



Institutional geographies of the New Age movement

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the production and reproduction of different institutional geographies of the New Age movement. Instead of taking institutional geographies to be given and fixed co-ordinates in the social field, the paper seeks to understand how they are relational outcomes and effects that require constant upkeep. After characterising the New Age movement, in terms of its central cosmology and visions of transformation, the paper takes an actor-network theory (ANT) approach to the understanding of institutional geographies. Through analysing how New Age knowledges and practices travel through time and space, and utilising ANT's concept of 'centres of translation', institutional geographies are taken to be active space-times that are both enrolled into New Age teachers and practitioners programs of action, and space-times that actively enrol teachers and practitioners. It is argued that the intertwining of different engineered actor-networks in and through these space-times maintains the New Age movement itself and thus examining institutional geographies can tell of the movement's shape or topology. A controversy over the work of David Icke is explored to reveal how institutional geographies are sites for regulation of what counts as New Age knowledge. Finally, this paper seeks, partially at least, to assess in terms of the ANT approach taken, the visions of transformation propounded by the New Age movement. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

The term 'institution' implies and conjures notions of permanence, continuance and fixity. We talk of institutions as if they are stable and solid co-ordinates in the social field. In light of these common associations, to talk of 'institutional geographies' is to speak of invariant and sturdy spatialities and geographies that are (re)produced within and through institutions. In this paper, I wish instead to take institutions and the geographies that create and are created by them, as processes, as achievements, as effects, and thus always *becoming* institutions, rather than *already* institutions. In other words, rather than taking 'institutional geographies' in terms of narratives that rely on nouns (describing institutions and geographies as given, ordered and a priori classifications), here I evoke an understanding of institutional geographies that moves towards descriptions composed of verbs (Law, 1994). Therefore, this paper sets out to trace the making of institutional geographies, and in doing so views them as outcomes of heterogeneous networks that stabilise and maintain certain rela-

tions amongst different actors. However, this analysis is not achieved at the expense of detailing certain instances of control and prescription that are performed in and through such space-times. Thus, I do not wish to ignore how institutions can and do patrol what can be said, done and what form agency takes. Further, I wish to describe institutional geographies as processes that require constant effort and upkeep, and thus are always on the way to becoming the immutable and enduring domains as given in the (social) order of things.

This broad intention is achieved through highlighting a number of characteristics of institutional geographies as (re)produced by the New Age movement. Therefore, this paper concentrates upon how the New Age actors make, create and delimit certain institutional geographies, and how, in turn, certain institutional geographies make, create and delimit (what counts as) the New Age and New Age actors. The approach taken in this paper draws upon Actor Network theory (Law, 1991, 1992; Law and Hassard, 1999; Law and Mol, 1995; Latour, 1999). Therefore, one of the primary objectives of this paper is to explore the theoretical and conceptual utility of Actor Network theory (ANT) in making sense of institutional geographies, and thus offer a different way of understanding these spatialities (Flowerdew, 1982;

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Philo, 1995). In the process of achieving this, I seek to contribute to the ongoing debate between socio-cultural geographers and Actor Network theorists (Bingham, 1996; Davies, 1999; Hinchcliffe, 1996; Law, 1999; Murdoch, 1995, 1997, 1998; Thrift, 1996, 1997; Whatmore, 1997). Furthermore, by taking this approach I hope to reveal and develop the potential of bringing Actor Network theory to the social scientific study of new social or, in this case religious, movements – a potentially interesting and productive dialogue that has yet to receive much attention (Holloway, 1998). Finally, it will become apparent that ANT is a useful analytical tool for making sense of New Age beliefs and notions of spiritual change, and thus the movement's potential to achieve its desired cosmological transformation. In order to effect these contributions I first must briefly introduce and (partially) circumscribe the 'New Age movement', its common beliefs, unifying practices and visions of change.

2. The New Age movement

Defining and delimiting the New Age movement is a task of considerable difficulty owing mainly to the diverse and manifold range of beliefs, cosmologies, practices and techniques that are subsumed within the phrase 'New Age movement'. Describing a New Age convention in the US, Ross (1991, p. 15) observed an "eclectic and colorful mix of healers, psychics, holistic foodsters, folk metaphysicians, psychotechnologists, UFO contactees, crystal therapists, dolphin advocates, channellers and a roster of New Age stars such as Timothy Leary, Marilyn Ferguson ... [etc.]". Further, healing practices could include Shiatsu massage, Reflexology, Reiki, homeopathy, psychic counseling and past life regression; 'folk metaphysicians' could include Sufism, Gnosticism, Wicca, Zen, Druidism and Shamanism; and channellers could be in touch with Seth, the Ashtar Command, Emmanuel, Bartholomew or Michael, to name but a few. Indeed much of the social scientific literature concerned with the New Age devotes significant time and space to characterisation and definition in order to manage this multiform movement (see Albanese, 1992, 1993; Alexander, 1992; Bruce, 1995; Chandler, 1988; Ellwood, 1992; Heelas, 1993, 1994, 1996; Lewis and Melton, 1992; Melton et al., 1990; York, 1995), while simultaneously realising that the diverse "nature of the movement ... frustrates any attempt to characterize it in a decisive manner" (Lewis, 1992, p. 6).

Yet there are certain characteristics of the movement that can be described in order to grasp this heterogeneity. For example, the New Age movement believes in the inherent spiritual and divine nature of humankind: "We are a creature of body, soul and spirit – and the spiritual being within is, the true 'I', is imperishable. It

always was and always will be" (Trevelyan, 1991, p. 31, original emphasis). This Truth of human reality is a belief in spiritual consciousness that is *essentially part of the Whole Cosmic Unity*: our inherent spiritual reality is an "individualized manifestation of [the] Ultimate Unifying Principle" (Melton et al., 1990, p. xvii). The Truth of the individual as ultimately a materialisation of the Divine, the Godhead or the Christ consciousness (as it is variously labelled) is the New Age movement's central *monism*. Furthermore, there is an essential *immanent* Divinity that permeates all existence. Every living creature, including ourselves, is part of the Cosmic Unity: we are all Ultimately the same. In turn, this is a theory of *correspondence*: "everything is everything else in New Age belief" (Albanese, 1992, p. 363). Finally, this tells of the New Age movement's central belief in *holism*: if the Divine is immanent in everything, if we all are a manifestation of Ultimate Truth, then we also are a reflection of this Whole. Here God is not transcendent, each of us is part of, or more accurately, *is* God:

Who is God? If you've never heard this before, or if you have a strong religious background, the answer to this question may sound very egotistical or presumptuous. *You* are God. And so am I. And so is everyone else in the world. We are all God (Haber, 1994, p. 1).

