetorical power -- the (re)organization and (re)distribution of social and cultural knowledge (McKerrow, 1989: 105) that its use has led to in the West. The deployment of this term has been both profoundly productive and self-contradictory. While some ardent New Age "ideologues" have abandoned the term, the discourses, markets, practices, and institutions associated with "New Age" have continued to proliferate and expand. Most New Age marketing is still allied to an anti-consumerist rhetoric, but this critique of consumerism has, paradoxically, been channelled into the formation of new consumer markets.

This contradiction -- consumer marketing based on anti-consumerist rhetorics -- deepens one's suspicion that New Age marketing may, in part, be understood as the "entry of a masked "other"." The meaning of the term "New Age" is evidently ambiguous because it refers, simultaneously, to two discontinuous phenomena. Used in marketing, the term can, but does not necessarily, refer to the movement. As I

will discuss in the following section, the expansion of New Age marketing has led to the rapid deployment and reorganization of earlier discourses, and the appearance of new institutions, practices, and audiences. It has surfaced as a new mode of expression with its own power effects and separate modes of producing knowledge and organizing experience.

### The Emergence of New Age Marketing

"I want to prove that spirituality is profitable,"  
- Shirley MacLaine<sup>38</sup>

In 1986, Americans spent an estimated \$400 million on New Age goods and services.<sup>39</sup> Of this, about \$300 million went towards the purchase of "psychotechnologies," sold in the form of audio or video tapes, designed for "harnessing the power of the mind to influence the body."<sup>40</sup> Since the early 1980s, the New Age market has been in constant expansion, and it now encompasses not only the familiar books, tapes, and seminars, but also New Age fashions, New Age "Lightclubs" (a variation on "nightclub"), professional agencies for psychics, crystal wholesalers, New Age realtors, New Age travel agencies, neuro-linguistic

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<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Friedrich, "New Age Harmonies," p. 64.

<sup>39</sup>Blow, "Moronic Convergence," p. 26.

<sup>40</sup>Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg (ed.), "Mainstream Metaphysics," Forbes 139 (12), June 1, 1987, p. 156.

programmers, psychic reprogrammers, "Spiritual Emergence" networks (past-life crisis counselling), "contemplative" colleges, and management consultant firms that cater to large corporations.<sup>41</sup> Related industries have also fared well; by 1987, the Natural Foods industry was reaping \$3.3 billion annually in the U.S.<sup>42</sup> In that same year, "channeling" became a growth industry; the success of trance mediums such as J.Z. Knight and Jach Pursell, who set up for-profit corporations to market their books and tapes and now earn up to \$400 million annually, inspired dozens of competitors to enter the field (including one who channels a dolphin).<sup>43</sup> U.S. entrepreneurs, with publishers in the lead, have also overseen a vigorous international expansion of the New Age market, especially in Europe and Canada. Canadian New Age book retailers have experienced a boom similar to that in the U.S., although one American publisher observed that the Canadian market is "totally different" than that of the U.S.<sup>44</sup> By 1988, with the publication of

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<sup>41</sup>Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," p. 38; Owen, "Cashing in on the New Age," p. B4; "Talk of the Town," New Yorker 64 (10), April 25, 1988, pp. 31-32; "Secrets of Sedona," 48 Hours, March 27, 1991.

<sup>42</sup>Trachtenberg, "Mainstream Metaphysics," p. 157.

<sup>43</sup>Lowry, "Channelers," p. 48.

<sup>44</sup>Bethune, "New Age: Still Glowing," p. 22. This study focusses on the development of the New Age market in the U.S., primarily because very little has been written about the Canadian New Age market. An analysis of New Age cultural formations in Canada, although beyond the scope of this study, would need to cover both the distinctiveness of the Canadian

the first edition of the "New Age Yellow Pages"<sup>45</sup>, the New Age market had emerged as "one of the most booming service industries of the post-industrial era."<sup>46</sup>

"New Age" surfaced relatively quickly as a marketing term. One bookseller observes that it was a common "buzzword" during the 1970s, but "then around the early '80s it suddenly became known as the New Age."<sup>47</sup> The book publishing trade was probably the first major industry to adopt the term as a market category. The promotion of books on health and healing under the New Age category served to "[propel] New Age ideas and values into the mainstream."<sup>48</sup> A book retailer who dislikes the label remarks that it "has been creeping up on us for a while" and, because the publishing industry made it generic, "we're stuck with it."<sup>49</sup> The reason behind publishers' enthusiasm for New Age books is no mystery; in 1987, annual retail sales of New

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scene, and its relation to U.S. exports of New Age goods and services. Kevin Marron's Witches, Pagans, and Magic in the New Age (op. cit.) is probably the most comprehensive examination of the Canadian context currently available. Unfortunately, Marron ignores the relationship between Canadian New Age culture and its American counterpart.

<sup>45</sup>Advertisement in Publishers Weekly 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup>Marron, Witches, Pagans, and Magic in the New Age, p. 219.

<sup>47</sup>Margaret Jones, "The Bodhi Tree: A New Age Nirvana," Publishers Weekly 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, p. 55-56.

<sup>48</sup>Bethune, "New Age, Still Glowing," p. 16.

<sup>49</sup>Jones, "New Age Backlash?," p. 54.

Age books totalled \$100 million in the U.S.<sup>50</sup> At least one major publisher, Bantam, now promotes a separate New Age imprint which has rapidly expanded since the success of Shirley MacLaine's New Age bestsellers in the mid-eighties.<sup>51</sup> 1987 also saw the formation of the New Age Publishers and Retailers Association (NAPRA) by representatives of the publishing industry in order to promote and monitor the market.<sup>52</sup>

Specialty stores have historically dominated the New Age retail trade. "The Bodhi Tree," perhaps the most well-known New Age bookstore in North America, advertises with the slogan "one-stop-shopping for all your inner development needs."<sup>53</sup> Specialty retailing has rapidly expanded in both the U.S. and Canada; in Vancouver, for example, thirteen New Age bookstores opened between 1986 and 1989.<sup>54</sup> By 1987, most mainstream booksellers had responded to the growing popularity of New Age books by setting up their own New Age sections; some New Age distributors were doing 60% of their business with

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<sup>50</sup>Trachtenberg, "Mainstream Metaphysics," p. 157.

<sup>51</sup>Tuller, "New Age: An Old Subject Surges in the '80s," p. 31.

<sup>52</sup>Allene Symons, "Marketing New Age," Publishers Weekly, 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup>Tom Spain (ed.), "New Media for a New Age," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 60.

<sup>54</sup>Todd, "New Age business means lots of \$\$\$," p. A12.



mainstream stores and redesigned their 1987 catalogues to make them more accessible to mainstream retailers.<sup>55</sup> At least one major distributor regards the mainstream New Age trade as temporary at best.<sup>56</sup> But many mainstream booksellers, observing that the New Age category is rapidly expanding and broadening, deny that this new market is a fad.<sup>57</sup>

Booksellers hope that the New Age category will last not only because they have invested much time and money in promoting New Age books, but also because the category is advantageous. "New Age" has been most commonly used to refer to books that link holistic health to spiritual growth, and advocate forms of spirituality based on non-western and pre-modern cultural practices and/or "innovative uses of new technology."<sup>58</sup> However, the range of books now grouped under the "New Age" banner has swiftly expanded. In 1988, Publisher's Weekly observed:

. . . the most striking . . . indication of how far the New Age consciousness has surged into the mainstream is the new emphasis on practical applications . . .

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<sup>55</sup> Author unknown, "Getting New Age into the Marketplace: A range of distributors, veterans and newcomers alike, find the category healing to their bottom line," Publishers Weekly 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, pp. 25-27; 30; 32.

<sup>56</sup> Author unknown, "Getting New Age into the Marketplace," p. 28.

<sup>57</sup> John Eggen, "How to Set Up a Successful New Age Section," Publishers Weekly 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> Marron, Witches, Pagans, and Magic in the New Age, p. 219.

particularly in business.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, the book-buying public's surging "New Age consciousness" and appetite for business-related New Age books do not, in themselves, explain the growth of "New Age" as a publishing category. More importantly, the industry has given the category a high profile, actively developing and promoting it as the basis for a major reorganization and expansion of titles.

Since the early 1980s, the book trade has increasingly used "New Age" as a "catch-all" term to replace categories such as "astrology" and "occult."<sup>60</sup> Many retailers, especially specialty shops catering to the spiritual and metaphysical market, began using "New Age" because the term "occult," in particular, was felt to limit trade and reader interest.<sup>61</sup> The New Age sub-categories adopted by publishers and retailers suggest a similar concern for connotative shifts: "occultism" has been displaced by "mysticism"; "witchcraft" by "goddess worship"; and "religion" by "spirituality."<sup>62</sup> In 1988, NAPRA called

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<sup>59</sup>Bethune, "New Age: Still Glowing," p. 20.

<sup>60</sup>Tuller, "New Age: An Old Subject Surges in the '80s," p. 29.

<sup>61</sup>Symons and Bolle, "Selling New Age at Sunlight," p. 70.

<sup>62</sup>Author unknown, "Getting New Age into the Marketplace," p. 30.

for industry-wide adoption of five New Age sub-categories<sup>63</sup> in an attempt to streamline the displacement of old by new terms. This shift in categories relates to changes in the types of books being published. The term "occult" emerged in the publishing field during late 1960s to refer to a booming trade in books that "fetishized" transcendental states.<sup>64</sup> Most New Age books, by contrast, emphasize

integrating esoteric knowledge into daily life . . . modern readers are interested in learning how Oriental principles will help them be healthy and stress-free.<sup>65</sup>

The book trade, then, has not simply embraced the New Age category in response to high consumer demand. Perhaps because it lacks a straightforward definition, "New Age" has come to serve as a flexible and expedient classification that bypasses the outdated connotations of previous terms and signifies a new terrain of practical self-help, optimism, and self-understanding. As one book merchant comments:

. . . it sounds almost high tech and celestial. If you can put those two together, it has the feel of a

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<sup>63</sup>The NAPRA sub-categories are: Metaphysics and New Awareness; Health and Fitness; Psychology and Self-Improvement; Social Change and Responsibility; and Classic and Ancient Thought. Eggen, "How to Set Up a Successful New Age Section," p. 58.

<sup>64</sup>Tuller, "New Age: An Old Subject Surges in the '80s," p. 31.

<sup>65</sup>Tuller, p. 31.

promise of better things to come.<sup>66</sup>

Mainstream retailers are especially attracted by the extent to which the New Age category promotes "cross-merchandising." New Age sections commonly incorporate books from other categories such as business, parenting, and women's studies<sup>67</sup>, while New Age books have increasingly found their way into non-New Age sections.<sup>68</sup> Such crossovers help merchants to increase sales and lengthen the shelf life of titles.<sup>69</sup>

The publishing industry, then, has played a major role in the development of the New Age market. One book publisher suggests that the thrust of New Age culture is "really ideas, not suitable for TV," and hence the printed word has predominated.<sup>70</sup> Despite the importance of books, however, other media such as magazines and audio and video tapes have carved out strong market niches.<sup>71</sup> In addition, New Age bookstores now make a significant portion of their earnings in "sideline" items such as games, cards,

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<sup>66</sup>Allene Symons and Barry List, "New Age Causes Growing Pains in General Bookstores," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 73.

<sup>67</sup>Symons and Bolle, "Selling New Age at Sunlight," p. 70.

<sup>68</sup>Eggen, "How to Set Up a Successful New Age Section," p. 58.

<sup>69</sup>Tuller, "New Age: An Old Subject Surges in the '80s," p. 33.

<sup>70</sup>Bethune, "New Age: Still Glowing," p. 20.

<sup>71</sup>Spain, "New Media for a New Age," p. 60.

tarot decks, incense, jewelry, clothing, lotions and scented oils, pyramids, chimes, meditation cushions, oriental art, and computer software.<sup>72</sup> Many bookstores also sponsor a North American circuit of consultations, seminars and lectures -- generally delivered by the authors of New Age books. Self-help, psychic, and spiritual training programs constitute an important "service sector" of the New Age market, and some have been syndicated for broadcast on radio or television.

Even more than publishing and related sectors, however, New Age music has come to the fore as the most mainstream element of the market. It had scarcely attained widespread popularity when the first New Age grammy was awarded in 1987, an interesting contrast to rock music which was not given such recognition until years after its first commercial successes.<sup>73</sup> The New Age music industry has grown even faster than the book trade, and some industry analysts expect it to have more "staying power."<sup>74</sup> As with publishing, "New Age" as a musical category has expanded through the absorption or displacement of formerly "fringe" classifications such as "relaxation" music and

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<sup>72</sup>Symons and Bolle, "Selling N.A. at Sunlight," p. 72; Jones, "The Bodhi Tree: A New Age Nirvana," p. 56.

<sup>73</sup>Fricke, "New Age, Old Hat," p. 98.

<sup>74</sup>Spain, "New Media for a New Age," p. 61.

certain genres of experimental, jazz, and ethnic music.<sup>75</sup> The category has tended to be applied by retailers and the large music studios rather than artists and small producers, and the boom in New Age music can partly be attributed to the heavy airplay it has received over the in-store sound systems of New Age bookstores.<sup>76</sup>

Although publishing and music dominate the New Age market, both pale in comparison to the success of "human potential," "attitudinal training," programs and "psychotechnology" programs that have been marketed to corporate managers. In 1987, U.S. corporations spent an estimated \$4 billion to "change the way their employees think"<sup>77</sup>, and fifty percent of Fortune 500 corporations purchased training tapes on behaviour modification.<sup>78</sup> The majority of training services consciously avoid using the term "New Age" to describe their organizations because it is seen to have "crackpot" connotations within the corporate community.<sup>79</sup> Still, the connection between the New Age

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<sup>75</sup>Spain, p. 60; Fricke, "New Age, Old Hat," p. 100.

<sup>76</sup>Zinssner, "Music to Buy Books By," p. 40.

<sup>77</sup>Annetta Miller, "Corporate Mind Control: New Age gurus want to change employee thinking," Newsweek 109 (18), May 4, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>78</sup>Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," p. 42.

<sup>79</sup>Bordewich, p. 42. This perception is at least partly justified. A survey of New Age business-oriented books by one major business magazine dismisses them as "moronic", banal, and unreliable. See Joe Queenan, "Crystal Clear", Forbes 144 (3), Aug. 7, 1989, p. 52.

market and the corporate human potential and psychotechnology market is close. Many technologies or programs that were originally marketed as New Age techniques for "personal transformation" have later turned up on the corporate market, minus the "New Age" label.

Transformational Technologies Inc. ("TransTech), for example, was founded by Werner Erhard, whose controversial "est" seminar was probably the best known of the personal transformation programs that became popular during the late 1970s. TransTech is now one of the most successful human potential companies catering to corporations, most of whom are unaware of its connection to "est." The Church of Scientology has also made millions in the corporate market through an agency known as WISE and a consulting firm, Sterling Management; few corporations and even fewer of the corporate employees who undergo WISE or Sterling training are aware of these companies' links to Scientology.<sup>80</sup>

Whether aimed at individuals or corporations, New Age marketing is perhaps best characterized by the conspicuous individualism that it promotes,

. . . the feeling, naturally congenial to Americans, that individuals can indeed be masters of their fates - through how they live, what<sup>81</sup> they eat, what music they listen to and how they think.

