

Alternative Cultural Heterotopia: ConFest as Australia's Marginal Centre

Submitted by

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Chronology¹

Phase One

- 1976 (Dec) **Cotter River** (ACT) *A Shaping Of Alternatives* (9-10, 000).
- 1977/78 (New Year) **Bredbo** (Mt Oak, NSW) *Focus for a Future* (15, 000).
- 1979 (Easter) **Berri** SA (on Murray River) *The Year of the Child* (5,500-7,000).
- 1980 (Jan 25-28) **French Island**, Vic (Cairns' event not supported by DTE) (2,000).
- 1980 (May) **Rainbow Region** Gathering at Wyaliba NSW (largely rained out).

Phase Two

- 1981 (Jan 23-6) **Glenlyon I** (Daylesford) *Welcoming and Exploring the New Age* (3,000).
- 1982 (Jan 28-Feb 1) **Glenlyon II** *Viable Futures Through Loving Action* (8,000).
- 1983/84 (New Year) **Baringa I** (Wangaratta) *Making Alternatives Work* (5,000).
- 1984/85 (New Year) **Baringa II** *Peace* (4,000).
- 1986 (Jan 24-27) **Glenlyon III** *Co-operation*.
- 1986/87 (New Year) **Glenlyon IV** *Co-operation*.
- 1987/88 (New Year) **Mt Oak** NSW (10 year anniversary) (1,200).²
- 1988 (Jan) **Permacroft** (Seymour, Vic) *Resurgence of the Call For a New Society*.
- 1988/89 (New Year) **Walwa I** (Neils Reserve on the Murray) (3,500).
- 1989/90 (New Year) **Walwa II** (4,000).
- 1990/91 (New Year) **Walwa III** *Heal Thy Self - Thy Planet* (5,000).
- 1992 (Easter) **Toc I** (Tocumwal NSW) *Continuing the Tradition*.
- 1993 (Easter) **Toc II** *Weaving the Web*.
- 1993/94 (New Year) **Moama I**.
- 1994 (Easter) **Toc III** (4,000).
- 1994/95 (New Year) **Moama II** (9,000).

¹ In this chronology of ConFests, the date, place, specific theme and, if known, attendance at each event are provided. Attendance figures are estimates.

² Though the site was not favoured by DTE, they provided \$5,000 and equipment.

1995 (Easter) **Moama III** (3,500).

Phase Three

1995/96 (New Year) **Birdlands** (Tocumwal) *A Birdlands Experience* (9,500).

1996 (Easter) **Toc IV** *Back to the River Harvest Festival* (4,000).

1996/97 (New Year) **Moama IV** (6,000).

1997 (Easter) **Moama V** (5,000).

1997/98 (New Year) **Gum Lodge I** (Tocumwal) (6,500).

1998 (Easter) **Gum Lodge II** (4,000).

1998/99 (New Year) **Guilmartens I** (Tocumwal) *Universal Togetherness* (3,500).

1999 (Easter) **Guilmartens II** *What's Alternative Now?* ('unplugged') (2,000).

Summary

ConFest (Conference/Festival) is an alternative lifestyle festival hosted by the Down to Earth Co-operative Society (DTE). Born in 1976, ConFest has become a principal site for the celebration of Australia's alternative movement - the country's marginal centre. A permissive enclave for exploring, exchanging and contesting diverse alternate discourse and practice, this vast counterscape represents an organic catalyst for the multi-dimensional (re)production and suffusion of alternative culture.

With the purpose of devising an apposite rendering of ConFest, a five year multi-modal research commitment has demanded re-evaluation of the most influential paradigm in the study of alternative lifestyle events - that of Victor Turner. The thesis undertakes a twofold deconstruction of the Turnerian paradigm.

First, I identify Turner's archetypal liminal modalities (play, drama, and community) demonstrating how each, through their unique on-site expression, contextualise the performance and realisation of various qualities of authenticity. I provide special attention to *ferality*, a local eco-radical career accessed and performed at ConFest. Second, I respond critically to Turner's essentialist legacy (the homogeneity and non-carnality of actors) through an exploration of ConFest's identifiable *heterogeneity* and *corporeality*. Specifically, I regard ConFest as: (a) an alternative cultural *heterotopia*, a *hyper* matrix of performance zones occupied by variously complementary and competing de-centrist neo-tribes, and; (b) a pleasurescape of performative carnality, a realm of the liminal body. Therefore, via a detailed investigation of a contested and sensuous counter-community, I reconfigure Turner to provide an appropriately post-structuralist heuristic of public events.

Drawing upon extensive research data and the hitherto unexplored connections between various strands of contemporary writing, this is an ethnography on authenticity performed and realised at an *organic hyper-liminal* centre on the edge of Australian culture.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the La Trobe University Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Human Ethics Committee as appropriate.

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Introduction

Just going around, and around, an' around, an' around observing ya'know. And one sees this year after year and one sometimes wonders is it leading anywhere or is it just the same thing? Ya'know, they dust out their sarongs once a year and, and get out there, parade around and around, arh looking ya'know, what are they there for? I often wonder ya'know, what are they looking for? (Spinifex)

It was the space I'd been looking for. It was the soul, the antithesis of the current structure, the egotistical structure. You can see it in the big cities, the big phallic towers - essentially a big male ego ... This was the opposite of it. It was temporary structure, it was cobbled together - desert island productions. It was done on the scrounge. It was thieves. It was piracy, ya'know ... I was convinced that this bunch had got the idea of organic [right] ... It was [a] completely subjective, chaotic situation. Yet it worked, it had its own coherence. (Laurie)

It's a huge Buddha field of Love, a matrix of pure possibility, a cosmic clearing house for memes & ideas. A loving & safe space to explore & experiment with modalities of mind, body & spirit. (Professor Ceteris Paribus 1996)

I s'pose you could say ConFest is the mother of all festivals. (Magpie)

For over 20 years, ConFest (Conference/Festival) has been Australia's principal site for the celebration of alternative culture. Since 1976, this alternative lifestyle festival has been a regular (now biannual) seasonal event in the alternate calendar, attracting well over 100,000 people. The event is facilitated by Down To Earth (DTE), which in 1979 became a Melbourne-based co-operative society. Most ConFesters spend between five and seven days inside the event-space, often after undertaking pilgrimages from cities hundreds of kilometres distant. There, they experiment with the multiplicity of discourse and practice gaining popular currency in the alternative sector. Indeed, a vast spectrum of beliefs and behaviours are championed, performed and contested by participants, for whom ConFest is, typically, a sacred space, a transitional period, a centre on the margins. Yet, since thousands of eager participants access a growing plurality of thresholds and zones, unlike in conventional passage rites, there can be no predetermined outcome.

For me, the immediate dilemma is one of defining and elucidating a complex time-space matrix, an animated hub of Australian alternative culture since the mid-seventies. Several concerns have driven my inquiry. What is the purpose of DTE/ConFest? What constitutes the culture of DTE/ConFest? What is the significance of the ConFest

experience for its participants, and how may this be compared with other events and experiences? What has been the effect of this experience upon both the alternative and broader communities? Why and how has the event endured for so long? What cultural theoretical models and conceptual mechanisms, past and present, can be drawn upon in the attempt to fashion an appropriate heuristic device?

Mapping the contours of a spectrum of comparable events and charting the historical, social, political and cultural co-ordinates formative to ConFest itself are critical to the investigation. The approach reveals a unique contemporary experience reliant upon an anarchic *social organicism*, a co-operative event-space representing a diverse (or more precisely *heterotopic*), and thereby prismatic, lens on contemporaneous explorations on the frontiers of leisure, health, environment, religion and community - an inimitable mirror to the Australian alternative movement.

Furthermore, extensive research employing multiple methods (see methodology in Appendix A), coupled with an analysis of relevant contemporary writing, warrants the application of an advanced theoretical modelling of ConFest. My approach will demonstrate that the standard theoretical paradigm adopted for the analysis of alternative events, that of Victor Turner, while remaining applicable, requires renovating and reconfiguring if it is to remain useful in the study of contemporary events. The thesis, therefore, undertakes a deconstruction of Turnerian thought, and it does so via two connected routes.

First, the thesis defines the demonstrable junctures of liminality and authenticity. I explore the means by which Turner's triad of liminal modalities, or *limina* (play, drama and community), contextualise respectively unique opportunities for the performance and realisation of various qualities of authentication, or *authentica* (a multiplicity of discourse and practice valued as 'true', 'natural', 'pure', 'sacred'). Moreover, I investigate how ConFest foments participant access to, and performance of, *ferality* - a local eco-radical trajectory and authentic career demanding considerable attention.

Secondly, through a critical deconstruction of Turner, I draw attention to the essentially exclusivist, non-carnal and consensual proclivities of the Turnerian paradigm. Since the latter cannot account for the key event themes of *heterogeneity* and *corporeality*, I enlist the concept of *hyper-liminality* to navigate a revealed counterscape of plurality and contestation, and adopt a body-oriented conceptualism from contemporary writing to investigate the liminal embodiment and performative carnality transparent in this permissive pleasurescape. Furthermore, ConFest's distinctive anarchist-grassroots character, determined via the comparative-historical investigation, requires the adoption of

the more specific designation - *organic hyper-liminality*. Thus, my 'data' demand the reconfiguration of an inherited model, calling for an appropriately post-structuralist heuristic of alternative cultural events, an effort also made possible through an application of the ideas of Hakim Bey (the Immediatist/TAZ project) and Michel Maffesoli (neo-tribalism and Dionysian sociality).

In addition, I have structured the thesis such that the renovation undertaken commissions the exploration of principal vectors in alternative lifestyles' authenticity pursuits. The main themes surveyed are: (1) the complex political and personal dimensions of cultural borrowing - especially in regard to the appropriation of indigeneity; (2) the implicit contiguity between the commitments to self-growth and earth-consciousness, and; (3) the authenticity wars breaking out between proponents of rival music cultures within a context of conflict and compromise. The study of a grassroots counterworld which is simultaneously liminal, marginal and, for a majority of its participants, *central*, thus illuminates primary cultural processes operating within the alternative sector, processes effecting the (re)production and suffusion of alternative culture.

Thesis synopsis

Chapter one, 'Alternative Cultural Events: Heterotopia Now', is an introduction to alternative culture and its events. The chapter details the alternative culture movement and investigates alternative cultural events, ascertaining their principal *counterspatial* criteria. Several event-clusters, including the variant forms of alternative lifestyle event, are delineated. The latter, following the ideas of Foucault, are described as alternative cultural *heterotopia*. A survey of prior ethnographic research on alternative events is also undertaken. The critical and comparative analysis of theoretical and methodological approaches employed in these projects assists my own investigation of ConFest.

Revising Turner's core concept of liminality, borrowing insights from parallel theory and acknowledging the unique context of the event itself, Chapter 2, 'The Organic Hyper-Liminal Zone', proposes a suitable heuristic approach to ConFest. First, the Turnerian paradigm is detailed drawing specific attention to the significance of the *limen*. This is followed by a critical exposition of an inhibiting essentialism in Turner's work. This, in turn, lays the foundation for an apposite rendering of ConFest: as an *organic hyper-liminal zone*. That is, with the work of Hakim Bey providing complementary explanatory power, I suggest that a localised anarchic social *organicism* lies at the heart of ConFest's 'design'.

Furthermore, I suggest ConFest is a distinctive *hyper*-performative context for the manifestation of a triad of *liminal/authenticity* modalities (play, drama and community) upon which I elaborate in Chapters 6-8.

Chapter 3, 'The Down to Earth Movement', issues a diachronic perspective on the Down to Earth Co-operative Society and ConFest. Following an investigation of the movement's emergence, I provide a detailed historiography of DTE, attending to its three phases. DTE is regarded as an inimitable 'neo-tribe' (Maffesoli 1996) which is elective, responsive, affectual, diverse, neutral and unstable. I investigate how DTE has, over more than twenty years, mutated from a millenarian movement to the neutral custodian of Australia's principal alternative cultural heterotopia. ConFest is introduced as a prismatic lens upon the contemporaneous discourse and practice of the Australian alternative movement. Despite ongoing internal divisions and mounting tension within DTE, ConFest continues to reinvigorate the Co-operative.

Chapter 4, 'ConFest: Alternative Cultural Diversity Celebrated', proposes a summary ethnography of five ConFests. Following information on the events researched, participants, ConFest's organicism and volunteer ethos, I provide a detailed illustration of the cultural topography of ConFest, with particular attention to the key event zones and the villages/workshops. As a desired 'location', ConFest is revealed to be contested, yet its design ensures the coexistence of competing interpretations and expectations.

An authentic condition of human being for disenchanted Australian youth, *ferality* approximates the definitive cultural business of ConFest. In Chapter 5, 'Going Feral: Eco-Radicalism and Authenticity', I investigate the origins and principal characteristics of ferals - an eco-radical subcultural milieu committed to the celebration and defence of indigenous ecology and peoples. Via an exploration of this milieu's activist confrontationalism, spectacle, semi-nomadism, postcoloniality and sociality, I advance the view that *ferality* is a contemporary rite of passage connoting reconciliation, a redemptive return and re-enchantment. The chapter also describes how ConFest furnishes access to, and licences the performance of, this desirable condition. At this space on the edge, and in this time in-between, one may be or go feral.

Chapter 6, 'Playing Out: Carnality, Alterity and the (Re)created Self', is the first of three chapters detailing the hyper-performativity of the respective *authentica* fomenting *limina*. ConFest is a powerful context for the abandonment and (re)creation of the self. It is a 'subjunctive' world where participants are permitted to experiment with desired sources of authenticity, to 'play out' (or 'down', 'across', 'up') side of ordinary experience, to experiment with 'alterants', to be 'other'. Yet, as an extraordinarily tactile

and sensuous environment, I give special consideration to the corporeal possibilities of Turner's 'subjunctive mood'. Therefore, articulating the interwoven on-site options of carnality and alterity, and paying special attention to a reconsideration of cultural appropriation, I discuss ways in which embodied otherness and 'the other' (especially the indigene) are implicated in participant desires. Also, attending to performative appropriation, or *mimesis*, I move toward an analysis of complicated DiY identities, fashioned via identification with multiple nodes of difference.

Turning to the liminal modality of drama, Chapter 7, 'Sacred Drama: Self, Earth and Indigeneity', focuses upon the manifold *sacra* ('the ultimate concerns') of participants, as they are evoked in this environment. The chapter contends that alternative culture is (re)produced through the 'collective reflexology' that takes place in the context of a temporary *multi-cultural drama* performed via ramified genres at multiple venues. Several on-site 'ultimate concerns' are articulated. I discuss how health and environmental concerns are 'ecologically' related (a relationship I call *the self-globe nexus*), as is clearly evident in manifestations of eco-spirituality such as Neo-Paganism. I also attend to indigeneity, the varied significance of which is evoked through numerous events and their interpretations.

Via a critical assessment of *communitas*, Chapter 8, "'What Tribe do you Belong to?': Immediate and Contested Community', circumscribes ConFest as: (1) an alternative cultural *heterotopic community* accommodating a multitude of 'constituencies' holding to diverse interpretations, and; (2) a desirable demesne of *intercorporeality*, the understanding of which is enhanced through readings of Maffesoli and Bey. I find that ConFest, or what is locally dubbed 'the ConFest Spirit', is enigmatised by concurrent tendencies towards *massification* and *tribalism*, homogeneity and heterogeneity, inclusivity and exclusivity, realising internal unity *and* discord. Despite the unqualified ideology of 'being together', as a community, and in the interests of maintaining a distinct 'counter' identity, DTE and ConFesters are preoccupied with identifying and excluding 'foreign' elements. Yet, as the example of competing music authenticity claimants indicates, ConFest is a *contested community* as there is little consensus on that which constitutes 'foreign'. In the face of such disunity, however, the event's social *organicism* nourishes networks and dialogue potentiating 'unity in diversity', working adaptations and localised resolutions.

Chapter 1

Alternative Cultural Events: Heterotopia Now

Introduction

This chapter introduces alternative culture and its events, and surveys previous ethnographic research conducted on alternative events. It consists of two parts. Following an introduction to the alternative culture movement (ACM), part one investigates alternative cultural events (ACEs). Here, I identify the key criteria of ACEs before devising a non-exhaustive historical inventory. Six separate event-clusters, including the three variant forms of alternative lifestyle event (ALE), are delineated. The latter, characteristically polydimensional, are what I call *alternative cultural heterotopia* (ACH), a discussion and definition of which concludes part one. In part two, I discuss previous ethnographic research projects conducted on separate ALEs. It will be clear that critical and comparative analysis of theoretical and methodological approaches employed in each of the projects has assisted my own approach to, and rendering of, ConFest.

Part I: Alternative Culture

What is alternative culture? For Altman, it consists of ‘all those aspects of apparent non-mainstream social activity and consciousness [including ‘counter-culture’] that seem to prefigure a radically different type of social system’ (1980:116-117). Cognate with Altman, yet seeking greater comprehensiveness, I define alternative culture as: *a diverse network of discourse and practice oppositional to perceived deficiencies in the parent culture*, which is the system of values, beliefs and practices hegemonic under modernity. Not to be confused with reactionary grassroots organisations of the radical right, the alternative cultural milieu (or alternates) are adherents to alternative lifestyles.¹ Disaffected by the parent or dominant culture, adherents seek manifold solutions to its complex and restrictive grasp. As such, they may be involved in intentional communities, LETS (Local Exchange Trading Schemes), co-operative societies and self-help groups,

¹ Writing in 1985, Metcalf and Vanclay estimated that 95,000 Australians (1% of the population) planned to develop an ‘alternative lifestyle’, urban or rural (1985:2).

grassroots activist organisations, Queer collectives, therapeutic communities, and committed to conservation, alternative technology, NVDA (Non Violent Direct Action) campaigns and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Western cultural history abounds with anti-hegemonic, resistance or utopian currents.² Today's alternative culture is expressed in various social movements (e.g. communitarian, bohemian, agitation art, healing-arts, green, feminist, queer, peace, civil and land rights movements), new spiritualities (e.g. Neo-Paganism or the New Age), and youth subcultures (e.g. new traveller, raver-dance, feral). It is the combination of such currents, their accumulation and their fusion, that I refer to as the ACM - a heterogeneous movement, a matrix, even palimpsest, of voluntary and unstable de-centrist 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli 1996), affinity groups and 'disorganisations' holding to alternative values and vocabularies. This is a network consisting of diffuse, sometimes openly antagonistic, sometimes 'submerged', groups variously committed to sustainability, reconciliation, civil rights, freedom of expression, personal wellbeing and co-operative living. Their lifestyle may be articulated via symbolic identity repertoires (Melucci 1989), constructions no longer regarded as anomalies in the study of social movements traditionally focused on resource mobilisation (Johnston and Lio 1998).

The ACM has been credited as 'DiY'. For McKay (1998:2), 'DiY Culture' is 'a kind of 1990s counterculture': 'a youth-centred and -directed cluster of interests and practices around green radicalism, direct action politics, new musical sounds and experiences' (see also Purdue et al. 1997). While the 'DiY community' is a diverse expression of resistance, with varying manifestations from street parties, to squats, protest camps and alternative press, most combine 'party and protest' under the ethic of NVDA. Here, social criticism is combined with cultural creativity in what is 'both a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance' (McKay 1998:27). The party/protest, pleasure/politics fusion customary to DiY Culture presents a contemporary manifestation of what Musgrove called 'the dialectics of utopia' (1974:16), a dynamic tension of *political* activism (resistance) and *personal* growth (aesthetics and play) which characterised the 'counterculture'.

Despite such neat and comfortable terms like 'counterculture'³ or 'DiY Culture', a recurrent problem for researchers of alternative culture is that its constituents are not united under a single ideology or cause. To speak of a united front of opposition or a comfortably amalgamated de-centrism is erroneous as it falsely presumes consensus

² For example, see Armytage 1961, Cohn 1970, Kanter 1972, Abrams and McColloch 1976, Manuel and Manuel 1979, and Metcalf 1986:Ch.3.

³ Which, as McGregor (1975) pointed out, really means 'countercultures'.

between de-centralising elements around that which constitutes 'the centre'. Different rejections of 'the centre' activate an abundance of alternative 'truths', other ways of being - conflicting *authentica*. Although networks enhance connections, alternative culture is not a homogeneous culture. 'Culture', here, consists of a *plurality* of contradictory and/or complementary discourses and practices. It also consists of the *process* by which their various proponents attempt to reconcile or embrace differences, or take advantage of semblance.

Some components of this culture desire to remain underground, on the edge, or in the gaps. They seek to avoid *defusion*. Others desire the dissemination of their values, ideas and practices. They seek to enact cultural *diffusion*. A detectable ambivalence, therefore, exists within the ACM, a tension between the desire to remain undiscovered and immediate, and the pro-active desire for exposure and reform; between actively avoiding recuperation via commodification and the disclosure of alternative discourse and practice; between the desire to maintain boundaries and breaking them down; between de-centring and re-centring.

Of course, adherents of either attitude may experience difficulty in preserving 'unadulterated' desires. This has been the subject of much critical investigation on 'resistance' as a cultural tactic, whether stated or implicit. Various commentators have suggested that social dissidence is defused as radical alternatives, gestures of refusal, and modes of authenticity are co-opted, domesticated (cf. Munro-Clarke 1986:225; Metcalf and Vanclay 1985:94-95) or recuperated (Hebdige 1979) by the dominant culture. Under market forces rebellion becomes a consumable fashion accessory for 'target' groups whose social and political motivations remain spurious. The counterculture's stress on freedom and individuality proved to be an especially marketable trait. In Australia, radical rhetoric, rebellion and romanticism were speedily absorbed into consumer culture. According to Alomes (1983:45), the themes of experience, harmony, friendship and the consolation of nature characteristic of 1960s 'alternative lifestyles' were rapidly 'translated into the wider romantic social mythology of consumer capitalism'. Later, in the birthplace of the 'counterculture', the music festival to mark the 25th anniversary of 'Woodstock Nation', had a US\$135.00 cover charge!

Others speak of dissidence as a *temporary*, youthful, affectation, or a rite of passage - especially for the more privileged. In this vein, Kanter (1972:196), regards communes as 'temporary way stations', transitional sanctuaries appearing in an increasingly mobile

society.⁴ Moreover, Brake (1980:87) suggests that the ‘dropping out’ performed by sixties youth ‘presupposes a location in the class structure from which to drop (and to return)’. Moore (1998a:176) argues that bohemia is ‘the acting out by the young bourgeoisie of marginal lifestyles to dramatise ambivalence toward their own identities, to refuse - if only temporarily - a stable and limited identity’. Here, there is an ‘urge to disrupt and subvert ... but not to abolish’ (ibid:176-7). Similarly, Bey’s ‘temporary autonomous zone’ or TAZ (1991a) (see Chapter 2) has been denounced as ‘episodic rebellion’, even an ‘anarchist club-med’ - a ‘socially innocuous’ ‘lifestyle anarchism’ (cf. Bookchin 1995), or possibly ‘repressive desublimation’, which Marcuse thought allowed ‘just enough freedom to disrupt and integrate discontent - but not enough to endanger the discipline necessary for a stable industrial order’ (in Roszak 1995:xxii). Other modes of ‘resistance’ have been relegated to the field of ‘leisure’ and construed, therein, as ineffectual. Such was the fate of British working class youth subcultures, the pursuits of whom, under the Marxist gaze of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies researchers, were said to be merely *symbolic*, ‘rituals of resistance’ (Clarke et al. 1976).

Yet, despite intra-cultural disputation, the risk of co-optation, ever present charges of temporality and insinuations of class privilege, as long as ‘the centre’ remains, there will always be an *edge* - that is, marginal cultural ideas and sites. Contemporaneous, multitudinous and often subterranean, *the edge* is the result of the perennial insistence to range beyond the boundaries of the familiar and conventional, to seek alternatives. At the edge (which may also be interstitial) there are limitless possibilities.

Alternative Cultural Events

The principal concern here is the (re)production and/or suffusion of alternative identities and culture via public events. Anthropologists have long been interested in public events variously described as ‘ritual’, ‘ceremony’, ‘rites of passage’, ‘celebrations’, ‘feasts’, ‘carnivals’, ‘festivals’, ‘parades’, ‘pilgrimage rites’, ‘spectacles’, etc. In perhaps the most comprehensive heuristic treatment of public events, Handelman (1990:16,3) suggests that all such events are ‘closed phenomenal worlds’ wherein ‘people undertake in concert to make more, less, or other of themselves, than they usually do’. Public events are ‘little worlds’ which ‘point beyond’ themselves, are ‘symbolic of something outside of

⁴ When it is understood that utopian experiments are attractive to both those committed to their ideals and to those merely taking a short-term survival option - as the ‘least undesirable of

themselves, standing for, evoking or bringing into being something else, something absent' (ibid:13). They 'operate on and through' participants, who are said to be 'captured by, and caught up within, the logic of their design' (ibid:16). As such, they are, for both natives and ethnographers alike, 'privileged points of penetration' into socio-cultural universes (ibid:9).

This thesis goes some way toward correcting the absence of 'an anthropology of alternative cultural public events'. It seems clear that the communion (*coming together*) of dissenters, the profoundly disenchanted and part-time expatriates who inhabit certain spaces at certain times, to resist and celebrate - to quite literally seek *otherness* - is indispensable for the (re)production of alternative identities. Alternative cultural public events are sanctioned and patronised by the ACM.⁵ Though they interrupt and agitate normative conceptual and value frameworks, such event-spaces are, however, truly varied in substance and effect - variation conveyed via theoretical models deployed to apprehend events and event-spaces. Lefebvre (1991), for instance, refers to 'spaces of representation' (or 'representational spaces'), everyday event-spaces resistant to commodification, which seek to make visible the contradictions in the capitalist production of space. Alternatively, Handelman (1990) speaks of 'events of representation', specialised, usually legitimate, moments of suspension and transgression in the seasonal round such as the carnival.

A discussion of alternative event-spaces should not be inattentive to tourism and the tourist-event. Seeking respite from, or disillusioned with, modern, urban life, westerners have developed an insatiable longing for the authenticity that is perceived inherent in the cultures and lifestyles of 'others' - especially indigenes. Like pilgrims, 'traveller-tourists' have discovered alternative, or 'elective centres' (Cohen et al. 1987) 'in the recesses of the Other' (Cohen 1992:51). Introducing the phenomenon of expatriate youth 'seeking spontaneous experiences in the excitement of complete strangeness', Cohen (1973:89) discusses a global itinerant traveller culture converging upon 'drifter communities', 'semi-

options available' (Metcalf 1986:116-17, 365) - their transitory character becomes all the more apparent.

⁵ It should be borne out that discussion of the collective behaviour and 'events' - uprisings, revolts, riots - of the oppositional movements of 'the South' (people's revolutionary or liberation armies etc) would be incompatible with the purpose of this thesis. The ACM is principally of the First World and is associated with lifestyles arising within the metropolitan centres of the democratised, post-industrial 'North'. Similarly, a discussion of the collective behaviour and events of the socialist left and its championed 'proletariat' - union formation, strikes and worker revolts - would also render this a different project. Though important cross-pollinations have occurred, this thesis does not address the labour movement or its events. I discuss oppositional cultural patterns and behaviours not necessarily directly related to subsistence.

autonomous islands of transplants' developing at exotic locations like the Spanish island of Ibiza and Goa, India, since the sixties.

The last three decades have seen the appearance of 'cultural productions' (MacCannell 1976) catering for 'traveller-tourists' who are 'searching for *experience* and for their *origin* through the rural, the primitive, the childlike, the unpolluted, the pure, and the original' (Bruner 1993:324). Describing the existence of one such nostalgia-laden 'production', Manning (1983:26) cites the example of the Rio Carnival to which North American tourists flock *en masse*, 'not to revel in fantasia, but to encounter a pristine and genuine spirit of festivity that they believe has been "lost" in their own society'.

Authentic representation, however, is a process identifiable in cultural productions transpiring within the geographic boundaries of advanced capitalist societies. Such productions may appropriate, re-create or re-enact a constellation of themes from other cultures, rurality or the past. The nostalgia industry has, for instance, given birth to the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in San Francisco, which, since the sixties, has been held in a meticulously reconstructed Elizabethan Shire where participants, normally comfortably well off, imagine their immersion in a Shakespearian epoch (Cohen 1993:138-47). In this, and other examples of 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1976:101), traveller-pilgrims are often immersed in social imagery 'redolent with simplicity, truth, naturalness, and purity' (Manning 1983:26). I have especially in mind numerous *counter-spaces*, 'elective centres' largely outside the reach of corporate capital and state surveillance which have appeared at 'places on the margin' (Shields 1991) within the borders of 'home nations' since the sixties.⁶ Perhaps performative alternatives to 'alternative tourism', or 'anathema parks', these are temporary local 'drifter communities' accommodating contemporaneous antinomians and expatriate pilgrims seeking affirmation, wholeness and a better world (Reader 1993:9-10).

It could be argued that *festival* (or *carnival*) is itself a universally alternate moment in the life of a people. Since the Roman Saturnalia and the Feast of Fools, the festival has been a time of inversion, intensification, transgression and abstinence.⁷ Falassi (1987:3) makes this clear:

⁶ In more recent times, communities of dissent have convened in cyber space. While cyber space might be described as one immense 'virtual event', I have in mind singular sites of convergence such as the AllChemical Virtual Powwow hosted by psychonaut Terence McKenna on 4/3/99.

⁷ Such moments have an intimate relationship with faires and markets. The medieval marketplace was, for Bakhtin (1968), an early seedbed of 'the carnivalesque'.

At festival times, people do something they normally do not; they abstain from something they normally do; they carry to the extreme behaviors that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life.