Another central tenet of the New Age movement is the belief in *reincarnation* and *karma*. The immortal and eternal soul begins its journey when it descends from the Divine Source, and periodically incarnates on Earth in physical bodies (as merely temporary 'containers' or 'vehicles' for the spirit or soul). At our Divine Source all is perfect, pure and balanced. Yet Karma is introduced to disrupt these perfect qualities of the True Self in its Cosmic genesis.¹ In its New Age usage:

Karma, the law of cause and effect, although a demanding principle, is also entirely just, and one fights against or even complains against it in vain. That which we shall sow we shall reap. Every action contains within itself logical and inevitable consequences. Every emotion brings about certain reactions (St. Aubyn, 1990, p. 18).

Every incarnation and past life, develops its own karmic balance (either positive or negative) and thus experiences and events in previous incarnations have impacts on present and future incarnations, forming, as

¹ As Melton et al. (1990, p. xvi) argues, the belief in karma as "one of the most commonly accepted opinions in the New Age movement" is held with "passion and dogmatic certainty".

it were, a cosmic and transhistorical moral economy of the spirit or soul.

The New Age movement holds that we realise these past lives through *revelations* or spiritually significant experiences and events. Crucially then, the ‘goal’ of a New Ager’s spirituality is to come to some form of Divine understanding, ascension or higher consciousness. Yet this imbalance caused during the transmigration of the soul must be restored in order that we can become “more and more what one essentially is as a soul” (Crème, 1998, p. 3). Furthermore, in achieving this we take part in and contribute to the Cosmic Plan which usually concerns some form of redistribution and expansion of either Love or Knowledge in the Universe:

When the many-armed octopus sends down to earth one or more of its tentacles, everything that happens to that tentacle during its earth life will be communicated back to the group through its body, thus expanding the learning of all its members, whether incarnate or disincarnate (St. Aubyn, 1990, p. 14).

Knowledge of this Cosmic Plan has been transmitted to humankind by those known as Masters or ‘Ascended Masters’, who have achieved Enlightenment, of which the New Age Movement believes in a whole panoply. This transmission of the Cosmic Plan occurs either when these Beings ‘materialise’ on this earthly plane – for example, Christ, known in New Age circles as Sananda – or when this Wisdom is shared via ‘sensitives’ and ‘channellers’.²

However, the New Age movement holds central that, both individually and collectively, we have lost touch or been conditioned out of this knowledge by various external and negative sources – such as organised and dominant forms of religion, traditional education, ‘materialist’ ways of life and ideologies.³ These societal forms and psychological imbalances in individuals need to be redressed through New Age knowledges and practices. In other words, we must become *healed* in order that we can jettison these blocks to the realisation of our Divine origins. Hence it is time for humanity to realise its True potential and begin the *New Age*, al-

lowing us “to reclaim the power we long ago surrendered to custom and authority to discover, under the clutter of all our conditioning, the core of integrity that transcends conventions and codes” (Ferguson, 1982, p. 36).

Of significance to this paper are New Age visions of transformation, of which three can be outlined.⁴ First, the New Age places central importance upon the *individual* to change and usher in the New Age. As we have seen it is often an individual’s responsibility to heal themselves, and thus realise their Divinity, for a subsequent wider shift in consciousness to occur (see Athanasiou, 1989; Satin, 1979; Cummings, 1981). The second notion of change can be deemed *millennially apocalyptic* and is bound up with the Zodiacal ages of the Earth. These ages last approximately 2000 years, and are often seen as cosmic events. In other words, with each age the Earth takes another step in its cosmic evolution.⁵ Accordingly the Earth is currently moving from the Age of Pisces (which began with the birth of Christ) to the Age of Aquarius (see Joy, 1986). As to the exact date of the arrival of the latter it seems that astrologers and New Agers alike are divided (some estimate it has already arrived while other put the date in the future), yet more important are the qualities (human and societal) and events associated with these ages. Thus, the Piscean Age, the Old Age, is being superseded by the Aquarian Age, the New Age, wherein value systems that give rise to environmental destruction, patriarchy, inequality, hatred and disease will be replaced by Love and Light (Jagadeesh, 1995). This future will be one where we have rediscovered our True Divine nature, achieved Balance in ourselves and with the planet, and finally realised our part of the Cosmic Plan.

The third vision of spiritual transformation is one which is most apposite to the tracing of institutional geographies that is sought here: this can be deemed the New Age movement’s *network spirituality*. This vision has three interrelated facets. Firstly, the New Age movement seeks to disseminate its beliefs and practices amongst a wider spiritually impoverished or negatively conditioned population. In common with many other religious and spiritual movements then, the New Age seeks to persuade those bound up in a materialist and destructive society, and thus to bring them ‘into the Light’. The movement must always be seeking to grow

² As with Christ/Sananda these Beings take the form of more traditional spiritual or religious figures revealing what many commentators on the New Age Movement deem its *perennialism*. This signifies the dominant trend in New Age thought to trace the essential Truth of all religions and spiritual traditions. In other words, at the heart of all religions lies a basic Divine meaning and message – with religious differences arising as a result of “historical contingencies and ego-operations” (Heelas, 1996, p. 27).

³ For example, the ills of bad nutrition must be replaced by healthy eating: ‘normal’ diets represent the intake of toxins and poisons which only act as further obstacles to Holistic health and thus spiritual development.