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<sup>80</sup> Miller, "Corporate Mind Control," p. 38; Jeremy Main, "Trying to Bend Managers' Minds," Fortune 116 (12), Nov. 23, 1987, pp. 100, 104.

<sup>81</sup> Trachtenberg, "Mainstream Metaphysics," pp. 156-157.

The slogan of one New Age publisher, in an ad for book retailers, reads: "Take charge: New Age readers want to take charge of their lives."<sup>82</sup> The rapid growth of the New Age market can be partly explained by demographic shifts; whereas the primary self-help customers were once the sick, the "superstitious," and the aged, marketing firms have identified New Age "self-help" consumers as the "leading edge of the baby boomers, the market we all want to reach."<sup>83</sup> Moreover, although most self-help consumers are still women, one New Age bookstore reported a rise from 10% to 35% in the number of male customers in just over a year.<sup>84</sup> High income 25-50-year-olds -- "the most sought-after [consumer] in America"<sup>85</sup> -- have both an individualist, "take charge" orientation and expensive tastes. Most mainstream bookstores began to stock New Age titles because they attract this upscale, well-educated audience.<sup>86</sup> Market research on ways to apply self-help appeal to the widest possible range of products has led to the development of New Age marketing strategies by such "big players" as Safeway (health food), Kraft (herbal teas), RCA,

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<sup>82</sup>In Publishers Weekly, 234 (25), Dec. 16, 1988, p. 19.

<sup>83</sup>Trachtenberg, "Mainstream Metaphysics," p. 158.

<sup>84</sup>Symons and Bolle, "Selling N.A. at Sunlight," p. 70.

<sup>85</sup>Trachtenberg, "Mainstream Metaphysics," p. 158.

<sup>86</sup>Eggen, "How to Set Up a Successful New Age Section," p. 58.



and Bantam.<sup>87</sup> The boom in corporate human potential training can probably also be connected to the socio-economic pull of New Age consumers, a large number of whom are urban professionals (Melton, 1990: xxx) with some influence over management decisions. The logical leap from self-help for individuals to self-help for corporations is not enormous, especially since corporate culture is also grounded in a discourse of the self-determining individual.

Publisher's Weekly observes that New Age music crossed over to mainstream audiences when they "discovered they could enjoy its meditative rhythms without embracing the ideology."<sup>88</sup> What this observation ignores is that the rhetoric of New Age marketing exerts an ideological pull of its own. The discontinuity between the movement and market -- a rupture characterized by discursive reversals, appropriations, and new relations of domination -- suggests that what is at issue is two "competing" ideologies of the New Age. These ideologies interpellate two different, yet overlapping collective subjects -- a movement, and a consumer market. Moreover, both position the subject in relation to a "transformative" consumer lifestyle. The overlap between the two ideologies helps to explain the apparent "masking" of the New Age marketing as a discontinuous discourse.

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<sup>87</sup>Trachtenberg, "Mainstream Metaphysics," pp. 156, 158.

<sup>88</sup>Zinssner, "Music to Buy Books By," p. 40.

Utopia For Sale: The Rhetoric of the New Age "Lifestyle"

Dick Hebdige, referring to Stuart Hall's Gramscian mode of ideological articulation, emphasizes the importance of non-monolithic conceptions of ideology:

There are only competing ideologies, themselves unstable constellations, liable to collapse at any moment into their component parts. These parts in turn can be recombined with other elements from other ideological formations to form fragile unities which in turn act to interpellate and bond together new imaginary communities, to forge fresh alliances between disparate social groups. (1988: 206-07)

The emergence of New Age marketing points, in this framework, to the appearance of an ideological formation different from that of the earlier movement. The ideology of the New Age movement derives from a rhetorical appeal for a socio-cultural constituency to revalorize the non-material (spiritual or metaphysical) aspects of human experience and reject consumer capitalism. New Age marketing, as a new ideological constellation, reconstructs this search for non-material experiences into the desire for material or "meta-material"<sup>89</sup> goods and services (books, crystals, training seminars), and responds to the critique of consumerism by developing anti-consumerist markets.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>By "meta-material" I mean commodities that are physical objects yet are sold on the basis of their purported metaphysical properties. Crystals are perhaps the prime example: in the New Age market, their value is determined by their relative "potency" in absorbing and diffusing metaphysical "energies."

<sup>90</sup>The multi-billion dollar "natural" foods industry is one of the best examples of marketing based on an earlier "revolt" against consumer capitalism. The marketing of health

Thus, it has arisen out of the recombination of some of the "component parts" of the New Age movement's ideology with market structures, in order to "bond together" a new collectivity: the New Age consumer market.

One approach to understanding why such a shift has taken place can be found in theories of the contemporary political economy of culture. As Alan Tomlinson (1990) has argued, one of the most important changes in the Western capitalism has been a shift in the relationship between production and consumption. Whereas production was once geared towards a mass market, it is now increasingly based on fragmented modes of consumption. (4-5) This has been accompanied by a shift, in marketing practices, from an emphasis on the function of commodities towards what they signify in terms of self-identity and lifestyle.

Consumption has become a core element of contemporary culture, since consumers increasingly construct their identities and their lifestyles based on the commodities -- and ultimately the meanings -- that they purchase. (11-13)

The development of consumer capitalism has also led to the growth in importance of market research, a discourse that both constructs consumer markets through the definition and targeting of specific demographic groups, and defines self-identity, lifestyle, and personal freedom in terms of

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food appears based on an expansion of consumer "choice" to encompass a formerly oppositional discourse about food production, consumption, and distribution.

consumption. (21-22; 29) Market research is used to construct the signification or "aura" (11) of commodities, and it also articulates a "rhetoric of freedom", of expanding consumer "choice" and access to self-identity through the expression of consumer preference. (31) But precisely because marketing rhetoric defines freedom in terms of consumption, it opens the way for new relations of domination; the commodities which we "freely" choose are those which, in turn, act upon us. They position us as individuals, inserting us into pre-determined demographic and "lifestyle" categories. (9; 29) Market research has therefore emerged as one of the principle discourses of contemporary culture, ordering social relations and the experience of the self at the most local and personal level -- that of consumer choice.

The concept of "lifestyle," as constructed within the discourse of market research, provides a key for understanding how an ideology of the New Age market emerged to compete with an earlier ideology of the movement. New Age marketing appears to be based on the construction of a New Age commodity "aura" linked to the appeal of a New Age lifestyle. This aura, in turn, has been constructed out of the New Age movement's utopian narratives of a better world, its emphasis on self-knowledge and self-help, and its critiques of consumer capitalism and the technological-scientific-religious establishment. Thus New Age marketing

represents the application of market research in order to reconstruct the rhetorical audience of the New Age movement as a consumer market. Far from going against the grain of the movement's rhetoric, however, this reconstruction simply extends the logic of the movement's own appeals. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the rhetoric of the New Age movement already contains, within it, the well-developed conception of a "transformative lifestyle" around which self identity is constructed, personal freedom is expressed, and social change is achieved. I argue that the rhetoric of the movement laid the groundwork for the emergence of a competing market ideology.

CHAPTER 3  
NARRATIVES OF TRANSCENDENCE:  
THE RHETORIC OF THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

In 1980, Marilyn Ferguson published The Aquarian Conspiracy. The book became an immediate best seller, and was "accepted more than any other single book as a consensus statement of the New Age perspective." (Melton, 1990: 169) Ferguson's book has been warmly received by the American business community. Business endorsement of the Aquarian Conspiracy appears linked to the growth in importance of futurology.<sup>1</sup> Futurologist John Naisbitt, who wrote the preface to the second edition of Ferguson's book in 1987, remarks:

What got me to read [The Aquarian Conspiracy] was the enthusiasm of business people. Rarely has a book articulated and documented what so many of us were secretly thinking . . . we are experiencing a . . . revival in personal spirituality. The individualism of the new spirituality is fed by the individualistic nature of an information society, and also by the trend I have called the "high-touch response" to all of the high-tech in today's society. (Ferguson, 1990: 13)

Read by business people as a thoughtful projection of current social trends into the future, The Aquarian Conspiracy presents an optimistic scenario in which the

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<sup>1</sup>In the 1980s, futurology emerged as an important adjunct to market research and corporate planning. Futurologist John Naisbitt, in providing a rough definition of business-oriented futurology, identifies its logic in this way: "The most reliable way to anticipate the future is by understanding the present." Most corporate executives now see the interpretation of current social trends by projecting them into the future as crucial to helping businesses cope with rapid change. See John Naisbitt, Megatrends (New York: Warner Books, 1982), p. xxiii.

"information revolution," far from stamping out spirituality, creativity, and personal freedom, actually enhances them. The book provides a legitimating narrative for the expanding information economy that challenges fears that an Orwellian dystopia looms on the horizon. In this new narrative, business people are not merely the daring pioneers of a new socio-economic miracle, but also the benevolent shepherds of a new spiritual order of expanded consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Positive business response to The Aquarian Conspiracy helps to explain the rapid development of New Age marketing in the 1980s. Since a large number of Ferguson's readers are business people, it is not surprising that, in identifying with the New Age movement, they have been quick to exploit its business potential. Similarly, many appear to have adapted New Age spiritual practices, from astrology and tarot reading to meditation and "human potential" training, for use in business.<sup>3</sup>

The Aquarian Conspiracy, and the movement with which it

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<sup>2</sup>"Business executives," Ferguson writes, "may be the most open-minded group in the society, far more open than scholars and professionals, because their success depends on their being able to perceive early trends and new perspectives." (1990: 340)

<sup>3</sup>See Schiller (1990: 9). The use of esoteric traditions in market research is not as strange as it might seem. Tomlinson compares market researchers to "astrologers" and "soothsayers" (1990: 22; 29), and the extent to which contemporary marketing parallels certain esoteric sciences is remarkable. Both astrology and marketing, for example, serve as systems of divination (cf. futurology) based on the analysis of and interaction among archetypes (cf. demographic categories).

is associated, have also been the object of a great deal of criticism. Fundamentalist Christians, in particular, have responded with a vehement, and at times violent, anti-New-Age rhetoric. In many instances, this rhetoric cites Ferguson's notion of a "conspiracy" as evidence that a satanic plot has taken root in the U.S., portending the Apocalypse. (Melton, 1990: 170) Pentacostalists in Colorado burned New Age books in front of their church.<sup>4</sup> In Vancouver, an anonymous Christian organization regularly slips biblical tracts under the doors of New Age bookstores warning that "hell is real" and that the New Age movement is one sign that the end of the world is at hand.<sup>5</sup> In Minneapolis, a New Age bookstore was firebombed.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, ad hoc parents' groups, notably in Alberta and Colorado, have sprung up around a counter-rhetoric that

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<sup>4</sup>Fergus M. Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults", New York Times Magazine, May 1, 1988, p. 42.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas Todd, "New Age business means lots of \$\$\$," Vancouver Sun, February 22, 1989, p. A12.

<sup>6</sup>Allene Symons and Sonja Bolle, "Selling New Age at Sunlight," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 71. An analysis of Fundamentalist anti-New Age rhetoric, although not possible here, would probably reveal that the New Age movement is now as important a target among conservative Christians as "secular humanism." At least one television evangelist, Jack Van Impe, has targeted the New Age movement as the focus of his appeal. Other fundamentalists have begun to incorporate the term New Age into their critiques of the culture industry. Donald Wildmon, head of the conservative Christian "American Family Association" recently condemned a pilot television sitcom, "Sunday Dinner", for promoting "New Age secular humanist religion." See John Dart, "Sitcom Sunday Dinner already has enemy," Montreal Gazette, May 27, 1991, p. C10.



targets the adaptation of New Age spirituality for use in public schools. At least one teacher has been taken to court for teaching "visualization" and relaxation techniques.<sup>7</sup> Scientists and academics have also found fault in the movement, debunking New Age "pseudo-sciences" and calling for the shoring up of rational thought. Humanist organizations and "Skeptics' Societies" have been especially active in this endeavour.<sup>8</sup> In addition, much as Ferguson's book was warmly received in business circles, the increasing application of New Age human potential techniques in the workplace has led to protests and court challenges by employees and labour organizations.<sup>9</sup>

For opponents of the New Age movement, its rhetoric appears to have a strong and nefarious appeal that must be counter-acted lest it recruit unwary adherents. The perception that the movement represents a threat is not

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<sup>7</sup>Bordewich, "Thriving", pp. 42-43; Virginia Byfield, "New Age and Advanced Ed", Alberta Report 14 (21), May 11, 1987, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>Cheryl Cornacchia, "Shirley, you jest! Ghostbusting author takes on the New Age," Montreal Gazette, May 29, 1989, p. D1; Steve Weatherbe, "The Skeptics tackle the New Age," Alberta Report 15 (50), Nov. 28, 1988, p. 28; Maxine Negri, "Age-old Problems of the New Age Movement," The Humanist 48 (2), March/April, 1988, pp. 23-26.

Occasionally, the New Age movement has responded with its own counter-rhetoric. In Toronto, for example, Dr. Howard Eisenberg accused the University of Toronto of engaging in a "witch hunt" because he was forced to discontinue his courses on astrology and paranormal phenomena. See Patricia Orwen, "Cashing In on the New Age," Toronto Star, Feb. 25, 1990, p. B4.

<sup>9</sup>Jeremy Main, "Trying to Bend Managers' Minds," Fortune 116 (12), Nov. 23, 1987, pp. 100, 104.

surprising. The Aquarian Conspiracy voices compelling critiques of scientific and religious, and to a lesser extent educational, medical, political, and labour establishments. Ferguson promises an up-beat alternative to experiences of social and cultural fragmentation and disempowerment ostensibly wrought by traditional institutions and out-moded practices. That this has inspired mass defections by the audiences of more traditional rhetorics is doubtful.<sup>10</sup> Yet the book has, without question, exerted a strong ideological pull. The reasons for its positive reception, especially among business people, can be traced to a number of the book's rhetorical characteristics. The book contributed a great deal toward defining and addressing the New Age movement as an ideological subject. The term "New Age" had already become popular during the 1970s, both as an epithet for certain utopian narratives of social change, and as one appellation for socio-cultural movements that sought to make these visions a reality. Ferguson brought narrative and movement together in a text that "calls into being" a new subject (Charland, 1987: 137-138) -- the "Aquarian

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<sup>10</sup>Gordon Melton observes that New Age and anti-New Age audiences are relatively insular: "Members of the [New Age] movement do not read anti-New Age material, and many are quite unaware of its existence as its main circulation is among evangelical Christians and scientific skeptics rather than its intended audience...[New Age denouncers] have only a superficial understanding of the New Age, its ideas, and its program." (1990: xxxi)

conspirator." At the same time, however, Ferguson defined the movement in terms of a "transformative" lifestyle. The movement's subsequent expansion became linked to the marketing of the New Age goods and services that provided the means for constructing this lifestyle. In fact, Ferguson's book represents the market as more crucial than the movement for the realization of a New Age utopian project. As we shall see, the collective subject that Ferguson addresses is highly ambiguous, and this ambiguity ultimately leads to its displacement by the market as the "featured term" (Burke, 1969: 15) of her rhetorical appeal.