Carnival, a season of festive events culminating in two or three days of massive street processions, is rooted in Roman Catholic pre-Lenten festivities occasioning 'release from the constraints and pressures of the social order, generat[ing] relationships of amity even among strangers and allow[ing] forbidden excesses' (Cohen 1993:3). Duvignaud (1976:18) argues that the 'destructive or subversive spirit inherent in [such festivities] ... involve[s] a real awakening of individual consciousness'. Indeed, Duvignaud remembers Rousseau's romantic understanding of the non-imaginary 'other-world' of the festival where 'individual minds would fuse together under the pressure of intense participation' (ibid:16). In regard to the Rio Carnival, Da Matta (1984) understood this as the usually impersonal street's domestication. Bakhtin (1968) knew it as the cosmic world-body correspondence of the medieval carnival and market place. Turner (1969) deemed it 'spontaneous communitas'.

But what is the character of the subversion, rebellion or resistance inherent to the festival, carnival or market place? Are they moments of real conflict: instruments of political opposition, sites of subversion occasioning open criticism of the state and religious authorities? Or, are they 'rituals of rebellion' (Gluckman 1954), fake revolutions like Fasnacht at Basle, 'a savage form of class struggle' which 'enables the underprivileged class to make revolution without really performing it' (Weidkuhn 1976:44). Do they, therefore, function as 'safety valves', permitting people to 'revolt' before returning to their consented place in the social hierarchy, their allegiance to the system reaffirmed? Furthermore, are not carnivals means by which the powerful maintain their privilege - through which class, gender and ethnic strata are reproduced? The truth is carnival is essentially ambivalent. According to Cohen, it is poised between genuine opposition *and* means of domination. Like a 'grand joking relationship', carnival/festival is characterised by 'both conflict and alliance' (1993:128).

Yet, what is distinctive about the events I outline here, is that they are diverse products of an oppositional culture. After all, there are substantial differences between most commercial festivals, or state sponsored arts festivals, and independent, underground or alternative orientated events. In chronicling events, I have kept several principal criteria in mind, taking into account the organisational and economic framework of events themselves as much as their self-designated or apparent purpose. That is, to qualify as *counter-spatial*, they are, firstly, grassroots and, therefore, communally derived. As such,

the administrative structure of events inclines towards a non-hierarchical, co-operative style of (self)management. Collective ownership of the event-space is encouraged. Second, the organisers (also ‘facilitators’, ‘focalizers’ or ‘enablers’) should not be motivated by self-profit. In some cases, this means that an event may be ‘commercial’ (that is, possessing an entrance fee), but only such that this necessitates its reproduction.⁸ Third, events lie largely outside the spectacularising tendency, and recuperating implications, of the corporate media industry. Thus, they are not normally ‘media-events’. Immediatist as such, commodification is largely avoided. Fourth, they are not singularly, nor in large part, dependent upon the state through the administration of ‘Arts’ funding. Fifth, on the performative level, they are participatory. As such the boundary between performer and audience is fluid or non-existent. Sixth, practical demonstrations of non-violent philosophies, such events are usually safe environments. Finally, they are ‘real-time’ encounters. Rather than ‘virtual events’ - though these may be employed in the hatching of such encounters - they are intercorporeal occasions.

As I will indicate, several clusters of ACEs have emerged, the most significant for my purposes being the alternative lifestyle event (ALE), of which there are several varieties. Before disclosing these, I will attend to other ACEs conforming to the above criteria: co-operative, not-for-profit, non-spectacularised, independent, participatory, non-violent and intercorporeal. It will be clear that boundaries between event-clusters are fuzzy. This discussion not only seeks to detail the contours of several event-clusters, but is intended to provide a cursory history of the international ACM, and Australia’s contribution to this field.

Folk Festival

Proliferating with ‘folk’ music, folk festivals became popular heterodox events in the US in the 1950s. In Australia, in the same decade, folk music was established by radical left-wing nationalists, espousing collectivism, egalitarianism and a general suspicion of authority (Smith and Brett 1998:4). Folk attempts to keep alive ‘non-official’, independent musical styles. It is distinguished from commercial genres and professionalism by the ideology of the folk ‘community’ and ‘process’. The music is the product of a communal process. That is, it is firstly an expression of community interactions, and secondly, there

⁸ I have needed to make this point as the organisers of some ‘alternative’ events hold pecuniary interests. Therefore, some events (e.g. Australia’s Earth Haven) may be, organisationally, only a short remove from ‘mainstream’ events.

is a porous boundary between performer and audience. Folk is ‘committedly inclusivist, a celebration of culture from below ... ground[ing] cultural production in community and the face-to-face’ (ibid:7).

As minimal-commercial orientated music events, folk festivals should not be confused with most country, pop or rock festivals. Folk festivals are intentionally heterodox to mainstream music trends especially in their focus on ‘authenticity’. That is, apart from the ‘ideology of total participation’, there is a proclivity towards: ‘traditional’ (especially acoustic) music instead of electronic instruments; widespread amateurism instead of ‘stars’, and; embracing a multiplicity of ethnic and regional styles instead of a monocultural, profitable style (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:201-2). Also, often maintaining an explicitly political agenda, the genre celebrates and promotes the interests of disadvantaged populations (cf. Eder et al. 1995). Australian folk festivals appeared in the 1970s. Such festivals, like Port Fairy and the Australian Annual Folk Festival (held annually at different locations), along with Queensland’s folk-derived Woodford/Maleny Festival, occasion songs, lectures and yarns expressing deep concern ‘with past and present oppressions, injustices and barbarities perpetrated by the state upon ordinary people and upon the land itself’ (J. Kapferer 1996:173).

Dance Party

Underground ‘raves’, or free techno dance parties, appeared in Britain from 1988 (the so called ‘second summer of love’).⁹ The dance party involves a distinct celebration of the corporeal, of altered embodiment and states of consciousness via a multi-media cyber-chemical assemblage. Its complex origins can be traced to a range of bohemian events and licentious enclaves ‘pushing at the edges of acceptability’ (Moore 1998a:172). Its immediate origins include Detroit ‘techno’, the Chicago ‘house’ black gay scene and Britain’s underground ‘acid house’ phenomenon of the late eighties (Reynolds 1998:Ch.1 and 3).¹⁰ More distant, yet formative, are those ‘psychedelic symphonies’ of the American sixties, the Acid Tests (especially the 1966 Trips Festival) conducted by Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters (Wolfe 1971; Buenfil 1991:51). Yet, the lineage can be traced further back to other all-night bohemian parties, especially those of the 1920s Jazz era, which, in Australia, included the Artist’s Balls at the Sydney Town Hall (Moore 1998b:57).

⁹ Techno music possesses different styles (from extreme fast ‘hardcore’ or ‘gabber’ to the ambience of ‘psy-trance’ - often incorporating Goa Trance or Tribal music).

Free, or by donation, outdoor dance parties were originally operated in Britain by various sound system collectives such as Spiral Tribe, the DiY Collective and Exodus (Reynolds 1998:Ch.8). Possessing an anti-market orientation and featuring largely anonymous DJs, these all-night parties constituted deliberate attempts to withdraw from the spectacle of rock concerts and machismo of disco culture. They are distinguishable from the extravagances of clubculture where dance culture became commodified and 'rave style' super-marketed. In Britain, illegal outdoor dance parties proliferated in the early nineties, seemingly reaching a crescendo with the Castlemorton 'mega-rave' of 1992, where the traveller/raver connection was forged.¹¹ Though the Criminal Justice Act (CJA)¹² has effectively criminalised free dance parties in Britain, smaller 'microraves' continue to appear, and from the mid-nineties sound systems and travellers have sought to escape home-nation restrictions by joining other Europeans at events like the Czech Teknival (Garner 1998). Exiled 'tech-nomad' sound systems like Spiral Tribe have thrown *techno fiestas* in Bologna (Reynolds 1998:173), while Desert Storm and Dubious Sound System have travelled Europe, holding free dance parties in places like Bulgaria and Bosnia (Dubious Dan 1998; Bean 1998).

Protest

Operating via the principles of NVDA, 'sit-ins', 'die-ins', 'protest villages', vigils, reclamations, encampments and festivals organised to raise consciousness of, and funds for, political, identity and lifestyle (e.g. environmental, gender, land rights, human rights, sexuality) issues are also, or can become, significant ACEs. As the public event phase of collective action, protests can be temporary communities and theatres of creative resistance, spaces where politics and pleasure converge, and where concrete disturbances of, and symbolic challenges to, state and corporate interests transpire. With roots in surrealism as much as leftist-politics, projects may embody prescriptive agendas which

¹⁰ Melechi (1993:30) argues that British Acid House was born out of the attempt to 'relive the jouissance' experienced by tourist-ravers on the Spanish Balearic island of Ibiza.

¹¹ In Australia, the independent techno-bohemia, earthcore, is one of the principal outdoor dance party/festivals of the southern hemisphere.

¹² In 1994, the Tory government legislated the notorious Criminal Justice Bill. The 'final solution' engineered by the New Right, the CJA constitutes a draconian system of police and legal powers which have 'almost decommissioned a lifestyle' (Dearling 1998:1). The Act includes clauses which criminalise squatting and trespassory assembly (including raves and free festivals not officially sanctioned, and, potentially, peaceful protests). It also repealed the 1968 Gypsy site legislation which obliged local authorities to provide sites for travellers.

seek to generate ‘situations’, non-violent moments of resistance to the spectacle and banality of capitalism (cf. Debord 1983).¹³

There are varying manifestations. The Paris Commune of 1968 is probably one of the most significant episodes of situationist revolutionary carnival. A dramatic ritual re-enactment of past revolts - 1789, 1848, and the Paris Commune of 1871 - the festival ‘finally gave true vacations to those who had never known anything but workdays and days off work’ (Turkle 1975:85). During the eighties, an indication of the strengthening of the peace and women’s movements, women’s anti-nuclear Peace Camps appeared in Britain (Harford and Hopkins 1984; Young 1990; Roseneil 1995), the US (Krasniewicz 1994) and Australia (the Pine Gap peace encampment of 1982). During the nineties, anti-road protests such as the ‘Free States’ (McKay 1996; Routledge 1997) and Reclaim the Streets rallies (Jordan 1998) have become significant sites of cultural resistance. With anti-logging encampments and forest festivals appearing through the eighties and nineties - such as the US Earth First! ‘rendezvous’ (Taylor 1993:227-8; 1995) and their Australian equivalents (see Chapter 5) - the history of eco-radical direct action illustrates the merger of civil disobedience, poetic gesture and gathering.¹⁴

Some events have begun as small protests, evolving into huge annual street carnivals. Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras follows this pattern. Beginning in 1978 as a commemoration of New York’s Stonewall riots, the Mardi Gras has since shifted to the summer blossoming into one of the world’s premier gay and lesbian celebrations (Altman 1999; Carbery 1995). Despite experiencing the conversion from protest to street carnival and dance party, the Mardi Gras remains a crucial annual moment in queer identity politics (Hawkins 1993:131). Though experiencing a different quality of mutation, London’s Notting Hill Carnival, known as ‘the biggest street festival in Europe’ (at least up until the early nineties), represents an equally significant field of expression and intervention, in this case for a subaltern immigrant community (Cohen 1993). Beginning in 1966 as a ‘revived traditional English fair’, from the seventies West Indian’s embraced the Notting Hill Carnival as an ‘all-West Indian institution’ and ‘liberated territory’, which

¹³ Yet, by contrast to other ACEs, protests are more likely to attempt to secure the power of the corporate media to convey their protest message.

¹⁴ As ‘powerful poetic gestures and effective political strategies’ (Jordan 1998:151), various ‘rave-derived’ (Luckman 1998) events also possess political-activist significance (Rietveld 1998). This is especially apparent in Britain, given the criminalising effects of, and widespread responses to, the CJA. In Berlin, the annual LOVEPARADE is a massive occupation of the city’s major thoroughfares. According to organisers, it is officially a ‘political demonstration’ - with participants (500,000 people in 1995) gathering to protest for peace (Richard and Kruger 1998:171).

came to symbolise and enhance the ‘corporateness and cohesion’ of that disadvantaged minority.

Alternative Lifestyle Events

What I call alternative lifestyle events (ALEs) possess varying manifestations: the free festival, gathering and mega-event. Most ALEs are seasonal events, annual moments in the (re)creation of an alternative lifestyle. They accommodate a diversity of alternative discourse and practice within their locales, often combining that associated with either of the above clusters. I will now provide details on each of these clusters.

Free Festival

The 1970s and ‘80s occasioned the emergence and growth of free festivals in Britain and the US. The free festival represented a critique of the commercial exploitation and profiteering of rock festivals, a nostalgic effort to revive folk festivals and the medieval fair. The ‘free’ element constituted the absence of an entrance fee or payments to entertainers and musicians.¹⁵ In January 1967, 100,000 people attended the first ‘Gathering of the Tribes’ or ‘Human Be-in’ in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, and huge free concerts also transpired in London’s Hyde Park in the late sixties. Other free festivals appeared on the periphery of large commercial festivals (Hetherington 1993:147-8). In the seventies, a circuit of free festivals and fairs (or ‘fayres’) evolved in Britain (Earle et al. 1994:Ch.2; McKay 1996:Ch.1). As Clarke (1982:82) conveys, in these events, commerce was often replaced by voluntary efforts, with food and drink either given away or distributed at cost price, or large informal markets evolved.¹⁶ Free festivals were ‘a test of counter-cultural independence ... a genuinely collective achievement’ (Clarke 1982:83). Their success demonstrated that music festivals were not ‘dependent upon the expertise and finance of commercial promoters in laying on an elaborate set of facilities’. Yet, they were more than just music festivals, as ‘arts and crafts of various sorts, music and forms of

¹⁵ Since they were free, there was no need for fencing or hired security.

¹⁶ Markets are themselves, as Henry (1994:299) points out, ‘alternative events’ since they are sites of informal sector work. What makes free festival markets, along with markets at sites like Kuranda, St Andrews near Melbourne and ConFest even more significant is that the majority of vendors reject formal sector work, consciously seeking economic alternatives. ‘Marketing [Henry continues] is particularly attractive to “seekers of alternatives” because it offers the opportunity for self-employment and an associated autonomy of action which formal sector work does not provide’ (ibid).

theatre, folk dancing, fireworks and various manifestations of commitment to ecological awareness and ... the occult' were apparent (ibid).

Stonehenge was the most renowned of these events. As 'anarchy incarnate, a riot of self expression and celebratory culture' (Stone 1996:192-3), this summer solstice event, formative in the development of Britain's semi-nomadic new traveller¹⁷ culture, began in 1974 (also, see below). The Thatcher government oversaw the demise of summer solstice festivals at Stonehenge with the violent demolition of the 'Peace Convoy' at the 'Battle of the Beanfield' in 1985 (cf. Earle et al. 1994:Ch.1; McKay 1996:Ch.1; Hetherington 1992; 1993). Despite the repressive strategy employed here and elsewhere, many smaller free festivals continued to appear - 'utopian models of an alternative society, offering an ethos of freedom from constraints, an economy based on reciprocity and gift and on the principles of mutual aid rather than money' (Hetherington 1993:148) – some in the mould of the free dance parties discussed earlier.

In Australia, the National Union of Students Aquarius Festival of May 1973 was the formative free festival out of which the nation's 'alternative capital', Nimbin, was born.¹⁸ Located in the 'Rainbow Region' of northeast NSW, Nimbin has become a desirable topos for young Australians and international travellers seeking alternative culture and independent living. Nimbin is a demesne of independence and resistance, a significant port-of-call (or destination) on the Australian youth migratory route popularly regarded as 'the hippie trail'. It has become a popular hedonic centre at the margins for 'experimental' and 'existential' tourists (Cohen 1979) chasing the authentic life. At least 5,000 people participated in the watershed moment that was Aquarius. An intentional 'tribal' process and 'a work of art immeasurably greater than anything yet attempted' (Jiggins 1983:11), Aquarius was a direct precursor of the Cotter ConFest in 1976.¹⁹ Coming to 'symbolise the alternative lifestyle movement' in Australia (Metcalf 1986:122), it was celebrated at a ten year anniversary festival, the 1983 Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration (Newton 1988, see

¹⁷ Often labelled 'New Age Travellers', they possess diverse commitments and practices. Some pursue spiritual and occultist practices, others have been outright hedonists, while others still are eco-radicals and anti-road activists (e.g. the Dongas Tribe). Following the CJA, Britain has experienced something of a traveller exodus - the new nomads declaring themselves 'world citizens ... [a] stateless tribe roaming through the European Union and beyond' (Dearling 1998:177).

¹⁸ As a 'community celebration', Aquarius received Federal Government funding via the Australia Council's newly established Community Arts Program (Hawkins 1993:42-3).

¹⁹ Both Aquarius and Cotter undoubtedly had some influence in New Zealand, where the Nambassa festivals occurred in 1978 and '79 (Broadley and Jones 1979).

below), and at a twenty year commemorative community arts festival (the Aquarius '93 Winter Festival).²⁰

Gathering

Alternative gatherings are distinguished from festivals, in that, not being carnivals of excess, they exemplify conscious efforts to recreate radical utopian communal perspectives. They are decentralised, co-operative and non-hierarchical social experiments, with a distinct commitment to healing-arts and non-commercialism. The Rainbow Gathering of Living Light is the most popular and enduring example of such an event. Beginning as a 'festival of prayer for world peace' in Colorado in 1972, Rainbow Gatherings are annual North American congregations of the all-inclusive Rainbow 'Family' (Niman 1997; Beck 1991). The Gathering grew out of a diverse range of alternative communities and experiments beginning in the sixties, all of which possess 'the shared intent of working for the healing of the Earth' (Buenfil 1991:17). It operates via numerous Councils (e.g. Main Council, Banking, Kitchen, Supply and Vision), consensus orientated decision making bodies which 'strive toward being nonexclusionary and nonhierarchical' (Niman 1997:38). Using money to buy or sell anything at Gatherings is considered 'taboo' - all food and materials are purchased through donations made to 'the Magic Hat'. Gatherings eventually spread around the world. The first Australian Rainbow Gathering took place at the Om Shalom community, northeast NSW, in November 1996. An international phenomenon, Gatherings attract thousands of global travellers, or 'Rainbows', and engender a steadily growing Rainbow 'consciousness' (see below for further elaboration).

There are a host of new spiritual gatherings possessing comparable characteristics and attracting similar participants. The annual One Earth Gatherings, the first of which was held at the Findhorn community in Scotland in the mid seventies, and subsequently passed from host to host around the world (*DTEQLD* Sep 1983:9), is an exemplary New Age²¹ gathering. Australia and New Zealand are host to numerous annual gatherings with

²⁰ Nimbin also hosts an annual celebration, the Nimbin Mardi Grass Fiesta.

²¹ Though there are inevitable cross-overs, these events should usually be differentiated from the specialised and explicit commercial orientation of events that are hallmark showcases of the 'New Age industry', such as a great many weekend 'retreats', 'intensives', 'workshops', 'funshops' and 'conferences' designed for the development of one's 'internal resources'. Also, gatherings, and ALEs in general, should not be confused with New Age exhibitions, fairs and expos operating since the late seventies and usually held in exhibition halls or show grounds.

specialised 'healing and wellbeing' constituencies.²² Alternatively, Neo-Pagan gatherings, designed to celebrate the survival or revival of strains of ancient folk or nature oriented spirituality, have also proliferated. 'Sabbats', meetings of covens or families and other individuals on the solstices and equinoxes and 'quarter days' or fire festivals (seasonal ritual meetings), and 'esbats' (full moon meetings) (Lurhmann 1989:47), have grown in popularity in western nations. In Australia, Pagans have converged at such events since the early eighties (Hume 1995:7; 1997:37-9). Radical Faerie Gatherings, celebrations of 'gay spirituality' (Rodgers 1995:34), are also evident, as are ritual theatre gatherings like those held at Wolfgang's Palace in Victoria.

The Burning Man Festival, Black Rock Desert, Nevada, is perhaps the world's largest techno-Pagan or Zippie (Zen Inspired Pagan Professional) gathering. Thousands of people travel long distances onto the desert playa to become part of a sacred community and to eventually witness, and participate in, the burning of a 50 foot wooden statue packed with fireworks and rockets - 'the Man'. Emerging out of the bohemian scene in San Francisco in the mid-eighties, with its philosophy of 'no spectators', Burning Man is a temporary experimental art community accommodating 'restless, creative counter-rituals of community building and active participation' (Wray 1995). According to Sams (1999:6), the experience is 'off the beaten track, well off any beaten track in America'. Within this edge-community comprised of numerous 'villages' or theme camps, commodification of art is repressed, while a 'gift-economy' is promoted and nurtured. Aside from a 'black market' trade in illicit substances, commodification is kept to an absolute minimum (e.g. most barter for goods). However, as the event increases in size (15,000 people in 1998), it is subject to wider mediation and thus external commodification.

Mega-event

²² These include the Homeland Festival of Peace and Healing (from 1985) at 'The Sanctuary' on the Bellinger River NSW, Ananda Marga's Ananda Mela (or Festival of Bliss) held near Stanthorpe Qld (from the early eighties), the 'Renewing the Dreaming Camps' hosted by Yuin elder Guboo Ted Thomas, and the Healing Arts Festival held in Victoria in 1998. Gender-specific events like Lismore's Green Man or the Thora Men's Gathering, and The Wild and Wise Women's Festival in East Gippsland, along with pan-indigenous and inter-cultural events like The Global Village held near Townsville in 1996, and the Laura Aboriginal Dance and Culture Festival in Bellingen NSW, have also emerged. In New Zealand, in the early nineties, the Aotearoa Festival of Light at Tauhara, and The Gathering at Owhangu (1993) - originally a drug and alcohol free healing festival with a \$250.00 cover charge, but evolving into that country's largest dance festival - became local manifestations.

Recent times have been witness to the appearance of large-scale alternative events the territories of which are occupied by an ever growing diversity of performance zones and genres. The mega-rave at Castlemorton in 1992 was a free-festival attracting about 40,000 people. The counter-spatial character of such events is jeopardised by encroaching and sometimes unscrupulous commercialism. Britain's Glastonbury, is perhaps the most famous event of this kind. Beginning in 1970, a free festival throughout the seventies, Glastonbury became larger and commercial in the following decade, with a 'fringe' festival developing outside its perimeter (Earle et al. 1994:30). In Australia, the Woodford/Maleny Festival possesses a family resemblance. Beginning in 1985 at Maleny, Qld, the event grew from a small folk festival into a huge alternative community New Year festival, now held at Woodford in Southern Qld. Accommodating indigenous, environmental, multicultural and New Age components, the event attracted around 80,000 people over New Year 1990/91. Woodford/Maleny hosts a large indigenous presence and culminates with a 'Fire Event' (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:203 [see below]). Today the event incorporates a 'Murri festival', the participants in which are accommodated at a separate 'Murri Camp' (Goodman 1998:39).

We might call these mega-events *alternative tourism events*. Demonstrating parallels with conventional 'mega', or 'hallmark' (Ritchie in Roche 1992:577) events'²³ - like world fairs, significant political or religious events, historical milestones, major sports events and international rock concerts - they often transpire in urban contexts of 'world cities' and attempt to stimulate local economies. While there are signs that alternative mega-events are changed by the input of the corporate dollar, by comparison with 'hallmark events', alternative mega-events possess markedly variant cultural, lifestyle and political 'content'.

Alternative Cultural Heterotopia

There is at least one theme common to most alternative events - they are polydimensional in form and content. First, they possess *overlapping* event formats, and perhaps, historically, or even during the course of an event, metamorphose from one event cluster to another. Second, and this is especially the case for ALEs, they are likely to accommodate the *heterogeneity* of alternate discourse and practice evident within the ACM. As Moore (1995:212) recognises for public events in general, such events are intersections of various 'pathways'. Rarely 'single issue' events, they occasion *disputation*

²³ Also called 'global media events' - 'publicly performed for, highly mediated through, and popularly consumed by global audiences' (Palmer 1998:267).

between constituents over matters of philosophy and method, as well as the interpretation of the event itself. They are what I call *alternative cultural heterotopia*. In order to describe this, I now turn to a discussion of the concept's principal term.

'Heterotopia' is a spatial concept in receipt of growing interest in recent times. Partially developed by Foucault, the concept has been applied to a range of spheres, installations, geographies and events, accumulating a heterogeneity of meanings in the history of its usage - a confusion which is, in part, a legacy of its brief and non-concise treatment by Foucault himself (1973; 1986). As Hetherington (1997:41) conveys, 'heterotopia' has been used to denote: sites constituted as incongruous or paradoxical, through socially transgressive practices; sites that are ambivalent and uncertain due the multiplicity of meanings attached to them; sites that have an aura of mystery, danger or transgression about them; sites defined by their absolute perfection; marginalised sites, and; incongruous forms of writing.

Heterotopia is Latin for 'place of otherness'. It originally came from the study of anatomy where it refers to 'parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien' (Hetherington 1997:42). In his early work (1973:xviii), Foucault was concerned with the heterotopic character of language - that is, 'the way that a textual discourse can be unsettled by writing that does not follow the expected rules and conventions' (Hetherington 1997:8). Later (1986), however, he used 'heterotopia' in reference to specifically unsettling or ambiguous social spaces. Foucault argued that, by contrast to 'utopias', 'sites with no real place' - which 'present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down' - there exist 'heterotopia'. These 'counter-sites' are:

a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1986:24)

Foucault suggests that there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute real spaces that are 'absolutely different from all the sites they reflect and speak about' (ibid).

Hetherington has helped clarify our understanding of such spaces, 'whose existence sets up unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate "objects" which challenge the way we think, especially the way our thinking is ordered' (1997:42). Rather 'monstrous combinations' appear in these 'almost magical' spaces (ibid:43), since the internal

organisation of 'texts' and 'objects' is thought to be derived from similitude rather than resemblance - that is, there is no unity of meaning via resemblance within heterotopia as their content signifies 'through a series of deferrals that are established between a signifier and a signified rather than with direct reference to a referent' (Hetherington 1996b:158-9).

Foucault saw that 'spaces of otherness' can be event-spaces (or 'heterochronia') of transgression (like the festival or the carnival), or spaces for the perfection of social control and order (e.g. the prison and asylum, new colonies or museums and libraries). An understanding of this spectrum has informed Hetherington's take on heterotopia. He defines them as:

sites of alternate ordering ... established by their incongruous condition. That incongruity emerges through a relationship of difference with other sites, such that their presence either provides an unsettling of spatial relations or an alternative representation of spatial relations. (1997:51)

The 'Otherness' of such sites, therefore, does not exist in itself, nor does it derive from the site, but is established via its relationship of difference to other spaces. Such spaces are not fixed as heterotopic - they always have multiple meanings for agents (ibid:51).

Hetherington displays a shift in his position on heterotopia. In earlier work, including his PhD (1993), they are sites of resistance and transgression, marginal spaces where alternate identities are performed. In more recent work, they are 'spaces of alternate ordering', a 'mode of ordering based upon some idea of social improvement' (1997:52).²⁴ In offering 'a theory of the spatial dynamics of modernity' (ibid:ix), Hetherington introduces several spaces as key sites of 'alternate ordering' in the history of modernity. Manifestly ambivalent - accommodating a unique combination of rational debate and hedonistic pleasures - the Palais Royal in eighteenth century Paris was one such site: 'one of the first sites in which the utopics of modernity, the ambivalent interplay of freedom and control, were expressed' (ibid:17). As a heterotopia, the Palais Royal, along with other spaces like the Masonic lodge and the factory, have:

acted as obligatory points of passage, in producing a spatiality that expressed the utopic ideas of freedom and order through which we might begin to understand modernity ... Almost like laboratories, they can be taken as sites in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out. (ibid:12-13)

²⁴ Yet, that which Hetherington claims for heterotopias, has long been known for public events, 'in' and 'through' which 'cultural order' is made (Handelman 1990).

Hetherington is not so much concerned with the utopia or dystopia of modernity, but with heterotopia - actual spaces and spatialised processes of ordering. Heterotopia exist, but they only exist *in the relationship between spaces*, in particular, between *eu-topia* (good place) and *ou-topia* (no-place) - the two Greek words Thomas More (1985) merged to form the term *Utopia*, which meant 'a good place' which was 'nowhere', except in the imagination (Hetherington 1997:ix). Heterotopias are spaces where efforts are made to turn the nowhere of the imagination into the good place - but they are invariably 'in-between' such ideals.

The above clarifications have facilitated the development of the concept of *alternative cultural heterotopia* (ACH), which, I suggest, involves four interdependent characteristics:

First, they are primarily spaces of *otherness*, that which Foucault has called 'counter-sites'. That is, centres for alternative culture - expatriates and exiles, outsiderhood, marginality, authenticity - they are places where dispersed ambivalence and uncertainty, displaced and rejected knowledge (Hetherington 1993:92), are celebrated. This constitutes their difference in relation to adjacent sites, in contrast to those 'other spaces' established for the control of disorder like prisons or psychiatric hospitals.

Second, they are *heterogeneous* spaces. Indicating 'a complex juxtaposition and cosmopolitan simultaneity of difference' (Soja 1995:15), they accommodate variant alternatives, multiple 'utopics'²⁵ - marginalia. Their *habitués* may subscribe to a vast range of alternative discourse and practice - *authentica*. They are thus heterogeneous zones, with variant expectations held by inhabitants.

Third, they are *contested* spaces. Uncertainty and variant expectations condition disputation between inhabitants over the meaning of the space. Conflict does not arise exclusively between inhabitants (organisers and patrons) and non-inhabitants (external bodies), but possibly *between inhabitants* themselves. This may produce fission.

Fourth, often event-spaces, they are *liminal* realms. That is, despite contestation, or perhaps because of it, they hold potential for (re)creating alternative identities and effecting 'alternate orderings'. I thus take my cues from Turner (see Chapter 2) and Foucault (via Hetherington) who claims that heterotopia 'do not exist in the order of things, but in the ordering of things' (1996a:38).

²⁵ A term used by Marin (1984), which Hetherington (1998b:138) describes as 'a spatial practice that seeks to make use of the marginality of certain sites to articulate ideas about alternative futures for society'.