⁴ Here, I adapt and extend the distinction made by Melton et al. (1990) between passive and active forms through which the New Age will be realised.

⁵ The New Age consistently views world events as emblematic of this shift. Thus, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Stock Market crashes, Natural disasters, Wars and Revolutions are all seen as indicative of the “chaotic transition period” from Piscean to Aquarian (St. Aubyn, 1990, p. 7).

and extend its networks to convert and awaken. Secondly, the New Age movement constantly endeavours to forge links and connections with other like minded spiritual seekers and groups. This is deemed necessary in order that preparation can occur in line with the immanent or current shift to the Age of Aquarius.⁶ In this perennialist vision, all those who speak of a spiritual deficit and/or a need to awaken humanity from its meaningless slumbers, need to be linked together so that the necessary societal forms can be prepared and pre-figured. Thus there is an almost eschatological desire to get ready or change society for the New Age, whether currently manifesting or immanent. The final aspect of network spirituality relates strongly to the previous facets. The crucial and necessary spiritual awakening of humanity and networking with other groups to prepare or accommodate ourselves to the New Age, is seen as evidence in itself of the New Age. In other words, the very fact that more and more people and groups are seeking spiritual enlightenment is seen, often retrospectively, as emblematic of the appearance of the New Age: as the movement extends to include more of humanity and connects with those engaging in a spiritual life the very appearance of such a network is indicative of the dawning of the New Age. Thus there is a spiritual significance to New Age networks, their appearance, extension and linkages.

3. Acting at a distance: enrolling and creating institutional geographies

The previous section revealed that the New Age movement consists of a wide range of believers, practitioners and teachers seeking to bring about or prepare for the shift in human spiritual consciousness that is the New Age. There is, therefore, a desire to develop a network of spiritual individuals and groups for the current or immanent New Age – a process of networking that itself is given (a retrospective) spiritually emblematic significance. This desire involves the creation, maintenance and incorporation of what can be deemed New Age institutional geographies. I will return to the significance and potentialities of institutional geographies to, what I called above, the network spirituality of the New Age movement. Here, I wish to take a very material focus and trace, if you like, the ‘workings’ of this collectivity and the resulting institutional geographies. This is a necessary step in order that the

utility of ANT to exploring New Age beliefs can be achieved. I wish, in other words to begin by ‘following the actors’, to use Latour’s (1987) famous phrase. In particular, I aim to understand how New Age knowledges and practices ‘travel’. In other words, how is it that the variety of beliefs and techniques that comprise the New Age movement journey through time and across space? A principal means by which New Age knowledges are maintained and spread is through face-to-face dialogical interaction wherein certain generic ways of talking about the world and the self are deployed (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986; Holloway and Kneale, 2000; Voloshinov, 1973). However, “voices don’t last for long, and they don’t travel far. If social ordering depended on voices alone, it would be a very local affair” (Law, 1994, p. 102). Talk, dialogue and voices are local: standing on top of a hill and shouting as loud as possible may help in the transmission of New Age ideas but it remains pretty hit and miss. In order to reach beyond the local potential of talk, New Agers become engineers of networks in and through which their messages and techniques can be spread – a process, as we shall see, which entails various translations and nominations of agency en route. It is here, therefore, that we can profitably utilise ANT as a way of understanding institutional geographies, and in the process explore the potential of ANT to describe the spatialities of such new social/religious movements.

Let me begin this through a brief example. Let us imagine we are someone called Cariad West and we have trained for (no doubt) many years in order that we can call ourselves a ‘Reiki Master’. We live in Bath and we wish to practice this system of natural healing and share our knowledge – as to share is to potentially extend the New Age, prepare people for the current/immanent shift to the New Age and thus add to the growing network that is evidence of the New Age. Yet this desire to heal will barely be satisfied if we rely on talking to people, because, despite how loud we shout or how many people we talk to, our voice does not travel far. ‘Word of mouth’ and the dialogical (re)production of New Age knowledge is indeed important but this must be accompanied with other means of acting at a distance. The dilemma, therefore, becomes how to make this knowledge, the potential benefits of Reiki and our voice travel further so that more people become aware of our practice. One simple answer is to advertise our services (see Fig. 1).

In the design of the advert, as much as we would like to, it is impossible to describe and explain the intricacies and complexities of Reiki and the diverse events of our life history that have brought us to this desire to practice. In other words, we have to ignore or at least simplify this complexity into an advert, costing £40 in a free, quarterly, approximately 120 pages long directory of alternative therapies called South West Connection

⁶ In addition to making linkages with other groups, societal organisations such as communes and New Age communities can be seen as indicative of this ‘prefiguring’ approach (Bates and Miller, 1995; Pepper, 1991). The most famous of such organisations is The Findhorn Community (see Findhorn Community, 1975; Hawken, 1976).

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Fig. 1. Source: South-west connection: A guide to personal development and natural therapies, issue No. 47, December 1996/March 1997, p. 41, Reproduced by permission of Cariad West.

(SWC). We have now (potentially) succeeded in making ourselves known further than our voice can travel, through the availability of SWC in places like bookshops and cafés across the South West of England. Cariad has therefore engineered a network in order to act at a distance.

Now let us look closer at this material process in order to reveal certain issues and make apparent certain characteristics of New Age institutional geographies. In order for Cariad to act at a distance, which here means attracting clients or customers to the service she offers in Bath, a series of *translations* must be performed and a set of heterogeneous materials *mobilised*. Let us take this concept of *translation* from ANT first: “the elementary operation of translation is triangular: it involves a translator, something that is translated, and a medium in which that translation is inscribed” (Callon, 1991, p. 143). ANT uses the term translation to mean “displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies two elements and agents” (Latour, 1994, p. 32). In other words, for Cariad to act at a distance, involves a series of changes and transformation of herself, her practices and her skills. Cariad is a translator inasmuch as she displaces and thus transform her skills, knowledge and life history into texts (adverts in SWC) of no more of a sixth of a page. This translation involves *mobilisation*: the use or the *enrolment* of different, heterogeneous, materials. We could suggest, then, that Cariad mobilised such materials as paper, word processing packages, PCs, envelopes, cameras, films, developing materials – the list is manifold. This mobilisation links “things to texts, texts to things and things to people” into a configured actor-network (Callon and Law, 1995, p. 501). Moreover, the advert stands for or more accurately *re-presents* this configured actor-network. It is an *effect* of a series of associations between people, artifacts, materials and machines for which it stands – it *punctualises* the work of this configured actor-network, simplifying the

complexity from which it is derived into a single point or *trace* (Callon, 1991).