In this chapter, I will examine the rhetorical structure of The Aquarian Conspiracy in order to identify some of its "narrative ideological effects" (Charland, 1987: 138-141) that serve to interpellate the New Age movement as a collective ideological subject, as well as to describe the ambiguity of these effects. However, my analysis is also designed to contest a tendency in academic accounts to regard the New Age movement as merely the most recent expression of long-standing ideological conflicts between rationalism and romanticism, materialism and idealism, or science and metaphysical occultism. I argue that the rhetorical narrative of The Aquarian Conspiracy interpellates an historically and culturally specific subject that cannot be recognized by looking to history for the "origins" of the New Age narratives. For this reason, I

will begin my discussion by placing The Aquarian Conspiracy in relation to a particular modality of history -- the "monumental" (Foucault, 1977: 161) -- and a certain genre of historical narrative: that which evokes the present as the crucial turning point in an unfolding movement towards transcendent socio-cultural renovatio.<sup>11</sup> These narrative categories encompass the basic characteristics of the contemporary "New Age" narrative, and allow us to compare it with similar narratives that have served to interpellate different collective subjects in the past.

The New Age Narrative: Transcendence as Socio-Cultural Renovatio

"The other day I went personally into that bookshop -- what's it called? Never mind; it doesn't matter -- you know, the place where six or seven years ago they sold anarchist books, books about revolutionaries, Tupamaros, terrorists -- no, more, Marxists . . . Well, the place has been recycled. They stock those things Bramanti was talking about . . . they sell the authors who believe and the authors who say it's all a fraud, provided the subject is -- what do you call it?"

"Hermetic," Diotallevi prompted.

"Yes, "I believe that's the right word. I saw at least a dozen books on Hermes. And that's what I want to talk to you about: Project Hermes. A new branch . . ."

"The golden branch," Belbo said.

"Exactly," Garamond said, missing the reference.

"It's a gold mine, all right. I realized that these people will gobble up anything that's hermetic, as you put it, anything that says the opposite of what they read in their books at school. I see this also as a cultural duty: I'm no philanthropist, but in these dark

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<sup>11</sup>"Renovatio" (ie. renovation) was a term commonly used during the late Middle Ages to describe a much-anticipated era of social and cultural renewal.

times to offer someone a faith, a glimpse into the beyond . . . " (Eco, 1988: 219)

With this scene, the black comedy of Eco's novel, Foucault's Pendulum, begins to unfold. Garamond, a scheming publisher, enlists his editors in the development of a new imprint: "Isis Unveiled," geared towards the popular market, and an academic series, "Hermetica." Despite his bow to "cultural duty," Garamond's chief interest is to make good on an increasingly prosperous trade in esoteric books. Meanwhile, the editors -- Diotallevi, Belbo, and Casaubon -- have been haunted by a sense of political estrangement. Garamond's observation that the market for political books has declined, and political bookstores have been "recycled" into the esoteric market strikes an odd chord. Gnosticism has replaced Marxism. This commercial metamorphosis is the first of many juxtapositions that bring the "death" of politics up against a ridiculous, and ultimately fruitless, search for the Answer to the Ultimate Secret of existence. With the help of a computer, the editors embark on a game to manipulate their bumbling, credulous, book-buying audience, the "Diabolicals," but the manipulation succeeds too well. Diotallevi, Belbo, and Casaubon lose control of the game, and are eventually destroyed by the arcane web that they themselves created.

Eco's narrative can be read as a parody of unbridled, hermeneutic historicism. The Diabolicals will stop at

nothing, not even murder, in their obsession to detect and decipher ancient messages and search out secret, timeless meanings. The Garamond editors are equally imprudent because, having given up on politics, they turn this obsession into a game. Michel Foucault, following Nietzsche, describes parody as a modality of history that is "directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition." (1977: 160) Parody is the antidote to the Platonic, "monumental" tradition:

In 1874, Nietzsche accused this history, one totally devoted to veneration, of barring access to the actual intensities and creations of life. (1977: 161)

Foucault's Pendulum calls attention to implications of the monumental uses of history. It is possible that contemporary Western culture has been marked by a turn towards this modality of history; political and social engagement appear, in many instances, to have been replaced by a grandiose, but detached and dislocated, Search for Meaning. Like the bumbling Diabolicals and the imprudent Garamond editors, we search, or perhaps only pretend to search, for the secret Map that will tell us who we are, where we are, and perhaps even provide us with a source of unlimited power. What we usually find, as Foucault notes, is not ourselves but only the "ephemeral props that point to our own unreality."

One of the most monumental of contemporary popular histories is a narrative that presents our own time as the

beginning of a period of social and cultural "awakening."  
It is a narrative of transcendent, social and cultural renovatio (renovation), that promises the reintegration of the disparate and colliding fragments of social existence into a harmonious, meaningful totality. Transcendent renovatio, in such accounts, will see the replacement of all of our old, dysfunctional systems with new ways of thinking, speaking, and living. It will bring back our authentic identities, both individual and collective. It will also bring back the past: the cultural artifacts that we too hastily discarded in a rush to modernize will find their proper place in the present, no longer in conflict with, and indeed the perfect compliment to, our most advanced technologies. Transcendence, the instant creation of a whole, the reattachment of microcosm to macrocosm, will be the panacea for all our ailments, the self-knowledge for all our alienation, the empowerment for all our weakness.

In the mid '70s, Tom Wolfe published "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening," an unsparing critique of such monumental narratives. The essay makes apparent the extent to which such monumental Searches for transcendent meaning have filtered into popular cultur It also demonstrates how vulnerable the narrative of transcendent renovatio is to parody:

In 1961, a copy writer named Shirley Polykoff was working at the Foote, Cone & Belding advertising agency on the Clairol hair-dye account when she came up with the line: "If I've only one life to live, let me live

it as a blonde!" In a single slogan she had summed up . . . the Me Decade. "If I've only one life, let me live it as a -----!" (You have only to fill in the blank.) (1981: 432)

The "Me Decade," for Wolfe, was a descent into a kind of luxurious narcissism that had previously been an exclusivity of only the very rich. But in Wolfe's account, the new narcissism of the middle class is a cheap and hoaky imitation of aristocratic "finishing" schools. It represents the reduction of grand narratives of renovatio to an obsession with the individual person. Wolfe observes:

The old alchemical dream was changing base metals into gold. The new alchemical dream is: changing one's personality -- remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very self . . . (428)

We have diminished our social vision, Wolfe would seem to suggest, to filling in our blank identities with Foucault's "ephemeral props."

For the moment, I wish to leave aside the question as to whether contemporary narratives of transcendent renovatio are impoverished in this way. There is little doubt, however, that these narratives have taken on extraordinary importance in contemporary culture. In recent history, they have structured the rhetoric of two major popular movements, the New Age movement and the '60s counter-culture. Both of these rhetorics have stressed a search for transcendent meaning based on the rejection of traditional means of cultural expression and explanation. In 1967, journalist William Braden wrote of the psychedelic drug movement:



. . . people have started once more to ask ultimate questions. They are asking who they are, and who God is, and what is the relationship, if any, between them and him.

The asking of ultimate questions is significant in itself. It implies the assumption that there are ultimate answers . . . But the new search for answers is not predicated upon scientific principles, nor indeed is predicated upon orthodox religious principles; it seems to reject both the Scribes and the Pharisees. (1967: 6)

According to Braden, drug experimentation, in fostering an "assumption that there are ultimate answers," had spawned a revival of metaphysics and a "reassertion" of the irrational and the unconscious. (5; 7) Orthodox science and religion had failed to serve the needs of people asking ultimate questions, and thus a new culture with a new theology would have to be erected.

In a similar fashion, a section of The Aquarian Conspiracy subtitled "The Search for Meaning" refers to an "irrepressible hunger for meaning," an impulse that is driving Americans to the "unnamed shores" of an unconventional spirituality. (1980: 366) A critique of traditional science and religion justify Ferguson's narrative of renovatio. She begins The Aquarian Conspiracy with the following chronicle:

A leaderless but powerful network is working to bring about radical change in the United States. Its members have broken with certain key elements of Western thought, and they may even have broken continuity with history.

This network is the Aquarian Conspiracy. It is a conspiracy without a political doctrine. Without a manifesto. With conspirators who seek power only to disperse it, and whose strategies are pragmatic, even

scientific, but whose perspective sounds so mystical that they hesitate to discuss it. Activists asking different kinds of questions, challenging the establishment from within.

. . . the great shuddering, irrevocable shift overtaking us is not a new political, religious, or philosophical system. It is a new mind -- the ascendance of a startling worldview that gathers into its framework breakthrough science and insights from earliest recorded thought. (Ferguson, 1980: 23)

Here, the story of renovatio is told in the terms of every day existence: there is an identifiable locale, the United States, and a specific, if ambiguous, protagonist, "a leaderless but powerful network." The narrative dramatizes the ordinary: the "conspirators" are everywhere, and they are seeking change "from within." At the same time, they are participants in a momentous, "irrevocable shift" that is displacing the now outmoded discourses of traditional science, religion, and the humanities. The "new mind" cannot be contained by the existing categories upon which these other discourses rely because the "conspiracy" is operating beyond politics, religion, philosophy, and "certain key elements of Western thought." Only the "pragmatic" and the "mystical," advanced science and ancient thought, remain to be gathered up and redeployed.

Ferguson justifies the displacement of traditional science and religion with critiques that point to their limitations. Scientific rationalism, for example, is portrayed as so fragmented and alienating that it scarcely serves society's needs:

. . . at many universities, the science and humanities

centers are blocks apart . . . the science majors are funnelled into their specialties, subspecialties, and microspecialties. By graduate school, they can scarcely communicate with each other.

Most of us end up feeling that science is something special, separate, outside our ken . . . Synthesis is left to the hardy few, the irrepressibly creative researchers whose breakthroughs make work for the whole industry. (147)

Religion is also represented in terms of failure:

Formal religion in the West has been shaken to its roots by defections, dissent, rebellions, loss of influence, diminishing financial support. (368)

The old religious ways are especially inadequate because they over-emphasize "intellectual concepts" at the expense of "direct knowing." (373) They fail to produce tangible spiritual experiences.

At issue, however, is not the dismissal of science or religion, but the advancement of a new, "holistic" culture that overcomes scientific and religious flaws and failures. A "radical science," that "begins to sound mythic and symbolic" (148) -- a more "natural" science that takes into account the spiritual and the transcendent (186) -- is presented as a replacement for traditional science. Similarly, "spirituality" -- the experience of expanded, transcendent consciousness -- replaces traditional religions based on doctrine and belief. (362; 371) Spirituality is redefined as a "technology":

Millennia ago humankind discovered that the brain can be teased into profound shifts of awareness. The mind can learn to view itself and its own realities in ways that seldom occur spontaneously. These systems, tools for serious inner exploration, made possible the conscious evolution of consciousness. The growing

recognition of this capacity and how it can be accomplished is the major technological achievement of our time. (71)

New Age spirituality, a pragmatic and instrumental "tool," assimilates the vocabulary and methodology of scientific experimentation and technological intervention. Such rehabilitated religion serves to produce individual experiences of expanded, transcendent consciousness -- a process of "personal transformation." (68) This greater awareness, enhanced by a science of transcendence, are offered as cultural cures for a society ridden with fragmentation, alienation, and lack of meaning:

The beginning of personal transformation is absurdly easy. We only have to pay attention to the flow of attention itself . . . Identifying with a wider dimension than our usual fragmented consciousness, this center is freer and better informed. (68)

Those who believe in the possibility of impending social transformation are not optimistic about human nature; rather, they trust the transformative process itself. Having experienced positive change in their own lives -- more freedom, more creativity, more ability to handle stress, a sense of meaning -- they concede that others may change too. And they believe that if enough individuals discover new capacities in themselves they will naturally conspire to create a world hospitable to human imagination, growth, and cooperation. (70)

Together, the new science and spirituality provide a repertoire of metaphysical technologies that speed up the "evolution" (69) of consciousness. Society is transformed by the domino effect of newly-integrated, self-aware individuals possessing a "sense of meaning," who "conspire" together to change the world.

The rehabilitation of science and religion, then, are key events in Ferguson's narrative of socio-cultural renovatio. As Condit and Lucaites argue, rhetorical narratives are characterized by a "unity of purpose" that enlists the audience in arriving at the solution to a specified problem:

. . . rhetorical narratives describe a set of relations contributing to a conflict or problem and ask the audience to participate actively in the interest of the discourse to bring about the desired transformation. (1985: 100)

In Ferguson's narrative, the audience is encouraged to undertake a project of personal transformation in order that a new, more "hospitable" world may be created. An additional demand Ferguson makes of her audience, in promoting the curative potential of metaphysical technologies, is that they recognize an apparent correlation between ancient and non-Western cultural heritages, on the one hand, and the cultural experience of contemporary high-tech society on the other. Ancient "tools for serious inner exploration" are represented as the ideal model for post-industrial processes of transformation.

This correlation serves to naturalize New Age metaphysical technologies as time-spanning products of evolution:

For the first time in history, humankind has come upon the control panel of change -- and understanding of how transformation occurs. We are living in the change of change, the time in which we can intentionally align ourselves with nature for rapid remaking of ourselves and our collapsing institutions.

The paradigm of the Aquarian Conspiracy sees humankind embedded in nature. It promotes the autonomous individual in a decentralized society. It sees us as stewards of all our resources, inner and outer. It says that we are not victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions or conditioning. Heirs to evolutionary riches, we are capable of imagination, invention, and experiences we have only glimpsed. (29)

The (re)discovery of an ancient/new technological apparatus -- the "control panel of change" -- brings the promise that humanity can realign and re-embed itself in nature. We can "remake" ourselves and our world, not by applying a destructive technology to a defenseless nature, but by employing the technologies that "nature" has to offer. This appeal to "natural" metaphysical technologies, however, rests upon an ultimately imperialistic and totalizing way of referring to "global" culture and its "evolutionary riches." Ferguson collapses para-normal experiences, and non-Western and pre-modern spiritual disciplines that induce transcendental awareness, into a an "all-encompassing" physical and physiological paradigm that "demonstrates" they are "part of nature." (177) Paranormal, non-Western, and pre-modern practices are enlisted in the quest to displace the stifling hegemony of Western rationalism. The "aquarian conspirator" is entreated to break "the bonds of culture" (105), the reward being unlimited access to cultural traditions previously marginalized by Western rationality. Such traditions are portrayed as pool of "technological" resources, separable from their basis in particular social, political, cultural, and economic contexts. The use of a

technological metaphor permits the reduction of disparate cultural traditions into a set of equivalent tools. Such rhetoric melds a kind of enlightened anthropology<sup>12</sup> with a typically American form of expansionism: the erasure of borders and "freeing up" of resources. Ferguson advocates, in effect, a kind of "free trade agreement" on culture and spirituality -- the "sharing" of traditional cultural wealth as if such culture stood pristinely waiting for the taking. Clearly, the use of such free trade rhetoric helps to explain why The Aquarian Conspiracy is so appealing to business people. Her scenario of New Age renovatio involves the inauguration of a late stage of colonialism: the West, having gained control of global material resources but foundering in a postmodern cultural crisis, raids cultural treasure chests that remain intact elsewhere in order to construct a "global" repertoire of metaphysical technologies that will foster inner peace, well-being, and ultimately a better functioning of the social whole.