My thesis is that ACEs (especially ALEs) are ACH. And, ConFest will be offered as an unparalleled example of such a phenomenon. Not only had the original Aquarius Festival presaged the building of Australia's permanent ACH (Nimbin), but it provided the prototype for the DTE ConFest, which had, according to Altman (1980:116), 'come to replace Nimbin ... as the best known symbol in Australia of the "counter-culture"', or, as I prefer, alternative culture. Yet, it is an inimitable counter-site, and its special place in Australian alternative culture is affirmed and validated through its unique combination of the above ACEs - a synthesis of festival, gathering and mega-event (and accommodating features characteristic of the folk festival, dance party and protest). Such polydimensionality engenders a remarkable environment of contrast and complementarity. Yet, for now, I wish to examine the way researchers have investigated other ALEs.

Part II: Alternative Lifestyle Event Ethnography

I now turn to a review of the published results of four ethnographic projects conducted on ALEs. The first two projects derive from PhD thesis research carried out on non-Australian events by non-anthropologists. The latter two are articles on Australian ALEs researched by anthropologists. My intention is to offer: a description of the events themselves; an appraisal of conceptual issues raised; critical commentary on methodological and theoretical perspectives, and; a general comparison of the approaches.

Stonehenge Solstice Festival

In a sociology/cultural geography PhD thesis, Kevin Hetherington (1993:Ch.5) renders Britain's Stonehenge as a significant site in the historical (re)production of 'New Age Traveller' identity.²⁶ Between 1974 and 1984, travellers and other festival participants gathered at this ancient megalithic site on Salisbury Plain to celebrate the summer solstice and participate in a nearby rock festival (ibid:143-4). Hetherington maintains Stonehenge

²⁶ Reference to Stonehenge and new travellers in his thesis have been published in several places (Hetherington 1992; 1996a; 1996b; 1998a).

is heterotopic, arguing that there are 'few sites in the world that create such a heteroglossia of interpretation' (ibid:142; see also Hetherington 1996b). Among these, two general views hold sway: Stonehenge as 'order/heritage' (held by the National Trust and English Heritage) or 'mystery/festival' (held by new travellers). For new travellers, the site is 'a place of worship and renewal'. As 'a symbolic site of Otherness, associated with rejected knowledge in the form of Earth Mysteries' (Hetherington 1993:147), the rituals of festival performed there enhance the 'heteroclitic' identities of travellers, that is marginal identities that are 'monstrous, anomalous and collage-like in composition' (Hetherington 1996a:43). Festival participants celebrated their identities via rites of inversion and 'enacted' their lifestyle through excessive consumption (Hetherington 1992:87). As grotesque harbingers of uncertainty and discontinuity, sources of pollution and anxiety, the traveller lifestyle was associated with sources of 'risk' to those (including locals) holding to the 'order/heritage' view. Their transgressive life-strategies are thought to have led to the ultimate suppression of their spectacularly utopic 'museum without walls' (Hetherington 1996b).

In this disquisition on marginal space, performance and identity, Hetherington draws heavily upon Victor Turner, and establishes a strong link between heterotopia and what Turner called liminal, or more precisely liminoidal, space-times. Heterotopic spaces are, like liminoidal space-times, both marginal and interstitial. As such, Stonehenge festivals were interstitial occasions occurring at a marginal space, which possessed the effect of reproducing the marginal identities of travellers. For Hetherington, such events are realms of performance, 'offering a carnivalesque and liminoid ethos or theatre of cruelty in which the Otherness and deliberate marginality of the Traveller lifestyle can be performed' (1993:192). Furthermore, such spaces, regarded as 'centres' on the margins for pilgrim/participants, are said to exemplify Turner's 'spontaneous communitas' (ibid:179).²⁷

Hetherington's 'deliberately eclectic' (1993:294) project employed minimal ethnography. Besides extensive documentary research, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted (including five with Travellers in 1991). In defence of this small sample, the author cites the frequent mobility and geographical dispersal of his informants, and his own 'limited financial resources' (ibid). Since festivals, gatherings and protests are not infrequent occurrences, I am not altogether certain why field research should be restricted in this way. As Hetherington's 'participant observation' consisted of 'two and a half days'

²⁷ As Turner's conceptual framework is examined at length in Chapter 2, I reserve elaboration of and commentary upon his concepts until then.

at the Forest Fayre - 'a small commercial festival organised by some of the Travellers and not exactly a free festival' in 1991 (ibid:292-4) - interviewing a greater number of experienced Stonehenge participants would have added weight to his ethnography.

The Rainbow Gathering

In a comparatively in-depth ethnography, Michael Niman (1997)²⁸ portrays the Rainbow Family, Nation or Tribe as a 'revitalization movement' (of, now, global proportions) which attempts to realise a 'utopian libertarian-anarchist vision' at Rainbow Gatherings (or just 'Gatherings'). 'The Family' is described as an 'intentional group', indeed 'the largest utopian community in America' (Niman 1997:31). Yet, 'the Family' is also an 'occasional group' (ibid:112), or 'band society' which dissolves and regroups while maintaining 'a cohesive identity' (ibid:201). Since there are now many regional North American as well as global Gatherings, there is today, at any given time, 'at least one Rainbow Gathering taking place somewhere in the world' (ibid:33) - a circumstance which, according to Niman, renders 'the Family' a community with an element of permanence. The Rainbow Family possesses an open membership, Gathering attendees automatically qualifying as Rainbows. The invitation encourages people of diverse backgrounds (e.g. middle class kids, Dead Heads,²⁹ war veterans and hobos) and spiritual affiliations to live in peaceful co-existence - a 'multispiritual utopia' (ibid:146). Indeed, with sixties peace activists and Vietnam War veterans forming the core of the first Gatherings, it is grounded in a tolerance for diversity. It is further argued that 'the Family' are a 'cooperative community of individualists' (ibid:70), their Gatherings expressing a 'commitment both to communalism and to individual liberty' (ibid:213). With 'no central organization to be subverted or destroyed', Niman describes how they have survived media misrepresentation and persistent harassment and persecution by the government (ibid:201-2).

Niman's account is grounded in a proximate, first-hand understanding of his subject matter. A long term member of the Rainbow Family with years of experience - and conducting 49 interviews between 1990-94 (Niman 1997:262-3) - he provides a thick description of the Gatherings. Such immersion justifies a departure from conventional

²⁸ Work which began life as a PhD (1991).

²⁹ Dead Heads were followers of The Grateful Dead, a band which went on a 'Tour' that, beginning in the sixties, spanned about three decades. 'Dead' concerts became spiritual gatherings for 'Dead Heads' (Sardiello 1994).

ethnography, which is demonstrated by the opening chapter, 'Sunflower's Day' - described as 'a piece of ethnographic fiction'.³⁰

However, while Rainbow Gatherings are *public events*, albeit of a peculiar kind, a discounting of the potency of socio-cultural theory³¹ on such events reveals an analytical deficiency in Niman's approach. Not festivals or celebrations, Gatherings are regarded as 'communities', and comparative analysis is restricted to 'utopian communities'. While this may account for inattention to comparable events and marginal people's worldwide (such as Britain's free festival circuit and new travellers), and the avoidance of other temporary seasonal events, I find it curious that the salient concepts of 'community' or 'communitas', as these have been employed by anthropologists and sociologists (e.g. Anderson 1983; Cohen 1985; Turner 1974), have been overlooked. In addition to this, while Niman regards the Rainbow Family as a 'movement', indeed a 'revitalization movement', no attempt is made to explicate this via social movement theory. Yet, overlooking Turner proves especially noticeable for, of the four events discussed here, Gatherings most approximate the sacred redress and spontaneous communality of the *limen*. It is almost as if Rainbow Gatherings are of such divine character that they cannot be made heuristically renderable.

The Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration

The Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration of 1983 (4,000 people) marked the tenth anniversary of the Aquarius festival. Concerned by anthropology's apparent neglect of the popular culture of Australian alternates, Janice Newton (1988) investigated this nostalgic attempt to recapture the essence of Aquarius - using 'impressionistic evidence' (ibid:64) gathered at the event itself, and extensive archival research (including documentation on the original Nimbin event). Each day of the Celebration possessed a theme: 'kid's day, yin day (women's activities), green day, peace day and land rights day'. According to Newton, the event was pervaded by naturalism. She observes two key manifestations of 'the natural' desired by participants - 'tribes' and 'Aborigines' - meditating upon what

³⁰ The chapter pursues a day in the life of 'Sunflower', 'an amalgam character'. Sunflower's experiences are, according to the author, 'real, based on both my field notes and stories Rainbows have shared with me'. The topography of Sunflower's gathering is also 'real' - being a combination of two separate National Gatherings (xi). Though the suggestion that Sunflower's experiences are both 'real', yet, at the same time 'fictional', may provoke criticism, given the researcher's own history of involvement, such an approach is warranted. Though idealised, it does provide an insightful introduction.

³¹ Apart from a brief reference to the ideas of Bey (Niman 1997:97).

they reveal about Australian counterculture. The attempts to 'recreate tribal communalism' and 'tribal ritual structures' (ibid:64), and the celebration of, and identification with, Aboriginality (evident, for example, in a 'Koori space', land rights tent, workshops on Aboriginal dialogue and birthing practices, a '*bora* ring' and 'Rainbow Serpent' closing ceremony [ibid:62]), demonstrate a romantic 'idealisation of a tribal and Aboriginal way of life' rooted in the counterculture.

The Celebration also revealed significant shifts since Aquarius, as 'the radical New Left Politics of many of the 1973 participants were replaced by a more humanistic political interest: conservation, Aboriginal land rights, peace, and world hunger' (ibid). However, Newton reveals that what she regards as the political/personal (or religious) 'cleavage' of early counterculture, was retained, since social and political issues were evidently 'secondary' to the 'expansion of self' (ibid:64).

Like Hetherington, Newton grants Turner pride of place in her theoretical modelling. Indeed, Newton first recognised the value of plying the ideas of Victor Turner to the study of ALEs and their participants. After all, it was the countercultural milieu which Turner believed best characterised the intimate marriage of marginality and what he called 'communitas' in western culture. Newton argues that the original Aquarius Festival was an exemplary 'spontaneous communitas', a source of regeneration, and the '83 Celebration was a kind of 'ideological communitas', an attempt to 'recharge the permanent alternative communities, to revitalise a contra-ideology, to keep up the strength of the anti-rationalistic ideals of work, play and personal development' (1988:66) conceived ten years before. Finally, interpreting the later event as a font of societal change, Newton also acknowledges the utility of the (post)modern 'liminoid', which is applied to render it a 'proto-structural' force. Quoting Turner, she says liminoid activities can:

generate and store a plurality of alternative models of living, from utopias to programs which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles ... in the direction of radical change (in Newton 1988:65).

While this may be true for the former event, I wonder whether it has equal applicability to 1983 where, echoing the 'personal/political (religious) split' of the early counterculture, social and political issues were 'secondary' to self-growth. I think this inconsistency may be corrected once it is recognised that the 'cleavage' about which Newton speaks, may be quite simply overstressed (see Chapter 7). A related problem can be located in the author's

implication that the Celebration's adopted tribal model resembles 'small scale liminality'. My concern is that we are left with little solution as to how this perceived valorisation of 'the tribal model' can be reconciled with the simultaneous predominance of individualism and self development in the observed 'counterculture'. My chief question is, where does the presence of apparently incompatible values - the collectivism of the 'tribal model' on the one hand (including the women who apparently 'acted within a separate social and political unit' [Newton 1988:62]), and the individualism inherent to self-growth practices on the other - leave 'small scale liminality'?

Finally, in accordance with the parameters she set for her article, Newton, in discussing the counterculture's valorisation of Aboriginality, does not go beyond reference to their 'false idealisation of a tribal and Aboriginal way of life' to take in a discussion of the politics and/or phenomenology of cultural appropriation. I have no doubt that further investigation would uncover a complexity of issues: from the neo-colonialist distortion, homogenisation and occupation of essentialised 'others', an approach gaining momentum in the wake of Said (1978), to the reconciliatory and alliance building potentials of cultural borrowing, and the syncretic creativity located in the appropriational process of 'othering' as a means of identity (re)creation. However, this is not a criticism as Newton's goal is to initiate discussion on the matter. As she says, the counterculture's 'reaching out' to Aboriginal culture 'provides a fruitful area for further research' (1988:67).

The Maleny Fire Event

Lowell Lewis and Paul Dowsey-Magog (1993) provide a detailed exegesis on the fate of the Fire Event taking place within the context of the Maleny Folk Festival between New Year 90/91 and 93/94. The Fire Event is perhaps Australia's most popular and renowned incidence of 'ritual theatre', with up to 20,000 people in attendance in the period researched. Special attention is accorded the 91/92 Event, considered to be an exemplary 'totalising integrative force'.³² The authors argue that the Event's power as an engaging transformative performance was weakened in the later Events where 'art' had apparently triumphed over 'ritual'. This occurred in two ways: the dominance of linear

³² That Event involved the 'victory of natural forces' (symbolised by a huge mobile Earth Mother figure) 'over the excesses of civilisation' (a twenty metre wooden skyscraper called the 'Tower of Babel'), which was eventually consumed in a conflagration of flames, fireworks and mortar rockets.

time over cyclical time (the Event's transference from New Year's eve to the last night of the festival), and of individualism over communal processes (Western art, such as ritual theatre, is not so much a 'deeply communal process' as a domain of 'individual genius') (ibid:207). The Event's shift away from New Year's eve replaced collective engagement and resolution with passive spectatorship to an experience controlled by artists. At the same time, an indigenous people's night replaced the Fire Event on New Year's Eve. This event 'stole some fire' from the Fire Event as the largely non-Aboriginal crowd attracted were able to participate as spectators only. The authors claim that, here, indigenous people:

have sometimes constructed themselves as groups with ritual, as opposed to (Euro) others who had lost it. The implicit effect was to disallow or delegitimize the possibility of the popular recreation of ritual and to put indigenous people in the position of 'standing for' the sacred. (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:216)

Ultimately, this encouraged people 'to watch the performance of the sacred at the Fire Event' too (ibid).

Relying upon detailed ethnographic data,³³ Lewis and Dowsey-Magog offer a tight analysis of the Fire Event and its participants. Like the Nimbin festivals, the Fire Event is said to have been an example of ritual's revitalisation in the (post)modern world - a liminal event. In an integrated approach, the authors use the ideas of Turner and MacAloon (1984), to argue that, 'at best' (when they were held on New Year), the Fire Events 'constitute a neo-liminal framework within which participants can achieve a consensus of belief and action' (1993:198). Here, they use MacAloon's 'neo-liminal' (1984:269) in place of 'liminal' since, due to 'the degree of individual variation, no special performance framework in a large scale society can be as integral to general daily life as similar frameworks can be among small-scale groups' (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:217). They argue that, ideally, Fire Events elicit the kind of 'totalising integrative force ... central to many kinds of ritual practice' (ibid:198-9). Therefore, it is 'grounded in transcendental, fundamental, or "ultimate concerns"' - engaging people by embodying their most important concerns (green politics and New Age spirituality). Consonant with the earlier approaches to Stonehenge and the Nimbin Celebration, prior to the triumph of art over ritual, the Fire Event occasioned 'communitas' - 'an experience of egalitarian solidarity and spiritual integration' (ibid:201).

³³ Made all the more probable as this is an annual event observed over several years, and since one of the authors was involved in its production and planning.

While the authors imply that Aboriginal spectacle took the place of non-indigenous communitas, and while they speculate that the separation of Aborigines (the Murri stage and camp) and non-indigenes on site may reflect the ‘difficulty of social reconciliation in the outside society’ (ibid:217), I am left wondering about possible, but undisclosed, disharmony between indigenous and non-indigenous organisers and participants.

It should be clear that I am indebted to all of the above research projects. Variably rich in ethnographic data on, and analyses of, a diversity of ALEs, they represent the key texts drawn upon for comparative purposes throughout the thesis. They have furnished appropriate conceptual tools and the identification of various theoretical and methodological shortcomings has helped clarify my project. Hetherington’s elucidation of the Stonehenge solstice free festivals as heterotopic has been particularly useful in formulating my own interpretation of ALEs in general, and ConFest in particular. It is clear to me that all of the four events above are ACHs.

My reading of past approaches has given rise a certain degree of dissatisfaction. I have been especially concerned that, although three of the projects are inspired by the writing of Turner, a critical deconstruction of his project has not been undertaken. For instance, what does the concept of heterotopia and its implied heterogeneity and conflict, reveal about liminality and its ostensible consensuality? Or, if these events are elevated moments of excess and intercorporeality, a celebration of the body, will a non-revisionist Turnerian perspective be appropriate for their study? If the popular Turnerian paradigm restricts the inquiry of contemporary ACEs, then what directions should we take?

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced alternative culture, a movement consisting of a heterogeneity of de-centrist DiY neo-tribes connected by their commitment to, and expression of, discourse and practice responsive to perceived deficiencies in the parent culture. It has investigated alternative cultural events, the principal criteria of which have been ascertained. Several event-clusters meeting with this criteria, including alternative lifestyle events, were identified. The latter, following the ideas of Foucault, via Hetherington, were described as alternative cultural heterotopia. Finally, I examined four independent research projects conducted on ALEs (employing ethnographies of varying description). This critical and comparative investigation serves to assist the formulation of

an appropriate approach to the inimitable, local ACH, ConFest, and to provide valuable comparative data and analysis to be drawn upon in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

The Organic Hyper-Liminal Zone

Introduction

With the purpose of formulating an apposite understanding of ConFest, this chapter evaluates and revises Victor Turner's core concept of liminality. Though Turner's ideas remain influential, their reconfiguration sets this study apart from Turner-inspired analyses of alternative events discussed in Chapter 1. There are three parts. First, focusing largely on his post-sixties material, I introduce Turner's project elucidating the significance of the *limen*. This is followed by a critical deconstruction which sheds light on aspects of Turner's essentialist tendency. An exposition of the basic elements of, and shortcomings in, Turnerian thought enables the fashioning of an appropriately tenored model accounting for a plurality of bodies, voices and genres. In the third part, I therefore posit that, as a unique alternative heterotopian threshold, ConFest is an *organic hyper-liminal zone*. In this final part, I articulate the two principal conceptual elements of this model. 1) I initiate discussion of the event's social *organicism*, which I find consistent with the anarchic poetics of Hakim Bey's TAZ. 2) As a *hyper*-performative cultural context for the expression of a triad of authenticity conditioning modalities (the *limina* of play, drama, community), ConFest is host to multiple alterity, ramified performance genres and variegated constituencies.

Part I. Victor Turner: What is This Thing Called Liminality?

It will take many more lifetimes to trace out the multifarious and interconnecting ramifications of the stupendous interdisciplinary web of ideas that [Turner] spun endlessly out of himself. (Babcock 1984:461)

In social and cultural theory, Turner made a deep impression on both sides of the Atlantic. He stamped his influence on social and cultural anthropologies in England and the US respectively. Along with Geertz, he contributed to the development of symbolic anthropology, and attracted plenty of interest from outside the discipline (especially literary, performance and cultural studies). Yet, despite making significant inroads upon

diverse fields,¹ Turner rarely paused to galvanise his ideas into a transparent theoretical 'model', a 'Turnerian system or semiotics of culture'. Indeed, paraphrasing Oscar Wilde, academic clarity, he remarked, 'is the last refuge of the Philistines' (Babcock and MacAloon 1987:19). The approach and style of this 'incursive nomad' (Turner 1974:18) betokens a somewhat anomalous theoretical position. A 'post-functionalist' (Flanigan 1990:52) he may have been, yet Turner was clearly a pre-poststructuralist. An architect of strong processualism, his writing, at least the later material, betrays the workings of a sophisticated functionalism.

Turner's wide ranging project constituted an attempt to comprehend how socio-cultural systems (what he - in reference to the English as opposed to the French tradition - called 'structures') are produced *and* reproduced. We might identify the process as *socio-cultural (re)production*. Since 'normal social science' was said to ignore 'at least one half of human sociality' (1974:293-4) - thereby constituting 'an obdurate evasion of the rich complexities of cultural creation' (Turner 1969:viii) - Turner sought to gaze upon interstices which 'provide homes for anti-structural visions, thoughts and ultimately behaviours' (1974:293). That such times and spaces are regarded as necessary sources of *resolution*, is the crux of Turner's perspective. Meta-explorations beyond, beneath and between the fixed, the finished and the predictable, his later work consists of an extensive journey into such times and spaces, pregnant margins, the cracks of society, necessary thresholds of dissolution and indeterminacy through which socio-cultural order is said to be (re)constituted. And, through observation of culture unkempt and unclothed, in its drunken, ludic and inchoate moments, one may obtain a clear apprehension of the ordered world.

His project is founded upon a sense that society is in-composition, open-ended, forever *becoming*, and that its (re)production is dependent upon the periodic appearance, in the history of societies and in the lives of individuals, of organised moments of categorical disarray and intense reflexive potential. This is most powerfully articulated as liminality, a concept which has sparked the imagination of cultural observers attempting to apply meaning to a phalanx of public time-space zones demarcated from routine life, yet harbouring unquantifiable social possibilities. It is in such zones of experience - the 'realm of pure possibility' (Turner 1967a:97) - where the familiar may be stripped of its certitude and conventional economics and politics transcended. They are occasions where people,

¹ His enormous cross-disciplinary sphere of influence is evidenced in the appearance of many edited volumes indebted to his work (e.g. literary studies - Ashley 1990; pilgrimage - Morinis

often strangers to one another, may achieve an ineffable affinity, where sacred truths are imparted and/or social alternatives explored.

Liminality has its roots in the Latin *limen* (threshold), a term used by van Gennep to describe the middle phase of rites of passage. Writing in 1909, van Gennep grouped together all rituals ‘that accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another’ (1960:10). He divided transitional rites into three phases: ‘separation’, ‘margin’ (or *limen*) and ‘reaggregation’, for which he also used the terms ‘preliminal’, ‘liminal’, and ‘postliminal’. He suggested that, in different rites, the symbolic elements of one phase may feature predominantly. The first phase, that of separation, is comprised of ‘symbolic action signifying the *detachment* of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from a set of cultural conditions, or both’ (Turner and Turner 1982:202, my emphasis). Here, as Turner reminds us, separation ‘demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular spacetime’ (1982b:24). The third phase represents ‘desacralisation’, the participant’s celebrated *return* to society as a transformed or reborn individual - perhaps with new status, roles and responsibilities (or simply an altered attitude or outlook on life). Yet, for Turner, the central or liminal phase (‘social limbo’), representing moments ‘betwixt and between’ fixed cultural categories, was most critical. Such clusters of rites as the life-death cycle, crisis and seasonal rites were reckoned socially significant moments ‘betwixt and between’, matrixes where elements of structural organisation are temporarily suspended or rearranged.

The *limen* became the leitmotif in Turner’s theoretical firmament (see Appendix B.1), denoting a complexity of interwoven processes (see ‘modalities’ below), and versatile in application. Responsible for consolidating ‘liminality’ in social and cultural theory, he defined it thus: ‘a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process’ (Turner 1986:42). In an early preoccupation, Turner applied the concept to illuminate the central phases of two clusters of transition rites common to premodern cultures:

1. Life cycle (or crisis) rites: rites of transition, often private, such as rites which mark birth, puberty, marriage and death; rites of affliction such as divinatory and curative rites which tend to possess a socially therapeutic function (cf. Turner 1967b:359-93); and rites of status elevation such as rites of initiation, inclusion into political office and

1992a; psychoanalysis - Schwartz-Salent and Stein 1991; neuro-phenomenology - Laughlin et al 1990).

membership to secret societies, clubs etc. These rites often involve seclusion, humiliation and ordeals, the leveling or stripping of normal distinctions and the lowering of the liminary's status (prior to elevation) (Turner 1969).

2. Seasonal (calendar) rites: collective and public celebrations of agricultural events of the round such as sowing, first fruits and main harvest, or the celebration of cosmic events such as the solstices, equinox and the intersection of solar and lunar cycles. Related are public rites which mark a transition from one wider social state to another (such as from war to peace) or which mark the end of natural disasters. These rites often provide occasion for the legitimate performance of illicit behaviour (inversion) by the 'structurally inferior' which includes temporary saturnalia, lampooning, derision and mockery of the 'structurally superior' and which may be accompanied by age and sex role reversals (cf. Bakhtin 1968; Babcock 1978). It is said that these momentary irregularities, which make the 'low high and the high low', reaffirm regularity (Turner 1969:76; Gluckman 1954). All of these rites are often festive, celebratory occasions.

Both clusters feature ludic recombinations of cultural forms in every imaginable (and sometimes unimaginable) way(s). The known is often defamiliarised, the 'natural' transmuted into the 'unnatural' - (e.g. a disguise may combine human, animal, and vegetable fragments, as in initiation rites) - and conventional reality may be exaggerated or distorted (for the purpose of satire or burlesque mockery, as in seasonal events [Turner 1982b:27]). Liminality is 'the realm of primitive hypothesis' (Turner and Turner 1982:205), it is ritual's hermeneutic (Kapferer 1991:xi) since such ludic 'dislocation' (Da Matta 1984) and categorical juxtaposition encourages speculation and enhances understanding of the social world.

Yet, as Turner came to perceive substantive commonalities in ritual and performative phenomena in premodern, modern and postmodern cultures, 'the liminal' was telegraphed beyond description of the mid-phase of passage and seasonal rites in small scale and agrarian societies. In (post)modern culture, further to the attenuated continuation of such liminal rites, Turner described the presence of 'quasi-liminal' or 'liminoid' cultural phenomena (such as carnival, festival, sport events, theatre, ballet, film, the novel, television and 'the arts' in general).

The liminal/liminoid concepts harbour important differences. Liminal cultural phenomena are perceived to be the collective, integrated, and obligatory ritual action of premodernity - tribal and early agrarian cultures. They predominate in societies possessing

what Durkheim called 'mechanical solidarity'. They are concerned with calendrical, biological and social structural rhythms or with crises in social processes. They are enforced by necessity but contain the potentiality for the formation of new symbols, models and ideas. They are 'collective representations' - 'symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all the members of the group', yet they are the antithesis - inverse, reverse, negation - of quotidian, 'profane' collective representations (Turner 1982b:53-4). Such activity is often called 'the work of the gods' and here work and play are 'intricately intercalibrated' (ibid:32).

Liminoid phenomena emerge in feudal, but predominantly capitalist societies with a complex social and economic division of labour, and are perceived to involve the voluntary and idiosyncratic action of moderns. With a stress on individuality and open-ended processes, they are seen to occur within leisure settings apart from work, are experimental and exploratory, plural and fragmentary, developing along the margins of society, forming social critique and providing the potential for the subversion of the status quo. They are also commodities (1982b:53-5), and, to a considerable degree, are 'deprived of direct transcendental reference' (Turner 1992:160). The crucial difference here is that the liminoid is said to be *freer* than the liminal (1982b:55).²

Part II. Turner's Essentialism: a Critical Deconstruction

Acknowledging, somewhat regrettably, that 'the modern is now becoming part of the past' (1985b:177), late in his writing Turner began making noise about 'the postmodern turn'. In fact, in one essay he stressed that his own work 'for many years had inclined me ... towards postmodern ways of thinking' (ibid:185). Was Turner a theorist of the 'post' then? There are plenty of cues to support his contention. He deemed his processual analysis, with its inherent challenge to modernist (functionalist and structuralist) preoccupations with consistency, congruence and cognition as evidence of his contribution to post-structuralist theory in anthropology. His contribution, he suggested, amounted to

² Liminoid genres are largely the product of a division between 'work' ('ergic') and 'leisure' ('anergic'). Citing Dumazedier (1962), Turner finds this division to have developed out of two conditions: wherein society no longer governs its activities through common ritual obligations, some activities, including work and leisure, become subject to individual choice; and where there has occurred a demarcation of work time from free time. Only in postindustrial culture do we find these conditions (1982b:36). In this new 'leisure time' one has 'freedom from' (established obligations to organisations, institutions and work) and 'freedom to' transcend, fantasise, experiment and play (to choose).

‘the processualisation of space, its temporalisation’ as opposed to the spatialisation of time (what he called ‘spatialised thinking’ [ibid:181]). In the same essay he made allusions to ‘a multiperspectival consciousness’ and even referred to ‘the notion of society as an endless crisscrossing of processes’ (ibid:185).

Further cues may, for the casual observer, indicate a post-structuralist perspective. The championing of disciplinary cross-fertilisation and the discursis on liminoid genres, especially that which he deemed the ‘hall of magic mirrors’, come to mind. The contention that ‘[r]eligion has generally moved into the leisure sphere’ (Turner and Turner 1978:35) has attracted numerous post-structuralist thinkers and students of popular culture who have mined his ideas. However Turner’s ‘turn’ remains unconvincing in the light of the development of postmodernism. For one thing, his approach to symbolic interpretation was not ‘post’. Though acknowledging symbolic complexity, Turner did not adequately recognise what has become known as ‘the crisis of representation’. According to Foster (1990:133), his concern was ultimately one of ‘straightening out’ complexity or ‘getting to the bottom of [it] so that an orderly and satisfying analysis could become feasible’. As such, his method of ‘decoding’ the symbolic worlds of others is considered to be ‘somewhat mechanistic, constricted and impoverished’ (ibid:125). Turner’s quest to understand the ‘total’ constituents of experience (cognition, affect, volition), a ‘unified science of man’ (Babcock 1987:40) drawing him to Freud (1978), Jung and even sociobiology, but notably not embodiment, is clearly a modernist project.