Here we have a chain of translation that links, aligns, in short, forms an actor-network, that allows practitioners (their skills, bodies, knowledges, etc.) to be made present while remaining temporally and spatially absent (Latour, 1994). Crucially, these displacements and transformations allow Cariad to (potentially) exert an influence, to be able to act, across space and through time. Thus New Age knowledges and practices, via the enrolment of diverse materials into which they are translated, displaced and transformed, can travel through time and space. Looking closer at this process, and thus focusing upon the characteristics of, “both the succession of hands that *transport* a statement and the succession of *transformations* undergone by that statement” (Latour, 1991, p. 106, original emphasis) we can suggest, via ANT, three aspects to this technology of representation. First, complexity must be reduced through a process of *simplification*: interactions, experiences, events, beliefs, knowledges, personality, even the bodies of this practitioner is necessarily suppressed, in order for such heterogeneity “to be brought together in a comfortable space at a particular time” – in this case an advert (Law and Whittaker, 1988, p. 178). Second, a process of *discrimination* is undertaken, whereby “new classes of objects are brought into being, objects whose boundaries and properties are clearer than those who they have replaced” (Law and Whittaker, 1988, p. 178): the photograph of Cariad, the text and the advert as a whole, are new clearer objects, brought into being as traces of something else for which they speak. Third, these newly constituted objects have the characteristic of being interrelated with other similar objects (adverts in texts). These three processes describe the transformation involved in translation. More is revealed if we also inspect the characteristics of the ‘hands’ that ‘transport’ the traces of Cariad. The voices and the skilled hands of this practitioner, as we have seen, are only mobile over a

short distance; they deteriorate and break up at distance (notwithstanding the effects of ‘word of mouth’). Therefore, anything that allows action across space and through time must have the properties of *immutability* and *mobility*. So adverts and texts like SWC can be passed from hand to hand, sent through the post, left in shops – mobility through space – and they do not fall apart, distort or decay – durability through time (Latour, 1988). In summary, then, simplification, discrimination and interrelation transforms Cariad as she is translated into immutable mobiles that allow her to (potentially) exert an influence across space and through time.⁷

In the process of acting at a distance, it can be argued, that Cariad has simultaneously made, incorporated and arranged certain space-times into her engineered actor-network. Thus Cariad creates the space-time of the Reiki circle held (somewhere) in Bath, and she has incorporated and arranged into this actor-network space-times that include shops, offices and cafés wherein SWC is produced, discovered and read. In addition, therefore, to the mobilisation and attribution of agency to various objects and technologies, engineered New Age actor-networks create and incorporate certain space-times as active and agents. New Age engineers arrange and mobilise different space-times “so that certain types of action can be conducted” (here acting at a distance) and thus “the action in actor networks configures space[-time]” and lends agency to such space-times (Murdoch, 1998, p. 361). A first characteristic, then, of institutional geographies that can be derived from this analysis is one of active space-times in programs of achieving action at a distance. Yet in line with the notion of agency generated from ANT these active space-times can only achieve such status as relational effects. Therefore, space-times become active only through the arrangement of certain interactions and relations, and the mobilisation and weaving together of humans and non-humans into certain configurations. In short, these space-times are actor-networks in themselves.

However, if the agency of these space-times (in Cariad’s desire to make her knowledge and practices

travel) is an effect or relational outcome of the work of teachers, delegate agents and the variety of relations and translations enacted in these space-times, then a certain amount of stability and cohesion must be introduced to the actor-network in order that an influence can be exerted. In short the actor-network must be held together through various relations and linkages being maintained. To recognise this is to appreciate that space-times such as the offices wherein the SWC is put together, have their own actor-network trajectories, which may disrupt Cariad’s configuration and delegation of agency to such space-times. If, however, this space-time can be enrolled in her actor-network so that it and other materials act on her behalf, Cariad’s agency and ability to act at a distance can be potentially achieved. It is necessary to note therefore that the “[actor-]network [that allows knowledges and practices to travel] does not emerge as a simple aggregation of these gathered space-time trajectories; rather all are modified as they enter into new and complex relationships within the [actor-]network” (Murdoch, 1998, p. 361). Indeed, the modifications and translations performed in and through different institutional space-times (so that they are active on her behalf) are necessary in order to stabilise and weave an effective actor-network. Once achieved, once the actor-network is stabilised, Cariad’s knowledges and practices can travel.

Yet such stabilisation requires effort. Without upkeep and labour, distribution of agency to humans, non-humans and institutional space-times can fall short and programs of action fail. An error in typesetting the advert, a double booking of a room, insufficient copies of SWC printed to cope with demand, a lack of response to adverts, even an ineffective Reiki healing, are all examples of misfortunes that can occur which render the programs of action and the engineering of a (stabilised) actor-network precarious. Cariad can attempt to keep these potentialities in check to a certain extent, but the uncertainty inherent to and often perilous endeavour that is the generation of delegate agents and active space-times, means that the institutional geographies that are formed in, form part of and are themselves New Age actor-networks are always in a state of becoming. Institutional geographies, then, are active space-times constantly in formation.