Far from acknowledging the cultural, social and political implications of her narrative of renovatio, however, Ferguson portrays it, in turn, as a natural and indeed inevitable occurrence. She attributes the conspiracy to rehabilitate science and religion, and the project of producing a consciousness that is both transcendent and

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<sup>12</sup>Ferguson describes the 'transformed' self as a "folk psychologist." (116)

practical, to the rapid development of communications technology:

We are benefitting from a phenomenon predicted in 1964 by Marshall McLuhan: the implosion of information. The planet is indeed a global village. (35)

By amplifying . . . unrest and . . . options, a society's communications network acts much like a collective nervous system . . . These nerveways transmit our shocks and aches . . . they amplify the pain from alienated parts of our social body. They help break our cultural trance, crossing borders and time zones, giving us glimpses of universal human qualities that illuminate our narrow ways . . . If we let it, our technology can shock us out of the sleepwalking of the centuries. (128-129)

The "global village" cliché, and physiological metaphors of a "collective nervous system," serve to naturalize the development of communications technologies, which are portrayed as the driving force behind both the sharing of cultural traditions and the evolution of a universal, transcendent consciousness.

In Foucault's sense of the word, Ferguson's use of history is "monumental." Her narrative offers the "confused and anonymous" individual

who no longer knows himself [sic] or the name he should adopt, the possibility of identities, more individual and substantial than his own. (1977: 160)

Potential "conspirators" are invited to rediscover and reintegrate themselves as part of a cumulative panorama of cultural practices and identities. For Foucault this use of history is a "masquerade," empty and unreal. It reduces history to "reestablishing the high points of historical development," which are maintained "in a perpetual



presence." In Ferguson's narrative, ancient and non-Western mystical traditions are unearthed as both the monuments of a transcendent grandeur, and the tokens of a more complete and up-to-date identity. Moreover, this monumental impulse leads to a cumulative renovatio, in which the fruits of "natural" evolution are finally reconciled with technological intervention in the evolutionary process.

Scult, McGee, and Kuntz have argued that the power of rhetorics is frequently based on the narratives they advance that serve to "organize the social facts of existence." (1986: 126) Such narratives have organizing power because they interpret discourses in terms of every-day lived experience. The public rhetoric of science, for example, uses narrative to naturalize and place within the realm of the ordinary the signifying practices, such as "objectivity," that science promulgates:

The public scientist takes hold of this objectivity for scientific values through a hierarchical rendering of history with science at its apex -- the subtle suggestion being that the superiority of the scientific ethos is firmly reflected in the evolutionary character of nature. (Lessl, 1989: 188)

The public narratives of science and religion establish hegemony for scientific or religious ways of speaking as privileged modes of comprehensibility and explanation.

However, the discourses that are thereby marginalized as incomprehensible can provide, in turn, the basis for a rhetorical assault on these hierarchies. Hariman observes:

Marginal discourse must be seen as essentially

confused, inarticulate, flawed. This attribution of inchoateness serves the society in two ways: it is used to discipline speaking, to keep speech within the margins, and it remains a continual source of symbolic renewal, a resource for creating new hierarchies (Hariman 1986: 45).

Clearly, Ferguson's rhetoric challenges scientific and religious hegemonies by advocating "symbolic renewal." Her narrative proposes a rehabilitation of traditional science and religion by resurrecting what they have relegated to the margin, and this rehabilitation is attributed the power to shift social values and relations, giving rise to a new "discursive hierarchy." Traditional science and religion are relocated at the margin of this new hierarchy on the basis that they are flawed and outmoded. New practices are adopted to define and explain self and society that, while not dispensing with science and religion, subsume them to a privileged discourse of, in this case, metaphysical technology. The rhetorical audience is encouraged to empower itself by adopting this new form of expression and explanation, thereby participating in an unfolding process of cultural renovation.

This narrative is obviously most appealing to an audience that already questions the dominant version of social reality advanced by science and religion. However, it is doubtful that its rhetorical impact consists of actually displacing scientific and religious hegemonies. Just as these hegemonies shift and respond to the new rhetoric by producing their own counter-rhetorics, the

rhetorical narrative of renovatio tends to be more productive than destructive, operating around rather than against the hierarchy it contests. Historian Lynn White remarks, in reference to the counter-cultural critique of science:

. . . a high proportion of ultraindividualists who are not themselves scientists profess alienation from science even when they continue to enjoy its by-products. (1978: 56)

This observation is probably even more applicable to the New Age movement, which embraces discoveries and technological advances in fields as far ranging as psychology and molecular physics. The rhetoric of the New Age movement is markedly dependent upon contemporary science, which provides the framework of natural law and hypotheses that holds together the New Age discourse of metaphysical technologies. In the long run, New Age rhetoric may begin to appear "old-fashioned" as the result of its narrative marginalization of science, since the latter has, in many cases, advanced beyond concepts promoted as established fact by the New Age movement. (Melton, 1990: xxx)

This is not to suggest that the rhetoric of the New Age movement is destined to self-destruct. Instead, we must look beyond the rehabilitative displacements that it proposes and examine the precise character of its reorganizational effects. Historically, rhetorical narratives of transcendent renovatio have been relatively common in Western culture, and many bear traits similar to

those of contemporary New Age rhetoric. Academic accounts of the New Age movement often regard its appeals for social transformation as the repetition or culmination of a lengthy history of ideological conflict. Such accounts focus on the origins of the New Age critiques of science or religion, and stress the similarities among renovatio narratives of different historical periods.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, such stress on historical continuity leaves unexamined the dissimilar characteristics of late 20th century New Age rhetoric, as well as the historically-specific ideological subject that it constitutes. We can outline some of these discontinuities and shifts by contrasting the most recent New Age narrative with some of its historical antecedents.

The concept of a "New Age" long pre-dates today's New Age movement. One of its earliest precursors is a theory of the "three ages" of history expounded by a medieval scholar, Joachim de Flores' (1145-1202). Flores based his theory on Christian cosmology, proposing that history could be divided into an original Age of the Father, which corresponded to

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<sup>13</sup>For example, Melton describes the New Age movement as a "late phase of occult/metaphysical religion, a persistent tradition that has been the constant companion of Christianity through the centuries and has blossomed heartily as a result of eighteenth century scientific enlightenment." (1990: xxii) Raschke (1980) proposes that the movement is a resurgence of second century Gnosticism. The origins of the '60s counter-culture have also been the subject of much debate. White (1978) traces them to a culturally traumatic schism between the classical scholarly methods of the Trivium and the Quadrivium that took place during the late Medieval period. Leo Marx (1978) equates them to the romantic reaction against rationalism that began in the late 18th century.

the period covered by the Old Testament, followed by the Age of the Son -- the Christian era. He foresaw the arrival of a third age, the Age of the Spirit, in which a new, as yet unnamed, religion would ascend (Melton, 1990: 26). Flores' theory was probably heretical. But it was received in a scholastic context where unorthodox debate was common and permissible provided that it was kept within the bounds of the scholarly community. (White, 1978: 51) Since the setting in which it was received had little in common with that of the contemporary New Age movement, its rhetorical effect was no doubt quite different.

During the Renaissance, the theory of historical ages was reinterpreted in astrological terms as one element of a regular pattern of cycles, revolutions, and recurrences:

The Renaissance was in fact awaited, announced and interpreted, as a return to the light, like a new and positive epoch after a period of turmoil. In the fourteenth century the theme of a change of epoch became almost obsessive: renovatio (renovation) and translatio (transformation) become commonplaces in the anticipation, especially in the West, of decisive events. (Garin, 1983: 15)

The Renaissance can be seen as an analogue to the contemporary New Age movement, since it was based on a revolt against a traditional discourse, scholasticism, and led to an understanding of socio-cultural change as both the result of and reflective of metaphysical phenomena.

Renaissance esotericism represented

a reaction against what we may call "provincial," that is, purely Western civilization, and a longing for a

universalistic, transhistorical, "mythical" religion.  
(Eliade, 1976: 56)

But here again, the similarity to the New Age movement is somewhat superficial. During the Enlightenment, as is well known, esoteric arts such as astrology were widely attacked and discredited. Yet the numerous discussions over the interpretation and validity of esoteric doctrines that had taken place during the Renaissance was integral to the development of Enlightenment rationalism. Renaissance esotericism was largely a framework for debates among intellectual peers, the result being the gradual definition and elaboration of scientific values, disciplines, and methodologies. (Garin, 1983: 112) It can hardly be compared to New Age appeals that ordinary individuals enter a market of metaphysical technologies in order to remake themselves and their world.

Nineteenth century rhetorical narratives of transcendent renovatio share more similarities with the rhetoric of the New Age movement. In 1877, Helena P. Blavatsky published Isis Unveiled, a book that outlined the tenets of "Theosophy" -- a metaphysical system that promised transcendent awareness. The book also announced an impending New Age, to be brought on by astrological and other metaphysical shifts. (Melton 1990: 27; 38) The popularity of the Theosophical Society reached its height in the years leading up to the turn of the century. Long in decline, it still exists in the U.S. and some New Age

rhetors appear to have been heavily influenced by Theosophical doctrines.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the New Age movement, however, Theosophy in its heyday appealed principally to the urban rich on the basis of doctrines of racial and social exclusivity. (Raschke, 1980: 199) It emphasized the occult nature of the "secret doctrines" it purported to reveal, promising

the reward of supreme spiritual status in a universe overcrowded with inferior, unenlightened beings. (199)

Far from endorsing a project of popular cultural and social renovation, Theosophical audiences interpreted the New Age as a transformation that would benefit an initiated clique.

The counter-cultural narratives of renovatio common during the late 1960s are also very similar to those of the New Age movement. Theodore Roszak argued that the counter-cultural revolt of middle class youth represented the possibility of replacing an overly rational and ailing industrial society:

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<sup>14</sup>In 1967, for example, David Spangler published a booklet entitled The Christ Experience and the New Age. Spangler was a member of the Theosophical Society, and his theory of the New Age incorporates many Theosophical conceptions. He went on to become a major theorist of the New Age movement, although he later dissociated himself from it. His major publications, The New Age Vision (1973) and Revelation: The Birth of a New Age (1976), outline a now widely-cited definition of the New Age. Insisting that the new era has already begun, he argues that its impact can be enhanced and expanded through the actions of committed individuals. He was the first to argue that advances in communication technology, in combination with astrological and spiritual forces, had pushed humanity into a new era of awareness, interaction, and cooperation. (Melton, 1990: 173; 428)

. . . the primary project of our counter culture [is] . . . to proclaim a new heaven and a new earth so vast, so marvelous that the inordinate claims of technical expertise must of necessity withdraw in the presence of such splendor to a subordinate and marginal status in the lives of men. (1970: 240)

Roszak's rhetoric presents the cultivation of a transcendent, "gnostic" world view as the key to social change, an argument that reappears in The Aquarian Conspiracy. But Roszak's rhetoric differs in that it defines the new era in terms of binary oppositions: mainstream versus counter-culture; old versus young; scientific rationalism versus "gnosis." Roszak's renovatio is contingent upon a struggle between two opposing world views (Marx, 1978: 69) over the implications of technological "progress." The rhetoric of the New Age movement, by contrast, rejects conceptions of change as the confrontation and struggle between opposites, advancing instead a reconciliatory vocabulary of "natural" and holistic "transformation." Moreover, it represents the achievement of transcendent gnosis as itself a technological advance.

Counter-cultural renovatio was also associated with a set of cultural practices very different from those of the New Age movement. The counter-culture defined itself largely by constructing an oppositional semiotic code:

In an age of plastic, authentic value could only be found in the "real" textures of the past, along with traces of the "real" labor that once went into fashioning clothes and objects. By sporting a whole, exotic range of preindustrial, peasant-identified, or



non-Western styles, the students and other denizens of the counterculture were confronting the guardians (and the workaday citizens) of commodity culture with the symbols of a spent historical mode of production, or else one that was "Asiatic" or "underdeveloped." By doing so, they signaled their complete disaffiliation from the semiotic codes of contemporary culture. (Ross, 1988: 14)

Popular occultism played an important role in this strategy of disaffiliation. Astrology was by far the most prevalent occult discipline taken up by the counter-culture, and it served as the basis for a "'pop' religion . . . which proclaims the great renewal of the post-Aquarian Age." (Eliade, 1976: 67) The term "Age of Aquarius" became the slogan of pop occultism, referring to astrological calculations regarding the movement of the Earth out of a 2000-year long cycle under the sign of Pisces into one ruled by Aquarius. Like the Theosophical narrative of renovatio, Age of Aquarius rhetoric proposed that the coming astrological era would trigger the transformation of the world into a utopia.

But popular occultism went further than the Theosophists in emphasizing and naturalizing the apparently empirical inevitability of change; astronomical phenomena were invoked as the chief determinants of global transformation, as suggested by lyrics from the stage musical Hair made famous by the pop group The 5th Dimension:

When the moon is in the seventh house  
And Jupiter aligns with Mars  
Then peace will guide the planet  
And love will steer the stars.

This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius . . . <sup>15</sup>

Ferguson's use of the term "Aquarian" also establishes an association between astrology and the narrative of transcendent renovatio:

Although I am unacquainted with astrological lore, I was drawn to the symbolic power of the pervasive dream in our popular culture: that after a dark, violent age, the Piscean, we are entering a millennium of love and light -- in the words of the popular song, "The Age of Aquarius," the time of "the mind's true liberation."

Whether or not it was written in the stars, a different age seems to be upon us; and Aquarius, the waterbearer in the ancient zodiac, symbolizing flow and the quenching of an ancient thirst, is an appropriate symbol. (1980: 19)

Ferguson's representation of astrological "lore" as symbolic, however, displaces astrological forces as a determinative factor in the narrative. Moreover, although the emergence of the New Age movement and the spread of popular occultism both resulted in the rapid development of a consumer market whose dimension and social composition extended beyond the initial movement, the pop occult market's appropriation and commodification of the tribal and primitive "camp" (Ross, 1988: 3) of the counter-culture was markedly different from the New Age market's emphasis on practical metaphysical "technologies." The two markets set up very different conditions for the incorporation of the

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<sup>15</sup>This points to one of the chief differences between popular occultism and what historian Martin Marty (1970) terms the "occult establishment." Most professional astrologers regarded as exceedingly hasty the proclamation that the Age of Aquarius had "dawned," pointing out that by strict definition, a new astrological era would not begin until near the end of the 23rd century. (Melton, 1990: 26)

paranormal, pre-modern, and non-Western into the practices of everyday life. The counter-culture and the New Age movement, in other words, called very different ideological subjects into being. This difference, perhaps more than any other, makes apparent that the two are discontinuous cultural formations. This, then, brings us to our crucial question. If the counter-culture called into being the "back-to-the-land" hippie, what is the subject interpellated by the rhetoric of The Aquarian Conspiracy?