There is also the matter of an implicit pre-postcolonialist countercultural romanticism. Turner’s notion of the ‘power of the weak’ is most revelatory. He noted how middle class white Americans assume the identity of the socially disadvantaged who are perceived to be a source of power since they are believed to harbour communitarian values. Subdued autochthonous people, he says, possess a ‘ritual potency’ (1969:99) for the west. This is an intriguing assessment of the semiotic ‘power’ inhering in those of a position ‘beneath’, especially indigenes, yet it does not extend to an awareness of the political power of essentialism - that is, the discursive strategies through which ‘others’ are mobilised to speak the cultural truths of non-indigenes (Lattas 1991:315). Nor does Turner attend to the critical positionality of those Weber (1995) calls ‘borderlands’ people. According to Weber, Turner privileges a sense of ‘social leveling and attendant cultural bonding over what we now recognise as an encounter with identity politics and the border’ (530).

Turner’s preoccupation with the universal ‘strain towards order and harmony’ in social processes (1985b:183) - the resolution of disorder and ambiguity - suggests a functionalist processualism. Therefore, though Turner made forays into post-structuralist territory, he

had firm anchorage in pre-postmodernist (and pre-postcolonial) thought, a reality to which the essentialist character of ‘anti-structural’ liminality is testimony.

In Turner’s project, liminality takes its place in a dialectical system.³ Society is the product of the interplay of ‘structural’ and ‘anti-structural’ forces throughout history - liminality being anti-structure *par excellence*. Anti-structure simply refers to those regions of experience in culture (outside, in between and below) which are characterised by the temporary *dissolution and/or re-arrangement of social structure*, which is the differentiation of positions, particularly statuses and roles, in hierarchical organisation. It is the *necessary* antagonist in society since it constitutes potentiality - the positive, generative source of culture (Turner 1985a:171). Predisposed towards articulating anti-structural phenomena, Turner’s analysis privileged these over the ‘structural’ forms to which they would eventually secede. Granting anti-structure ontological ascendancy, he championed one side of the dialectic.

Cultivating a utopian outlook, Turner sails close to Bakhtin’s idealisation of the popular carnivalesque and its liberating dialogical discourse (Flanigan 1990). According to Flanigan, with a ‘religiouslike fervor’, both Turner and Bakhtin offer their views ‘not as heuristic devices, but as descriptions of being’. Occupying a central place in Turner’s writing, the liminal ‘acquired transcendent value and became depicted as that which was quintessentially real, a kind of primal unity’ (Flanigan 1990:52). Discussing three key themes in Turner’s writing - the sacred, ritual and community - I intend to expose and explore the extent and implications of Turner’s essentialist vision.

The Sacred: Decline and Resurgence

Turner’s unified historical exegesis is underpinned by contradictory dispositions that are a legacy of Durkheim.⁴ Two linked historical biases can be detected. The first calls attention to the loss or attenuation, and the second to the resilience or even rebirth, of *the sacred* - especially as it is transparent in ‘the orchestrated religious *gestalt*’ of ritual (Turner 1982c:85). These are the tragic and heroic narratives. I will discuss these in turn.

First, in modernity there is a perceived recession away from liminal toward liminoid conditions. The ‘religious sphere’ has contracted, and, as a consequence, Turner speaks of disintegration: ‘the decline of ritual’ (1983a:105), ‘deliminalisation’ (1982c:85), the exaltation of the ‘indicative mood’ (ibid:86), and the loss of ritual’s ‘cultural evolutionary

³ For which he is indebted to Marx via Gluckman - see Appendix B.1(v).

⁴ See Appendix B.1(iv).

resilience [which ceases] to be an effective metalanguage or an agency of collective reflexology' (1985a:165). 'Esthetic media' like 'song, dance, graphic and pictorial representation ... [have] broken loose from their ritual integument' (ibid:166). And, since 'anti-structure' and 'the sacred' are synonymous, a dissipating anti-structure is implicated.⁵ The argument follows that ritual's power and potential for transformation has been denuded. In modern times, where societies have grown in scale and complexity, as the division of labour has increased, and as work and leisure spheres are more clearly demarcated, ritual has become peripheral (Turner 1992:156). It is largely the perceived shift from collective, obligatory social bonds - as seen in rites of passage - to individual voluntary association, which has foreshadowed and accompanied the emergence of aesthetic, liminoid genres (Turner 1985a:165-6; Alexander 1991:22).

However, despite lengthy ruminations on 'the Fall', Turner was keen, especially in later writing, to demonstrate that 'traces of the original' are found in the modern world, that the symbolic action of the collective ritual performances of premodernity can be observed - albeit in the miasma of performance genres of contemporary western cultures (ie. theatre, festivals, celebrations). He argues that whilst 'ritual' has perished as a dominant genre 'it dies *a multipara*, giving birth to ritualised progeny' (1982c:79), an ensemble of magnifying and distorting lenses. Employing a different metaphorical strategy, he claims: 'free liminoid experiences are the cultural debris of forgotten liminal ritual' (1982b:55).⁶

Yet, not only was this essential social performance frame *residual* in fragmented and weakened forms, strong pockets of *revival* were detected. Assuming the task of plural cultural reflexivity, 'a multiplicity of desacralised performative genres' (particularly new theatre, but also carnival) were said to be emerging in the postmodern world (1985a:165-66). Such was claimed to evidence a 're-turn to subjunctivity and a rediscovery of cultural transformative modes' (1982c:86). There are signs, Turner declares, 'that the amputated specialised genres are seeking to regain and to recover something of the numinosity lost in

⁵ Yet, since the sacred may be more nebulous than Turner's anti-structure allows, the latter concept becomes disputable. Take, for example, Schechner's understanding of play. Voicing dissatisfaction with Batesonian depictions of play (stabilised, localised and impermeable), Schechner (1993) suggests a shift beyond Turner's anti-structural, and therefore oppositional, play frame towards the ephemerality of 'playing': 'the ongoing, underlying process of off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring and transforming - the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood from below, behind, and to the sides of focused attention' (ibid:43). 'Banana time', he suggests, 'is always with us' (ibid:42).

⁶ He also suggests that in liminoid genres the 'play frame' (e.g. in theatre or sport) has become a very serious matter, and has 'to some extent inherited the function of the 'ritual frame' (1983a:105).

their dismemberment' (1986:42). 'Ritual' was undergoing an heroic revitalisation and it is probable that Turner saw himself witness to the actualisation of Durkheim's prophecy:

A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effervescence in the course of which new ideas arise and new formulae are found which serve for a while as a guide to humanity. (Durkheim 1976:427-28)

The sentiment of the tragic *decline* of sacred ritual remains a key trope, forming the necessary background to its *resurgence* - its heroic renewal. In Turner, the depiction of the lost sacred under modernity becomes a strategic narrative - a point from which it can only return. As he pointed out 'dismembering may be a prelude to remembering' (1982c:86). It is clear, then, that in Turner's historical melodrama, in one way or another - in fragmented and/or resurgent forms - the sacred persists. As Grimes wrote, 'the liminoid is sacred to members of a secular society'. The remnants of liminality - and therefore the sacred - are now everywhere: in the arts, politics and advertising (Grimes 1990:145).

Therefore 'revitalised' rituals, or perhaps what Turner might call 're-liminalisation' - which have been discerned within the framework of liminoid occasions as 'neo-liminal' events (cf. MacAloon 1984:269; and Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993) - do not contradict Turner's perspective. More accurately, contemporary manifestations of integrative and *redressive* ritual only provide evidence against Turner, as they do in Lewis and Dowsey-Magog (1993:198-99), when the entirety of his perspective is discounted. For Turner, sacred liminality remained an essential human social process as it became fragmented, diversified and renewed in a complex grid of genres.

Privileged and Transcendent Ritual

That which Turner admitted as liminal *ritual* assumed an ontologically privileged status in his dialectic. Further, ritual was decidedly transcendent (and/or reflexive). It is worth exploring what is excluded from this privileged domain.

First, in concordance with a secular/sacred division, Turner made a fundamental distinction between 'ceremony' ('indicative' spectacle) and 'ritual' ('subjunctive' performance).⁷ Within this arrangement, he justified the analytical dismissal of what

⁷ Others have also made such a distinction. Handelman (1990) discusses Firth's (1967:12) contrasting of 'ceremony' with 'ritual procedures' and that here the symbolic affirmation central to 'mirroring' is seen as more resembling a 'ceremony' than those procedures carried out to alter a situation. Firth's position also resonates with that of Gluckman and Gluckman (1977:233).

Handelman (1990) calls 'events of presentation' - the performance frameworks Handelman claims predominate in modern nation states. Quite simply, since ceremonial forms (e.g. state funerals, royal pageants, commemorative days) do not fit comfortably into Turner's dialectic, they are ignored. Therefore, while ritual's ambit had expanded in Turner's later years, it retained an exclusivity which cannot embrace the sheer plurality of contemporary cultural events.

Formal, even institutionalised, often spectatorial, public, events - in many cases requiring obligatory performances and gestures - are shunted to the periphery in Turner's historicism. It was considered that while:

simpler societies have ritual or sacred corroborees as their main meta-social performances; proto-feudal and feudal societies have carnivals and festivals; early modern societies have carnival and theatre, and electronically advanced societies, film. (1979:96)

The rationale for such a distinction and, ultimately, the sequestering of ceremonial, is that these forms are bereft of the transformative power that liminality alone possesses. Without considering liminality, 'ritual':

becomes indistinguishable from 'ceremony', 'formality' ... The liminal phase is the essential, anti-secular component in ritual *per se*, whether it be labelled 'religious' or 'magical'. Ceremony indicates, ritual transforms. (Turner 1982c:80)

Turner therefore agrees with Moore and Myerhoff that 'ceremony' - what they call 'secular ritual' - 'is a declaration of form against indeterminacy [and that] ... all collective ceremony can be interpreted as a cultural statement about cultural order as against a cultural void' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:16-17). Such a definition cannot be applied to 'ritual', says Turner, for 'ritual' does not portray a dualistic struggle between order and void, cosmos and chaos, the formed and the indeterminate, with the former always finally triumphant. Liminal rituals promote the abandonment of form, the dissolution of fixed categories, and permit the unfolding of a predominantly 'subjunctive mood': the 'mood' or 'world' of 'wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis' (Turner 1982c:83). This is what Turner has in mind when he says liminality is the depths ('the abyss') 'of pure possibility', which inverts and negates, the 'indicative mood' of routine social life - the 'mood' or 'world' of 'actual fact' and 'it is so'; the world of the finished and the fixed (Turner 1982c:83; 1984:21).⁸

⁸ Turner's privileging 'ritual' as the quintessential forum for play is problematical. Play, in the sense of assuming roles, dressing 'up' and acting *as if* other - albeit in a hyperstructural/formal

Though useful for the study of small-scale processes (micro-events), we confront significant obstacles when applying this concept to (post)modern public events. It is possible to imagine Turner appreciating this when he states that the Rio *Carnaval* is a 'dynamic, many levelled, liminal domain of multiframed anti-structures' (1983a:124). The underlying difficulty is the almost impossible task of categorising many events as sacred or secular, 'subjunctive' or 'indicative', 'leisure' or 'work'. Public events do not respond well to this kind of typological chauvinism. Falassi (1987:6) insists that several components of the complex 'festival morphology' will form the configuration of each event. As Manning argues, both 'ritual' and 'play' frames (corresponding to Turner's 'ceremony' and 'ritual') are combined in sequential format in contemporary cultural 'celebrations' such as festivals and sporting events (1983:22). For MacAloon (1984), mega-events like the Olympic Games possess 'ramified' 'frames' or 'moods' (e.g. games, concerts and rituals) within their spatio-temporal dimensions. As Roche (1992:581) points out, mega-events like the Games are 'multi-dimensional'. They are simultaneously 'a work experience for the participants, an unusual *leisure* experience for local spectators, a *touristic* experience for visiting spectators and a *media* phenomenon for media professionals and viewers'.

Second, Turner's inclination toward the transcendent and reflexive aspects of the telegraphed ritual frame signalled his inattention to the body.⁹ Thus *the liminal body*, that is subjunctive embodiment like gender disruptions, erotic contacts and physical mutations, or intercorporeal 'communions' transpiring in moments 'betwixt and between', were only ever provided cursory treatment. Though he later urged that we bring anthropology 'back into touch with the bodily as well as the mental life of humankind' (foreword to Schechner 1985: xii), Turner was not an 'anthropologist of the body'.

In attempting to comprehend contemporary public events employing Turner's ideas we meet significant difficulties. Attending to the transcendent and reflexive (numinous and ideational) potentials, though not the corporeality (the physicality), of such moments leads to unbalanced accounts. In order to right this imbalance, other theorists prove useful. Bakhtin's approach to 'the people's second life' of carnival, articulating the world-body

way - is not foreign to 'ceremony'. Occupying spaces between routine social life, ceremonies are also extra-ordinary events requiring role inversion and excess (e.g. hypermasculinity and femininity) (I am indebted to John Morton for making this apparent).

⁹ Although, Turner was not exactly a non-materialist. Opposed to the 'cognitive chauvinism' (Turner 1982d:21) and 'left-hemispheric imperialism' (Turner 1985f:275) of Levi-Strauss, he made some advancements on a 'neurosociology' (Appendix B.1(viii)) and found agreement with the ideas of Freud and Jung. Turner's early attention to the cognitive *and* affective dimensions of ritual symbolism has been highly influential (cf. Kapferer 1983; 1984b).

correspondence of 'grotesque realism', comes immediately to mind. Though Turner acknowledges Bakhtin himself, his non-material interests are clearly betrayed. 'Perhaps we are only now,' Turner stated:

beginning to learn the ambiguous, ludic language of what Bakhtin calls 'the people's second world', a language as much of verbal as of non-verbal signs and symbols, always pregnant with good sense, always rich in metaphors and other figurative expressions, often scatological to counterbalance the chilling refinement of spiritual and political repression, but always charged with *communitas*, the likely possibility of immediate human communion. (Turner 1983b:190)

Here, Turner's bent towards the cognitive dimensions of 'the peoples second world', towards the 'ludic language' of 'figurative expressions' is evident. Turner's liminaries were more preoccupied with reflexive semiotica than gratifying erotica. What of the ludic body, of carnality? What of 'communions' of mutual gratification?

More recently, authors subscribing to a social 'eroticism' of Bataillian dimensions have appeared on the theoretical landscape offering useful material for the study of public events. They include Maffesoli, whose 'passional logic' of the social 'orgiasm' (1993) is said to animate the social body, achieving its ultimate climax in the festival, and Bey who holds that the immediate events he calls temporary autonomous zones (or TAZs) (1991a) are characterised by the struggle for physical 'presence' and a certain group *jouissance*.

Significant public events in Australia, like the Woodford/Maleny Folk Festival, the AFL Grand Final and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, cannot be adequately scrutinised via a paradigm encumbered by the exclusivity and strictures of Turner's ritual frame. Each of these events are work, leisure and tourist experiences, as well as media events. They feature ramified performative 'frames' or 'moods'; involve ascribed *and* voluntary behaviour; may be solemn *and* festive; induce passivity *or* ecstasy. Sequential/ramified arrangements contextualise swings between the indicative ('straight') and the subjunctive (ludic) moods, and may be either to different participants - they fuse 'ceremonial' and 'ritual' performance as Turner sees these. Participants may also access the numinous, interrogate their social universes and become abnormally embodied in such celebrational frames. A single event, such as any of those mentioned above, may then be a sensual meta-performance/narrative. In this way, such polydimensional events are schizoid in the sense that they oscillate between genres, 'moods', 'frames' and embodiments, or hold simultaneous combinations.

Although it is possible some of these problems may be resolved with Turner's later use of 'celebration' or the 'celebratory frame' (1982d) - which seems to blanket ritual,

ceremony and festival - the implications of coinciding performance zones in a single event, and the contortions of the liminal body unique to such moments, went largely uninvestigated. Indeed, never losing sight of the transcendent vision, for Turner, 'celebration' approximates Durkheim's 'effervescence' - 'generated by a crowd of people with shared purposes and common goals' (1982d:16).

Homogeneous Community and Apoliticalism

Although the process of social drama has furthered the understanding of political process, and although one of Turner's main preoccupations was variability and social change, as recent commentators have pointed out (e.g. Weber 1995), Turner steered towards the explication of passage structure and homogeneity at the expense of open-ended political manoeuvring and contestation within event frameworks. Symptomatic of an 'essentially utopian' approach, as Weber suggests, there is an 'implicit consensual dimension' in Turner's vision of cultural change - one which renders the consciousness of the ritual liminal implicitly apolitical (ibid:531). This conservative political paradigm is most evident in the development of the concept of *communitas* and its application to the study of pilgrimage.

Searching for ritual analogues between 'tribal' and 'historical' religious liminality, Victor, along with Edith Turner, encountered pilgrimage (especially Christian) upon which was applied a swag of already well refined theoretical tools - a predisposition to account for the cultic practice of pilgrims as part of an historical/biographical dialectic (Marx/Gluckman), and as a form of social unification (Durkheim). In all the 'higher' religions, Turner saw pilgrimage as 'the ordered antistructure of patrimonial-feudal systems' replicating processes already observed in tribal societies: 1. the liminal stage of rites of passage and, 2. the inclusiveness of earth and fertility cults (1974:204,206). Parallel with these latter cults, pilgrims are members of a religious community in a state of 'flow', 'impregnated by unity ... purified from divisiveness and plurality' (Turner and Turner 1978:255). Such an 'inclusive, disinterested and altruistic domain' (1973:208), was deemed an exemplary state of *communitas*, or more precisely, 'normative *communitas*' which meant that, in the major religions, pilgrimage was 'organised into a perduring social system'. Turner, therefore does acknowledge that:

the mere demographic and geographical facts of large numbers of people coming at set times and considerable distances between the pilgrim's home and sacred site themselves compel a certain amount of organisation and

discipline. The absolute *communitas* of absolute anarchy does not obtain here.
(Turner 1973:195)

However, such organised cults are 'essentially inclusive and universalistic' in Turner's model. All are like siblings. There is always a tendency towards a form of sociality which 'strips actors of their social personae and restores their essential individuality' (Eade and Sallnow 1991:4).¹⁰

The Turnerian model has been 'tested' and challenged by ethnographers in various cultural settings. To begin with, Werbner demonstrates that cults are fields of micro-politics which may herald 'new power divisions' (1989:295). Not straightforwardly inclusive, the Mwali cult of God Above is characterised by 'the dynamic tension between inclusiveness and exclusiveness' (ibid:296). In addition, Turner's insights have been debated as pilgrimage has been subject to thoroughgoing analysis (Eade and Sallnow 1991:4-5; Morinis 1984:258, 273-4; 1992b). In a study of Bengali pilgrimage practices, Morinis (1984:273) argues they are not those in which 'the structural bonds of the home community are sundered by a joyful, levelled *communitas* relationship among the participants'. Morinis points toward the various motivations held by pilgrims - such as seeking cures and personal salvation. The existence of different levels of meaning and behaviour give rise to a rather less consensual quality of experience than that which Turner promoted.

Furthermore, that such phenomena reinforce social, cultural and religious distinctions rather than occasion their dissolution, is a recurring theme in the pilgrimage literature. Sallnow, in a study of Andean Pilgrimage in the Cuzco area of southern Peru, found that such regional devotions were occasioned by nepotism, factionalism, endemic competition and inter-community conflict (1981:176). Rather than become attenuated, the boundaries separating various groups involved - sponsored community and ethnic groups - were accentuated. Discussing the Sri Lankan pilgrimage site at Kataragama, Pfaffenberger (cited in Reader 1993:12) reveals how pilgrimage to the shrine serves to underline and reaffirm the differences between Hindus and Buddhists, and between Hindu castes. Bowman (1991) reaches similar conclusions in a study of the super shrine of the Holy Land, Jerusalem: 'There are as many Jerusalems as there are religious denominations visiting the city ... Here Judaism, Islam, and a variety of Christianities jostle with one another in an atmosphere of deep suspicion and sometimes outright hostility' (Eade and

¹⁰ The model has been accepted by the commentators of a vast range of events and practices (e.g. Moore 1980; Lett 1983; Newton 1988; Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993; Hetherington 1993; Sardiello 1994; Palmer 1998).

Sallnow 1991:10,13). Bowman demonstrates how Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Christian Zionist arrive with different understandings of the sacred. 'The sacred center par excellence of the Christian tradition paradoxically becomes the global focus for the display of its deep and pervasive doctrinal schisms' (ibid:14).¹¹

These examples demonstrate that pilgrimage destinations are contested sites where conflicting interpretations and reinforced divisions frustrate the realisation of *communitas*. Researchers have thus regarded Turner's emphasis on unrestricted fellowship with caution. The problem, according to Weber, is that Turner lacks 'a conception and recognition of culture as *political* contestation: the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story, and from which position' (Weber 1995:532). This contrasts with the approach of Abner Cohen who regards cultural performances like the Notting Hill Carnival as 'politico-cultural' processes, 'intimately and dynamically related to the political order and to the struggle for power within it' (1993:4).¹² Though interested in the play of power relations, Turner was more interested in 'the interplay of discrepant psyches than of the social cleavages wrought by political and economic contradictions and conflicts' (Parkin 1996: xix). Pilgrimages are not neutral fields independent of the distribution and operations of power. For MacClancy (1994:34), political mechanisms are indeed integral to such processes.

Turner regards pilgrimages as symbolic forms whose meaning, if at times relatively opaque, is already given. But the elite controlling the performance of the ritual can manipulate the multivocality of the usually employed symbols and forms for their own interested ends. By exploiting the discourse they can try to dictate how the event is to be interpreted. (MacClancy 1994:34)¹³

¹¹ Contestation can be discerned at variant pilgrimage destinations. Hetherington argues for Stonehenge's status as a contested space: 'a space with many actors who all wish to project their ideas about society, their utopias, through it' (1996b:162). Glastonbury presents another clear case. Various, an 'English Jerusalem', a centre of 'Celtic renaissance' or 'a stronghold of hippy counterculture' (M. Bowman 1993:36,42), the town of Glastonbury has played host to a range of Christian denominations, Sufis, Buddhists, Bahais, members of ISKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), New Age Travellers, self proclaimed Pagans and Druids (ibid:39).

¹² Cohen has developed a model of interpreting cultural performances as frameworks of contestation and/or contexts for the expression of resistance - what he calls 'masquerade politics' (1993). Cohen's approach is essentially Marxist. For Cohen, it is universal practice for peoples to 'seek nonexplicit or diversionary, and therefore ceremonialised, ways of resolving' contradictions and conflicts (Parkin 1996:xix).

¹³ MacClancy argues that Turner may have corrected his approach had he read the little known paper of Robert Hertz on the Alpine pilgrimage to the Italian rock-shrine of St Besse published in France in 1913. According to Hertz' account, the cult of St Besse was far from a harmonious or spontaneous community. MacClancy informs us how five villages from two different valleys were associated with the cult, and that devotees 'are torn by wranglings, by conflicts of ambition, by struggles sometimes concealed, sometimes open, violent and even bloody' (Hertz 1983:63 in MacClancy 1994:35). The confusion arose (and continues to arise) out of competing

Moreover, as Eade and Sallnow (1991:5) posit, the paradigm imposes ‘a spurious homogeneity’ upon a phenomenon which is culturally and historically ‘polymorphic’. They argue that, at best, the Turnerian approach takes pilgrimage as either supporting or subverting the status quo - a scenario wherein complex combinations are not considered. Eade and Sallnow counteract this support/subversion dichotomy by reformulating pilgrimage as ‘a realm of competing discourses’ (ibid).¹⁴ They therefore adopt a pluralistic model which emphasises the multiple cultic constituency of such events and their conflicting representations. Pilgrimage is:

above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and the non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups, for drives towards consensus and *communitas*, and for counter-movements towards separateness and division. (Eade and Sallnow 1991:2)

Part III. ConFest: the Internal Logic of Design

Turner’s focus upon the exclusive, non-sensual and homogeneous field of liminal ritual - a product of the privileging of anti-structure - has given rise to an approach which does not apprehend the din of voices and morass of bodies in cultural performances. Not necessarily one-dimensional or euphonic, contemporary ‘liminoidal’ events may be convoluted, crowded, cacophonous. Not necessarily chaste, they may be carnal and libidinous. This is the case for ConFest. Where can we then turn for inspiration to formulate an approach which overcomes theoretical weaknesses in Turner? On the surface, it appears that ConFest most approximates Handelman’s ‘representational’ event -

interpretations of the Saint’s biography - hagiographical inconsistencies - and disputes between village representatives over who should bear the ritual ornaments including the statue of the Saint. Unfortunately Hertz’ paper, focusing as it did on the divisive as well as the cohesive aspects of this pilgrimage rite, and which seemed to challenge Durkheim’s interpretation of ritual as a source of solidarity, had gone unnoticed by Turner.

¹⁴ Similar criticism has been levelled at Turner’s earlier work on ritual symbolism. Kratz alludes to Turner’s tendency to homogenise cultural meaning in ceremonial analyses, suggesting Bakhtin’s notion of ‘heteroglossia’ (multiple voices) as a valuable tool to help understand the contested meanings and contradictory perspectives within cultural performances, and the tension between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ understandings of culture carried simultaneously by the same cultural form (Kratz 1994: 23-5).

one which possesses its own 'internal logic of design' (1990:7).¹⁵ While it will be useful to think about ConFest's internal design - how it functions - as a single event, however, it does not fit comfortably into Handelman's typological framework.¹⁶

I seek to fashion an approach which, despite its indebtedness to Turner, moves beyond weaknesses in his paradigm, and which, at the same time, eschews typological straightjacketing. Two integral factors demand such a progression: that ConFest is a *contemporary festival*, and an *alternative cultural* event-space.

ConFest is a contemporary festive event to which thousands make 'pilgrimage'. Throughout the 1980s and '90s, improving especially upon the Durkheimian 'cult of man' approach, research on public events and related phenomena has shed much light on festive celebrations, providing particularly insightful groundwork for the interpretation of an event-space like ConFest. The work of Manning (1983), on celebrations, and MacAloon (1984), on the Olympics, illuminates the multi-performative dimensions of major cultural events. Others, like Cohen (1982; 1993), writing on an urban carnival movement, and Baumann (1992), writing on a range of events including polyethnic ceremonies, have stressed that public events are arenas of contestation and resistance, significant moments over which there are competing interpretative claims. Pursuing parallel paths, yet more concerned with spatial practices, other commentators - like Hetherington (1993), on Stonehenge free-festivals, and Henry (1994), on the Kuranda Market - have elicited event-spaces as heterotopic 'hot-spots' for competing discourses, as spaces of ambivalence and uncertainty. Others still, following the likes of Bakhtin (1968), are interested in articulating the implications of fulfilled desires for carnal sociality and convivial intercorporeality in festal culture (Maffesoli 1993; Bey 1991a).

As I indicated in Chapter 1, ConFest is polydimensional, a local aggregation of a spectrum of ACEs, rendering it an inimitable ALE. Facilitated by a unique co-operative society, and rooted in the Australian ACM, this event-space owns a distinct history and structure. Operating via grassroots anarchist principles, it is a unique context for the pursuit, exchange and realisation of alternate styles of living.

¹⁵ Handelman details three types of public events, each possessing an 'internal logic of design' or 'meta-design'. These are events that 'model', 'present' and 'represent' the 'lived-in world'. 'Events that model', such as rites of passage and shamanic rites, effect a change of status and identity, or influence the cosmos, via the resolution or synthesis of contradictions and uncertainty. 'Events that present', like parades, strikes and state funerals, are occasions mirroring politics and symbolism, replicating social order. 'Events that represent', like carnivals and festivals, are unpredictable, often inverting and even subverting cultural and political order.

¹⁶ To be fair to Handelman, anticipating 'crosspollination' and 'mergers' he did qualify that 'the probability of a given, real event fitting neatly within one type is necessarily small' (1990:60).

ConFest is an *organic hyperliminal zone*. In the remainder of part three, two key conceptual themes are articulated to advance this model: temporary social *organicism* and *hyper-liminality*. I will demonstrate that while ConFest's unique context and framework necessitate strong allusions to Turnerian liminality, they also demand a reconfiguration of this concept.

Temporary Organic Matrix

ConFest is distinctly liminoidal. Children in the care of adults aside, attendance and participation are most certainly voluntary. Common to liminoid performance genres, the event is critical and subversive and, as such, a 'proto-structural' system of potential alternatives, a 'precursor of innovative forms' (Turner 1982b:52). However, ConFest is quite different from any of the performance genres to which Turner gave specific attention, or the types Handelman develops. Fundamentally, it is an *organic* process. This means that, in contrast to projects patronised by distant administrations (like the Community Arts Program of the Australia Council) and controlled via vertical organisational models (such as 'community', 'arts' or even 'Fringe' festivals), it functions via 'local action that works'. That is, *each event is DiY* - 'grassroots', self-organised and spontaneous. Les explains:

The community group finds out what works - action research - then lives it, talks about it, experiences it and the ideal, the best praxis, emerges from the shared living together ... What we do and how we do it emerges or unfolds from our living and communing in an organic way ... In the organic unfolding process those involved, those who know it, unfold it. Things are done by those best placed to do it together. [Therefore] local knowings and local interests are involved.¹⁷

With particular emphasis on current events, Les idealises: 'the directors have no power whatsoever [at ConFest] ... It is totally local-lateral once it gets underway. It is totally organic, totally spontaneous. It is consensual evolved spontaneity. What works is repeated. What's enjoyed is repeated'. Like Rainbow Gatherings, responsibility for infrastructure maintenance is, ideally, de-centralised and shared. And its spatial and temporal parameters are, again ideally, occupied spontaneously.

ConFest's *organicism* is translatable into several interdependent characteristics each holding a share in ConFest's success. It ensures that the festival is: *co-operative* - where participants are mutually responsible for achieving collectively desired outcomes; *tolerant*

- with an open respect for, recognition and celebration of, difference/otherness; *autonomous* - characterised by a safe and trusting environment where personal freedoms are granted and social experimentation permitted, and; *immediate* - with a relatively unmediated experience of palpable, sensuous and familial connection (with others and the environment).¹⁸ Despite a resurgent culture of factionalism, intolerance and paranoia within DTE (see Chapter 3) and obvious departures from some of these traits (see Chapter 8), ConFest is a liberated zone potentiating ‘growth’ on personal, social, political and cultural levels.