4. Centres of translation

Institutional geographies, then, have been characterised so far as active (but precarious) space-times that are created and enrolled into New Age actor-networks in order that practitioners and teachers are able to act at a distance. In order to further detail such spatialities through ANT one must discuss the concept from that body of work that seems most pertinent to institutions

⁷ I am aware that this material description of how New Agers engineer actor-networks could be read in such way that human intentionality remains intact – it is humans who are primarily responsible for the actor-networks they create – and that this is something that ANT attempts to eschew at all costs. I would like to make two responses to such a reading. Firstly, this trace of an intentional human agent results, in part, from beginning my account with Cariad – if I had begun with the advert an account could have been developed that revealed how Cariad, the human agent, is produced in and is an effect of the actor-network that the advert traces. Secondly, I hope my stress on relationality and the role of the non-human in allowing Cariad to act at distance disperses her unified status and agency amongst other non-human agents and materials.

and their geographies – namely the notion of *centres of translation* (Latour, 1987). In overview, centres of translation are sites wherein combinable elements or traces of distant events or places are gathered together and additional work is done. Initially at least, it is possible to take SWC as one such a centre of translation.⁸ As a directory containing adverts for many different therapies and practices, events and courses from all over the South West, SWC accumulates the traces of various spatially distanced points across this part of the country: these points being workshops, practitioners, course organisers, healing centres, etc. The gathering of these traces is dependent upon various other actor-networks (e.g. the postal system), but also it relies on the fact that the adverts sent in are mobile, immutable and combinable. This characteristic of interrelation – that Law and Whittaker (1988) and Fyfe and Law (1988) describe as part of the process of transformation in re-presentation – takes the form here of the adverts being similarly designed, sized and coloured: it is no use sending in an A4 colour advert into SWC as this is not combinable with the others. These initial inscriptions require additional work once they have all been sent in by the deadline for the next issue: typesetting, laying out, allocating a section within the directory, printing and assigning a page number – all of this is additional and potentially precarious work. Once again the chain of association which includes (and produces) Cariad has been extended, incorporating and enrolling further human and non-humans allies. But importantly, once again a translation has occurred in that SWC is the *n*th order inscription: “the *n*th order inscription will now stand for the *n*th –1 order paper forms exactly as these in turn stood for the level just below” (Latour, 1987, p. 234). Furthermore, these translations, once performed and stabilised, allows the space-time(s) of SWC to become an active institutional geography.

In this sense, focusing upon SWC allows us to continue tracing the institutional geography of the New Age movement. Yet in order to do this one must be aware of the function, role and general characteristics of centres of translation given in ANT. Importantly, the accumulation of traces in a centre of translation allows the creation of an asymmetrical relation to a dominated periphery. So Latour (1987) uses the examples of how it became possible for the court of Louis XVI in Versailles to know and act at a distance on regions of China, or how zoologists in dusty museums

could gather so much knowledge about the ethnozoology of so many distanced people. The creation of an asymmetry between centres and peripheries in both examples was due to the accumulation, combination and endless translation into *n*th order inscriptions of the traces of distant places and people. Yet a strong, as it were, asymmetry between centre and periphery – the domination of many at the periphery by a few at the centre – is somewhat weakened in this analysis. To an extent it is possible to argue that SWC fits into this schema in that it combines and accumulates traces of distant places, events and people: the reader of SWC becomes akin to scientists and Kings, in that through holding it they can (virtually) travel around the South West, visiting the places, the people and institutions that the directory represents and punctualises for them. Yet it would be with some caution that one could suggest that they (the readers or producers of SWC) do so in order to dominate a periphery. Indeed, we have seen how the reverse is enacted here in that those on the ‘periphery’, such as Cariad, enrol and utilise SWC, in order to act at a distance, trace connections and make active certain space-times.

Let us look at two examples from New Age space-times that seem (initially) to have the characteristics of centres of translation, in order that the utility of this notion can be explored. Firstly, let us take *Gothic Image* that is situated at the lower end of the High Street, Glastonbury, Somerset. In 1975 *J* and *F* moved from London and took over *Gothic Image*, which then was a failing art gallery selling medieval style paintings and large craft items and transformed it into a New Age book-shop. As such, *J* and *F* gather the traces of the work of innumerable and distanced people and machines, through accumulating books. These are combinable (they can be interrelated on shelves according to topic) and immutable and mobile (they do not decay that easily through time and space). This process is made clear:

F: (...) so what we do want to do, though, is we want to support small publishers and small magazines, and there are all sorts of wonderful little earth mysteries magazines produced up North and all over the place, that no one would ever see, if we didn't have them. So why have the big mainstream publisher's stuff? We prefer to go for the, as long as they're interesting and well put together, for the slightly eclectic, a bit more obscure if you like.

F: (...) we get a lot of our books from small publishers, and from America as well, small publishers in America as well, so you won't, the books on UFOlogy and stuff, they won't be available, generally over here.

⁸ It is significant to note that the use of the term *centre* here does not necessarily refer to a physical space. For Latour a centre of translation (or sometimes calculation) can be anything from a laboratory to a graph on a piece of paper: the astronomer's map of the heavens is such a centre as it allows “celestial bodies billions of tons heavy and hundreds of thousands of miles away” to become “the size of a point on a piece of paper” (Latour, 1987, p. 287).

In addition to the book-shop they began *Gothic Image Publishers* in the early eighties. Again, this could be interpreted as gathering in the traces (such as manuscripts) of distanced people and work, lending *Gothic Image* the status of a centre. Yet we have to ask the question as to who is enrolling who, and who is attempting to dominate who, if we are to attribute this status:

F: (...) and then the publishing was a matter of really finding that no publishers, that there was no book on a particular subject, like Fairies and Angels, or there was no really good book on Dowsing, in fact there wasn't at all, and all the subjects that a lot of people were interested in. So we started to publish.

JH: So on the publishing side, how do authors come to you, do they come to you with their manuscripts?

F: Yeah I get a lot of manuscripts, billions, and authors, a lot of friends of mine are authors, so that's another thing, and they come with proposals, and also I think well it would be really good to do a book on that and that, and so and so would be good to do it, y'know, and it works, and I love it because it's a real small scale, it's quite organic, and it happens, I mean there are billions of books that I'd love to do, but I also don't want to be umm, sort of big time and employing billions of people, it's all money, I like the personal relationship with the author, so that the author can choose what kind of jacket that they want.