The "Aquarian Conspiracy": An Ambiguous Ideological Subject

At first glance, The Aquarian Conspiracy appears to constitute a very clearly-defined ideological subject. Ferguson describes and appeals to the "Conspirators," who are characterized by their commitment to transforming themselves and their world. However, this reading is deceptive. A close analysis shows that Ferguson's representation of this subject is highly ambiguous. Far from calling into being a clearly defined agent, Ferguson's "nameless, leaderless network," continually redefined and relocated, is an amalgam of geographical, cultural, and social contradictions. She begins by locating this network in relation to a dialectic of recent social history in the U.S.:

The social activism of the 1960s and the "consciousness revolution" of the early 1970s seemed to be moving towards a historic synthesis: social transformation resulting from personal transformation -- change from

the inside out. (1980: 18)

The identification of "personal transformation" as the locus of change defines the rhetorical subject as the individual American. As with counter cultural rhetoric, cultural change is promoted as a means for curing social ills. Yet unlike most counter cultural calls for collective change, Ferguson proposes a culture of transformed individuals. The individual and his/her transformative belief system become the means by which a healing wholeness can be created.<sup>16</sup>

"The real alienation in our time," Ferguson states, "is not from society but from self." (75) Social problems and solutions are defined in terms of interiority -- the need to find one's "inner" god, doctor, o. learner. (269; 293; 382) One of Ferguson's primary appeals is for a complete redefinition of the self:

A new understanding of self is discovered . . . there are multiple dimensions of self; a newly integrated sense of oneself as an individual . . . a linkage with others as if they are oneself . . . and the merger with a Self yet more universal and primary. (1980: 98-99)

The self is a field within larger fields. When the self joins the Self, there is power. Brotherhood overtakes the individual like an army . . . a living, throbbing connection . . . a spiritual fusion. This discovery transforms strangers into kindred, and we know a new, friendly universe. (100)

This redefined self becomes the key for reconceptualizing

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<sup>16</sup>"If we imagine that we are isolated beings, so many inner tubes afloat on an ocean of indifference, we will lead different lives than if we know a universe of unbroken wholeness. Believing in a world of fixity, we will fight change; knowing a world of fluidity, we will cooperate with change." (Ferguson, 1980: 146)

social relations, which are redefined as a larger selfhood. Social fragmentation is apparently overcome through the development of a transcendent Self.

The composition of this larger Self, however, is highly ambiguous. Most of the book is narrated using the first person plural, yet the boundaries delimited by "we" are shifting and contradictory. At times, the pronoun appears to signify primarily the participants in the "Conspiracy":

In this time of uncertainty, when all our old social forms are crumbling, when we cannot easily find our way, we can be lights to each other. (403)

Alternately, it encompasses the United States, a country which Ferguson describes as the prototype of a global, New Age utopia (120):

If we are to dream a larger American dream, we must go beyond our own experience, much as the authors of the Constitution immersed themselves in the political and philosophical ideas of many cultures and as the Transcendentalists synthesized insights from world literature and philosophy to frame their vision of inner freedom. (131)

This call for a redefinition of the "American dream" is principally an appeal for Americans of European descent to regard themselves as part of a synthetic, pioneering culture where a convergence of global riches takes place in a context of unrestrained freedom.

This rather hackneyed argument that the U.S. is at the forefront of global change is contradicted, however, by Ferguson's claim that American Aquarian conspirators are abandoning their ethnocentric "cultural trance,"

. . . the naive assumption that the trappings and truisms of our own culture represent universal truths or some culmination of civilization. (103)

Insisting that the conspiracy is a global phenomenon, and that it is leading Americans to appreciate the importance of other cultures, Ferguson shifts the boundaries of "we" such that it includes all of humanity:

We are increasingly aware that no one culture and no period of history has had all the answers. We are gathering our collective wisdom, from the past and from the whole planet. (306)

The Whole Earth is a borderless country, a paradigm of humanity with room enough for outsiders and traditionalists, for all our ways of human knowing, for all mysteries and all cultures . . . Rich as we are -- together -- we can do anything. We have it within our power to make peace within our torn selves and with each other, to heal our homeland, the Whole Earth. (405-406).

Here, an appeal to a global subjectivity affirms a turn towards the plurality of traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices as a means of resolving the problems confronting the planet. Ferguson's focus on the wealth and power generated by this "paradigm" is significant. The promise of a world in which national borders have become obsolete, and human interdependence is finally recognized, is that a curative "collective wisdom" will be shared. But this is also a reiteration of Ferguson's free trade rhetoric. "Mysteries" and "cultures" are converted into riches, whose free flow must be guaranteed if the project of constructing a Whole Earth is to succeed.

The question of who will benefit from this project is

elided. Instead, Ferguson focuses on the democratic spirit of the New Age movement:

The Aquarian conspirators range across all levels of income and education, from the humblest to the highest. There are school teachers and office workers, famous scientists, government officials and lawmakers, artists and millionaires, taxi drivers and celebrities, leaders in medicine, education, law, psychology. (24-25)

. . . what has been considered an elitist movement . . . is profoundly inclusive, open to anyone who wants to be part of it. (41)

The amplitude of the Conspiracy is presented as evidence that it is democratically representative. Meanwhile, the claim that anyone can join leads Ferguson to presume she can speak on behalf of the entirety. What this presumption overlooks is that the totality does not exist outside of the rhetoric that is calling it into being.<sup>17</sup> In speaking for the whole, Ferguson defines its character and dimension, implicitly contradicting the claim that the whole is merely an expression of its freely-associated parts.

Not surprisingly, this attempt to enlist the entire population of the planet in a utopian movement for change is undermined by its own contradictions. The self/Self, rather than emerging as a non-alienated, newly unified whole -- a subject that transcends and resolves the fragmentation of

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<sup>17</sup>Ferguson's trans-societal and transcultural subject is comparable to the "transhistorical" subject of constitutive rhetoric that Charland has identified: "This interpretive strategy is perfectly reasonable. It is also perfectly tautological, for it is a making sense that depends upon the a priori acceptance of that which it attempts to prove the existence of, a collective agent." (1987: 140)

contemporary culture -- collapses under the weight of Ferguson's incessantly totalizing discourse. The only subject that can really occupy the position of "we" constructed within this rhetoric is one who, recognizing that contemporary culture is a contradictory totality of fragments, denies the contradictions. Such a subject valorizes totalization at the expense of fragmentation, mistaking this valorization as the sudden materialization of a non-contradictory, non-alienating whole. Far from escaping contradiction and alienation, this subject is doubly alienated. A fragmented, but at least unique, subject is replaced by a seamless, impenetrable, universal Subject; the self loses itself in the Self.

The ambiguity and alienation of Ferguson's subject is exacerbated by the degree to which it becomes indistinguishable from the rhetorical "scene."<sup>18</sup> The Aquarian conspirator is frequently represented in geographical terms as a terrain that is subjected to an array of technological interventions. In an especially telling passage, Ferguson transforms the subject into a time-scarred landscape that yields maps and geological samples:

. . . psychotechnologies -- picks, pitons, compasses, binoculars -- have aided in the rediscovery of inner landmarks variously named across cultures and across

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<sup>18</sup>In Kenneth Burke's "dramatistic pentad" of analytic terms, "scene" refers to the time and place where action occurs in a rhetorical narrative. (1969: xv)



times. To understand more about the transformative process, we will look at these vistas. (97)

With the collapse of subject into scene, a terrain of surfaces and eras to be explored and manipulated, "agency" and "purpose" emerge as the foci of Ferguson's rhetoric.<sup>19</sup> Although the application of metaphysical or "psychotechnologies," defined as "systems for a deliberate change of consciousness" (87), promises to deliver up a new subject-as-scene, the purpose for deploying this agency is not, in the final instance, the production of a new subject or a new world. Agency is instead most closely associated with the production of a "transformed life." (116) Ferguson likens the transformed individual to an artist-scientist who intuitively experiments with and redesigns his or her life using "new tools, gifts, sensibilities." (116) In one of her numerous references to McLuhan, she observes: "The transformed self is the medium. The transformed life is the message." (118) At the centre of Ferguson's narrative of renovatio, then, and justifying the deployment of a rehabilitative discourse of metaphysical technologies, is an appeal to lifestyle as the nexus wherein the New Age is to be realized.

It can hardly be a coincidence, then, that a rhetoric of New Age marketing developed rapidly following the

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<sup>19</sup>In Burke's pentad, "agency" refers to how an action is carried out within a narrative, and "purpose" to why it is done. (1969: xv)

publication of Ferguson's book. New Age marketing is based on the New Age movement's rhetorical appeals for a "transformed life," and simultaneously on a discourse of market research that constructs "lifestyle" as the locus of identity, freedom, and personal power. Ferguson's stress on the pragmatic transformation of lifestyle helps to explain why her book was so well received by the business community, since she defined the movement in terms of the logic and ethos of consumer capitalism. One might speculate that what Ferguson's rhetoric actually calls into being is the New Age market -- a formation that organizes New Age consumers within a "lifestyle" framework and interpellates them via the "aura" of New Age commodities.

I now turn to the ideological and cultural formations that have emerged within the New Age market. More specifically, I will examine them in light of the critique of modernity evident in the New Age narrative of renovatio. The metaphysical technologies that are privileged as a result of this critique invoke a new question: are New Age cultural formations postmodern? It is easy to assume so, since these technologies are usually appropriated from pre-modern and non-Western cultures, and New Age consumer culture seems to construct lifestyle as a postmodern pastiche in which traditions and practices drawn from disparate cultural contexts and historical periods are mixed and matched in a playful or critical manner. A closer

- 77 -

analysis of this culture, however, suggests that such an assumption would be misleading.

CHAPTER 4  
"META-MODERN" CULTURE:  
THE NEW AGE AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

In this chapter, I will examine some of the textual negotiations and cultural formations that have emerged around the marketing of a New Age "transformative lifestyle." New Age marketing promises a great deal: healing, wholeness, new selves, new communities, the revalorization of traditions marginalized by Western culture, the empowerment of women, the sharing of untold cultural riches, and a solution to the social, cultural, political, and economic ills of a bankrupt modernity. Because New Age rhetorics mobilize such a comprehensive critique of the modern world, it is tempting to regard the emergent New Age culture as yet another example of that ubiquitous -- and contentious -- phenomenon: the postmodern.

The conversion of non-Western and pre-modern spiritual disciplines into metaphysical technologies is a case in point. These technologies are an outgrowth of "transpersonal" psychology, a branch of applied psychology that emerged in the United States during the 1960s. Transpersonal psychology was based on the use of religious disciplines and practices from around the world as tools for therapeutic intervention. (Melton, 1990: xxvi) This project engendered the possibility for a postmodern spirituality:

In their attempts to isolate the effects of various spiritual disciplines, the transpersonal psychologists

accomplished one unplanned, but important, task. Their methodologies separated particular practices (such as meditation or yoga technique) from the religious ideological context in which they had been developed and justified their free movement from one to another. Now, for example, one could practice Zen meditation without becoming a Buddhist or chant mantras without becoming a Hindu. Concurrently, transpersonal psychology lent scientific respectability to a new language of consciousness, creativity, and personal transformation to explain the observed changes accompanying the use of the spiritual techniques, a language eagerly adopted by the emerging [New Age] movement in the 1970s. (Melton, 1990: xxvii)

We can isolate, here, the principles used in the construction of metaphysical technologies: the removal of spiritual disciplines from a religious framework, and their attachment, instead, to a "new language of consciousness." The abandonment of often oppressive religious ideologies leads to the possibility of a "free play of spirituality."

Stuart Hall's Gramscian model of articulation offers a way of tracing the possible implications of such an ideological shift. This model dispenses with a notion of Ideology as a singular, stable formation anchored to a fixed social structure. Hall observes that religion

. . . exists historically in a particular formation, anchored very directly in relation to a number of different forces. Nevertheless, it has no necessary, intrinsic, transhistorical belongingness. Its meaning -- political and ideological -- comes precisely from its position within a formation. It comes with what else it is articulated to. Since those articulations are not inevitable, not necessary, they can potentially be transformed, so that religion can be articulated in more than one way." (1986: 54)

Even if metaphysical technologies offer up the possibility of experiencing consciousness as a pastiche, then, there is

no guarantee that this is what actually transpires within New Age cultural formations. The central issue, as Hall makes clear, is how religion is articulated to other formations.

Earlier in this study, I suggested that the term New Age appears to refer to at least two "competing ideologies" -- that of the movement and that of the market. The enormous rhetorical impact of books like The Aquarian Conspiracy, which helped call the market into being, suggests that marketing has emerged as the dominant New Age ideology, organizing groups of consumers into "transformative lifestyle" formations. The articulation of metaphysical technologies to consumer markets would seem to diminish the possibility that New Age communities are simply free-playing postmodern formations. As Alan Tomlinson points out, markets "act" upon consumers in highly specific ways, organizing them demographically and interpellating them by means of commodity "auras." (1990: 9; 29-30)

Of course, this in itself does not preclude the possibility of postmodern negotiations between New Age consumers and commodities. Along with market forces, the stress that New Age rhetoric puts on notions of identity, totality, and transcendence, as well as its monumental narratives that represent history as the movement towards a utopian telos, would seem antithetical to what Dick Hebdige identifies as the three "negations" that bind together the

discourse(s) of postmodernism: the negations of totalization, of teleology, and of Utopia. (1988: 186, 190, 196) To this, one could respond that postmodernism is not necessarily a strategy of negation. In Andreas Huyssen's view, negative, critical postmodernism is one of two strains of postmodernism that emerged during the 1970s:

. . . on the one hand . . . a culture of eclecticism, a largely affirmative postmodernism which had abandoned any claim to critique, transgression or negation; and, on the other hand, an alternative postmodernism in which resistance, critique, and negation of the status quo were redefined in non-modernist and non-avantgardist terms, terms which match the political developments in contemporary culture more effectively than the older theories of modernism. (241)

Although Huyssen is referring specifically to postmodern aesthetics, his distinctions are useful in considering a possible relationship between New Age cultural formations and postmodernism. Indeed, he links the emergence of affirmative postmodern architecture to a larger cultural "nostalgia for various life forms of the past." (237)

Within Huyssen's framework, New Age formations seem to connect with two non-critical postmodern impulses: an affirmative "culture of eclecticism," mixing and matching cultural traditions and technologies is combined with an almost cloying nostalgia for pre-modern culture.

However, Huyssen also describes affirmative postmodernism as an approach that "simply jettisons modernism" (238), and it is this failure to "explore [modernism's] . . . contradictions and contingencies,

tensions and internal resistances," that most characterizes it as "uncritical." (268) New Age consumer culture hardly "jettisons" the modern project. Indeed, it recoups all of the modern impulses of totalization, teleology, and utopianism and binds them together with a conception of history as progress. Far from involving a step outside the trajectory of modernity, whether critical or non-critical, it proposes a new way of succeeding in the world based on the deployment of a (metaphysical) technological apparatus, that is very much akin to a kind of modernism/modernization.