Hakim Bey and the TAZ/Immediatist Project

Hakim Bey’s ‘TAZ/Immediatist project’ is a ‘struggle’ which, he claims, ‘opens itself potentially to all kindred spirits & fellow warriors’, and which seeks to expand and multiply ‘until it infects or even becomes the social’ (Bey 1993a). Bey’s anarchist-liberatory ‘project’, which is interested ‘in results, successful raids on consensus reality, breakthroughs into more intense and more abundant life’ (1991a:115) amounting to the refusal of and challenge to received ideas, structures and forms of control (ie. the media, the Church, nuclear family, work, education), holds a distinct capacity to recalibrate Turner’s *limen*, and, moreover, to illuminate the organic character of ConFest. It thus warrants my attention here.

Described as ‘the Marco Polo of the marginals milieu’ (Black 1994:105), the enigmatic Bey¹⁹ is an American libertarian-anarchist philosopher, subversive poet, proponent of ‘edge Islam’ and author of *The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism* (or *The TAZ*) (1991a).²⁰ In advocating ‘creative destruction’ of the ‘old Consensus’, Bey has been labelled a ‘postmodern “anarchist”’ (Zerzan 1997/98:79) - or in

¹⁷ See Appendix C for brief informant biographicals.

¹⁸ See Appendix D for emic elaborations of these characteristics.

¹⁹ Hakim Bey is a pseudonym of Peter Lamborn Wilson. Although he has written under the latter name, I will use the former. Bey maintains secrecy about his past. He has never made any public appearances as ‘Hakim Bey’. At the time of writing, he was residing at the Dreamtime permaculture/hypermedia community in Wisconsin.

²⁰ Described as ‘the countercultural Bible of the 90s’ (*The Whole Earth Review* 1994:61), *The TAZ*, along with most of Bey’s other writings, are freely available on the web. See the following principle locations:

Zero News Dataspool: ‘Peter Lamborn Wilson’: <<http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/plw.htm>>

Zero News Dataspool: ‘Hakim Bey’: <<http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/hakimbey.htm>>

Marius Watz’ page: <<http://www.notam.uio.no/~mariusw/bey/>>

Bookchin's (1995) denunciation, a proponent of 'lifestyle anarchism'.²¹ Indeed, critiquing the cultural landscape of 'too-Late Capital', Bey is a post-structuralist strategist and *provocateur* of the imagination. 'Be prepared', he counsels, 'to drift, to nomadize, so slip out of all nets, to never settle down' (1994a:44). His project consists of exposing 'the enemy' ('separation' and 'sameness' via mediation and commodification), and inciting 'the cause' ('the new autonomy' of 'presence' and 'difference': strategically *lived* in a 'third position' [the insurrectionary TAZ] or achieved via revolution [the self-determined 'jihad']). His work is prescriptive. Real liberation, he argues, cannot be achieved via the attainment of phantom needs manufactured under capitalism. Readers are offered existent and possible tactics for the realisation of 'the new autonomy', which can only be achieved in the direct presence of the Other, of an *immediate* community - the immanently 'Social'. The cause amounts to the strategic realisation of free associations of individuals - non-mediated, non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical.²²

Under 'too-Late Capitalism' people have become immiserated largely through their separation from others - through *mediation*. The most comprehensive statements come from the manifesto *Immediatism* (1994a)²³ and Media Creed (MC). While all experience is necessarily mediated - the human body is itself 'the least mediated of all media' (1994a:10) - what is heralded as 'the Immediatist movement' amounts to a critique of major public media ('the Media'). That is, those media, especially TV and virtual reality, which demand little imaginative participation, and which commodify the human subject. In the course of Bey's theoretical career, he has offered several responsive strategies: first, investment in the 'intimate media' (ie. books, zines, community radio and possibly 'the Web' - see below); second, refusal of the major public media and commoditisation (that is, 'to vanish from the grid', to 'withdraw from the area of simulation, to disappear' [Summer Land; 1991a:102]), and; third, the achievement of the 'necessary revolution', the 'greater jihad' (1996).²⁴

²¹ For Bookchin (1995), such 'episodic rebellions' as *The TAZ* are 'merely a safety valve for discontent' from which the bourgeoisie have nothing to fear. He dismisses *The TAZ* as 'irrational', narcissistic, decadent and a 'bourgeois deception' demonstrating a mass retreat from the programmatic commitment of classical anarchism. Yet Watson (1996:ch.7) shows up shortcomings and contradictions in Bookchin's polemic.

²² See Appendix B.2 for a more comprehensive background on Bey - his influences, strategies and shifts.

²³ With its roots in Situationism, Immediatism is essentially an 'outsider art' movement seeking to eliminate 'the gulf between the production and consumption of art'. It reaffirms the creative power of everyday life by withdrawing from the world of the market and commoditisation of art (1994a:8;1996:8).

²⁴ See Appendix B.2(ii) for an explanation of this.

Here, it is the first two strategies, intercalibrated, that interest me. These are the organic grounds of the TAZ, recommended as a key strategy since it provides a context for the nonviolent alteration of existing structures. Bey suggests that what he calls ‘direct action’ might be more assiduously designated ‘indirect action’ - ‘symbolic, viral, occult and subtle rather than actual, wounding, militant, and open’ (MH).²⁵ As for describing the TAZ, although we are faced with difficulty since he remains deliberately obscure about this concept (1991a:99), we are provided with some ponderous cues. The following is the closest to any apparent definition:

The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. (ibid:101)

This implies that the TAZ exists not only beyond control ‘but also beyond definition, beyond gazing and naming as acts of enslaving ... beyond the State’s ability to see’ (ibid:132). Therefore, its greatest strength is its *invisibility*. It remains invulnerable so long as it remains invisible.

As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it *will* vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle. The TAZ is thus a perfect tactic for an era in which the State is omnipresent and all-powerful and yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies. (ibid:101)

Waging war on ‘molar and molecular lines’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1982), the TAZ is thus a ‘deterritorialised’ mutation of desire.

Bey provides some classical examples of the deterritorialised TAZ from the past and present including: ‘pirate utopias’ (such as the Republic of Salé), the North American Wilderness (especially Croatan), ‘drop-out’ tri-racial isolate communities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Paris Uprising of 1968, and countercultural and permacultural communities (Wilson 1995; Bey 1991a:116-24). ‘While it lasts’, the TAZ ‘fills the horizon of attention of all its participants ... [and] it becomes (however briefly) a whole society’ (MH). Therefore, it is essentially an immediate community - ephemeral, unmediated sociality, a kind of experimental laboratory for ‘Immediatism’. Indeed, despite the view that the TAZ “exists” in information-space as well as in the “real world”

²⁵ This includes what he calls ‘poetic terrorism’ defined as ‘largely nonviolent action that would have a psychological impact comparable to the power of a terrorist act - except that the act is one of consciousness changing’ (Bey 1995a).

(1991a:109),²⁶ Bey reveals the TAZ to be a higher form of ‘immediatist organisation’, which may emerge from other ‘action groups’.²⁷ Immediatist organisations have several goals which are in fact both objectives and strategies: 1) *conviviality* (‘the coming together in physical closeness of the group for the synergistic enhancement of its membership’s pleasures’); 2) *creation* (the collaborative production of ‘necessary beauty’ outside all structures of hypermediation, alienation and commodification); 3) *destruction* (‘Beauty defines itself in part (but precisely) by destroying the ugliness which is not itself’), and; 4) a *reconstruction of values* flows from the collective intensity of immediatism (MH). Ultimately the TAZ ‘breaks its own borders and flows (or wants to flow) out into the “whole world”’ (1993a).

As an immediatist organisation, there is one basic rule of the TAZ: that all spectators must also be performers. Such dissolution of the boundaries of separation is covalent with what Bey calls ‘festal culture’ - the culture that flowers in the corporeal, nonregulated, noncommodified festival. Bey informs us that the ancient concepts of ‘the jubilee and saturnalia originate in an intuition that certain events lie outside the scope of “profane time”, the measuring-rod of the State and of History. These holidays literally occupied gaps in the calendar - *intercalary intervals*’ (1991a:105). Nodding towards Bakhtinian carnivalesque, we are reminded that such ‘gaps in the calendar’ are realms of the infinitely permeable body. The festival is carnal - it ‘functions as the crucial insurrectionary praxis or principle of social mutability’ (1994b). It amounts to a temporal ‘uprising’ - a ‘peak experience’, a temporary state of ‘non-ordinary’ consciousness:

Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day otherwise they would not be ‘nonordinary’. But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman returns - you can’t stay up on the roof forever - but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred - a *difference* is made. (1991a:100)

²⁶ Though suspicious about electronic media and virtual reality, the Internet - or the aspect of it dubbed ‘the Web’ (‘the alternate horizontal open structure of info-exchange’) - is expounded as essential for the full realisation of the ‘TAZ-complex’. ‘The Web’ provides logistical support for, and abets the manifestation of, the TAZ. For Bey, the TAZ must have a virtual durable ‘location’ *in the Web* as well as a temporary existence in actual time-space (1991a:115).

²⁷ Of these, four types are outlined: spontaneous gatherings including ‘anything from a party to a riot’ (such as anarchist collectives, Neo-Pagan celebrations, raves, Rainbow tribe gatherings, gay faerie circles, brief urban riots or ‘the Be-ins’ of the sixties); the horizontal potlatch (gift exchange such as ‘the orgy’ or ‘the banquet’); the Bee - a group united by a shared passion (e.g. a creative collaboration like a ‘quilting bee’ or an affinity group for a direct action), and; the ‘Immediatist Tong’ (the Chinese Tong is a model for non-hierarchical, clandestine mutual benefit associations) (1994a; 1993a).

Despite the paucity of a fixed definition or clear criterion (or possibly, because of this), 'the TAZ' has become something of an anthem. Elaborated upon in Bey's later work, it has emerged as a prescription for insurrection - appropriated by multitudes as a catchphrase for immanent transgression.

ConFest as TAZ?

For ConFest, the TAZ holds immense explanatory power. Yet, ConFest does depart from themes central to the TAZ. First, ConFest is not entirely 'invisible' - it has not avoided publicity or the attention of the state. As a populous periodical event, media representation and state intervention are likely. Yet, local, regional newspapers are the main carriers of stories. Though ConFest received attention in the major media in its initial phase, DTE Vic has remained relatively unexposed. The Co-operative normally promotes events via the 'intimate media' - bill posters, community radio, alternative newsletters/zines and primarily the DTE newsletter. As for governmental controls, permits are required from local councils to operate a ConFest. DTE must be authorised by, and maintain communication with civic and regulatory bodies including the local police. Undercover police surveillance is a constant probability. The revelation, in October 1997, that the then decommissioned Victorian Police Operations Intelligence Unit previously had DTE on file, came as no real surprise to members.²⁸ Further, as a Co-operative Society, DTE is legally obliged to comply to operational rules and regulations of the 1996 Co-operatives Act. Not secret or closed, DTE is therefore most unlike a Tong. Seasonally recurring, ConFest is more accurately a periodic or calendar autonomous zone.

Second, since ConFest has a gate price and also a food/craft market, the event is not a total withdrawal from commerce. However, the gate price is low (especially for members), it is free for children under sixteen, there is no hired 'security' and all participants (including site crew) are encouraged to pay the entry fee. Takings are used for future events and possible seed funding for allied projects. The market is a marginal vending and consumption zone, operating in conjunction with community/workers food kitchens, village potlatches and campsites.

Therefore, although ConFest operates 'within the law' and via the money economy, it remains clandestine, is largely unmediated and substantively non-commoditised. It is most like a TAZ. The TAZ is characterised by an anarchical organicism clearly resembling that

²⁸ Due in part to ConFest's internal safety mechanisms, uniformed police presence is remarkably minimal for such large populations gathering on traditional holiday periods.

which unfolds at ConFest and that which participants desire. The TAZ is a convivial distillery for the several organic traits I have found recognisable at ConFest. It is an anarchical moment of becoming paralleling the *limen*.²⁹ In a world of hyper-mediated experiences and disembodied entertainment, DTE enables an environment where multitudes are licensed to play, express dissent and form uninhibited coalitions. Presence and difference are there sought after and exulted. In such a populous, diverse and unpredictable space, much that transpires does remain 'invisible'.³⁰ DTE, like other neo-tribes (eg. Rainbow Family, Burning Man and earthcore) utilise the Internet (with a website and email-group). This indicates DTE is an 'Immediatist organisation' which, by its own criteria, maximises the possibility for 'insurrection'. However, though ConFest resembles a TAZ, the diversity of participants and the spectrum of discourses, genres and practices present make for a clamorous event characterised by a discord and contrariety that deviates from the ideal TAZ. I am therefore inclined to regard ConFest as a calendrical autonomous zone (or CAZ) accommodating numerous TAZs.

Hyper-Liminal Modalities and Authentication

Akin to new theatre or other contemporary performance arenas, events and cultural productions (e.g. mega-events and multicultural celebrations), in the words of Edith Turner, ConFest may very well have:

taken over the liminal space that belonged to ritual ... [and it may have] freed the community of performance from its mundane bonds, so that a level of symbolic power can be generated, effective in its own right, which feeds back into the social body. (E. Turner 1985:10)

Further to this, I suggest that the ConFest CAZ is a stage for 'the community of performance' to pursue and perfect authentic states of human being. Over the past few decades, it has been apparent that cultural productions, both external and internal to home

²⁹ Though Bey's individualist anarchist derivations and prescriptions distinguish his work from Turner's *limen* project, there are obvious and sometimes striking parallels. See Appendix B.3 for a comparison.

³⁰ The question then arises - by vivifying ConFest, does my research render it vulnerable? Or, is this project an unwarranted invasion of privacy? I would like to think not. I have been very careful about what I have made known. Often, it is that which my informants have requested. DTE and most ConFesters have given positive support to my project, and have been provided opportunity to offer feedback and generally acknowledge the benefit of promoting this kind of 'experience' (they have even 'commissioned' a film maker). Of course, Bey himself became caught in the dilemma of representation - he cannot avoid mediation in order to communicate his message.

nations, have become popular destinations for disillusioned ‘traveller-tourists’ desiring alterity. At such event-spaces, it is said that a *lost* ‘spirit of festivity’ (Manning 1983:26), an authentic ‘return’, may be experienced. Various ACEs, especially ALEs, are unique and diverse manifestations of the westerner’s quest for ‘the way out’, for ‘real experiences’, for ‘natural’ rendezvous, sanctity, community. As was related in Chapter 1, since the 1960s, a host of counter-spatial pilgrimage centres have appeared inside the borders of advanced capitalist societies - playing host to popularly desired valuations (play, healing, primitivity, ecology and a sense of belonging in a dystopian world). ConFest is itself a manifestly unique instance of such a centre.

ConFest accomplishes Edith Turner’s ‘take over’, and conditions authentication, in distinctively hyper, carnal and contested patterns. It does not possess a ‘performative structure’ *per se*. Not possessing a formal ritual frame with a ‘structure of practice’ (Kapferer 1983:9; 1984a:195), or a recognisable telos indexing predictable transitions via the successful resolution of contradictions and inconsistencies (as in many passage rites),³¹ this is an indeterminate threshold of condensed experience out of which there are manifold possible outcomes. ConFest, I argue, is manifestly *hyper-liminal* - via an organic switchboard device it exposes participants to multifarious alternate embodiments, sacra, TAZs - *authentica*.

In this final section, I wish to accomplish two concurrent objectives. (1) I will introduce the *three modalities* of meaningful action by which the liminal self is engaged, thereby excavating the *authentica* potentiating processes at the heart of the Turnerian paradigm. (2) I will advance upon this paradigm by outlining each modality’s *unique expression* in what is a hyper-performative context.

1. *Play/subjunctivity*

This is the abandonment of form, the dissolution of fixed categories and the licensed approximation of a predominantly ‘subjunctive mood’: the ‘mood’ or ‘world’ of ‘wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis’, of ‘maybe’, ‘could be’ and ‘*as if*’, a mood ranging from ‘scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy’, the mood of *were*, in ‘if *I were* you’ (Turner 1982c:83; 1984:20-21; 1992:149). This is what Turner has in mind when he says liminality is the depths (‘the abyss’) ‘of pure possibility’; it engenders ludism which could be construed as a *playing with otherness*, or *othering*. This re-creative modality is predominant in festivals, especially seasonal/calendar celebrations; such social paroxysms

in which the distortion and recombination of familiar symbols and normative behaviour transpire. Events may be characterised by the symbolic inversion and role reversal of Gluckman's 'rituals of rebellion' (1954), the momentary overturning and lampooning of hierarchy in Rabelaisian 'carnavalesque' (Bakhtin 1968), the transgressive paroxysm of sensuality in Maffesoli's 'orgiasm' (1993), or the radical wish for presence and difference in Bey's insurrectionary TAZ (1991a).

In its seasonal/subjunctive atmosphere ConFest permits and conditions alterity. Yet, I will expand on Turner's exposition of play to investigate an on-site alterity that is *corporeal* and *multiple* - indeed common aspects of the festival or carnival (which, it should be admitted, were not studied in any depth by Turner). I attempt to redress Turner's neglect of the body and carnality (his 'abyss' of 'pure possibility' was not the 'abyss of the womb'), and address the complications of identification. Therefore, like other ACEs (e.g. Rainbow Gatherings, Aquarius), which encourage the subjunctive, transgressive body, alternate identities are (re)created in a radically indeterminate fashion. In an immediate, sensual space where a profusion, indeed excess, of protean symbolic forms are encountered, appropriated and performed, participants become familiarised with a vertiginous tableau of otherness/othering.

2. *Drama/reflexivity*

This is the performative reception, exploration and expression of socio-cultural reality, especially the '*sacra*' or 'ultimate concerns'. The enactment of 'cultural dramas' inform participants (actors and audience) of society's most cherished symbols, beliefs and discourse. The cultural drama is like a 'ritual frame' (Bateson 1958) or 'metasocial commentary' (Geertz 1972:26), a performative genre facilitating collective inquiry into the historical and daily exigencies, conflicts and contradictions of social existence. Performers become the object of their own subjective awareness. Not merely reflecting culture, they are reflexive or evaluative of their life-worlds. And, through 'collective reflexology', society is imminent. In a discursive socio-cultural event-space 'a society looks honestly at itself', people are encouraged 'to think about how they think, about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, or to feel about how they feel in daily life [and wherein] a given group strive to see their own reality in new ways' (Turner 1984:22). Therefore, performances are themselves active agencies of change, 'representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out

³¹ This should not be taken to mean that all rites of passage have predictable outcomes.

what they believe to be more apt or interesting “designs for living” (Turner 1987:22,24).³²

ConFest is a *multi-cultural drama*. It facilitates collective inquiry into the diverse *sacra* of the ACM via a dense simultaneity of ‘ramified’ performance genres and venues. Passage rituals, healing rites, community dance and percussion, games and parades, interactive theatre, techno-trance events and entertaining spectacles coincide, and are juxtaposed, to the market-place, workshop exhibitions, demonstrations and educational forums. A festive calendar event, it also features many ‘crisis’, ‘cycle’ and affliction/curative rites. ‘Events that present’ (mirror) and ‘events that model’ the lived-in world are accommodated here. It is a vast meta-performative school of consciousness.

3. *Community/affectuality*

This is the spontaneous (re)formation of affectual relationships with co-liminaries. *Communitas* is a social modality within which people inter-relate relatively unobstructed by socio-cultural divisions of role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex, age and other structural niches (Turner 1982b:48). A Latin term meaning ‘a relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals’ (Turner 1969:96), *communitas* refers to a feeling of sacred community, homogeneity, and may involve the sharing of special knowledge and understanding - ‘a flash of mutual understanding on the existential level, and a “gut” understanding of synchronicity’ (Turner 1982b:48). This immediate and ‘total confrontation of human identities’, occurs between fixed social categories (in liminality), on the edges of structured social life (in marginality) and beneath structure (in inferiority). It approximates a ‘religious experience’: it is ‘almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy’ [since] it is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency’ (Turner 1969:128). It is a ‘mood’ wherein a high value is placed on personal honesty, openness, a lack of pretensions or pretentiousness (Turner 1982b:48).

Paralleling recent work on pilgrimage and other public events, the reality of the ConFest community challenges a purist definition of ‘*communitas*’. ConFest is a *heterotopic counter-community*, an alternate social gathering invested with multiple meanings, variously conflictual and complementary, carried by diverse ‘constituencies’ communing around different centralities clustered under its vast marquee. I question Turner’s ‘non-sensual’ orientation to spontaneous community by exploring the profile and significance of the event’s *intercorporeality*. As a community, ConFest is characterised by

³² See also Appendix B.1(v).

(dis)unity. Its constituency is concurrently homogeneous and heterogeneous, it accommodates ideologies of inclusivity and exclusivity, its distinct identity depends upon the classification of similarity and difference, and its contested 'boundaries' are subject to shifting tides of consensus and dispute. Therefore, despite the 'miraculous' realisation of community, I find an unqualified application of 'communitas' naive and problematical.

Conclusion

In making ConFest accessible to interpretation, it has been necessary to renovate the concept of liminality while remaining conscious of the concept's utility. A critical deconstruction uncovered the essentialism lying at the heart of the Turnerian project. For Turner, the telegraphed 'realm of pure possibility' of the *limen* is an inviolably sacred ritual community. Discussion revealed that such a paradigm holds public events as transcendent, uniform, 'ritual'-exclusive and given - classically demonstrated in the Turners' approach to pilgrimage. This paradigm provides a limited theoretical lens, since it cannot apprehend, or account for, the political and heterogeneous contextuality of liminal arenas themselves, nor the 'subjunctive' embodiment they condition - that is, as contexts for multiple performance genres, arenas subject to interpretative contestation and moments of inter-, and alternate, corporeality.

My approach to ConFest is informed by recent contributions to the study of public events, complementary thought, and the event itself. I have regarded ConFest as an organic *hyper-liminal* zone, which I articulated via the elaboration of two key conceptual themes. First, social *organicism*, a grassroots anarchist strategy, contextualises the ConFest experience. This is an experience I have found resonant with Hakim Bey's TAZ, the theory of which, despite qualifications, has proven useful. Secondly, the event is characteristically *hyper*-performative. A postmodern threshold, ConFest - by way of embodied multi-alterity, ramified genres and a network of neo-tribal constituencies - is a unique context for the three authentication triggering modalities, or *limina*, outlined. Offering a labyrinth of possibilities, pathways and nodes of identification, it is a matrix of (re)creative potential.

Chapter 3

The Down to Earth Movement

Introduction

This chapter provides a diachronic perspective on the Down to Earth movement, documenting the emergence of the Victorian Down to Earth Co-operative Society, and the evolution of DTE's ConFest. As its conflict ridden history demonstrates, DTE is a perennially unstable organisation. The occurrence of conflict within DTE has prompted me to divide its history into three phases, which I attend to respectively: (1) 1976-1980, (2) 1981-1994, and (3) 1995 to the time of writing (1999). While it is true that such delineation is an imaginative abstraction entertained by the author, it is equally true that 1980/81 and 1994/95 were synaptic periods occasioning unquestionable breaks and new growth in the organisation. While most crises in DTE achieve resolution or lead to submerged conflicts, at other times serious rifts develop after prolonged internecine dispute and open hostility. The latter has occurred on two occasions. The first became a media spectacle, largely because once-Deputy PM Dr Jim Cairns played the lead role. The second 'drama' is less known, yet it generated widespread concern, and subsequent notoriety, within DTE as the rift was completed with the establishment of a rival organisation and festival.

This historical exegesis seeks to demonstrate two features. First, DTE has evolved into a unique 'neo-tribal' (Maffesoli 1996) organisation, a form of sociation Hetherington (1994) describes as a *Bund*. The current DTE *Bund*, possesses the following six characteristics: 1) Its membership is *elective* - individuals choosing to be members of the Society. 2) It is *responsive*, members responding to the consequences of modernity, especially the perceived dissolution of community. 3) Its members therefore seek and achieve (especially in their desire to recreate the 'ConFest Spirit') an *affectual* solidarity. 4) It tolerates social *diversity*, the membership constituted by individuals with a vast range of backgrounds, interests and agendas. 5) It is *neutral*. Though members are not necessarily apolitical or irreligious, as an organisation, DTE has adopted a stance of non-allegiance to specific movements. 6) It is *unstable*, a result of the tension between the responsive and neutral traits, the diversity of members' personal agendas, and an ambivalence towards structure and formal procedure.

Second, both diachronically and synchronically, ConFest accommodates and indicates a multiplicity of alternatives, rendering it a unique ACH. As a 'closed phenomenal world', ConFest, for participants and observers alike, is a 'privileged point of penetration'

(Handelman 1990:15,9) into the amorphous cultural codes of alternative Australia. According to Cockatoo, 100,000 people have probably experienced ConFest. A diachronic study of this enduring public event offers a unique record of the evolution and composition of alternative culture in Australia since the mid-seventies. For more than twenty years (30 events - see Chronology), ConFest has been a veritable magnet for a heterogeneity of subcultures, rebellious lifestyles and modes of escapism emerging in the wider cultural sphere. Its evolution reveals an exhibition of alternative cultural lifeworlds, which, in themselves, convey the fashionable discourse and practice of a multiplicity of contemporaneous social movements achieving degrees of popularity and influence over more than two decades. ConFest's framework of interdependent sites or 'centres', known as *villages*, are significant synchronic repositories and indices of such alternate cultural formations.

An organisation facilitating a unique cultural production, DTE provides the experience of community that is a source of strength and identity for individual members. Like many neo-tribes, DTE is not 'spatially proximate' - its members do not all live together or near each other - though members experience the periodic communion of ConFest, the biannual reproduction of which has become the primary, unifying objective of the Society.

The Movement in Historical Context

Before discussing DTE and ConFest itself, it will be useful to explore the historical context of its emergence. What was the economic, political and social climate out of which DTE arose? Dennis Altman earlier argued that the first three ConFests together 'represent one of the more visible manifestations of the "alternative culture" that emerged in the Western industrialized world in the late 1960s' (1980:116). DTE and ConFest were clearly products of the radical culture of the sixties, a culture heavily influenced by radicalism in the US. Indeed, according to one experienced ConFester, the first ConFest was held in 1967 in San Francisco. An expatriate American, he was referring to the 'Human Be-in' held in that city's Golden Gate Park, a massive convergence of the radical New Left and the psychedelic 'love generation'. Reports of that event convey a primordial moment from which ConFest atavists may rightfully claim descent. The commentary of Gary Snyder should suffice here: '[a]t the Polo Fields, on a wonderful day, the new aboriginals gathered in bunches with their elders and children, and some of them with their own flags and banners. These were the real tribes and clans' (in Buenfil 1991:43).

Though the direct roots of ConFest are located in what became known as the counterculture, it should be kept in mind that the 'counter cultural movement' of the sixties itself represented the 'rebirth of a Dionysian culture' which possesses deep historical roots (e.g. Romanticism, early utopian socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, communitarianism, beats: Musgrove 1974:12). In Australia, communitarianism for example, has a long history (cf. Metcalf 1986:Ch.3; 1995).

Yet, in advanced industrial societies, the 1960s occasioned a momentous youthful avalanche of spontaneous strategies taken up in opposition to what Roszak (1968: xli) called 'the consolidation of a technocratic totalitarianism'. Conventional religion, gender relations, work practices, the nuclear family, reductionist science, allopathic medicine, the corporate media, leisure pursuits and mass consumption practices became subject to an unprecedented cultural assault. If an underlying goal of the international counterculturalists was to be found, it would approximate the radical struggle for individual liberty and freedom of expression. Yet, with no consensus on 'radicalism', strategies ranged from genuine opposition to outright disengagement. The culture of dissent possessed bohemian and militant elements, aesthetic and instrumental tactics - perhaps best clarified in Musgrove's (1974) 'dialectics of utopia'.

In Australia, an insurgent and highly derivative 'cultural radicalism' (Alomes 1983:29) mobilised especially around 'the quintessential sixties event' - Vietnam. As opposition to the war and conscription mounted, the era saw the revival of the peace movement (Burgmann 1993:190). Moreover, 'protest and youth became synonymous'. As Gerster and Bassett (1991:46) assert, being 'against Vietnam' meant, for youth, 'a blanket rejection of almost everything associated with the world of their parents'.

What became known as 'the counterculture' should be explained in terms of the complex consequences of both the economic prosperity associated with the 'post-war boom' and the increasing numbers of tertiary educated adolescents. That which Roszak deemed 'the Age of Affluence' (1995), or 'the sixties' (delineated as the period between 1942-72) saw the unprecedented increase in the standard of living in high industrial economies (especially the US). The liberal child rearing and education experienced by 'baby boom' children, stimulated reaction 'against both repressive institutions and ... the smothering security and overly comfortable conformity of their parents' way of life' (Gerster and Bassett 1991:33). In this era, prolonged education and the 'extended protection from the pressures of adult responsibilities' artificially extended the 'natural period of adolescence' (ibid:49). Suffering from an 'affluent alienation', the adolescents of the new middle classes were transfixed by the Romantic and anarchic concept of 'personal

freedom' (ibid:38), seeking 'rebellion', 'experience' and 'spontaneity', sometimes with the aid of marijuana and LSD, sometimes through uninhibited sexual expression, but, significantly, also through consumer capitalism.

This situation has continued throughout the 1970s and '80s, and into the '90s. In the mid 1970s, Inglehart stated that 'a new culture is emerging within Western societies'. He claimed that '[t]he values of Western publics have been shifting from an overwhelming emphasis on material wellbeing and physical security toward greater emphasis on the quality of life' (in Heelas 1992:141). Dominated by the inward gaze of new religions and psychotherapies, Wolfe labelled the 1970s 'the me decade'. And, Lasch claimed that 'to live for the moment is the prevailing passion - to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity' (in Yinger 1982:70). While some argued that this introspection was a response to discontentment with depersonalising and self-fragmenting modern technocracies (Berger et al. 1974), others, like Inglehart, following Maslow, have suggested that economic prosperity triggered advanced needs - especially 'self-actualisation' - and their fulfilment (Heelas 1992:149).