In the first instance *F*, through the desire to publish books on certain ignored topics, attempts to enrol others into publishing, thus controlling to some extent what happens at the periphery (according to ANT's schema). Yet in the second instance we have authors attempting to act at a distance (like Cariad), to spread

their knowledge, through enrolling *Gothic Image Publishers*.

It is not only in terms of publishing that one must problematise the idea of a (single) centre of translation and a (dominated) periphery. We could surmise that *F* is constantly approached by representatives and book-sellers from other publishing companies to stock their products, and thus another set of enrollers enter the equation. Moreover, if we combine this analysis with that of SWC, an interesting thing happens. The attempts of Cariad to act at a distance involves translations in and through SWC. However, this cannot be achieved if copies of SWC sit inactive, say, in a printer's firm or the offices of the publishers: they need to be distributed. As SWC is available in *Gothic Image*, in order to act at a distance involves enrolling of institutions like *Gothic Image* the book-shop, where they can be picked up for free and read. Thus, this space-time is made active and is drawn into the series of associations that need to be held together for Cariad to achieve her aim. So does *Gothic Image* gather and accumulate traces of distant points and people and thus act like a 'centre' 'dominating' a 'periphery'? Or does it become enrolled by other 'centres' who are attempting to act from afar? Or does the notion of centres of translation dominating through gathering traces of a periphery begin to dissolve into something else?

This something else can be explored through another example: the Isle of Avalon Foundation (IOAF – formerly the *University of Avalon*), established in 1991. Its office is situated on the second floor of the *Glastonbury Experience* courtyard, again at the lower end of the High Street in Glastonbury. With its maxim of 'Transforming Education' the Foundation offers a wide range of teachings, courses, workshops and events, covering the whole spectrum of New Age knowledges and practices (see Fig. 2).

So can we define the IOAF as a centre of translation? One way in which we could venture such an assertion is to reveal how it gathers and accumulates the traces of distant people and knowledges. Here Edwene Gaines

SUNDAY, OCT 22ND
FIREWALK !
WITH EDWENE GAINES
 5.30PM - 9.30PM £35 (£25)
 The Firewalk is an ancient ritual and an event of personal transformation. This is an intensive workshop with the opportunity for participants to actually do the Fire walk if they choose.

SATURDAY, OCT 28TH
"YOUR COSMIC CONNECTION" – LIVING IN RHYTHM WITH THE 13 MOON MAYAN CALENDAR.
WITH ROB & SANDY UNDERHILL
 10AM - 5 PM £20 (£15)
 A workshop to take you into the rhythm of the dreamspell 13 moon calendar. Discover your personal galactic gateway seal on the sacred Mayan calendar and re-unite with your cosmic connection.
 Early booking is essential as we need to know your date of birth in order that we can provide your galactic signature readout.

Fig. 2. Source: IOAF prospectus, Autumn 1995.

(from the US) and Rob and Sandy Underhill are transformed and translated into two paragraphs or résumés in the quarterly prospectus. This accumulation and translation, by a few of many distantly scattered people, lends the Foundation the characteristic of a centre of translation.⁹ To further exemplify this:

JH: “So what are the aims behind the Foundation, what are you trying to do there?”

BT: The aims of the Foundation are very, very clear. One, to bring together all the teaching that is in Glastonbury, not to do it itself.

JH: That existed before?

BT: That exists now.

JH: That exists now, yeah.

BT: To bring it all together into a coherent whole, where there is something missing, to install something that is missing. That is number one. Number two, to project that whole out into the outside world, so that people can understand it. And number three, to bring people from the outside world into Glastonbury, so that they can benefit from the transformative energies of Glastonbury (...).”

Bringing in teachings from Glastonbury and people from the ‘outside world’: both tell of a centre acting on a periphery. Yet the notion of a centre and a periphery disperses in that these teachers, like the authors who send in their manuscripts to *Gothic Image Publishing*, ring up, visit or write to the Foundation so that they can talk or practice there. In other words, they enrol the Foundation into their program of action across space and through time. Again the IOAF is both an active enroller (and thus acts akin to a centre) but also enrolled as an active institutional space-time into other’s attempts to act at a distance.

The examples of *Gothic Image* and the IOAF illustrate the problems with taking up the notion of centres of translation from ANT in terms of the understanding New Age institutional geographies. Specifically, the concept of a centre of translation involves an asymmetry of power between centre and periphery:

An asymmetry is created because we create a space and a time in which we place the other cultures, but

they do not do the same. For instance, we map their land, but they have no maps either of their land or of ours; we list their past, but they do not; we build written calendars, but they do not (Latour, 1986, p. 16).

The majority of the examples that Latour gives of this asymmetry (such as those of early colonial power and different scientific practices) describe a few gathering traces and (paving the way for) the subordination of the many. However, the examples given here from the New Age movement reveal many attempting to persuade, motivate and enlist many others. Thus, Cariad, *Gothic Image* and their authors, BT and the IOAF, Edwene Gaines, Rob and Sandy Underhill – all are attempting to enrol (sometimes each other). Therefore, I would like to suggest that, instead of characterising the New Age movement as formed by one (or more) centres and a periphery, it is preferable to describe it as multi-centred patchwork of engineered networks and institutional geographies. In other words, the asymmetrical relation between centre of translation and periphery dissolves into numerous and diverse enrollers and translators attempting to build stabilised actor-networks and institutional geographies that allow them to speak, practice or more specifically act at a distance. In this sense analysing certain institutional geographies allows us to think of the shape or the topology of the movement.