Yet at the same time, New Age culture cannot, strictly speaking, be collapsed into the modern. New Age cultural forms are constructed on the basis of a very concerted critique of modernity, which is seen to have failed, precisely, to guarantee humanity's progress towards its ultimate telos. For this reason, I propose a conception of New Age culture as neither postmodern nor modern, but rather "meta-modern." Meta-modernity, although perhaps an awkward and unwieldy proposition, seems to describe more accurately the relationship between New Age culture and the Modern. Webster's dictionary defines the prefix "meta" as ". . . situated behind or beyond . . . more comprehensive, transcending."<sup>1</sup> The meta-modern, situated beyond the modern, proposes to reiterate the modern project more

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<sup>1</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1981), p. 715.



comprehensively by transcending it. Meta-modernity eradicates modern dialectics (general vs. particular; individual vs. community; fragmentation vs. synthesis; self vs. other) but not by means of any deconstructive or critical strategy. Instead, modern dualisms are both maintained and resolved by an attempted relocation of the modern trajectory to a "higher" level as a process of "synthesis." The meta-modern is thus a response to modernity that, unlike affirmative, eclectic postmodernism, reproduces the logic of modernization in a new, often paradoxical fashion. As I will discuss in this chapter, New Age appropriations of pre-modern and non-Western traditions are a prime example of this meta-modern project. Far from serving as the basis of a play of forms and practices, New Age culture proposes to resolve the crises occasioned by modernity by retextualizing experiences of the body and consciousness, and relocating the frontier of "development," in order to fuel a new dynamo of "progress." The aim of this new form of progress is to generate a transcendent, meta-modern "lifestyle" that is no longer hindered by the inherent contradictions of modernity.

#### The New Age Body: Retextualizing Consciousness

During the late 1980s, Hollywood film star Shirley MacLaine became widely recognized as the celebrity spokesperson of the New Age movement. Renowned for her

exotic -- and high-priced -- seminars on spiritual development, she was described by Time magazine as the movement's "whirling dervish."<sup>2</sup> But MacLaine has also become a leading figure in the New Age market. Out on a Limb, the second volume of her biography, detailing her travels in search of spiritual self-awareness, was so successful that it spurred mainstream publishers who had previously shunned New Age titles to aggressively enter the market.<sup>3</sup> In 1987, the book was developed into a 5-hour TV mini-series. Although the series flopped in the ratings, in the weeks following its broadcast sales in New Age books skyrocketed by ninety-five percent.<sup>4</sup> In 1988, MacLaine followed with another bestseller, Going Within, in which she revealed the principles and techniques of her spiritual discipline. Shortly thereafter, she released her first New Age home video, "Shirley MacLaine's Inner Workout," based on the Hindu "chakra" meditation system.

In this section, I will use MacLaine's video to trace some of the ways that the metaphysical technologies available on the New Age market appeal to and construct individual consumers. My analysis provides some tentative

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<sup>2</sup>Otto Friedrich, "New Age Harmonies," Time 130 (23), Dec. 7, 1987, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>David Tuller, "New Age: An Old Subject Surges," Publishers Weekly 232 (12), Sept. 25, 1987, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg (ed.), "Mainstream Metaphysics," Forbes 139 (12), June 1, 1987, p. 158.

conclusions about what kinds of ideological formations interpellate New Age consumers, and more specifically, about why a meta-modern ideological articulation between consumers and New Age appears more likely than a postmodern one. I combine Hebdige's account of consumers as "potential producers, processors, and subjects of meaning" (1988: 211), with an examination of the rhetorical parameters set up by the video that guide the incorporation of chakra meditation into the practices of everyday life. Although New Age consumers are clearly active in negotiating particular ideological articulations with the text, its rhetorical structures are of crucial importance because the video structures subjective experience in a highly specific and relatively restricted fashion. The video explicitly entreats the viewer to operate upon her/his own subjectivity according to a predetermined and externally-directed system. Although at first glance this may suggest that New Age consumers are highly self-conscious, it also points to the possibility that their negotiations with New Age texts are extremely rigid and unquestioning -- that what is produced is an uncritical self-awareness.

In examining MacLaine's video, my intention is not to dispute the validity or value of chakra meditation. Having used MacLaine's system on several occasions, I do not doubt that such meditation can alter one's state of mind and bodily functions so as to relieve stress and reduce physical

tension. But there is much more to the experience than that. For me, it included being alone in a darkened room, seated in front of a vibrant, flickering sixteen-inch television screen, listening to MacLaine's disembodied voice as she guided me through a spiritual discipline imported from a cultural and historical context with which I am only vaguely familiar. I was struck by the technologization of this discipline -- its translation into Western terms and representation through the use of digitalized, video animation software. The video entreats us to believe in the chakra system as an authentic cultural practice whose ancient roots and long history of use are proof of its effectiveness. But the cultural "tradition" which we are invited to share is so thoroughly mediated that its origins are hardly unitary and can scarcely be identified. The video is vaguely postmodern, mainly in its eclectic mixing of ancient culture and high technology. Yet it works to conceal its own contradictions, proffering an impossible cultural "authenticity" in a banal and matter-of-fact manner.

The video opens with a full shot of MacLaine, outfitted in a pink sweat suit and seated on a director's chair. She is surrounded by large, potted plants and, behind them, a hazy deep blue background. We cannot put a precise name on her location; it is connected to contemporary urban reality via the plants, the chair, the pink sweats, and her casual,

intimate vocal expression. At the same time it is somehow removed, a relatively empty non-space suggestive of "inner space" she proposes to guide us through.

She begins with a discussion about the pervasiveness of stress in contemporary society. Citing the authority of "the medical profession," she identifies stress as "one of the major causes of disease and discomfort in the world." The claim that one's state of mind seriously affects the physical body -- that body, mind, and spirit form an interconnected system -- underpins one of the major enthymemes that MacLaine uses throughout the video:

Instead of going to alcohol, drugs, tranquilizers and so on, we can go within ourselves . . . In my travels, I learned that one of the secrets to peace within revolves around the ancient knowledge of what we call the "chakra" system.

The chakra system is presented as an answer to a set of chronic social disorders -- pervasive stress, drug and alcohol abuse -- based on a specific structure of reasoning. In MacLaine's account, physical pain and most forms of chronic disease are caused by stress, which in turn is caused by disruptions in one's interior structure of consciousness:

The body . . . reflects disorders or troubles in the consciousness.

Since the chakra system is "one of the secrets to peace within" -- and thus deals with the interior, root causes of stress more directly than do chemical substances -- it emerges as a logical solution to the problem of stress.

MacLaine goes on to explain the chakra system "in pragmatic, Western terms":

We each have seven spinning wheels of energy in little centres within our subtle anatomy. The physical body represents the gross anatomy. The chakra system represents the subtle anatomy, and these seven wheels of spinning energy are located within the body just in front of the spinal column, aligned vertically up and down the spine. When these seven energy centres are perfectly aligned, optimum energy flows throughout the nervous system, resulting in a feeling of peaceful well-being . . . This produces a completeness of self-realization.

The use of an anatomical vocabulary in this description permits a highly tangible and systematic interpretation of the self. The revelation that a "subtle anatomy" is concealed within, yet governs, the physical body seems both to expand one's sense of self and to promise greater self-control once the operation of the chakra anatomy is fully understood. "We are," MacLaine comments, "literally more than we seem, and in this world, that can be reassuring." Reassuring self-control is represented as a process of aligning the chakra energy centres such that one becomes "complete." The self is evaluated against the model of a perfectly interconnected, smoothly running system of energy exchanges. The body becomes a network that produces either well-being or stress and disease, depending on the effort we make to free up and direct the flow of conscious energy. MacLaine recommends

. . . like you would get up and brush your teeth in the morning, or even do a physical workout, do an internal alignment . . .

The chakra system is appropriated and technologized in order to incorporated it into a regime of personal hygiene and fitness.

Having explained the principles of the chakra system, MacLaine moves over to stand beside a muscular, male mannequin. She describes the exact location and characteristics of each chakra, while pulsing circles of coloured light appear in the appropriate places on the mannequin and a full octave of chimes are successively sounded, one for each chakra. Several close-ups of the circles reveal that they are mandalas -- kaleidoscope-like patterns that radiate from a centre of pulsating light. We learn that each chakra is the "seat" of a portion of our consciousness associated with a specific set of emotions and set of social relations, a single colour of the light spectrum, a major key of the musical octave, and a particular subsystem of our physical anatomy. The third chakra, for example, is located behind the solar plexus and

is the energy centre for . . . our feelings of personal power and . . . sensitivity. It is associated with problems of the spleen, stomach, liver, gall bladder, and pancreas . . . it is in this chakra that we carry . . . issues that we feel threaten our feelings, our personal power, our free will, and our ambition . . . it's colour is yellow, and it resonates to the note "E." [sound of a chime]

The chakras, then, serve as an organizing structure, not simply for body and consciousness, but as well for visual and aural stimuli and social interactions. Meditating on a given chakra releases specific emotional "blockages" and

tensions, healing associated organs, improve our social life, and ensuring alignment with the other chakras so that, ultimately, we are transformed a complete and optimally-functioning system.

The seventh, or "crown" chakra, however, has even broader implications:

This is the chakra through which we actively attempt to integrate ourselves with whatever our understanding of God is. This is the attempt to bring together our exterior and interior lives into a kind of harmonious whole . . . the energy centre most associated with issues of divine purpose. Our destiny . . . Sometimes it is symbolized by the thousand-fold lotus because this chakra deals with issues beyond our space-time linear understanding. It's concerned with aspects which are higher than our individual self-consciousness and really beyond limited consciousness, beyond our power of comprehension . . . When this chakra is aligned, relaxation is profound.

Here, the self is presented as having a determinable telos - - our destiny -- that is a function of perfectly integrating our interior state with a benevolent, yet incomprehensible exterior force. Moreover, this expansion of the self is potentially unlimited: it is completely ecumenical (we integrate with "whatever our understanding of God is"), and takes us beyond language, limited consciousness, and limited space and time. The self becomes fused to a sublime totality, with the added benefit of complete relaxation.

A feminist subtext<sup>5</sup> is introduced as MacLaine explains that the bottom three chakras are "associated, essentially,

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<sup>5</sup>One interesting note: the executive producer of MacLaine's video was long-time feminist activist Bella Abzug.



with yang [masculine] energy" whereas the top three are feminine, yin centres. One of the tasks of chakra meditation becomes to balance masculine and feminine energies: "When we are all perfectly aligned, we are perfectly mixing the masculine and feminine in each of our personalities." The chakra system thus serves as a means for ensuring the equal valorization of both sexes, reinscribing both male and female individuals as inherently androgynous. During meditation on the second, sexual chakra, MacLaine intones us to "believe that sexual equality is possible." Of course, as with most feminist essentialisms, the possibility that gender, sex, and sexuality are separate/ separable phenomena, and that their division into neat, binary categories is a social construction, does not enter the picture.

Having defined the basic principles of the chakra system, MacLaine proceeds to lead the viewer through an "open-eyed" meditation. We are instructed to sit cross-legged, with our forefingers touching our thumbs, so that maximum energy flows through the chakra system. As we begin, the camera slowly pans from MacLaine to her mannequin. Over the course of the meditation, the coloured circle of each chakra appears on the mannequin in the appropriate location, and then grows to fill the whole screen, while New Age music composed of gentle chimes, strums, chants, and hums, washes over us in the key

associated with the chakra. We are confronted with enormous, pulsating mandalas that initially radiate the colour of the rainbow linked to the chakra, and then incorporate other colours into the pattern.

MacLaine's voice guides us from chakra to chakra, encouraging us to probe for tensions and blockages:<sup>6</sup>

Now the green of the heart chakra. [music changes key] Use it . . . to focus on who you may desire to love unconditionally. Feel yourself pulsate love to that person . . . realize that love . . . is really coming from the love you have of yourself . . . feel how it activates love through your own immune system. Feel the green harmony flow through your own bloodstream . . . It begins to expand . . . ripple out . . . not only from your own heart centre to others . . . but . . . to the planet as well. Now bring in people of all types . . . the more you give the more you receive . . . breathe all the colours in and pump all of them out . . . Feel how healing it is . . . Now move up to the throat chakra. [music changes key]

Do you feel unable to express yourself? Do you feel incapable of communicating what you want to say? . . . breathe in blue air through the throat. Feel your throat open . . . You are free, no longer are you blocked in your expression . . . Feel the words flow. No tension. Now allow yourself to remember some of the harsh words you might have spoken . . . Clean it out . . . release the judgement you had of another . . . Feel yourself communicate positivity through the throat. Communicate many different colours of positivity. Feel everyone understanding . . . Integrate the blue of expression . . . Now move up to the brow . . .

Amid this languid imagery of rippling, pulsating love and cleansed, freely-flowing communication, self and body are represented as shifting from an undesirable state of resistance and inadequacy towards a paradise of surging

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<sup>6</sup>I have abridged these passages to eliminate repetition.

interconnection and fulfillment. This is largely accomplished by disrupting conventional distinctions between the tangible and the intangible. Emotions become instruments that can "activate" the immune system, "flow" through the bloodstream, and "open" the throat; colours become strangely material, something we can "breathe" and "pump"; bad memories can be "cleaned out." The materiality of the subject is displaced in favour of an ontology of light, energy, and information exchanges. The result of this new way of experiencing the self are interpreted in a specific fashion in the closing segment of the video.

MacLaine urges the viewer to

. . . realize what it was like to feel that peaceful, to feel that integrated. To feel that whole and that resolved . . . Know that if you're aligned with your chakras, you have no stress, you have no tension.

As with the subject, the definitions of health and well-being are rewritten in terms of integration and alignment. This, in turn, produces knowledge about when and how one becomes free from the anathema of relaxed wholeness -- stress. In short, the video constructs the ailment in naming its remedy.