In Australia, it is clear that a preoccupation with individuation, with an authentic self, gathered momentum from the early seventies. As the psychologies of Wilhelm Reich and Carl Jung superseded the historical materialism of Marx in the popular culture of alternative lifestylers, the children of 'the silent revolution' have concerned themselves with the growth of the mind, body and spirit. As Cock (1979:215) argues, the 'back to the land' or communitarian push of the 1970s and '80s was seen to signify a shift away from a direct challenge to the 'Corporate State' towards changing oneself. Communes and intentional communities provided the social environment for 'self-actualisation' and the expression of one's 'authentic self' (Munro-Clarke 1986:219). The trend continued in the form of an explosion of retreats, weekend intensives and short duration workshops designed for psycho-spiritual (re)growth in the 1980s and '90s. This has provided fertile ground for the burgeoning 'self religion' of the New Age.

Yet healing the self, I contend, is contiguous with a strengthening eco-consciousness. As I will elaborate (in Chapter 7), personhood and politics are difficult, if not impossible, to regard in isolation. My approach here is consistent with new social movement (NSM) theory. As 'resource mobilisation' models have fallen into disfavour, social movements are no longer simplified as collective efforts at reforming production and distribution patterns. Interest now lies in symbolic repertoires employed by the 'submerged networks' of contemporary collective identities - whose meaning construction is considered to be an end in itself. As Melucci (1989) infers, 'the movement is the message'. Everyday

symbolic activity, especially consumption patterns - or, perhaps, anti-consumption strategies - constitute a significant aspect of the identity politics of NSMs. Symbolic codes employed may include fashion and body decor, diet, choice of medicine, method of waste management, and chosen form of sociality.

At its birth, and through its reappearance for over two decades since 1976, ConFest became a large reservoir for diverse streams of the Australian ACM - itself, constituted by a multitude of NSMs. Two broader arms of alternative culture convened at ConFest's ontogenesis: the alternative health and therapy movements, committed to self-liberation/actualisation, and the peace and green movements, committed to activism and the raising of environmental awareness. The former, both responsive to the 'alienation' and 'repression' of modern industrialism, and pursuing advanced need fulfilment, were steeped in psychotherapy and advocated expressive individualism and self 'growth', later becoming a key trope of the New Age. The latter, responding to the global Cold War environment, the real prospect of nuclear Armageddon and the 'limits to growth', advocated collective action and solutions based on participatory democracy. So ConFest, in the mid-seventies, became an outgrowth of the contemporaneous interests of self-liberationists such as Jim Cairns, and activists, such as those mobilising against uranium mining - an industry supported by the reinstated Liberal administration of 1975.

Indeed ConFests rapidly became occasions for mystics and militants, Maoists and musos, aesthetes and activists, to bed down together. Over the course of its history ConFest would be multi-subcultural, becoming a haven for hippie, punk, anarchist, pagan, raver and feral subcultures, and would accommodate a multitude of organisations: human potential, alternative health, communitarians, new spiritualities, women's and men's groups, queers, greens, alternative technology-energy, nuclear-free and forest activists.

Phase One (1976 - 1980): Down To Earth

We must begin by rejecting what the system imposes upon us, and begin with what meets our real, natural needs, and transform that into a social movement. We must go Down to Earth. (Cairns 1976:5)

In October 1976, a leaflet was distributed from the Parliament House office of the former policeman, Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer and anti-Vietnam War crusader with

a PhD in history, Dr Jim Cairns. It was a statement inviting all 'who feel the need for radical change' to a forthcoming event. It stated that the event would be host to:

Aborigines, ethnic communities, women's liberation groups, peace activists, homosexuals, lesbians, members of rural and city communes and co-operatives and those concerned with self-management and work democracy, law reform, ideology, theories of social change, alternative food, health, energy, living structures, education, psychotherapy, yoga and meditation. (Rawlins 1982:24)

The event was the first ConFest held on the Cotter River Recreation Reserve in December 1976, an occasion realised through the political muscle, charisma and nascent psychopolitics of Cairns. With the purpose of organising such a 'national Alternative Australia gathering', Cairns had since May that year travelled the country establishing contact with, and harnessing the support of at least 2,000 people (Cock 1979:49). One of the more radical thinking politicians in Australian history, it wasn't until the mid seventies (in his sixties) that Cairns began taking steps which would eventually distance most of his political allies. To the chagrin of former colleagues and staff, he befriended Junie Morosi,¹ who stimulated his own personal liberation and commitment to a lifestyle of 'voluntary simplicity' (Miles 1978:71), and who became his personal secretary and 'partner in his crusade for an Alternative Australia' (Ormonde 1981:241).

In May 1976, still an opposition backbencher and member for Lalor, Cairns called a meeting in Melbourne at which there were gathered a motley of individuals and groups disaffected by the dominant culture (what Cairns called 'the lead society'). Those responding to his 'call' gathered at ensuing meetings such as that in Canberra in September where those present sought to unite their skills and energies in an event to incorporate a serious discussion of, and experimentation with, 'the way out', to be undertaken in a relaxed and festive environment. It was therefore - paralleling the Aquarius event - to be a conference and a festival. Presented with a Canadian newspaper carrying the promotion for an upcoming event there - 'Down to Earth - A Festival of Alternatives' - the title 'Down to Earth: A Shaping of Alternatives' was chosen for Cotter (Schmidt 1983: 8-9; *DTE Canberra* 4 March, 1980; King 1980:5).

¹ A mother of three at eighteen, the 'exotic' (Kelly 1978:13) Morosi was born in Shanghai, studied English literature and psychology in the Philippines and later worked in marketing and public relations. She became the 'best known "non-public" figure in Australia' as a result of her appointment as secretary to Cairns (Morosi 1975) and in the ensuing media generated 'Morosi affair'.

In the mainstream media Cairns became spokesman for what he called, in early pamphlets and literature - especially *Growth to Freedom* (1979) - 'the new culture'. Though in the main, little more than a banal cargo-cult of quotations, I cannot eschew consideration of Cairns' work since, for a moment in the late seventies, he was the champion of the alternative movement. His message to (and dialogue with) the flocking legions of distraught and disillusioned (printed on the October '76 leaflet) was precisely what they wanted to hear, and they seemed particularly curious, as here was a man who had achieved such a senior position in 'the establishment'. Cairns promoted a loose tract of Reichian inspired libratory psychology,² a philosophy which subsequently became synonymous with ConFests, and an enduring theme long after Cairns had left DTE.³ His mind was that 'we need a new theory and understanding of social growth to help us chart a course for the rest of this century. And that requires an alternative lifestyle and cultural pattern' (*Sunshine News* 34, c.1978). He went on to maintain (on a flier distributed at Berri 1979) that 'we must bring politics to an end ... [and develop] a people's liberation movement'. The primary goals of such a 'culture' or 'movement' were liberation from sensory repression and self-determination (*DTE Canberra* 4, March 1980:22).

Cairns had been a long time proponent of Marx, yet by the early seventies his position had shifted. As Horin put it, for Cairns 'Marx considered man only in the cold light of economics; psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich on the other hand, saw man and woman in the hot glow of sex, psychic energies, and mysterious life forces' (1979:31). In an eclectic style of literary patchworking, and following the example set by Reich, he attempted to marry the ideas of Freud with those of Marx, and then Reich with those of Engels (Ormonde 1981:245), supposing that a host of social problems (including repressed sexual attitudes) have their root in patriarchy, which, Cairns thought, superseded matriarchal cultures about 5000 years ago. Persisting with the quest for social change, he shifted attention away from parliamentary politics towards the liberation of the self. He aimed at nothing short of a panacea, a 'True Alternative', to the 'logic of destruction' set in motion by the 'theologies and ideologies of the lead society': the 'good society' could be achieved by liberating the repressed 'life force' (Cairns 1979:6).⁴

² As Ormonde relates, Morosi introduced Cairns to the work of American psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich who held the view that mental health was linked to sexual expression and that sexually repressive societies were prone to totalitarianism (Ormonde 1981:196).

³ His philosophy is compacted in a phrase from the October '76 leaflet: 'will to be that self which one truly is'.

⁴ The alternative Cairns sought would not come about by way of a political-economic revolt. Cairns stated to me himself that what he desired was an:

In 1976, preceding his retirement from federal politics the following year, Cairns produced a manifesto: 'The Theory of the Alternative'. The document encapsulated his ideas about, and intentions for, cultural revolution, and as far as later developments were concerned, it was embryonic. In it, Cairns revealed his principal aim: 'to transform society and bring an end to alienation, oppression, exploitation and inequality' (1976:16). 'Survival now [Cairns stated] requires a radical break with the past; it demands a future which has to be created. Survival demands a revolution in the way of life of everyone' (ibid:3). The necessary radical elision would be achieved in four stages. 1) 'Cultural preparation or consciousness raising'. 2) 'Building up radical groups or alternative enclaves of all kinds based on real needs of the people'. 3) 'The development of a community for change, of a peoples' liberation movement, with the capacity to challenge the structure of authority'. 4) 'The radical groups or alternative enclaves [would] take over as self-governing and regulating communities and replace the bureaucracy and machinery of the centralised, nation-State' (ibid:15).

To elaborate, Cairns saw that in most industrial systems:

there is a rising crescendo of violence, and everywhere, there is smoldering dissatisfaction ... [T]he prevailing and insatiable demands made on resources which cannot be replaced cannot long continue. Mental illhealth, a result of alienation and stress, is spreading. Ecological unbalance distorts and poisons life, and thermo-nuclear processes, if continued, will destroy it. (1976:3)

Alienation and oppression are revealed to be rather complex: not only are people alienated or estranged from themselves through meaningless work, but 'alienation begins at birth or before'. 'The worker [he contended] reaches the factory well prepared for a subsidiary role ... [A]ll authorities - parents, churches, schools, employers, and States - conspire to create the kind of character structure which is conducive to their authority' (ibid:11). A Marxist critique is then not an entirely adequate explanation for humanity's 'willingness to submit to authorities ... for its fear of freedom, nor for its acceptance of compulsory morality and guilt' (ibid:9). An economic analysis of the 'authoritarian social structure', therefore, must be supplemented by 'a radical psychological analysis' (ibid).

alternative to so called democracy, to operation of the means of production by capitalists, and to what had been seen as a way out, revolution. Revolution represented no change, because it wasn't a cultural change. It was only a change of those in power. They were patriarchs before, and they were patriarchs afterwards. Unless there is a cultural change, there can be no real change. He therefore pursued a cultural 'revolution'.

Further, it was suggested that three forms of alienation afflict modern humanity, for which there are three corresponding, yet integral, revolutionary responses.

In the Marxist tradition alienation was the result of production, of work, when the economic system was controlled by a few. For writers like Shilimith [sic] Firestone [and other proponents of] women's liberation, alienation is a result of a male dominant society. But more significantly, alienation is the result of repression of the natural needs of children. Each of these views is correct, but taken alone each one is insufficient and misleading. A complete theory of social behaviour requires the integration of these three views into a comprehensive social theory, which may, at this stage be called the Theory of the Alternative. (Cairns 1976:13-14)

The struggle is the need to eliminate private ownership: 'but it is not only private ownership of economic capital, it is far more significantly, private ownership of people - women by men, children by parents, and the people by the system' (ibid:14).⁵ Without a 'development of consciousness' - the demystification of the alienating and oppressive nature of an authoritarian, patriarchal society which claims to act 'in the public good' and which represses sensory pleasure, especially sexuality - liberation cannot be achieved. This liberation, Cairns argues, demands three things: the 'discovery of real, natural needs by each individual ... pride in those needs, and then participation in the common struggle to achieve them' (ibid:5). With this new consciousness, a 'free and strong individual' would emerge anticipating new social values and priorities. Indeed, Cairns later proposed multiple shifts - from: 'feelings of worthlessness to acceptance of self'; 'being directed by others to self-direction'; 'lack of awareness to sensibility of self, others and nature'; 'sexual inhibition to sexual fulfilment', and 'unproductiveness to creativity'. Such transitions would, he continued, stimulate capacious social modifications - from: 'authoritarianism towards participation'; 'a society based on guilt to a society based on joy', and; 'standards based on efficiency and mass production alone (ie. "quantity") towards standards based on human fulfilment (ie. "quality")' (Cairns in Hast 1979:11).

Cairns' October '76 statement forecasts the movement's acceptance of diverse alternatives: 'the new society will be made up of the choices of multitudes of people - individuals and groups - who are determined to find a way out. No one can be excluded' (Cairns in Rawlins 1982:26). DTE's legacy of providing a heterotopic harbour for most conceivable alternative options, tolerating the disordered and the contested, a space where

⁵ Another 'form of alienation', that which green movement adherents may posit to be a result of modern humanity's detachment from, and ownership of, the natural environment, is not incorporated in Cairns' human centred approach.

marginal knowledge and experimental modes of co-operation are embraced and exchanged, is here found in blueprint. The profusion of ideas that found haven in DTE in the early years is reflected in the following statements taken from a variety of sources. In an early letter entitled 'A basic philosophy of the DTE movement', Dik Freestun feels DTE is a multivocal educator:

[Down to Earth is] a name that means a common ground upon which all individuals who love Nature, Equality and Peace, can and do relate ... [DTE Australia is] a linking together of minority groups who have been suppressed and oppressed ... supplies alternative answers to solve society's age old problems of greed and power [and will become] an instructor, a communicator, an educator, a demonstrator of life ... DTE is many things and speaks with many voices, to bring about a time when Man with God as One rejoices. (circa Sep. 1977)

There were orientations more avowedly Marxist in inspiration:

We must challenge the present power structure in which those who own or control the means of production have the power to buy worker's lives for the fulfilment of their projects. We must challenge alienation & oppression of individuals caused by our present moral code and by the institutions who control our lives. (L. Redman in the first *DTEQLD* newsletter Feb. 1977, reprinted in *DTE North East Aust* March 1997:7)

Down to Earthers' ... function should be to help all those who are in conflict with the present authoritarian social structure, both in industry and in society at large, to generalise our experience and to make a total critique of our condition and of its cause, and to develop the mass revolutionary consciousness necessary if society is to be totally transformed. (B. James. *DTE Canberra* 4, March 1980:34)

Alternatively, a 'search within' may engender 'new mythologies':

[DTE and ConFest] offer you a real chance to explore the alternatives to daily living to broaden your canopies of vision and discover some exciting new routes to survival in a rapidly crumbling social order. We offer choices for living ... the change and restoration does not come from without but from individual consciousness-raising as a result of self inquiry ... The emerging new image of humankind developing from this search within entails new cultural and knowledge paradigms and is being reflected in the creation of new mythologies. As we become more aware of these new images we need to create ways to transform the vision to reality. (Anon. *DTE SA* 2, 1979:1)

Self healing may be connected to ecological and social alternatives:

[DTE offers the chance] to make our world an egalitarian and ecologically sound place to live in - within our lifetimes. We can replace our wasteful consumer cult with a sustainable creative and fulfilling way of life by working together, if we continue to work at communicating our vision of the possibilities: to learn, to create alternatives, to heal and reshape ourselves and our society. (in a letter from 'BLM', *DTE Canberra* 3, Dec. 1979:15)

Ultimately, it is envisioned as an expanding movement:

It's a movement that offers people a wide variety of choice to move out of the narrow confines in which they live. The safe, happy, restrictive, unquestioning pathways ... The analogy of the movement as an umbrella needs to be true at all levels. Not only as an umbrella for the various alternative lifestyle groups, but as a continually extending umbrella, continually broadening, and encompassing the universe. The limits of the umbrella are the limits of the people who make up the movement; and our aim has to be to extend the umbrella to the rest of the world, to the point of total inclusion. (letter from John Rainsbury, member of 'the Down to Earth Council', 5/9/78 Aldinga Beach, SA)⁶

Cotter: the 'Call For a New Society'

Some day all our lives will be a Confest. (Cairns at Cotter - in Horin 1979:33)

The Cotter event, held on National Park lands in the ACT in December 1976, was a watershed in Australian alternative culture. In a document 'Getting together for Canberra in December 1976' - largely distributed to the 'Tuntable tribe' (the Tuntable Falls community near Nimbin) - David Spain saw the event as a 'City-State predicated upon co-operative brotherhood' and environmental responsibility, and, further, 'one of the most advanced expressions or prototypes of "New Age" society'. He heralded it as a sign of the newly evolved Aquarian age wherein 'Man's proper function [is] as a shepherd of Beings, rather than as some pretentious Lord of Being'. This said, it was Cairns who had attracted large numbers of the 10,000 or so attending. In early December

the pilgrims began arriving - veterans from 1973; 1950s bohemians; old ladies from the vegan society; the current inhabitants of Nimbin; Carlton and Kings Cross street waifs; and professional film, theatre and advertising people, the elegant habitues of Paddington (both Sydney and Brisbane) - in short, a cross

⁶ From the personal archives of Ewen Richards.

section of Australian subcultures as never got together before. (Rawlins 1982:29)

Cotter's rationale? To unite the disconnected and to explore the parameters, the corporeal possibilities, of Cairns' 'new culture'. In his document, Spain envisioned the event to be a coherent expression of the alternative movement: 'those exploring alternative lifestyles should coherently understand and express just who we are, why our movement arose and deserves respect, and what we can positively do, prove and offer towards the fulfilment of that entire Australian Commonwealth, and even beyond, to all planet Earth, whereof we are unavoidably a part'.

Numerous features appeared at Cotter, many becoming part of the conventional ConFest assemblage. There was an initial 'sharing ritual' - an opening event wherein hundreds danced, embraced and massaged one another effectively releasing inhibitions. In several geodesic domes workshops were held on a host of themes. Ananda Marga, Hari Krsna, Quakers, Sufis and representatives from Scotland's Findhorn community were present, and the CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution) 'Gay Center' was set up. Speakers and instructors included Eva Reich (daughter of Wilhelm), Bill Mollison (on 'Perennial agriculture and alternative technology for the Third World'), Peter Cock (on the Moora Moora community), Benny Zable (dance), and co-founder of The Farm in Tennessee, James Prescott (on 'body pleasures and the origin of violence') (*DTE Canberra* 3, Dec. 1979:14-15).⁷ On the first day Cairns delivered a speech forecasting the gathering as a prelude to 'a new emerging society, a society of new values, a society in which the law of love will be the law of humanity' (in Hefner 1976:3).

On the morning of the final day 3,000 people gathered again to give heed to Cairns 'on the mount', and this time he delivered a 'manifesto'. A brief medley of ideas designed for popular absorption, the 'manifesto' had been produced by a committee led by Robert Hughes of Melbourne's Footscray Community Centre. It was formed out of its authors' experience at Cotter, and is infused with unmistakable 'Cairns-speak'. A significant comment on the moment, it was shortly afterwards edited and carried on the front page of the first DTE newsletter - *The Down to Earth Community News* (1977) - under the headline 'A Call For A New Society'.

⁷ A 'news bulletin' was printed daily promoting workshops and activities. Themes also included primal therapy, acupuncture, natural childbirth, Jungian analysis, magnetic grid lines and sacred geometry, women's liberation and alternative communities. Daily newsletters and programs were also produced and distributed at Bredbo and Berri.

It is clear that the authors had been inspired by what can be described as a most fervent instance of spontaneous *communitas* such as which had been approximated at Aquarius in 1973 and perhaps never repeated. The narrative drives home the feeling of collective rebirth, a kind of *puissance* achieved by thousands who experienced a return to 'real needs, to themselves, to one another and to the earth which supports them'. 'We are determined [they stated] to assist in the birth of a different society and a new awareness, realising that we ourselves will need to be reborn in order to bring it to life'. The manifesto evoked a host of crises - psychological, social, political, cultural - conditioned by 'prevailing hegemonic values' (the key words are 'alienation', 'anxiety', 'repression', 'unlimited consumption', 'excessive waste', 'unequal distribution' of wealth and power, and media 'brainwashing'). It was felt that the key to overcoming such a profusion of maladies had been discovered at Cotter, where 'a new consciousness', a 'freedom' so long awaited, was conceived. The 'new society' could only follow in its wake.

Later, at Berri in South Australia (1979), ConFesters were provided with a handbook⁸ which documented the emergence of the alternative movement in Australia and which, most significantly, implicated the readers (the participants) in the realisation of its goals:

DTE is a community of persons seeking new values and directions having questioned or in the process of questioning the goals, impact and directions of the existing alienating and dehumanising capitalistic society ... [A] main aim of DTE is to assist in the development of a viable alternative society: a new society ... As people working together, we *make* the future ... DTE - nationally and locally - consists of people dedicated to helping the cultural preparation and consciousness raising for a truly alternative society, free from alienation, oppression, exploitation and inequality.

Alas, *the* 'new society' never arrived. Yet this should not be regarded as a failure, for, though *the* revolutionary transformation imagined by legions of contemporaries in a host of guises was not realised, many minor 'revolutions' were, and have been since. Together with untold behavioural modifications, a multitude of communities, therapies, gatherings, 'tribes' and *Bünde* have come into existence, or have been regenerated, as a result of ConFest. *The* 'new society' never arrived but many new 'societies' did, as ConFest became a networking and 'recruitment' centre for the ACM (Metcalf 1986:208).⁹ And

⁸ Handbooks had, especially in the eighties, become a popular means of communicating relevant information concerning ConFest to participants - especially the need for co-operation.

⁹ Cotter was a powerful catalyst. There, for instance, Terence Plowwright (who had set up a New Awareness bookshop in Sydney), and others, met members of the Santosha Community (near Mildura), who were searching for a place to build a 'light centre' they called Findhorn

they have continued to emerge as a result of the DTE ConFest becoming periodic - a recurrent calendar event. ConFest has indeed become a successful distraction to, diversion from, and subversion of society ('Babylon'), and in this DTE has taken on a role scarcely foreseen by its progenitors.

The Rise and Fall of ADTEN

By 1980, ADTEN (the Australian Down To Earth Network) which consisted of groups in nearly all states, had emerged. In a letter to the 'National and State Co-ordinators and DTE Council' dated 5/1/79, Jay Guru Dev (George Schmidt) stated that the 'brainchild [of Cairns] has now multiplied itself into a number of "twins" [each of which are] growing up into self-contained individuals', trusting that 'each state engenders its own group/membership and maybe subdivides itself again and again like a living organism'. Though loosely structured and lacking the strength of unitary purpose, a 'movement' consisting of several diasporic 'families' or 'clans' became increasingly apparent. Each were committed to their own events and projects, yet connected through their rejection of the central values of dominant culture, a sense of commonality inspired by Cotter and the national objectives prescribed by Cairns: 'to help the development of consciousness', 'to draw people together', and, 'to show and demonstrate what alternatives really are' (Cairns 1978). Regional co-ordinators in the growing network met at Earth Haven (Sherbrook, Vic) on 28-30 July 1978 where the Down To Earth Council or so called 'council of elders' (or 'the 12') formed.¹⁰ The Council was designed as a 'think tank' group to gauge and reflect opinion on matters within the alternative movement - to channel the ideas and visions of the dispersed 'clans'.

In Western Australia, festivals were held at Cambray (1978), Nanga (1979) and later at York (1982), newsletters were printed and the Steinerian influenced Moontime School of Alternatives emerged as 'the child of our DTE association in WA' (*DTE Canberra* 4, March 1980:31). There were DTE festivals in Queensland such as at Beaudesert in September 1980. DTEQld (later DTENEA) produced newsletters from 1977 and Dik

Australia. The two groups merged to found a community in Upper Thora - Homelands (Marchant circa 1978).

¹⁰ The meeting was significant. Subsequently, many of 'the 12' were committed to share their feelings and visions in writing. For instance, in a letter dated 11/9/78, Chris Aronsten from Adelaide wrote: 'Dear friends. After that beautiful weekend at Earth Haven, and sharing so much with you all, I know more positively than ever before, that we can fill each other's cup to overflow, and join each other in a drunken orgy of loving and sharing, and learning, but we will

Freestun enabled small independent events (All One Family Gatherings) from 1986.¹¹ In South Australia, news sheets were produced from November 1978. In New South Wales, a drop-in-centre at Paddington in Sydney was run by DTE during 1977/78, and, at Easter 1979, a 'one day Confest' (FutureFest) was held in The Domain. In Tasmania the first Jackie's Marsh forest festival was held in February 1979 (now a major forest/activist festival). Victoria, as I document below, boasted the largest 'clan'.

By the early eighties, ADTEN had dissipated. One possible reason can be identified in an unpublished critique in which Peter Lee (c.1979) asserts that the DTE movement had failed to develop a 'unified theory' - by which he meant a Marxist critique. Failing to take Cairns' ideas seriously, DTE had become dominated by an 'irrational right-wing mystical element' (ibid:1), and possessed by a 'philosophy of meaninglessness' promoted by the likes of Stephen Gaskin (ibid:2). The 'predominance of style over content', an emphasis on peace, love, comfort and consensus, and the creation of an environment where 'the personal rules over the political', is interpreted as 'a refusal to come to terms with the contradictions of the capitalist system'. Lee claimed DTE - whose members were 'fleeing from the industrial productive process' - had created a non-critical, non-dialectical 'ghetto mentality' (ibid:7). Furthermore, he argued that DTE faced 'absorption' if it failed to develop a dialectical approach (ibid:12).

That DTE did not embrace the socialist ideals of the New Left is a sound reason why many alternates avoided DTE and ConFest. Yet, I have reservations about Lee's interpretation. From the beginning it was clear that the type of 'unified theory' Lee espoused was antithetical to the 'unity in diversity' approach adopted by DTE. The movement's unique attraction was its tolerance for a multiplicity of alternatives to dominant culture. This attitude was derivative of the experiences at the first ConFest, an ALE which became a celebration of diversity in the thought and practice of alternative culture.¹² Though it is probably the case that many disheartened by the absence of a

wake up every morning clear-headed and excited about each new and very special day' (from Ewen Richards' archives).

¹¹ AOF gatherings have usually been held at Magic Garden in the Bilambil Valley NSW or Auravale Healing Camp in far north Qld. They include sweatlodge, medicine wheel, 'tribal feasts' and 'humming bees' (Uroo).

¹² Lee's document is almost entertaining in its absurdity. Drawing favourable comparisons between the German Youth Movement and DTE, he intimates that the latter is a potential juggernaut of the right, paralleling Nazism no less! His approach typifies the positivist left's intolerance for spirituality. Mysticism is rejected out of hand as right wing, and meditation, the occult, Hari Krsnas and Ananda Marga are condemned as 'religious lunacy'. Lee, nevertheless, seeks to convert readers to his own religion, Marxism. His attitude to religiosity and new spiritualities is reminiscent of Bookchin (1995) and other socialists (cf. Jagtenberg and McKie 1997:109-11).

strong political voice and critical praxis in DTE itself, gave up on it for this reason, an in-depth examination of this period is required for a comprehensive understanding of ADTEN's demise.

In the period up to and including 1980, there were several contingent factors heralding a major crisis in DTE. Eventually a rift developed between Cairns and ADTEN, and there was ultimately a dispersal of 'energy' as many became involved in the more permanent experiments in the Rainbow Region and other areas. Cairns' apparent 'autocratic' style was an ongoing concern. The first signs of rupture followed Cairns' opposition to a popular call for a Rainbow Region gathering in 1977/78. At a DTE meeting in Canberra in September 1977, those present (representing several states) indicated a strong preference for the forests of the Rainbow Region as the site for 'the second plenary gathering'. Since Aquarius, this region had experienced the development of various experiments, the most notable being the Tuntable Falls Co-operative near Nimbin. Yet, since this call was reputedly 'vetoed' by Cairns who thought it too early in the movement to identify strongly with an existing commune (*DTE Canberra* 4, March 1980:18; Rawlins 1982:44), many of the strong Rainbow Region contingent, along with hundreds of others, withdrew from the process. The second ConFest - organised and controlled by Cairns, Morosi, and her husband, David Ditchburn (who controlled finances) - would occur in December 1977 on the banks of the Murrumbidgee at the much maligned semi-arid Bredbo (Mt Oak) site near Canberra instead.

Attracting about 15,000, mostly young people whose lives had been 'dominated by a nuclear world, the horrors of the Vietnam war, and the repressive social policies of successive Liberal governments' (Griffiths 1988a:4), Bredbo was a grandiose attempt to achieve a 'Findhornian transformation' on a large, affordable tract of land (1,100 hectares) which was at relatively equal distances from Melbourne and Sydney and that had no legal or other barriers to its development. The editorial in the daily newsletter and program, the *Mt Oak Oracle* (30/12/77), read:

We are uniquely privileged here in Australia in that we benefit from the geographical culture-lag between this place and other similar Western countries. In the States and Europe, the hippies are largely a dying race. There are only a relative handful who have made it on the land. We will face the same bleak future, socio-economic slavery, or be the victims of an insidious minority genocide - similar to that of the Aborigines but more subtle ... [if] we don't break loose from the military-industrial monstrous tentacles ... [and create an] alternative community.

Envisioned as a land reclamation project and model self-sustaining eco-community which would support hundreds, export food to the Third World (Bacon 1986:16), and host future ConFests, the land was to be purchased (price: \$59,000) from festival subscriptions and donations to the DTE Foundation/trust. Despite the festival's apparent loss of money,¹³ the purchase of the land was made possible by the contributions of up to 100 people (including Alex Eunson's life savings of \$32,000).