In describing the New Age movement as a multi-centred patchwork, I wish to retain the notion that New Age institutional space-times can be and are often centres for translation (in that they gather and transform different traces), but at the same time disperse and fold the notion of a centre and a subordinated periphery. This folding of the centre/periphery duality is primarily achieved through institutional space-times being *both* sites that are actively enrolled and enrol actively. Furthermore, the double engineering of institutional space-times into the configuration of different New Age actor-networks, allows one to state a further characteristics of such sites. It is possible, then, to see institutional geographies as active sites where there is often an intertwining or stitching together of different New Age actor-networks. This conglomeration in and through institutional geographies gives such space-times a certain analytical status: the intertwining and translations of myriad enrollers, objects, ideas and bodies in such space-times, allow us to see institutional geographies as sites where the *New Age movement* gathers or comes together. Without the institutional geographies of say IOAF and *Gothic Image*, one could argue that diverse elements or heterogeneous actor-networks of the New Age movement would remain separated and disconnected. Otherwise seemingly incongruent practices and knowledges are drawn together and a movement takes shape and is consolidated. Indeed, as we shall see, this

⁹ These few at the centre included, for one morning, myself. The two examples of entries I have used here were ‘translated’ by me. Given bundles of information from the Underhills and Edwene, I attempted to sum it up, or ‘simplify’ it, in order for it to fit into one paragraph. In short, I became a translator at the centre working on traces from the periphery. Again I wish to highlight the precarious nature of this achievement in that the (relatively new) computer and printer in the IOAF office crashed many times. This process of translation and the creation and maintenance of an institutional geography, here, was definitely a relational and precarious achievement!

intertwining in and achieving certain programs of action through institutional geographies has a significance for the movement beliefs and formulas for change.

5. Maintaining and regulating the New Age movement/ consequences for transformation

So far in this paper a materialist account has been developed for understanding the production and travel of New Age knowledges and practices, and creation of institutional geographies. Yet, as we saw in the brief overview of the movement outlined earlier, the movement wishes to spread its message and desires to link up with groups and individuals that are seeking spiritual goals so that the New Age can be prepared for or accommodated – desires and wishes that are subsequently given as evidence of a sea-change in consciousness occurring. In other words, the (material) networks and institutional geographies engineered by practitioners and believers are infused with vital and emblematic spiritual and cosmological significance. Yet, as we have seen, programs of action to be (potentially) effective requires strategies of regulation, management and stabilisation of the actor-networks and institutional geographies created/incorporated, such that they are made to perform their active roles in the ‘appropriate’ and ‘correct’ manner. The necessity for regulation and maintenance of the New Age actor-networks and their institutional geographies speaks therefore of the workings of power. Here power is produced through, and is an effect of, a series of *stabilised* relations and associations between a myriad of bits and pieces, bodies and ideas, and active space-times: the more stable the links between the heterogeneous parts/space-times of New Age actor-networks the more evidence there is and necessary preparation is performed for the heralded shift (Murdoch, 1995). In this discussion we have a patchwork of enrollers, a multi-centred network, in which many are attempting to become powerful by building and maintaining many different associations and relations. These multifold attempts at engineering unrevisable and irreversible coalitions, if successful realise the movement’s network spirituality.

I would like now to explore an example of this regulation and management so vital to the realisation of New Age beliefs. This example tell of negotiation and conflict of what ‘counts’ as New Age knowledge, and thus speak of attempts at consolidation and upkeep of actor-networks and institutional spatialities that are central to the movement’s visions of transformation. This illustration begins with David Icke, probably one of the most (in)famous New Agers in the UK. This New Age visionary contends that in recent years he has become a chosen or elected channel for a whole series of intergalactic transmissions concerning the source and

nature of humanity’s negative conditioning and spiritual poverty. Generously, Icke has deemed it necessary, through his publications (in particular Icke, 1994, 1995, 1999) and the self-proclaimed David Icke network, that he shares his knowledge of a global conspiracy to keep us from our Divine roots. In a flyer for this network he states:

I am now in a position to produce the newsletter connecting together all who come to my meetings, read my books, or simply write to me with their good wishes. This is particularly important now because, I need to be able to communicate information that is being constantly handed down to me and to give everyone on the network a vehicle for getting together with each other. Once we get this off the ground, no-one need feel alone.

To disseminate this knowledge, to make it travel, Icke needs to engineer an actor-network and to produce and maintain links between people, things and different space-times, so that necessary and important steps of preparation and accommodation (which no doubt, in his view, is evidence of the coming transformation) can be achieved – something that he is now in a position to do with a newsletter. Once these links are in place, and unrevisable and irreversible coalitions are made, the New Age can be realised, prefigured and seen to be appearing, such that ‘no-one need feel alone’.

Yet there is and has been resistance to this strategy of engineering a spiritually significant actor-network. The first moment of opposition comes from the book-shop *Gothic Image*:

JH: “You were saying that in a sense it became like a dogma, does your stock in your shop reflect an open-mindedness would you say?”

F: I hope so, I hope so, but I’m also, I also practice a little bit of censorship, because also one doesn’t have infinite of money to spend on every stock there is. I mean there’s loads of stock you’d love to have, and you can’t and you have to kind of pace it, but there was a recent thing that came up which was David Icke, and the magazine *Nexus*, which was accused of having neo-Fascist, well Nazi overtones, and connections.

JH: Yeah there’s been a lot in the alternative press about that hasn’t there?

F: So I didn’t want to have any of that, and I actually put, what I do is I actually, I always feel that I have to justify why I’m not doing something so I put a big article on the door called ‘New Age Fascism’ y’know, and got a lot of flack for that, y’know they said ‘Oh why can’t you, David Icke’s wonderful, it’s all wonderful, just forget about that it doesn’t matter’, and I say that I’d prefer to be paranoid than to not take

any notice, because ideas and books do influence people for god-sake, y'know and it's not on".