This observation brings up the possibility of placing MacLaine's video within a framework of postmodern theory. Donna Haraway argues that the contemporary shift from an "organic, industrial society" to a "polymorphous information system" has been accompanied by a simultaneous shift from "hierarchical," medicalized dominations to an "informatics

of domination" based on the management and control of multiple networks. (1989: 185) One important element of this emerging "informatics," in Haraway's view, is a new discourse of dysfunctionality and disease. "It is time," she quips in reference to Foucault, "to write The Death of the Clinic.":

The clinic's methods required bodies and works; we have texts and surfaces. Our dominations don't work by medicalization and normalization anymore; they work by networking, communications redesign, stress management. (177)

Indeed, in an emerging universe of exchange between systems, human beings have been increasingly redefined as "components" or "subsystems" rather than as isolatable "natural objects." (187) Haraway notes:

The privileged pathology affecting all kinds of components in this universe is stress -- communications breakdown. (187)

The rise of this pathology has led to the "retextualization" of the body as a "code problem" (197), and the renegotiation of "[the] public metaphors which channel personal experience of the body." (195)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>In response to these developments, Haraway proposes a critically postmodern feminism that resists the newly inscribed body, its pathologies of communication breakdown, and its control strategies of "stress management." At the centre of her oppositional strategy is the figure of the "cyborg, a hybrid of machine and organism." (174) For Haraway, the cyborg serves as an alternate, imperfect subject of meaning that resists and interrupts the perfect integration of subjectivity into the information system. Cyborgs are "wary of holism" and resist "the seductions to organic wholeness through the appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. (175) Instead, they seek to disrupt communication and flow, recognizing the "necessity of

In this light, Haraway cautions against the strategies of ecofeminism, "feminist paganism," and "anti-science metaphysics," because they involve the idealization of whole, perfectly functioning organisms, and construct gender as a global, integrating identity. (201) In her view, this represents a failure to disrupt, and ultimately a capitulation to informatic domination. MacLaine's video could be interpreted within Haraway's framework as a feminist metaphysics that reproduces the new, informatic logic of domination. Clearly, the video invokes an informatic pathology: stress is presented as an incontrovertible fact of life, as well the chief problem to be eliminated in the course of the meditation. With the help of her mannequin, MacLaine literally retextualizes the body both as an integrated system of exchange -- best experienced through the elimination of stress, the alignment of energy centres, and the optimal flow of energy -- and as a subsystem of a larger network: the transcendent forces beyond our individual consciousness and comprehension. Far from questioning the implications of integrating with this totality, MacLaine represents such integration to be the token of health and well-being that enables one to become

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limitation, [and] partiality." (202) They are the subjects of a critical feminist and postmodern project: obtaining and using power in a non-hegemonic and non-totalizing fashion. Cyborg theory involves deconstructions and experimental rearticulations of both organism and gender in relation to technology, race, and class. (204)

perfectly whole. The possibility and potential of an incomplete subject, and of a subjectivity based on partial communication, is dismissed.

The extent to which this represents a "capitulation" to an informatics of domination, however, is not clear. This would assume that the video positions the subject within a discourse of domination merely because it retextualizes and repathologizes the body in a manner somewhat analogous to general systems or information theory. Even if this were true -- and acknowledging that Haraway's approach is compelling -- it does not provide for a full understanding of MacLaine's video. To stay within Haraway's framework, we would have to conclude that the video constructs a postmodern experience of the body and consciousness. This, in turn, would require that we look only at the video's postmodern veneer, instead of considering the way in which the video proposes a meta-modern reworking of the project of modernity. This project involves the integration of Asian spirituality into Western culture. MacLaine advises the viewer to

. . . work with your chakra system..believe you can integrate it into Western life.

Asian cultures have been employing these techniques for thousands of years. We in the West are just beginning to learn.

She advocates, in effect, the reverse of the more familiar, neo-colonial project of "modernizing" non-Western societies. In this reverse project, we become the subjects of our own

"meta-modernization," the source of meta-modernity being previously ignored or marginalized non-Western cultural traditions. The techniques may be ancient, but they serve in the video as new discoveries, natural resources that have been unearthed not only to resolve our current predicaments, but to underpin a new form of progress centering on the spiritual transformation of the subject's lifestyle. Conveniently, according to the video, meditation on the sixth chakra can lead us to "seriously question our spiritual nature and how it relates to our lifestyle." Rather than producing a subject dominated by informatics, then, the video constructs the experience of consciousness and body in relation to a new, meta-modern telos: the development of a transformative, New Age lifestyle.

The meta-modernity of MacLaine's video provides some clues as to the ideological formations that New Age consumers participate in constructing. It would seem to limit, if not preclude, the possibility that a critically postmodern ideological articulation takes place between consumers and New Age texts. Thus, I suspect that although the video encourages its viewers to operate upon their own subjective awareness in a self-conscious manner, it's rhetorical structure favours the production of an uncritical self-awareness. The lack of critique would be attributable to the video's technologization of awareness such that it serves "progress" (the elimination of stress, the

transformation of one's lifestyle) rather than coming under scrutiny in its own right. In order to move beyond speculation about what happens to actual New Age consumers, however, we must examine the cultural formations that have emerged as the New Age market expands. In the following section, I will look at a few of these formations in an attempt to describe some of the characteristics of New Age meta-modernity.

Travels in Meta-Modernity: The "Spiritual Frontier"  
of the New Age

In April, 1990, an Ohio woman named Joanne Sustar died as a result of participating in a ceremony ostensibly based on Cherokee Indian spiritual practices. The ceremony, held as part of a weekend retreat organized by the "White Buffalo Society," involved complete burial of the body beneath a foot of sand for fifteen minutes. Sustar suffocated because the snorkeling tube which should have allowed her to breathe became dislodged from her mouth. Police in two U.S. states launched an investigation into the practices of the Ohio-based Society, and the organization became the focus of a media scandal. Former members told of receiving third degree burns while participating the "fire dance" ceremonies, and accused the Society's leader, Pa'Ris'Ha



Taylor, of criminal irresponsibility and fraud.<sup>8</sup> The White Buffalo Society was branded a "New Age cult", and Taylor was portrayed as a dangerous, manipulative peddler of inauthentic traditions.<sup>9</sup>

In this section, I will examine some of the ways in which New Age ideological formations serve to bind together groups of consumers into collectivities and communities. As with Shirley MacLaine's video, these ideological formations display some characteristics that one might call postmodern -- notably a penchant to mix and match pre-modern and non-Western cultural traditions. Yet New Age appropriations and marketing of native spiritual and cultural traditions, the White Buffalo Society being a prime example, raise significant questions about why and how representations of non-Western cultural "authenticity" have served to interpellate new and important collectivities in contemporary North American society. The significance of New Age ideological formations cannot be accounted for by

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<sup>8</sup>See Lois Sweet, "Growing Concern over New Age Cult," Toronto Star, June 10, 1990, pp. B1, B4.

<sup>9</sup>Native leaders in Ohio, for example, pointed out that the name Pa'Ris'Ha contains letters that do not exist in the Cherokee alphabet; they also condemned Taylor's practice of advertising and charging fees for participation in native ceremonies. See Sweet, "Growing Concern over New Age Cult," pp. B1, B4. Taylor has indirectly responded to some of these accusations. In the White Buffalo Society's most recent brochure, her autobiographical credentials are presented in terms considerably more vague than in previous advertising, and fee schedules for weekend retreats emphasize that "there is no charge for ceremony."

merely invoking some notion of a postmodern "condition" or "cultural logic."

Despite the scandal surrounding Joanne Sustar's death, for example, White Buffalo Society retreats have not lost their allure and regularly attract several hundred participants, the majority of whom are white, professional, middle class women.<sup>10</sup> Many similar organizations have sprung up across North America over the past decade, offering non-Natives an opportunity to be initiated into indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions. In Montreal, a group of non-Natives meets once weekly to "learn the sacred way," and weekend workshops on shamanism have drawn in hundreds of participants.<sup>11</sup> The increasing popular fascination with native culture has fueled a publishing spree, and the marketing of native spirituality has begun to overshadow previous New Age fads such as channeling and crystals. Hollywood has also entered this market, recycling the old cowboys-and-Indians genre into the giant box-office success of Dances with Wolves, described somewhat archly by The New Yorker as a "New Age social-studies lesson."<sup>12</sup> Most of these phenomena have one thing in common: they

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<sup>10</sup> Sweet, "Growing Concern over New Age Cult," pp. B1, B4.

<sup>11</sup> Marlene Caplan, "Spiritual connection: Natives, non-natives alike turn to Indian traditions to help discover 'the true way'," Montreal Gazette, June 2, 1991, p. A6.

<sup>12</sup> Review section, The New Yorker 67 (2), March 4, 1991, p. 20.

deploy cultural appropriation as the solution to our current social and cultural crises. We must look to indigenous peoples, according to this logic, for the means to rehabilitate the larger culture.

I am not suggesting that this is an unworthy or unwise endeavour. But it is important to consider the complex manoeuvring that takes place when one makes the apparently simple assertion that native cultures have something to "offer." Cultural appropriation is a serious political concern for native peoples. Art critic Loretta Todd sees it as a renewal of colonialism, the logical follow-up to the expropriation of land and resources already suffered by native communities. (Todd, 1990: 26, 30) By contrast, some natives, and most New Age "initiates," argue that the survival of Native traditions depends on making them available and accessible to as many people as possible, and especially to non-Natives, in order to boost the status of native culture in relation to the dominant culture.<sup>13</sup>

The issue of cultural appropriation has the makings of a dilemma. On the one hand, appropriation threatens to further undermine the already minimal autonomy of native communities, tying the fate of their cultural heritage to a market which they do not control. On the other hand, the richness and distinctiveness of native cultures are seen, by both natives and non-natives, to provide answers to larger

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<sup>13</sup>Caplan, "Spiritual connection," p. A6.

social and, especially, environmental crises. The question of "who can offer what to whom?" is not easily answered.

Determining who owns a given culture is not an adequate response to this problem, since it invokes the dubious assumption that cultures can be reduced to their pure essences. Indeed, the notion of "ownership" is part of the problem. One of the effects of the expanding New Age market in native cultural traditions has been to redefine cultures as essences that can be distilled, packaged, distributed, marketed, purchased, and owned within the context of a consumer lifestyle. These redefinitions have de facto structured the process of cultural appropriation in ethnocentric terms, since they reflect Western conceptions of ownership that differ markedly from those of native cultures. (Todd, 1990: 26) Yet even if we wanted to, we could not extricate ourselves from this economy of culture that has sprung up around the process of appropriation. Cultural autarky has become an impossibility, since we are faced with a context in which contemporary cultures are intermeshed, overlapping systems, and the boundaries that separate them are porous and fluid. (Gomez-Peña, 1987: 21) The question as to whether cultural appropriation should take place is thus a moot point. However, the claim that New Age collectivities and communities are spearheading the reform and rehabilitation of the dominant culture by unearthing the riches of marginalized traditions calls for a

closer examination of the effects and implications of such appropriation.

In an attempt to map out a few of these implications, I will refer to a broadcast of the CBS newsmagazine "48 Hours," which focussed on the New Age community of Sedona, Arizona.<sup>14</sup> Sedona is a recently incorporated town of 4800 residents, a large percentage of whom identify strongly with the New Age movement. The town has also become a New Age tourist attraction because it is believed to be surrounded by "vortexes" of metaphysical energy. The program, like most in the television "newsmagazine" genre, presents a series of short documentary-like reports put together by a team of journalists. This particular broadcast was characterized by a light, human-interest tone, and the bemused skepticism of the journalists was very much in evidence. In keeping with traditional news-reporting conventions, "both" sides of the story were presented. Thus, interviews with enthusiastic New Agers were "balanced" with portraits of a fundamentalist preacher, a forest ranger, and a local landowner who, in the words of one of the reporters, are "united by one desire: to push back the New Age."

Much of the program focusses on the exploits of individuals, but a secondary focus is the rapid growth and development of Sedona as a New Age centre. According to one

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<sup>14</sup>"The Secrets of Sedona," broadcast March 27, 1991.

resident New Ager interviewed during the program, Sedona's rapid growth is attributable to tourists who, after they "experience the energy," decide to stay. The town was named 90 years ago after an early pioneer, Sedona Schnebly, but in many ways, it is more of a pioneer town today than when it was first settled. The new "pioneers" appear to be drawn by the possibility of a lifestyle that is, in all its aspects, New Age. A real estate agent based in Sedona, for example, offers specialized New Age services such as the "exorcism" of bad energy from houses that are put up for sale. She observes:

I'm inundated, and I can't keep up with it. I'm closing over \$5 million this year . . . there's more and more people, especially in Sedona, which is becoming a mecca for spiritual people,, that think this way, feel this way, operate this way, live this way . . .

Like the realtor, the "48 Hours" reporters frequently compare Sedona to a place of pilgrimage, but what stands out in the comments of many of the New Agers they interview is a rhetoric of frontier development. The New Age constituency in Sedona is seen as not merely a new community, but a new kind of community that has left an older culture behind in order to build up a new socio-cultural edifice. According to a local journalist, migrants to the town

feel that the institutions in . . . other places in North America are not [adequate] . . . they're fleeing these institutions. They're coming here to set up, looking for a new value system.

The totally-New-Age lifestyle that Sedona residents can

potentially enjoy is represented as an experience of renewed freedom. The head of a local Goddess worship group, who also markets a line of Goddess fashion accessories and describes herself as a "sales rep for the angels and the fairies," explains her New Age practices as

. . . that part of us that is just playful and creative and joyful and imaginative . . . and feels unrestricted by boundaries. We can be anything. We can do anything.

The notion that New Age spirituality erases boundaries and opens up possibilities for new identities and new ways of living, and especially new kinds of identities for women, is shared by many of the people spoken to by the reporters.

The operator of a New Age bed-and-breakfast, for example, changed her name from Theresa Thelma Thompson to "Tanzara" after undergoing a series of past-life regressions. The reporter interviewing her frequently points to the contrast between her metaphysical curriculum vitae and her job as a cleaning woman:

TANZARA: I've had many incarnations in Egypt. I was very rich in Austria. I was also an Indian chief's wife. I lived in Cancun and sold jewelry. That was 600 A.D.

REPORTER: You're not just an ordinary cleaning lady . . .

TANZARA: Not at all. I'm an extraordinary cleaning lady . . . "

Indeed, her claim to have lived a past life in a city that was founded a mere twenty-five years ago by the Mexican government is especially extraordinary. A local writer and

longtime resident of Sedona, who views New Agers as credulous but "harmless," quips:

One of the bizarre aspects of reincarnation is that no one in their past life was ever a cook or a scullery maid, or someone who worked in the stables. They were kings and queens. I've met more people who were in Cleopatra's court . . . "

Whatever the inaccuracy or pretension, the recovery and expansion of one's "true" identity appears to be a central characteristic of Sedona's New Age lifestyle.

The frontier theme recurs in interviews with Sedona residents who represent themselves as lifestyle "innovators." Experiments in the development and use of metaphysical technologies are presented as the unrecognized harbinger of a new era of progress. Sedona itself is viewed as the beachhead of a spiritual avant-garde somewhat ahead of its time. A tourist from Los Angeles comments: "I don't think Sedona is for everybody . . . they have to be ready." Marlene Meir, director of "The Center for the New Age," who is interviewed while sitting inside a pyramid made of copper tubing, compares Sedona's New Age pioneers to early inventors:

REPORTER: Do you understand why some people think the New Age movement is really just a bunch of crazy people?

MEIR: Absolutely. And so was Fulton considered crazy. And so were the Wright brothers.

For Sedona's New Age population, then, the New Age "rehabilitation" of the dominant culture is primarily seen to be a process of lifestyle innovation that is opening up a



new frontier.

Rhetorical critic Janice Hocker Rushing views frontier rhetoric as part of an American "mythic identity" -- the "supply of myths" that, in Rushing's view, define that culture's identity and moral vision:

From birth to maturity, America has drawn upon the frontier for its mythic identity. Whether fixed upon Columbus sailing the ocean blue or Buffalo Bill conquering the Wild, Wild, West, the American imagination remains fascinated by new and unknown places. Lured by sea, then the plains, we are a people of the promised land, the New World, the untamed frontier. Since the beginning, the pioneer spirit has shaped the American Dream, and infused its rhetoric. (1986: 265)

The fact that frontiers vanish once they have been "tamed" is, according to Rushing, a central paradox of U.S. culture: in order to maintain its cultural identity, the country must constantly seek out new frontiers (266), and the "deep structure" of its rhetorical narratives shifts accordingly. The most recent shift in this frontier rhetoric reflects the American turn towards space exploration. Unlike previous frontiers of sea and land, Rushing argues, the conquering of space is practically inconceivable. As a result, the structure of the U.S.'s "mythic identity" has taken a dramatic turn.