At Bredbo, Bill Mollison spoke about his groundbreaking permaculture experiment Tagari in Stanley, Tasmania. Architect Derek Wrigley gave a workshop on solar heating. Neville Yeomens outlined his keyline irrigation technique. Communitarians and spiritual teachers Stephen and Ina May Gaskin extolled the virtues of 'The Farm' in Tennessee where, taking a 'vow of poverty', 1,000 'voluntary peasants' co-existed. Anti-uranium mining protesters travelled to, and demonstrated naked in front of, Parliament House in Canberra. Jonathon Daemion introduced the Native American Indian inspired medicine wheel and talking circle, and there was a three day 'vision circle' (Simon F) - features imported from Rainbow Gatherings.

Despite this activity, in relation to the event's communitarian purpose, though a small number of permanent residents had built a 'sustainable power-autonomous community' (Collective editorial 1986:30) and 'a model for the use of other semi-arid land throughout Australia' (Conway, in Jesser 1985:1),¹⁴ the Bredbo ConFest and Mt Oak were, for more than twenty years, regarded as a 'black hole', a menacing blight on the landscape of the Australian alternative movement. As Griffiths remarked '[s]omething nasty happened there ... [it is] a place to keep away from' (1988a:5).

According to Griffiths, events at and since Bredbo contradicted statements made by Cairns at the event, and, moreover, belied fundamental tenets of Cairns' philosophy, ultimately marking the end of his credibility in the ACM. Cairns clarified his intentions in his 'welcome statement' and morning sharing talks at Bredbo: Down to Earth would be registered as a Foundation/Trust to hold title to the land, there would be no 'influence,

¹³ A situation which had roused suspicion and has been the subject of allegations of fraud and embezzlement since: the \$59,000 was considered 'double the property's value'; Cairns had announced 'break even point' half way through the festival, and; Ditchburn, who did not turn up to co-ordinators meetings to report on his province, festival finance (Kelly 1978:13), later told investigating detectives that all records had been lost (Beyond the Law 1988:3).

¹⁴ Adopting permacultural practices and influenced, in part, by Kibbutzim in the Negev desert, Mt Oak has experienced successful efforts at revitalising arid, overgrazed land upon which hundreds have lived for short periods (Conway 1988:10). According to Michael Conway, 'the architect of this agricultural wonder', a few residents have planted 7,000 trees, built channels and drip irrigations systems to arrest major soil erosion and transform part of the land into a 'highly productive garden' (Jesser 1985:1).

power or control' accorded the Trustees over the land or the community (their ownership would be 'nominal' only), 'active participation' would be encouraged, and control and decision making would rest with the basics of 'self-regulation' and 'self determination' (Cairns quoted in Griffiths 1988a:4). Griffiths states, quite astutely, that 'this was to be the demonstration, the "down to earthing", of the Cotter manifesto'. It was to be 'land for *The People*, controlled by *The People*, and in a sense owned by *The People*'. In this participatory democracy, the residents were to be free people, 'unhindered by outside ownership, control, manipulation, interference. Free from all the oppressive and alienating forces Cairns spoke and wrote about so prolifically' (Griffiths 1988b:15). It was to form a precedent for, to use Cairns' words, how we can 'get rid of the capitalist principle of ownership', and, Griffiths continues, 'the primary constraints would derive from "ecological guidelines", the needs of the earth; and from a commitment to personal growth and group harmony, the needs of the people' (ibid).

Many participants contributed money, including the entrance fee, on the understanding that the land would be held in trust - on the basis of clear undertakings given publicly by Cairns before and during the event.¹⁵ Yet, Cairns and Morosi (and Wyuna Incorporated - Morosi's Canberra community), holding title and control of the community land through a company in which they both held shares - Research for Survival P/L - asserted ownership rights on the land and refused to transfer title to a trust body, as was originally conceived (Griffiths 1988a:4).¹⁶ In a remarkable series of events, claiming the Mt Oak experiment a failure, its occupants 'squatters' and 'trespassers', Cairns, the Morosi family and their affiliates attempted to remove residents (via eviction notice, intimidation and assault: cf: Jesser 1985:1; *Green Alliance Newsletter* 1988)¹⁷ who lived in fear and frustration due to their uncertain status in relation to the land. Cairns had also agisted sheep on the property - a direct insult to those who were attempting to repair the land from the devastating environmental consequences of sheep grazing. According to Griffiths, the Mt Oak/Bredbo affair revealed the contrast between the 'dishonest materialism of the "old wave" ... [and]

¹⁵ Including the major contributor, Alex Eunson. It was revealed by ABC's Four Corners in 1986 that while Eunson gave the money on the understanding that it was a donation to the Foundation, Cairns claimed it was a personal gift to him!

¹⁶ After Bredbo, Cairns had approached Aboriginal rights activist Burnam Burnam to act as trustee for the Mt Oak land. Burnam Burnam agreed. In 1984, he inquired of Cairns in a letter about the trust, but no reply ever came from Cairns (from added commentary to document: 'Recent media coverage of the Mt Oak situation' - 1985).

¹⁷ According to Griffiths, Cairns clearly intended to transfer the property title to Morosi and her community, Wyuna. In October 1985, the Morosi family and affiliates, terrorised community members and visitors committing assault, breaking and entering and theft at Mt Oak - apparently with Cairns support (Griffiths, B. *Green Alliance Network Newsletter* Oct. 1985.)

the youthful, idealistic naivete of the new - the “alternative lifestylers” (Griffiths 1988a:4). It became a site of contestation between the principles of capitalist ownership and communitarianism.¹⁸

The Mt Oak community proved resilient. They began a newsletter in 1978, the *Mt Oak DTE Community News*, set up a constitution based around freedom and ecological responsibility - ‘a land without owners’ - and held a 10 year anniversary ConFest in 1988 which enabled the establishment of a Free Mt Oak fund needed to challenge Cairns and Morosi in the Supreme Court (*The Mt Oak Time* March 10, 1988). And, as a testament to the community’s persistent struggle, claiming funds had been misappropriated and title vested fraudulently, in 1998, the Mt Oak Community mounted a successful Supreme Court action, in which, after more than 20 years of uncertainty, their claims were acknowledged and title became vested in a trust body nominated by the community.¹⁹

Further discontent arose when Cairns prepared to run a fourth national gathering on French Island in Westernport Bay, Victoria in January 1980. DTE was clearly dissatisfied with the arrangements as the contract proposed by the landowner (a Melbourne real estate agent and friend of Cairns) would secure him 50% of the profit, and give him power to veto decisions regarding the event. Many were nonplussed that DTE labour and capital were to be used to make improvements to private property (*DTE Canberra* 4, March 1980:16). Yet, what was most distressing about French Island was that the national co-ordinating body of DTE (ADTEN) were already committed to a national event in the Rainbow Region in May 1980, and felt that Cairns was railroading that effort once again. The state bodies who met to co-ordinate the national Rainbow Region event did not support Cairns’ event which, they argued, would divert valuable resources and energy. Concerned with Cairns’ proposal to use the ‘Down to Earth’/‘ConFest’ name, ADTEN wrote to Cairns urging that he refrain from such usage in his promotion of the French Island event (King 1980:4). But Cairns, who had ceased attending DTE meetings from June 1979, went ahead with French Island using the DTE name anyway (advertising it as the ‘DTE National ConFest’) claiming, in a front page article in *The Age* (Jan. 14 1980:1) that ‘it [Down to Earth] was a concept I brought into existence’. Bitterness was tasted all round as Cairns was said to have ‘walked out’ on DTE’s democratic process and,

¹⁸ The new settlement was seemingly marred from the outset. According to Simon Freidin, as the intention to purchase the land was not passed on to those setting up the festival, the infrastructure was temporary. For example, the swimming pools purchased to act as holding tanks for water supply had collapsed by the end of the festival.

¹⁹ Explained in a letter to the author from Barrie Griffiths (16/8/98).

somewhat pettily, withdrawing his invitation to DTE Vic to participate in his event (*DTE Canberra* 4, March 1980:19). Through the eyes of DTE Victoria's long time historian, George Schmidt, 'the French Island incident' had a positive effect: 'the fledgling sons and daughters served notice on the patriarch of the family of their independence' (Schmidt 1983:10).

Cairns' actions seemed to be motivated out of distrust. He argued that the declaration of a national organisation contradicted that which he believed DTE represented: spontaneity and freedom.

To me DTE is a coming together of people in all kinds of ways primarily aiming at liberation from sensory repression and then, at self determination; not more of the old forms of central control in the name of democracy or consensus. (Cairns in Peter White, *Maggies Farm* 7, March 1980:22)

It was considered that the demands of the 'national co-ordinators' (contemptuously positioned in inverted commas) and 'a few people elsewhere', was 'an example of the old form of central control masquerading as democracy'. He accused them of rapidly moving to become a State or Government within DTE (ibid) jeopardising his vision of 'many spontaneous activities each generating its own capacity for self-determination freely and autonomously' (in King 1980:4).

The dispute raised a debate over structure, one which has not been resolved, even at the time of writing. Many in DTE thought Cairns' position on structure naive. He wanted to move beyond politics. Others argued that there is no organisation without structure, without power, to which Cairns himself had been no stranger. The position taken in a post-Berri 'DTE Festival Planning' document (Fegan 1980) - which cited Freeman (1970) - was that the very idea of structurelessness, as a response to over structure, is in itself 'intrinsically ideological' and capricious. Eliminating structure triggers a leaderless group prone to insularity and internal strife. And "structurelessness" becomes a smokescreen. It becomes a way of masking power and is usually advocated by those who are most powerful. The rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few'. Elitism, it is argued, thrives on the informal group structure or 'structurelessness', individuals in such a situation having 'no obligation to be responsible to the group at large'. When a movement or organisation does not choose spokespeople, 'the Star System' is a consequence (Fegan

1980:6).²⁰ In contrast, ADTEN sought to harness structure, developing skills in co-operation, co-ordination and financial management.

As for Cairns, it was considered that he had ‘alienated wave after wave of good people by enforcing [his] own decisions’ (B. Lavary, treasurer of ADTEN in an open letter to Cairns - 25 June 1980 - cited in Ormonde 1981:244). This was evident at both Cotter and especially Bredbo, where, contrary to the principle of “active participation”, Cairns, Morosi and Ditchburn moved into the ‘open situation they had created’, assuming the vital functions of decision making (ie. selecting the site) and financial control (excluding others from such roles), running temporary, centralised and authoritarian autocracies (Griffiths 1988a:5). An unstructured organisation gave rise to financial mismanagement. Cairns had been the principal convenor of the first two events which ran at almost a 100% loss. Later at Berri, where the finances were controlled by a co-ordinating group (not including Cairns or Ditchburn), a surplus was obtained for the first time (Berry 1979).²¹ Indeed, Berri, a region with historical foundations in the 1890s utopian Berri Village Settlement (Metcalf 1986:101), was considered to be a model event. Co-ordinators meetings, initiated at Earth Haven in July 1978, were the key to success (Fegan 1980:9), and DTE were able to refund Cairns the money with which he backed Cotter.

In addition, many questioned Cairns’ personal commitment to the alternative lifestyle (‘voluntary simplicity’). Morosi had already dressed him down with the comment ‘you espouse freedom for everyone but deny it to yourself’ (in Ormonde 1981:196). At Berri, Cairns ‘remained neatly attired and closely shaved throughout, departing daily to the Berri hotel for showers’ (Horin 1979:31). Others, more to the point, challenged his commitment to the movement. For Griffiths, the involvement of Cairns (and Morosi and Ditchburn) with the alternative movement from 1976 to 1979 ‘highlighted the conflict between genuine alternative values and capitalist opportunism and power-seeking’. Further,

Cairns was not himself part of the alternative movement. He was not an inspiring leader. His speeches were long and boring, his vocabulary (academic Marxist) as foreign as his lifestyle. He was, after all, ex-Deputy Prime Minister, veteran of bullshit politics and powerseeking. He was an experienced and professional public speaker and debater. These young people

²⁰ Similar problems have been reported at Rainbow Gatherings. The Family promotes ‘an egalitarian vision of a world without leaders’ (Niman 1997:202): ‘with no one *in* power, no one is *out* of power’. Yet, as Niman contends, this apparent power vacuum attracts those hungry for it. De facto hierarchies form and ‘power trippers’ emerge among groups like ‘the Gate crew’ or Rainbow Peacekeepers who negotiate with authorities like the Forest Service (ibid:48).

²¹ Berry wrote a large marketing assignment, submitted as part of an M Admin at Monash University analysing the publicity campaign for Berri.

respected Cairns; he inspired confidence in himself as a sincere person, however stiff and self important his manner. (Griffiths 1988a:4)

This indicates Cairns was not, in regard to ConFest, 'on the bus'. His conspicuous absence following Bredbo demonstrated that he was no longer on the DTE bus either. Cairns, says Griffiths, 'must take much responsibility for misdirecting the potential, by reinforcing the softness and relative impotence, of the "movement" he summoned' (ibid:6).

DTE's second (and last) serious commitment to a permanent alternative society, the 1980 Rainbow Region ConFest, was designed with the conference process foremost and separate from the festive aspect. In an attempt to prevent the repetition of the perceived superficiality in previous ConFests, a series of independent and intensive workshops (of 3-10 day duration), to be held in secret locations, were planned.²² It was proposed that each workshop group would collate, distil and communicate their results via written reports to the wider DTE community (a 'communiversity').²³ Audio-visual records of workshops were to be shown to all participants at the ensuing festival held at the Wyaliba community. According to one of the co-ordinators:

[t]hese workshops, which will be selectively taped, filmed and written up, are by far the most meaningful co-ordination of intelligence and balanced action towards social change ever to have been envisaged or organised in Australia, if not the world. (Spain, *Maggies Farm* 7, March 1980:15)

The event would inspire and assist people to 'permanently adopt and explore alternative lifestyles'. The preparations were undertaken with such an air of optimism it was deigned that the workshops 'will cover all the skills and knowledge necessary for actively implementing a viable alternative or (as some see it) "New Age" civilisation' (*DTE SA* 2, 1979:36-37). Indeed, the prime objective of the event was to 'resettle tens of thousands of unemployed upon cooperative owned farms' (*Sunshine News* 55, April 24 1980:10).

However, except for a small spontaneous gathering at Mt Warning (not Wyaliba), the event was marred by heavy and sustained rains flooding the region. ADTEN's moment had come and gone. The absence of a strong political praxis, internal rifts, financial mismanagement, wasted 'energy' and resources, communication problems due to the distances involved, and the attraction of the 'permanent festival' of Nimbin and numerous

²² One planning meeting (3/9/79) was held at the base camp of Australia's first anti-logging blockade - Terania Creek (Spain, *Maggies Farm* 7, March 1980:15).

²³ A feat achieved by the media tools and production workshop, the participants in which produced *The Gumboot Gazette* (edited by Pip Wilson - who edited *Maggies Farm* and initiated the Rainbow Archives).

communal experiments in permaculture and building prototype hamlets there and elsewhere around the country, contributed to the demise of ADTEN and the disaffection of state 'families' (especially any potential NSW DTE). The Rainbow Region disaster was 'the beginning of the end' for DTE, or so Rawlins imagined (1982:46).

Phase Two (1981-1994): DTE Victoria

As the strongest remaining 'family', DTE Victoria rose from the ashes of ADTEN.²⁴ With fluctuating interest and commitment the Melbourne based group evolved over this period preoccupied with operating successful, co-operative and financially viable events. Having been involved in the earlier DTE experiments (especially the paradigmatic Berri event), DTE Vic,²⁵ determined to develop an effective structure, became incorporated as a Co-operative Society Limited in March 1979 and was later registered as a Community Advancement Society under the Co-operation Act of 1981. Though crucial additions and amendments have been made to its constitution in recent times, the basic faculties of the Co-operative remain largely unchanged to this day. Required to operate in accordance with the Co-operative Societies Regulations 1982,²⁶ the Society has seven elected directors, a secretary, a treasurer (now a committee), weekly board and general meetings (minuted), AGMs (accounts and elections) and a newsletter (produced somewhat randomly, depending on input). All members, including the 'core group' or board, are unpaid volunteers.²⁷ Though this section investigates the period 1981 - 1994, a small DTE 'family' emerged in Victoria in 1977 which, after a small post-Cotter gathering in the Dandenongs in January, took up shopfront residence in Bridge Rd Richmond and began issuing a monthly news sheet. In the following year small local festivals (at La Trobe University - 'Urban Alternatives Conference' - and the Burnley Oval) were organised, Mollison and Stephen Gaskin were sponsored to present lectures ('workshops'), a weekly Radio show was aired on 3CR, and the newsletter entered print. In the same year, the Melbourne based group hosted the first DTE national meeting at Earth Haven, where for nine months George Schmidt ran personal growth weekends. A

²⁴ Though DTEQld remained, and still remain as DTENEA, they are few in number.

²⁵ To which I shall refer interchangeably as the 'Co-operative', the 'Society' or just 'DTE'.

²⁶ Now, the Victorian Co-operatives Act 1996.

²⁷ The purchase of five \$2.00 shares makes an individual a member, and thereby a shareholder, in the Society.

new office opened at Fitzroy's Universal Workshop²⁸ in November 1978 where a small festival was held in January 1979 and where a range of courses were offered in the skill sharing adult education program Open Mind (for instance Cairns ran a course on 'the psychology of change').²⁹

Initially the Co-operative laboured to pursue Cairns' 'new society'. In 1979, in the first Annual Report (there were only ever two) Peter White argued 'unless we get a sound alternative society developed, then we'll all go down with the social ship. There must be a fundamental change in human attitudes about how we live if we are to survive. Scrabbling for profit as the catchcry of our present society will only lead to social death' (*DTE Annual Report 1979:7*). In the earliest set of aims I have located (in a document signed 'G. Schmidt Secretary DTE (Vic) Co-op Soc Ltd' circa 1979) Schmidt stated 'DTE Vic is in existence for one reason: to assist in the development of an alternative society'. Such would be achieved by promoting personal growth and human awareness programs and developing communications networks. Schmidt's rather loose aims were listed as follows:

- a) Concern for people and the environment.
- b) Creation of more meaningful, fulfilling, balanced, peaceful and happy lifestyles, in harmony with nature, ourselves and fellow human beings.
- c) Fostering of a consciousness which will enable people to distinguish between real needs and repressive, artificial values of existing social systems.
- d) Co-operation and co-ordination with allied organisations.

DTE's constitution was also formulated in 1979 with a list of objectives (a charter) which has not been altered substantially since. Those objectives considered most important were reproduced on a more recent ConFest hand out.

- (i) to examine and develop philosophies and practices related to Education, Agriculture, Energy production and storage, Architecture and building, Health and diet, Social structures, Community welfare systems, Religion, Food preparation, Conservation and Law; (ii) To carry out or sponsor research into such matters; (iii) To carry out public education programs regarding such matters by the production and dissemination of written material, films and audio and video tape recordings; (iv) To hold festivals, conferences, seminars

²⁸ The Universal Workshop was a renovated three-storey factory housing a cinema, live theatre, media resource centre, restaurant, roof garden and cafe, twelve shops including a bookshop, bulk food store and bakery, an art gallery and a natural healing school (Cock 1979:33).

²⁹ There would only be two other urban events like these organised by DTE - the Annual Exhibition of Alternatives in August 1981 and July 1982 at the Collingwood Education Centre.

and public meetings to further these aims; (v) To acquire and maintain lands and buildings for education, recreation, or other community purposes, and to promote and assist clubs, societies or other organisations for any such purposes. (from ConFest 1994/95 hand out)

Cumbersome and decidedly vague, the DTE project has become difficult to accomplish (and the few who are today aware of this charter, are concerned that many of the goals have never been achieved).

As a lesson acquired from the first phase, it was understood that survival was dependent upon the Society taking a 'co-operative path' (White and Carter 1980). One simple practical philosophy which took hold early was 'Loving Action' (indeed the theme of Glenlyon II was 'Viable Futures Through Loving Action'). This basic ethic of human agency was disseminated and discussed at a DTE research weekend at Lang Lang in 1980 (Schmidt 1980). It consisted of five basic ethical standards: sharing, caring, honesty, respect and patience.³⁰ In the build up to the Co-operative's first ConFest the message was simple:

[that] our actions have an impact upon everyone else in the world, and if we want it to be a better place to live, then our actions have to be loving and positive. Thus changing yourself means changing the world. And if enough people who believe and work in this fashion co-operate, the changes can become...? (White and Carter 1980:8)

Early forming the bedrock of the Co-operative, a strong message of the 'spirit' of selfless service, co-operation and responsibility is present here. The open-endedness of this passage is critical. The future is not set, the reader can participate in its emergence.

One critical factor in DTE's evolution is its avoidance of master narratives, political or religious. I suspect that, since one dominant discourse could not represent this melting pot of alternative philosophy and practice successfully, the organisation came to adopt a stance of neutrality. In contrast to the welter of manifestos, critiques, and predictions erupting in the mid to late seventies, the second phase is characterised by a dearth of commentary on and support for social, political, economic or ecological issues. Indeed, since Cairns, individuals pushing ideologies, objectives and solutions to contemporaneous social conditions and environmental problems have not achieved much status (directorship) in the Co-operative. A non-allegiance or alliance with any specific political groups or movements arose as such attracts the greatest diversity of people and interests,

³⁰ 'Loving Action' was also the guiding praxis of the Communiiversity at Geregarrow near Grafton NSW.

and provides DTE with the necessary support (from local councils, police and residents) to operate its events successfully. However, though the Society may be neutral, its members are far from apolitical or irreligious, a contradiction which is perhaps best conveyed in an early statement that DTE:

is made up of people who all have different solutions to different problems ... [It] is non-politically aligned, yet I believe everything we do is political. Certainly a lot of people in DTE are politically aware and committed to political action as individuals. DTE is non-religiously aligned, yet again most people in DTE are searching for spiritual awareness. (J. Hobson *DTE Canberra* 3, Dec. 1979:12)

‘We Are at the Threshold of Major Change’: the New Age?

Over the Australia Day weekend of January 1981, the Society held its first ConFest at Glenlyon on the Loddon River near Daylesford (Vic). Following the precedent set by the earlier events, the occasion attracted a diverse range of speakers and practitioners who regarded the event as a staging ground for their own agendas and visions. Some travelled to Glenlyon I to demand action. In a lecture he gave at the event, Barrie Griffiths chided participants:

It’s not enough to be concerned, it’s not enough to be aware ... we have to *live* it, we have to change the way we live, and we have to do it radically; we have to change our consumption patterns ... There is more to be done than coming together to talk and massage one another, and sing and dance and play music ... we have to create a whole new society, we have to reconstitute our battered environment, we have to create co-operative structures and learn how to function within them together. (Griffiths 1981:11)

He further entreated, ‘[l]et us make life a “Confest”, and let’s do it well’. In his nineties, sculptor, William Ricketts, came to share his enthusiasm for the nascent movement:

Down to Earth means just that; we have to live that, for the sake of the divine within ... I know now that I must join with you all in this great movement, as I’ve done here today, for the first time ... the Down to Earth movement must strengthen and unite ..., until we have a fighting force that will tell those people in Parliament, just take your hands off what is left of this country. That’s all. It belongs to God and it belongs to us; and we’re not going to see it destroyed. (Ricketts 1981:2-3)

Clearly, the period remained charged with expectation, as was reflected in the theme for Glenlyon I: 'Welcoming and Exploring the New Age'. Though I will not become entangled in what would here be an unproductive discourse on the definition of 'New Age',³¹ the theme is significant. Resurrecting and renewing the momentum of the earlier, 'classical', period of DTE, the Society was keen to facilitate an event with a truly millenarian theme, an event which was to usher in nothing less than a 'New Age'. In the promotional build up to Glenlyon, such a 'New Age' was intended, for the most part, to be an approaching and enduring era (an emergent historical period) - an 'Age' which many would interpret via the vernacular of the popularly predicted 'Age of Aquarius'.³² Moreover, participants were called upon to collaborate in bringing it into being. A handbook distributed to ConFesters stated that 'the "New Age" is an event that simply does not just happen: it's made by people working together'. Participants entering the front gate were then provided literature informing them that a new era can be realised - given serious commitment on their part: 'We are re-charged to begin building the "New Age" when we return home' (White 1981:7).

³¹ A complex sociological phenomenon (cf. Prince [1989], whose polythetic classification incorporates a vast diversity of people/subcultures beliefs and practices). As a 'meronymy' - where a range of distinguishable phenomena are cast into a single category - Possamai advocates an unpacking of New Age Spirituality into sub-types (1998).

³² No doubt such a 'New Age' remained sufficiently ambiguous to invite a plurality of interpretations from participants (e.g. alternative spirituality, personal philosophy, communitarianism, eco-consciousness).



The Glenlyon I (1981) site mandala. According to the event's co-ordinators, Glenlyon's circular site inspired them to plan the ConFest 'on the principle of a mandala' (from White and Carter 1980:8).

Writing before the event, White and Carter (1980:8-9) proposed that Glenlyon I would generate an historical transformation of historical and religious significance. Here, the authors divine the impending period as the most recent in the succession of turning points in human history, 'decision points' bearing key philosophies and belief systems. So,

following on the heels of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, the Protestant Reformation and Materialism:

[w]e are at the threshold of major change ... Our age's turning point is close and what is apparent is that the choices for us are but two: a materialist competitive path, or a loving co-operative path. The forces of the former seem almost insurmountable, whereas the latter is virtually unknown, weak. But in the materialist path lies the seeds of its own destruction and the destruction of the entire planet, so powerful it has become ... A co-operative approach on the other hand ensures that people, whatever their glorious diversity, will work together to achieve some goal. The 'alternative' people who believe more in co-operation and self-sufficiency than in competition and submission are also linking up all across the world and their numbers are growing ... In Australia there are thousands who are espousing or interested in the co-operative path. They too are linking together. A ConFest is an event which enables people to get together, to see in each other the dawning and potential of a New Age. (ibid)

Therefore, it seems that the new era shall arrive so long as enough people choose the alternative, 'the co-operative path'. Yet, considering the 'New Age' to be synonymous with a new historical era remains conjectural as DTE had never produced any substantive documentation on this 'New Age', and how ConFest may have realised any permanent condition/era under this mantle remains unclear. But White and Carter go on to make a most revealing proclamation: that '[i]n a few days the people who come to a ConFest create their own new age' (White and Carter 1980:9). Though an aside to the general thrust of the narrative, this comment conveys, quite presciently, the logic and design of the future event, and the meaning that ConFest holds for many current participants: that is, the potential it harbours for the realisation of an unparalleled - in the lives of its participants - sense of transcendence. The aside represents a far more accurate rendering of the reality of ConFest, since it - rather than procuring lasting transformations comparable to the emergence of Christianity, Islam or Buddhism! - forecasts the reputation for immediatism and possibility for change (on personal and social levels) that this liminal landscape, this periodic threshold, has come to hold.

Schmidt (in the circa 1979 document) made a point of stressing continuity with DTE's initial period. He went on to remark that the Society would not seek revolutionary change: '[c]ollectively we are aware that revolutions have, till now, not achieved much in the way of long lasting or globally acceptable changes. Mainly because force was used, force by the use of weapons, economics or group pressure'. A further comment represents a

succinct depiction of the direction DTE had taken: 'For people who are searching for a new lifestyle, DTE can be the vehicle through which they can come to a satisfactory solution'. Rather than dragging out the tiresome 'new society' proposition, I feel Schmidt's statement accurately conveys the emergent rationale of the Co-operative, and moreover, the purpose of its 'product', ConFest. It was not the unobtainable and utopian 'new society' but 'a new lifestyle' that would now become desirable. And the intimation of possibility in the comment 'DTE can be the vehicle' connotes the logic of its progeny, a temporal process through which alternative lifestyle(s) are sought, performed, consumed and discovered by way of diet, clothing, sexuality, art, spirituality and politics - all exchanged, contested and lived on site. The shift is consistent with that identified by alternative movement commentators as 'revolution by lifestyle' (Rigby in Metcalf 1986:81). There would be no more prophets and pedagogues 'uniting the masses' with manifestos, nor 'oracles' about 'military-industrial monstrous tentacles'. DTE no longer promoted 'the great transformation'. ConFest would no longer usher in 'the New Age'. Such pretensions evaporated. ConFest had become, in this second phase, a DiY event: a multi-dimensional experiment in alternative living.

ConFest's capacity to impact the post and inter-ConFest world came to depend largely upon the periodical adherence to a co-operative ethos. The idea was that if people, mostly strangers to one another, could converge for a week at an isolated location in a social environment of their own creation - a community with few agents of control and coercion (e.g. police, hired security, TVs), shared responsibilities (e.g. child minding, waste management, community safety, site maintenance), voluntary work, free education (workshops) and acceptance of difference and individual needs - then this would demonstrate to the participants themselves what could be achieved in the wider social field, in their neighbourhoods, communities, places of work, that 'the DTE spirit of co-operation' could be taken home.

Conference and Festival: an Ambivalent Union

Holding ConFest had then become DTE's key motivation, with members primarily concerned with the planning, promotion, facilitation and operation of successive events. While the Co-operative may have become neutral in the interests of its own survival, its product has always been far from neutral. The peculiarity of this ALE, distinguishing it from most pop, rock, country and folk music festivals, raves and New Age fairs, is its amalgamation of Festival and Conference. It became a popular seasonal location where

the perennial quest for release and diversion, for play (Festival), met the contemporary offerings of alternative cultural awareness (Conference workshops). It became a site where the hedonistic excesses of the carnivalesque coincided with the serious business of opposition (to dominant socio-cultural patterns such as: work, health and diet, religion, sexuality, technology, consumption), a context wherein a rapturous Dionysian sense of vertigo and quest for transcendence would engage creatively with an Apollonian inclination for order, organisation and the achievement of goals.³³ ConFest licensed transgression, becoming a sensually and socially promiscuous landscape where the fantasies and ideas of thousands of participants could be given free expression. It gained reputation as a transitional topos, an occasion whereupon one's spontaneous expressions, uninhibited tactile convulsions and exposure to a tableau of alternative practices, beliefs and behaviours may give rise to many different transformations: on psychological, spiritual, social, political and cultural levels simultaneously, a matrix of potentiality.³⁴

Conferencing is, according to Svendsen (1999), the significant partner in ConFest. For this ConFest disciple, the conferencing dimension is a catalyst for 'the generation of independently thinking self-organising ... moral agents for the wider unconscious society' (ibid:131-2). Conferencing is conventionally mediated through a huge range of workshops, discussions and forums reaching a total of around 300 at the earlier summer events. Participants have been invited to *do workshops* on themes ranging from a spectrum of holistic therapies designed for the purposes of personal growth, to a multiplicity of educational sessions and interactive theatre and dance 'playshops', to politically motivated sessions (contesting and resisting spiritual pathos, nuclear family, drug prohibition, sexual repression and environmental abuse). Many workshop themes convey a complex relationship between personal growth and ecological sustainability (ecological self/global community) - being healthy and being green are connected modalities of authenticity.