Firstly, constraint and management manifests itself here as a practical need for management of knowledge, with an emphasis upon the sheer quantity of books and texts available to order: 'you have to kind of pace it', as *F* puts it. The second constraint concerns the management of David Icke's works. However, for the book-buyer *F*, the connections that this book traces and the ideas it carries through time and spaces, are not justified or legitimate. The cause of this is Icke's arguments concerning the source of our blindness to the Truth. Icke's book '*... and the Truth will set you free*' (1995) drew upon and often quoted the discredited and forged text '*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*'. The latter is a Russian anti-Semitic text, outlining a conspiracy theory in which wealthy Jewish elite are said to be taking over or controlling the world – an elite who are said to cause everything from the first world war to the Russian Revolution (the book was given to Hitler, and subsequently formed part of the Nazi justification of the Holocaust). Icke draws on this notion of a Jewish elite conspiracy to justify his notion of a global cover-up of our Divine origins and destiny.¹⁰ Indeed, the use of this text led Matthew Kalman and John Murray, journalists for the left wing magazine *Open Eye*, to trace further associations between certain New Age organisations and the far right (see Kalman and Murray, 1995; Murray and Kalman, 1995). The links and connections between far right and neo-fascist and New Age ideas and groups was and is a long and complicated one: including the New Age magazine *Nexus*, (often a forum for publication of US Militia propaganda), Holocaust revisionism, the Oklahoma bombing, another New Age magazine called *Rainbow Ark* and the BNP. Actions and pickets were set up by the Anti-Nazi League on Icke's lecture tour, and his original publishers, *Gateway Books*, dropped the work (Middleton, 1995). The left-wing journalist's reaction and advice to New Age supporters was this:

It's time for New Agers to think long and hard about the man so many of them were eager to promote, a man who unhesitantly works with racists and Nazi sympathisers. I am not the only person who finds Mr. Icke's views on a 'Jewish conspiracy' reminiscent of the darkest days of the 1930s. The Nazi group Combat 18 have praised Icke in their newsletter *Putsch* (Kalman, 1995, p. 89).

¹⁰ Icke's (1999) latest assertion as to why we cannot control our own destiny and realise our innate spirituality is (in part) due to an elite of shape shifting human-reptilians of which the British Royal Family are prominent members (McClure, 1999).

The reaction to these accusations on the part of the New Age movement was, according to *Kindred Spirit's* (a leading New Age magazine) editor, 'mixed'. Some, however, came out in support:

I would very strongly advise Mr. Kalman, and other who disagree with David, to leave him well alone to carry on with his good work on awakening humanity to the dangers of being manipulated by the global elite in many different ways. Despite his mistakes (or learning experiences, as he calls them) I think he is fine, warm hearted fellow who has had his own problems as much as anyone (Brown, 1996, p. 89).

How, then, can we describe and interpret this controversy in terms of the argument set out in this paper? Firstly, and materially, *F*'s comments above reveal how institutional space-times actively manage the flow and 'type' of New Age knowledge through the restraint of the flow of immutable mobiles.¹¹ In other words, the refusal of *F* to continue to stock *Nexus* or Icke's work, and the posting of the article on the door of the shop, allows one to argue that these institutional space-times continually attempt to constrain and control what travels as New Age knowledge. Thus, in our terms actively refusing to gather these docile and tractable materials, *Gothic Image*, as an institutional space-time, is neither enrolled or actively enrolls. *Gothic Image*, in this instance, refuses to reconfigure Icke's books and as such what counts as an actor in *Gothic Image's* actor-network does not include the work/books of this author. Furthermore, the active space-times in Icke's program of action does not include *Gothic Image* as part of his actor-network.¹² Secondly, this controversy speaks of discord over the shape or topology of the New Age movement more generally. Therefore, the links and connections that *have* to be made with other groups seeking a spiritual awakening in order that we can accommodate or prepare for the New Age are themselves a source of altercation. The network linkages traced by Kalman and Murray, and engineered by Icke and *Nexus*, to the far right and other groups, individuals, space-times and objects, are for many in the movement not sanctionable and justified connections and agents. Indeed, disagreement over the shape, what is included/excluded and what acts in New Age actor-networks does not bode well for a maintained exemplary network, let

¹¹ It is worth pointing out that this process also involves dialogical relations. This is signalled by *F*'s debates with people who disagreed with her poster.

¹² *Gothic Image's* active managing and attempts at restriction does not mean that this knowledge cannot travel. Many shops still sell Icke's work, he continues to lecture all across the country (and tours across the US) and 'The David Icke Network' continues to grow.

alone one which can extend and draw in more spiritually unenlightened people, so essential and critical to the realisation of the New Age. Thirdly, this controversy tells of conflict over what counts as legitimate and acceptable New Age knowledge. Here we have a variety of spiritually engaged agents (Icke, *F* and the readers of *Kindred Spirit* – which is itself an active space-time in which the management of New Age ideas is enacted) fundamentally disagreeing as to what the New Age is all about. For Icke and his supporters a Jewish elite is part of a sinister conspiracy to withhold and refuse to allow a spiritual enlightenment to occur. For *F*, these ideas are anti-Semitic and totally morally bankrupt. The consequences of this are obvious: if what counts as the New Age or what is legitimate belief are a source of conflict and resistance, the chances of a broad network being consolidated and maintained seem minimal (and the opportunity to retrospectively engineer the network as emblematic of a shift to the New Age is limited to put it mildly). In summary, then, this example tells of management and regulation performed in and through institutional geographies, and simultaneously the difficulty of forming and maintaining New Age actor-networks when what is engineered into such configurations and what counts as active is a source of debate and confrontation.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, institutional geographies have been characterised as active space-times in allowing certain knowledges and practices concerning ourselves and the world to be performed and made to travel. Furthermore, these institutional space-times are active in that they gather traces, maintain the shape or topology of the movement itself (through the intertwining of a patchwork of different New Age actor-networks) and regulate New Age knowledges and practices. This agency, however, is never fixed and given, but rather require constant effort. Institutional geographies are, therefore, always *becoming* stabilised, rather than *already* stabilised and formalised relational effects. It has also been shown that institutional geographies take on a spiritual significance in the movement. New Agers thus seek to trace actor-networks, create/incorporate certain space-times and formalise certain translations, so that a shift in spiritual consciousness can occur, be accommodated for or exemplified. Yet the engineering of actor-networks, institutional geographies and different translations can be a source of altercation and thus the cosmological significance of New Age actor-networks will always be on the way to be realised and thus potentially never attained. Despite this one thing we can be relatively sure of is the continuance of the New Age movement through the constantly shifting, adaptable and mutable forms, shapes

and relations that are produced in and through New Age institutional geographies, whether or not it succeeds in its goals of spiritual transformation.

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