The New Frontier is a "transcendent" frontier, and this has given rise to new rhetorical narratives of holism, integration, and transcendence, evident in discourses as disparate as molecular physics and popular film. (284-286)  
The development of a "mythology of the transcendent New

Frontier" (286) has been accompanied by a reorganization of mythic relationships between particular and general, part and whole, and individual and community. In Rushing's account, an older dialectics has been superceded by an ultimate synthesis, such that these dualisms have fused into a higher unity. One of the indications that this has occurred is the recent appearance of a mythic "inner" frontier:

. . . in what only seems like a paradox, the exploration of outer space coincides with the exploration of inner space. The further we expand our conception of community, the deeper we look into our individual psyches. (285)

For Rushing, the emergence of this new mythology of transcendence has signalled a fundamental shift in American cultural identity. A culture that was previously maintained by a myth of the lone hero pitted against both the frontier and the community, is being transformed into a culture of integrated and interdependent individuals. American identity is still based on a frontier mythology, but the paradox that has driven the country rapaciously outward to new frontiers has been eliminated in favour of an interiorization of the frontier.

Rushing's argument, of course, is distinctly modern. American identity is maintained by a totalizing myth, and American culture has moved closer to what Rushing regards as the ultimate telos of history, "the unfolding of human consciousness toward wholeness and unity." (268) One notes

how close this definition of history resembles New Age narratives of renovatio; one of the central premises of The Aquarian Conspiracy is that the New Age will reach completion when individual consciousnesses have evolved into a collective whole. (48; 68-71) Moreover, although Rushing never directly mentions them, New Age discourses fit neatly into her framework as examples of the new frontier rhetoric emerging in the U.S. One Sedona resident describes her turn towards a New Age philosophy as a shift from outer preoccupations toward inner explorations:

I looked around at my life . . . and I saw that even though people were successful and they had all the trappings of the American Dream, not very many people were happy . . . It motivated me to see if there was a better way. That's what started me on the path of what is called the New Age. One goes deeper inside oneself to find out what you really want in your life.

Interpreting Sedona's New Age cultural formations as postmodern would require overlooking the extent to which the rhetorical interiorization of frontier development and the new telos of unified consciousness that structures them, far from providing the basis for a radical rehabilitation of Western culture, reproduces the basic logic of modernity. This is not to deny that New Age practices are transforming Western culture, nor that there is a complete absence of opposition to the status quo. Feminist critiques, for example, figure prominently in many New Age discourses,

although most are variations of feminist essentialism.<sup>15</sup>

But rather than postmodern, the New Age impact on contemporary culture can be more aptly understood as an instance of what I term the "meta-modern."

In Sedona, for example, the "boom town" talk of rapid growth, sky-high real estate markets, and pioneer innovations fails to acknowledge that New Age "progress" has brought about a new set of crises. The town has sprouted a profusion of gift shops, motels, and an infrastructure to accommodate tourists visiting the local metaphysical sites. One local observer of the Sedona scene remarks: "We are becoming a metaphysical Disneyland." The glimpses of the town's main street that the "48 Hours" broadcast provides us with suggest a rather typical pattern of tourist development. Shop signs appeal primarily to tourists: "Angel Art and Crystals: Vortex Maps, Gifts, Studio, Gallery"; "The Eye of the Vortex Bookcentre." A brightly painted antique streetcar, its sides covered with advertisements for local New Age attractions, clangs along the street carrying tourists from hotels to shops. A craving for things metaphysical is whetted at every turn. One tourist, examining a set of walking sticks on display

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<sup>15</sup>While an analysis of feminist New Age discourses is beyond the scope of this study, it is clearly crucial to a fuller understanding of New Age cultural formations, since women figure prominently in both the New Age movement and market. Donna Haraway (1989), in her critique of goddess worship, has laid some of the groundwork for such a study.

outside a gift shop, is greeted with a matter-of-fact sales pitch: "These are wizard walking sticks. They empower people." The fact that one can purchase "empowerment" suggests that although New Age tourism mobilizes a new set of values, geographies, and leisure activities, the commercial logic that underpins this exploitation is no different from that of conventional tourism.

Tourism has placed an added strain on the use of local metaphysical "resources," already heavily exploited by the town's resident New Age population. Most New Age tourists travel to Sedona in order to absorb spiritual energy from its famous "vortexes" of spiritual energy, as well as to visit its "medicine wheels," circular assemblages of stones, usually found on the top of hills, that were built by the area's early Native inhabitants as ceremonial sites. Six local tour companies, sporting names such as "Earth Wisdom Tours" and "Sacred Earth Excursions," offer tourists the opportunity to engage in their choice of ritual ceremony, achieve "heightened" spiritual experiences, and, in the words of one tour guide, "work with the silence." Increased tourism has meant that there are not enough original medicine wheels in the Sedona area to meet the growing demand for "silence" and spiritual "experiences." Responding to a growing scarcity of authentic native metaphysical resources, local residents have taken to constructing their own medicine wheels, a practice that

considerably disrupts the area's existing landscape.

Geographic beauty is also at a premium, since, as a local observer comments: "One of the paradoxes of vortexes is that they're never in the ugly parts of town." Limited space and increasing demand has particularly affected a nearby state forest, the location of several vortexes. New Age graffiti -- symbolic scratchings based on native traditions -- proliferates on the rock cliffs in the park, and numerous medicine wheels have been built. A forest ranger, charged with protecting the forest from human intervention, remarks:

The people that use this [medicine wheel] are altering the landscape for themselves. I've had people tell me that a spirit or the soul of a tree or . . . a rock has given them permission to move it or remove it . . .

New Age tourism has also spilled over onto local private lands. "Tours and things are beating this land up . . . ," laments one landowner. The opening of a new, spiritual frontier appears to have recycled historical patterns of land invasion, expropriation, and development in an ironic fashion. The area's "original" colonizers are thus confronted with an invasion of meta-modernizing colonizers, who are attempting a return to "original," ie. native, patterns of land use and development. Yet native people do not figure in this scenario. Instead, the land is being reorganized within a New Age framework that appropriates native culture in order to exploit a new, "metaphysical resource" economy.

I began this section with an interrogation as to the implications of cultural appropriation. I argued that New Age practices of appropriation cannot be adequately explained as postmodern cultural strategies. The example of New Age "development" in Sedona suggests that the difference between New Age practices and "critical" postmodernism appears to be especially acute. Critical postmodernism proposes to challenge and transform existing socio-cultural edifices by breaking apart the totalizing metanarratives and hegemonic identities of modernity to make way for new subjects, practices, collectivities, and hopefully, more democratic ways of deploying power. (Haraway, 1989: 179-181; Hebdige, 1988: 202-203; Huyssen, 1990: 268-71) My admittedly limited analysis of New Age cultural formations in one community suggests that, despite a bricolage of identities and cultural practices, New Age formations do not represent what Andreas Huyssen terms "a genuine and legitimate dissatisfaction with modernity." (1990: 238) Instead, the New Age appropriation of traditions and practices marginalized by modernization has tended to underpin new forms of teleological "progress." This often ironic "meta-modernization" is neither a return to the past nor a rejection of modernity. Instead, it is a lateral displacement of "out-moded" (ie., merely modern) institutions and practices by a new form of "frontier development" that brings with it most of the attendant

crises, exclusions, disruptions, invasions, and marginalizations that have, historically at least, tended to accompany such development. (Haraway, 1989: 200-201; Huyssen, 1990: 286)

It is the context of consumer "lifestyle" that organizes the meta-modernization of this interiorized, rhetorical frontier. In both the cultural formations of Sedona and Shirley MacLaine's video, marginalized, "authentic" cultural traditions serve to interpellate groups of consumers as meta-modernizing lifestyle innovators. For New Age consumers, there is no dilemma about what indigenous cultures have to offer: they become the very source -- or resource -- for a new form of teleological, socio-cultural advance. Unlike postmodern strategies, meta-modern culture is typified by a lack of critical, self-conscious awareness that would shed light on the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in such a project. Instead "consciousness" is retextualized by means of metaphysical technologies that serve as the dynamo of meta-modern progress. The result is a meta-modern "lifestyle" that appears to transcend, but actually relocates, the contradictions of modernity.



CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSION: FROM "FRONTIER" TO "HOMELAND"

Nowhere is the division more pronounced between North America's first peoples and the newcomers than in their different perceptions of wilderness as homeland or frontier. We see the dichotomy in thinking throughout our shared histories, and sadly, much in evidence today. (Henley, 1989: 103)

But in the end we are -- as Gramsci said -- all of us philosophers, which means we are all homesick, yearning backwards to the source ( "Philosophy is homesickness" [Novalis]). We all come down to earth in time: we all come back "home" to that bounded space, that space which grounds us in relation to our own lives and to history. (Hebdige, 1988: 244)

As these passages imply, a conception of "home" or "homeland" is a return to a sense of limitations. But Hebdige's words also hint that such a return could give rise to new possibilities, and indeed may be crucial in our times. I use this idea as a way of delimiting my critique of New Age culture, because several options come to the fore. I began this study with a reference to Adorno, and have raised in several places the possible link between New Age culture and dispersed networks of discursive domination. My discussion of Shirley MacLaine's video suggested that it mimics "informatic" domination in the way that it pathologizes and textualizes body and consciousness as subsystems of larger totalities. But consumer lifestyle and cultural appropriation, rather than informatics, appear to be the dominant organizing principles within New Age cultural formations. If domination is present, we must look for it in the meta-modernized New Age lifestyles -- in the appropriation, technologization, and consumption of cultural

traditions constructed as a form of "progress."

I implied in my discussion of the rhetoric of the New Age movement that The Aquarian Conspiracy was more of a market researcher's text book than a rallying call of a collectivity. As consumers, we are all positioned and constrained by marketing practices, and it is doubtful that the New Age consumer market that expanded in the wake of Ferguson's book is more nefarious than other market formations. The Adorno-esque fear that the New Age obsession with holism is a precursor to totalitarianism overlooks the possibility of the reverse: that totalizing impulses have mutated into consumerized holism. Barbara Marx Hubbard, a prominent New Age spokesperson, once remarked: "Totalitarianism is premature holism,"<sup>1</sup> from which we can interpret that the totalizing ethos of New Age culture is discontinuous and historically specific.

If Adorno sits on the periphery of this study, it is less to ask questions about domination than to query whether negative criticism is the required response to New Age culture. Negativity seems necessary in discussing a phenomenon that promotes so much positivity. The New Age idea that "positive thinking" can change the world, for example, and New Age reconstructions of self and society as seamless, harmonious wholes, devolve too easily into

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<sup>1</sup>Fergus M. Bordewich, "Colorado's Thriving Cults," New York Times Magazine, May 1, 1988, p. 42.

uncritical affirmations of the status quo. Negative critique also enables us to assert that, just as New Age culture does not appear destined to enslave the world, neither will it save us from our current predicaments. To this end, I have tried to develop a different inflection of postmodern theory in the face of a critique of modernity and strategy of appropriation that does not seem reducible to the term "postmodern." I have proposed the term "meta-modern" in relation to the specificity of New Age rhetorics and cultural formations, and use it contingently as a theoretical possibility that clearly requires further thought. For the time being, it serves to focus attention on the way New Age "development" replicates both the totalizing exclusions and assumptions of modernity, and a colonizing form of cultural appropriation.

Asserting that New Age culture will not save us brings us back to Foucault's observation that parody serves as an "antidote" to the "masquerade" of monumental histories:

The new historian, the genealogist, will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare for the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. No longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past, but our "unrealization" through excessive choice of identities . . . (160-161)

The greatest limitation that the rhetoric of the New Age faces is that it is liable to be received and recirculated in this fashion. The popular film Down and Out in Beverley Hills serves as an example. One of the main characters in

the film, played by Bette Midler, is the archetypical New Age consumer, using New Age techniques as a up-to-date pragmatic interventions in an attempt to improve daily life: a grating, off-key "ohmm" meditation to quell a fight at the dinner table; walking over hot coals to reunite the family; a yogi to dispel her feelings of middle class guilt. Yet ultimately, her use of metaphysical technologies represents a vain attempt to generate some sense of identity and integration in the face of a vacuous, fragmenting family situation. The film parodizes not merely New Age practices, but more generally our incessant attempts to inject "meaning" into our lives as if our problems were simply the lack of a "true" identity and purpose, ignoring the fact that it is we, ourselves, who construct these identities and purposes, and often in very self-serving ways.

It is doubtful, however, that New Age cultural formations will be much affected by their parodic representations in popular culture. The New Agers of Sedona frequently asserted that they don't mind, and even relish the fact that they are regarded as silly or flaky. We cannot ignore that for many people, New Age cultural practices seem empowering and pleasurable. Hebdige argues:

Pastiche and collage can be valorised as forms which enable consumers to become actual or potential producers, processors, and subjects of meaning rather than passive bearers of pregiven "messages." (1988: 211)

Consumption as bricolage, for Hebdige, is a nexus where

"cultures, subjectivities, identities impinge upon each other" (211), and such practices can open the way for the constitution of new, potentially empowered subjects and collectivities. Theoretically at least, New Age consumers is no different from other consumers in this regard. A difference arises, however, when we remember that Hebdige has popular culture in mind as the text for such practices of consumption. I have tried to isolate here, in analyzing New Age culture, what happens when the engagement is with "authentic" cultural traditions, and moreover, what happens when such bricolages of the authenticity are produced not just by, but for consumers.

I have pointed to some of the colonialist assumptions inherent in the New Age rhetoric of "global culture," and my critique of meta-modernization shows, in part, the need to develop alternative models for cultural sharing and exchange. The aspect of New Age culture that needs most to be contested is its frontier rhetoric, and the passages I placed at the beginning of this chapter serve to propose, as alternatives, conceptions of "home" and "homeland." Social change cannot come without conceptions of social collectivity, but the crucial point is that our collectivities can be made and remade. We need to engage with and remake our "transcendent 'we'" (Hebdige 1988: 211) in order to provide alternative(s) to the hyper-transcendent "we" that is currently being constructed under the sign of

the New Age. With this in mind, it is of great interest that the terms "home" and "homeland" have tended to structure the rhetoric of many native-controlled efforts to revalorize and share native spiritual and cultural traditions.<sup>2</sup> To contrast the cultural rhetorics of frontier and homeland, however, will be the task of another study.

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<sup>2</sup>See Henley (1989). Henley's book deals with "Rediscovery," a program of native-controlled summer camps that is open to both natives and non-natives of all ages. The camps, primarily designed to meet the needs of native youth, combine spiritual, cultural, environmental, and scientific education in activities that emphasize both cultural autonomy and intercultural exchange.

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