Characterised by crowds of strangers uniting for the purpose of having 'serious fun', the Festival dimension complements the serious business of self-healing and social/political activism. I have chosen one well known example, an experience which has been referred to as 'the Raindance' transpiring on New Year's Eve at Walwa III (1990/91). Dik Freestun is a competent commentator:

³³ David Cruise gives this a different lens by stating 'ConFest was born in 1976, the father a conference and the mother a festival' (*DTE News* 80 Nov.1994:5).

³⁴ For instance, in its second phase, ConFest inspired intentional communities at Murrindal (Vic) and Om Shalom (NSW), and a seasonal festival community at The Grove (NSW - from 1992). Earthcore (from 1993), promoted as an 'electronic music and lifestyle festival' at Easter 1999 (2.5 km from ConFest), possesses ConFestian derivations.

[B]eginning an hour or so before dark, some 2000 fun lovers mostly wearing nothing but body paints, willow leaves and natural adornments, took off to lead a mighty Pageant/Procession, which grew to take in thousands! It took around 50 to carry a VERY long Rainbow Serpent, made of a huge and heavy ship's rope, dressed with ribbons, paint, etc and a big, coloured head. Around it, walked, ran, jumped and danced the 100s & 1000s of painted people with rainbow flags waving, all sorts of musical instrument, drums, clap-sticks, pots & pans ... the Pageant progressed, round the island, through Craft street, past the Power Co'³⁵ and was headed to the Stage area when the STORM moved in. Over the hills came big black billowing clouds, thunder and lightening! ... That didn't seem to affect the height of Natural Energy swelling to a peak with every lightening flash - Cheering! Whooping! Yelling! Leaping! Drumming! Dancing! Wild - the primal mob seemed between 2 to 3 thousand strong. By the time the storm raged in with squalls of rain in wind gusts - driving- lashing - thunder - lightening - the people/serpent/rainbow/storm/energy performed a circle, spiral, in and around CAR-HENGE (... two old wrecked utes mounted on their tails 3 metres apart with a station wagon across the top, tied balanced and propped. Painted with symbols and rainbow colours).³⁶ From it's inside centre hung a great BELL - fullon - steel - loud - everyone rang it all confest thru' - but NOW at the height of the Storm Pageant it was ringing wildly! Some 44gal Drums up-turned became Bass Rhythm beaten with sticks to match thunder ... After dark, [though the storm had gone] the primal energy of thousands didn't weaken. (Freestun *DTENEA* Feb. 1991:14-15)

Akin to the way Maleny participants registered the post-Fire Event rain storm over New Year 1991/92 (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:211), many ConFesters interpreted the Walwa thunder storm 'as a divine sanction of the efficacy' of the festival.

The first events in phase two were organised with the specific intention of honouring that which, it was considered, made ConFest unique - its Conference component. Seeking 'Viable Futures', Glenlyon II (1982) featured a 'Community Politics Village' with workshops exploring current political issues and grassroots philosophies. Boasting the theme 'Making Alternatives Work', Baranga I occasioned a host of workshops on practical alternatives. A flier for the event carried the query: 'Do you feel threatened by an Orwellian vision of 1984?' and a newsletter (*DTE News* 37) promoting the event as a kind of reactionary antidote to a host of maladies, reminded patrons 'we are facing the 2nd

³⁵ Walwa III was a showcase of renewable energy sources for a small community. The Nimbin based Rainbow Power Company set up 6,000 watts of solar panels and a steam engine to power the lights, hot water and cool rooms (Hulm, 1990:10; 90/91 Handbook:10). Rainbow Power was formed by Peter van der Wyk. Otherwise known as 'Peter Pedals', he gave workshops at Berri back in 1979 after riding his solar powered bike there from Sydney (*Martin's Bend Newsletter* 2, 12/4/79).

³⁶ Built by the international industrial sculpture group, Mutoid Waste Co., who initially formed in Britain in 1984. Their post-apocalyptic 'carhenge' dates back to Glastonbury, 1987 (Earle et al. 1994:25-6).

depression of this century'. The event was designed to educate 'survival skills'. Isolation in nuclear families and false consumerist values could be countered by learning about 'mutual support' on rural communities. 'Standards of health and nutrition are low ... learn how to care for your body and mind'. 'We are alienated and distanced from each other ... learn how to network'. 'TV makes us passive and apathetic. Take control. Join in and enrich your life with music, drama, poetry'.

Baringa II (1984/85), described as 'a celebration of earth-conscious people', demonstrated well the combination of the Conference/Festival components. The theme for this event was simply 'Peace' reflecting the national and global anti-nuclear outrage at the time, especially the growing numbers of nuclear powered and and/or armed warships docking in Australian ports (indeed, it was The International Year of Peace). In the wake of Sydney's Peace March and Rally in April 1984 (in which 100 000 participated), and a blockade of the uranium mine at Roxby Downs in South Australia in August (and the film *The Day After*), ConFest would hold a 'group visualisation for peace'. The occasion attracted a host of activist organisations such as FOE, The Daintree Action Group, Redfern's Blackrose Anarchist Bookstore collective, the NDP and Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND) (Paul White 1985:28).³⁷ The event featured a 'Wimmins' village, and for its participants, it would mark the beginning of the final year of the UN 'Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace' (1976-1985). Later, in 1986, the 'Peace Train' (a mobile peace education resource unit) stopped at Glenlyon III as it travelled the nation visiting co-ops, festivals and country centres around Australia before terminating at Magic Garden for DTENEA's inaugural All One Family Gathering.

Yet the Baringa events (especially Baringa I: 1983/84) had also precipitated the future alignment of ConFest with Australia's 'cult of the New Year' (ConFest and New Year are now inseparable) and the steady domination of the Festival element, which, in today's promotion, is invariably intonated as the event's foremost attraction. In the late 1980s and early '90s, the social and political activist presence declined (the Political, Anarchist, Environmental and Women's villages did not have the presence they had had previously). This trend has invited a host of indictments and ridicule. In May 1994, George Schmidt stated 'we haven't done what we set out to do, to guide our younger brothers and sisters ... we haven't given them the tools. ConFest is now no more than a delightful psychological wank'. Criticising the organisational structure of the Society (in June 1994), David Cruise

³⁷ The latter had formed at Pine Gap where the 'Women for Survival' encampment was initiated in 1983 drawing inspiration from the efforts of women struggling for a nuclear/patriarchy free

believed DTE had 'not honoured its charter ... as it was expressed in the early days ... we have lost the path ... the incumbent group of current directors have lost the conference process'. Schmidt, in the Moama '93/94 handbook (6), expresses his concern that ConFests had become 'el-cheapo camping holidays'.

The Society had begun with fathomless depths of creative input and co-operative enthusiasm. The steady decline of the conferencing process is one reason why 'energy' (DTE volunteers) and ConFest populations ebbed rather dramatically at points throughout the eighties. After Glenlyon II (1982), though a small Exhibition of Alternatives was held at Collingwood Education Centre in July 1982, there was not another event until Baringa I (1983/84) near Wangaratta. Despite attempts to reinvigorate the co-operative essence of ConFest by promoting later events at Glenlyon (1986 and 1986/87) under the banner of 'Co-operation', Glenlyon IV (1986/87) was reputedly 'down in energy input' as the Society lost members (and their valuable skills and resources), the result, according to Ron Fletcher, of factionalism, power struggles - the 'shafting of opponents' - and the absence of consensual process (R. Fletcher *DTE News* 57, Oct. 1987; *DTE News* 59, Aug. 1988). The drained 'energy' prompted Fletcher to urge the Society to investigate the possibility of forming regional groups in rural Victoria or perhaps expand interstate, thereby returning to a national organisation with each group acting as resource bases for one main annual festival (*DTE News* 58, March 1988).

The dearth of on-site volunteers at ConFest has been of critical concern. Members of the Black Rose Collective, who co-ordinated the *Self Management* village at Baringa II, indicated at an early stage, that DTE organisational structures made access difficult for ConFesters. The extremely informal nature of the site structure 'consisting predominantly of highly motivated individuals each doing their own thing and coordinating mainly through a complex web of personal relationships' renders ConFest quite impenetrable for newcomers:

The people who want to get involved can't find a way in; most people with grievances about the way things operate can't find an appropriate forum to air them or get things changed, whilst the organisers become grossly overworked, withdrawn, bad tempered and/or resentful. In short the whole situation becomes intensely alienating for everybody concerned. (Alan et al. 1985:12)

Site workers thus also find 'little or no time for their own education' - workshopping. The Black Rose Collective intimated that the further separation of organisers from workshops

planet at 'Peace Camps' like Britain's Greenham Common (cf. Roseneil 1995:101-2), and

is possibly the root cause of the decline of the conferencing dimension: 'If the organisers themselves are shying away from educative processes then they are hardly likely to provide a continuing forum for other people in this area' (ibid).

The on-site organising of events in the latter stage of the second phase is indicative of the Co-operative's direction at the time. As echoed in workshops and other infrastructural arrangements, events appeared to be largely controlled by a small minority. At Moama II (1994/95) a centralised workshop district appeared where several marquees could be found all within short walking distance. The arrangement was designed to be efficient - it was made practical for participants to locate and move between workshop sites. However, since workshops were largely centralised and mixed, the unique potential of the event was circumvented. This structure meant that uniting around an explicit theme in a relatively removed sub-space (village-nucleus) was precluded. With planning 'dictated' by a small group, the ethic of responsibility and the effect of autonomy thought to render ConFest desirable was seriously challenged. Curiously, the event also heralded the appearance of the 'Nothing in Particular' village, perhaps a cynical, almost nihilist reflection on the direction the event was taking. By Moama III (Easter '95), there were further indications that the co-operative ethos was waning as significant workloads were undertaken by contractors.

The Society was then challenged by the breaking down of ConFest's Conference process coupled with its co-operative ethos. To prevent such a loss, members chose various strategies, therein defending the boundaries of tradition. For example, ConFesters purchasing tickets for Moama I (93/94) were provided with a handbook which stressed that they 'take responsibility for [their] own needs and feelings' (6). The handbook included 'a participation ticket' allocating participant's duties (front gate, garbage, toilets, staffing information, odd job person, car park attendant, fire/security, and children's village helper) which they were obliged to undertake for one hour of one day of the event.

'It's Always the Darkest Before the Dawn'

In his 1979 document, Schmidt makes it clear that the Society was attempting to avoid hierarchies, seeking to 'minimise the chances of secrecy, power play, empire building or other negative attitudes'. Yet the Society has not been free of hierarchical organisation, secrecy and power struggles as the conflict that came to a head during 1994/95 demonstrates. Chance would have it that, as part of my research, I began attending

Seneca in New York State (Krasniewicz 1994).

meetings¹ in the early stages of a crisis (the second in DTE's history) which resulted in a schism in 1995 (the resignation of 4 directors and the emergence of Earth Haven). Informants with lengthy involvements in the Co-operative reflect on this time as a period rife with paranoia, confusion, mutual distrust and open hostility, a predicament from which DTE could only experience growth. Others have become distanced from the procedures of the Co-operative, no longer attending meetings, though continuing to attend ConFest. Others still, attend the Earth Haven event which in 1996/97 was held over the same period as ConFest less than 200km away.

A couple of first impressions of the meeting process at this time serve to depict the creeping malignancy and acrimony that had begun to vitiate the Co-operative. Chris (who later became a director) remembers:

when I showed up I was really deflated 'cause I imagined this sort of incense filled room ya'know with sitar music and wall hangings and stuff, and these hippie gurus sort of hanging around sort of knowing this and that and laying down. [But] it was just these sort of old fart, middle classy, sort of bitter stressed out people in a classroom. It was a big disappointment. Immediately I saw that the thing was dying.

Marko's expectations were similarly unfulfilled - 'I expected to go there and everyone'd be sitting around a circle with their hands linked, chanting Om, and then they would just channel the divine structure to ConFest. I mean as a first timer, I went there in reverence really, thinking that's the exposure. And I saw this really intense political backbiting bitchiness and ... personality games going on and I was shocked'.

In 1994 rumours surfaced in a series of incidents throughout the year. The directors faced accusations that they were an authoritarian and paternalistic 'star chamber'. Other breaches allegedly committed by the board which held power until 1995 include: corruption, profiteering, 'book-cooking', a general 'lack of vision', and a self seeking attempt to 'highjack' the event.² Many members saw DTE plagued by an entrenched hierarchical model of control. Les stated that 'the central group ... tyrannical and power hungry ... are so preoccupied with top-down bottom-up directors stuff that their own aims - education, the creation of films and the setting up of allied functions - have never

¹ I began attending meetings in April 1994. These meetings were small (on average 10-15 people), attended predominantly by males and, I thought, remarkably aggressive. It was clear that the Society was wracked by internecine conflict and ongoing disputes over rules and regulations. Factions began to emerge. The meetings often degenerated into slanging matches.

² It should be made clear that the spectrum of allegations I have received over the course of my research remain largely unsubstantiated.

happened'. Another member thought that the directors were 'almost all authoritarians unable to work well as equals, thus they are seeking to consolidate their power as (supposedly) benign despots' (anon document, 1994). According to Cheryl (past secretary), the Society became dominated by two directors who persistently demonstrated a flagrant disrespect for others, especially incoming members. In this, 'the Dark Ages' of DTE, 'the fire energy of destructiveness' prevailed over 'the fire energy of creativity'. On this note, Laurie clarifies that these directors were:

not in contact with their souls, not in contact with their own seat of creativity. What they found is a nice position to sit and feed off other people's creativity and simply reproduce it. And what I saw them doing was burning off those creative people by sucking their ideas out and not letting them express it in any kind of way that gave them satisfaction as the artist.

The attitude of 'the board' at the time is reflected in one director's statement 'I don't want to give my backing to something which I can't control' (Wandoo). This attitude is representative of the kind of 'outdated management' culture Michael identifies:

They had various controls in place, like almost bribing people on stalls. They were almost bribing other functional entities around the set up of ConFest. They let them in for free. They let them have perks and things. And they didn't want change ... They didn't seem to have a loyalty to the people [who] come to the festival. They didn't seem to honour them, and respect them. [They] actually stifled ConFest.

The stifling effect was reported as early as Walwa III when Greenfinch's efforts to set up a community kitchen were railroaded by existing directors. According to Greenfinch, he 'disturbed their power structure' and they were consequently 'antagonistic', eventually closing the kitchen down. The bearing here contrasts markedly with the philosophy of a current director who advocates 'invisible leadership' and who proposes that the position of 'director', and all hierarchy, be gradually dislodged (Paula).

In this period, dozens of special resolutions were submitted which were intended to alter rules of the Co-operative and constitutional powers of directors. Two Special General Meetings were called with the purpose of changing rules and terminating the office of five existing directors. A relative newcomer, David Cruise, was the author of many such resolutions and a leading proponent in moves to sack the directors. On a 'how to vote' paper circulated at the second SGM, which would decide his (along with Lance Nash's)

future as directors, George Schmidt - who reminded members of his status as a long serving 'DTE elder' - launched a vitriolic counter-attack upon the 'incompetent' Cruise who was accused of being 'after DTE's money' and was ridiculed for his insistence that the Co-operative carry out its meetings and affairs according to the rules layed out in the constitution. Though Cruise had much support, both attempts to alter rules and remove directors failed. According to many present on these occasions, the 'stacked' nature of these meetings blocked the passage of resolutions: the voting procedures were marred from the outset. Nevertheless, the directors were unmoved and Cruise was labelled 'divisive'. Later (at a meeting on 14/12/94), David Cruise likened the previous ten years of the Society to 'a private club' or 'secret society'. With regard to the directors' unwillingness to impart information concerning their activities as directors of the Society, he said that he had, like most other members, been 'kept in the dark like a mushroom and fed bullshit'. Still, reasoned Cheryl, 'it's always the darkest before the dawn'.

Phase Three (1995 -): The New Society?

In late 1994 it became evident that the Society would realise some of the changes sought. In 1995, as Cruise gained further support, moves were made to undertake a 'comprehensive review of the structure and activities of the Society'. The long term objective of this restructuring was the development of 'a more cohesive and effective organisation which will be able to retain and use the energies of all of its members' and to increase member access to the decision making process (*DTE News* 81 Jan. 1995:1). This was ambitious, but it was widely agreed that DTE must embark upon a course of openness and delegate power and responsibility through the creation of relatively independent sub-committees and groups (e.g. Confab, focus, newsletter, computer and finance groups as well as a ConFest committee). These goals came about after a meeting on the 8/12/94 when there was a unanimous decision (23 to nil - a rare consensus!) 'to examine the aims, objectives, operating structure, rules and behaviour of and within the Society and ... evolve a process whereby proposals for change are submitted to a SGM(s) for discussion and approval' (ibid:4). This was a momentous occasion revealing a sense of solidarity rarely apparent in DTE for over a decade. Some of the proposed processes imagined at that time included: more open newsletter participation, special gatherings, reconciliation and mediation, encouraging small discussion groups to form and network, and mini-ConFests. It was deemed that no group within this process shall comprise a majority of directors

(ibid:1). These processes would, according to Les, engender a 'local-lateral type of infinite flat organisational structure' (the type of spontaneous and autonomous processes actually occurring at ConFest).

Events led to the resignation of five directors and the treasurer. One significant moment occurred at a meeting on 21/12/94. The treasurer, who had failed to provide shareholders with accounting details, and whose behaviour toward other members had become a subject of concern, had her integrity questioned and walked out. I could sense an immediate loosening of the tension which had stifled the Society since I first attended meetings - there was noticeable jovial interchange and conviviality. As one member said 'the bad energy has been let out of the room'. There was even a minute's silence! There was a motion passed that the treasurer and board be censured for failing to provide shareholders with all information surrounding loaned monies. At a later meeting, an SGM (16/3/95), it was Lance Nash's turn to walk out. At this meeting, characterised by the conspicuous absence of the mob of silent voters who had attended on previous occasions to block resolutions (as they had been pressured the previous week to provide rationales for blocking motions), several important resolutions were finally urged through. The obstinate Nash defended the position that members should be prevented from attending board meetings. The members present voted for an open structure.³

Recent Developments

The splinter group, Earth Haven (formed by most of the resigning board), conceived an 'alternative lifestyle festival' which promised a retrieval of lost ConFest traditions. The earliest leaflets promoted their event as a 'response to a need for a true conference/festival'. The literature was designed to seduce jaded ConFesters pining for a return to a space conditioning a lost sense of community, a return to 'the Garden'. The leaflet was nostalgic ('In the beginning was CONFEST'), and intentional (Earth Haven seeks a 'going back to grass roots'). A debate about 'the real thing' ensued incorporating a legal dispute over Earth Haven's promotional use of the name 'ConFest' (to which DTE

³ Several important additions and/or amendments to the Society's constitution were pushed through over this period. They included rules for : 1) open directors' meetings; 2) testing for consensus in the decision making process; 3) the delegation of powers to special subcommittees effectively distributing power, responsibility and generating a horizontal structure; 4) preventing directors personally appointing people to vacant directors' positions; and 5) limiting the power of directors to spend the Society's money without consent of the members.

now holds trademark rights).⁴ DTE responded by distributing posters warning patrons against being ‘conned by imitations’, and by advertising Moama IV as ‘The Original, the Only ConFest’ (*DTE News* 90 Nov. 1996).⁵ The conflict is reminiscent of the identity crisis occasioned by the 1980 French Island incident where Cairns had proceeded with the use of the names ‘DTE’ and ‘ConFest’ against the wishes of ADTEN. Criticism has been levelled at what is a private company run by a small group *organising* an event featuring a stage and billed acts as the central attraction and which does not promote a co-operative path. Such is contrasted with a Society which champions autonomy and *facilitates* an event actively encouraging the co-operative effort of all participants. The feeling is that Earth Haven, a ‘card-board cutout miscegenated simulation of Pure ConFest’ (Kurt, DTE email-group 22/5/99), is hardly ‘grass roots’.⁶

In its third phase, DTE has experienced a period of new growth followed by a more recent ‘entropic’ period. I will give attention to both here.

‘Out of the Dark Ages comes the Renaissance’, characterised by mutual respect and ‘a greater feeling of togetherness, a greater spirit, a rebirth’ (Cheryl). Cheryl also identified feminine energy returning in an open space and climate. ‘It pleases me greatly’, she rejoiced, to witness DTE accommodate ‘the essence of woman as negotiator, healer, the peace maker’. Indeed, at this recent phase, the Co-operative had entered a new era of growth. There were approximately 1,500 shareholders with increasing numbers participating in DTE organisation and activities.⁷ As Isha remarked, ‘DTE is much more open to people coming in and speaking their truth and being heard’ rather than being

⁴ This is ostensibly to prevent groups with commercial aspirations from appropriating the name. As an iconic tag, ‘ConFest’ or ‘Confest’ has, otherwise, entered alternative lexicon as an apposite designation of a desirable convergence of Apollonian and Dionysian dimensions. Some examples are: The National Lesbian Confest (Annual, since 1989), Women’s National Incest Survivors Confest (1992), World Environment Day Rally Committee Confest, and the Visual Voice Confest (on community access media - Durban, South Africa, 1985).

⁵ The view that past directors attempted to hijack ConFest for their own personal gain is strongly supported by the facts (other than Earth Haven’s use of the name ‘ConFest’). Current members have much to feel sour about since: a) the directors pulled out just weeks before a ConFest; b) they used the DTE newsletter to promote their commercial event; c) they erased the DTE shareholder/mailout list from the computers (since retrieved), and; d) used and continue to use DTE mailing lists to advertise their event.

⁶ The first Earth Haven (Australia Day weekend 1996) coincided with DTE’s ChatFest (held on the tense Birdlands 95/96 site), planned as a free weekend of discussion on, amongst other things, ‘commerce and community at ConFest, volunteerism, yobbos, future directions’ (from poster). A large crop of vegetables was planted to be harvested for the following Easter event (Toc IV).

⁷ Attendance at meetings has, in the five years from April 1994, increased significantly from about 10-15 to 25-35 on average. Weeks prior to ConFest, attendance of around 60-70 people at meetings is not uncommon.

'turned away' by 'rude and abusive' directors. And women became more active in the Co-operative, with four directors' positions held by females. With the addition of an Easter event in 1992 (at Tocumwal I), an annual cycle of Easter 'gathering' and New Year 'mega-event' was inaugurated. DTE also promoted a Winter Solstice Gathering held at 'Blue Lakes' in Plenty in 1993,⁸ and sponsored the annual St Andrews Music Festival. In June 1993, the Co-operative took up residence at CERES in Brunswick.⁹ DTE's Confab, a twice monthly evening of swimming, spa, sauna, massage and other healing arts also known as a 'clothing optional event', which started in June 1993 at the Fawkner Leisure Centre, moved (in Jan 1995) to the Collingwood Leisure Centre in Clifton Hill. In August 1997 a web site was developed and an email-group initiated. The Co-operative increased its coffers and generated funds used to support allied and charitable organisations and endeavours.

As a result of DTE's efforts at restructuring, ConFest itself took on a more open and decentralised (organic) character, resulting in greater co-operation ('energy') and diversity. Several committees and subcommittees deal with promotions, site survey, market, site works etc. A widening diversity of groups/networks (many of them funded via the village budget) have set up villages providing input and creativity (like *Spiral*, *Queer Presence*, *Food Not Bombs*, *Tek Know*, *Warrior*, *Forest*, *Labyrinth*, *Laceweb* and *Hybrid*). According to Manatoka, 'this empowerment of subgroups ... to run their own little territories' is a positive indication of the dissolution of the 'peak hierarchy' and of the distribution of power. As ConFest has been held fourteen times on or near the Murray River (at Moama and Tocumwal) since Easter 1992, significant numbers of locals from the region and country towns have experienced the event, often becoming regular ConFesters. At Moama III (1995) the Earth Link Cafe appeared (the re-emergence of community kitchens which had first appeared at Cotter, Bredbo and then at Walwa III). From Toc IV (1996) a multimodal *Healing* village emerged, as did *Queer Presence*. Also at this event, communications were enhanced via the installation of community base radios positioned in villages around the site rendering site operations less impenetrable. At Moama IV ('96/97) the ConFest Safety Group - a trained and co-ordinated group of non-

⁸ The Winter Solstice Gathering ground to a halt in 1996 when a strong faction in DTE acted on their perception that the dance party energy would taint ConFest's image as a 'family' gathering (see Chapter 8).

⁹ After situated in Victoria St Fitzroy and then Stephenson St Richmond in the early eighties, and Lt Lonsdale St from 1984-87, from 1987 the Society was housed in The Environment Centre in Flinders Lane, then at the FOE warehouse in Brunswick St Fitzroy in 1992 before moving to a schoolhouse at CERES from June 1993 to mid '96 and again from 1997 to the time of writing (1999), with an interval (from 1996-97) at the Organ Factory in Clifton Hill.

violent community ‘peacekeepers’ - was incorporated within the existing security initiative (*Pt'chang*), and a solar powered stage appeared.

Despite such advancements, concerns have once again mounted, and speculations made, about the pending demise of the DTE ConFest. The apparent lack of equilibrium - of inproportionate conferencing and festival dimensions - has generated much anxiety. Kurt Svendsen is an erudite proponent of the thesis that ConFest has undergone entropy, becoming ‘serepaxed’ as a result of the expiry of the conferencing dimension (1999:129). ConFest, he avers, is becoming a ‘pleasant & relatively trivial “Festival”’, a ‘Benny Hill boogaloo’, and thus suffering a degeneration from ‘ConFest to Festcon (festival confidence trick)’ (ibid:41). Echoing earlier criticisms, Wattle claims ConFest has ‘lost its connection with “grassroots” ethics and organisations and in trying to keep up with the fast pace of the ‘90s, it has lost direction and sight of its original vision’. And diasporic fragments of the original, including Earth Haven, but also Peacehaven (at the Tocumwal site, 96/97) and a non-DTE ‘Confest’ (held in the Blue Mountains, NSW, over Easter 1998), indicate growing discontentment.

The dramatic downturn in attendance and volunteer ‘energy’ at Guilmartens I (3,500) over 98/99 triggered a wave of introspection. Commentators readily concurred that the dominance of the festive dimension was the root cause. Amplified (especially electronic) music, considered to be anathema to the Conferencing dimension, received special critical attention (see Chapter 8) and Guilmartens II was promoted as an ‘unplugged’ event (a ‘Human and Acoustic Sounds Festival’). The theme for that event was ‘What is Alternative Now?’ - an inquiry ‘about the direction we as a group are taking at a time when I feel we may have lost touch with our roots ... What is our purpose? Where are we heading? What can we achieve?’ (Symons 1999:2). Despite these efforts at encouraging debate about ConFest’s continuing role in the ACM, Guilmartens II was also a poorly attended event (under 2000).

As was detectable in DTE’s second phase, a decline in volunteer ‘energy’ accompanied the newly declining conferencing dimension. That this is a recurring problem suggests the Co-operative undertake a critical dissection and reappraisal of its practices. Indeed, as current criticism of DTE politics indicate, recurring afflictions demand more precise surgery than the panacea of prohibition (putting amplified music ‘under the knife’). Claiming that the stewards of ConFest have rapidly achieved a new level of irresponsibility, Svendsen (1999) is the most passionate exponent of a critical self-reflexivity within DTE.

Certainly the mutual distrust and open hostility I witnessed within DTE at the beginning of my research had not evaporated by the time of writing. In 1997, prior to the Easter ConFest, there was clear evidence of an open 'atmosphere of distrust' (Mark) at meetings. Indeed, verging upon the new millennium, DTE had become wracked by internecine conflicts, some continuing, others new. Tensions mounted again. Old factions deepened and new ones emerged. There were acts of vilification and persecution, spiteful pranks, charges of nepotism, corruption and fraud.

A belief holding currency within the Society is that the problem lies in a 'core group' with a newly established 'old guard' who have come to express protective, decidedly non-co-operative rights of ownership over ConFest. In 1994, David Cruise stated to me that he saw himself as a 'benign dictator'. It is widely reported, in the formal and informal commentary of many, that this self-conferred status of 'benign' dictatorship, to which Cruise has clung with uncompromising tenacity - for which he has been reproached as an 'intrinsically dishonest ... exploiter of quiet people' (Laurie DTE email-group: 17/3/99) - has been a principal cause of internal division. Reminiscent of the political strategies of previous directors, lacking confidence in DTE processes over which he possessed no or little control, David Cruise has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to undermine the efforts of those at odds with him, or who have attempted to operate outside his immediate sphere of influence. As a result, Cruise failed in his bid to return to office at the 1998 AGM.

Furthermore, it is considered that 'protective' strategies employed by 'the old guard' have taken their toll on ConFest itself. There has been a consistent pattern of isolating, distrusting, devalorising and, ultimately, distancing potential DTE/ConFest 'energies'. In an astute missive to David Cruise on the DTE email-group (14/3/99), Paula commented on his and Cheryl's skills in 'isolating the difference between members who are not like you - to groups who are not like your's ... there is a pile a mile high of groups you and Cheryl have shunned - [who] have now gone away'. To this effect, Richard later claimed that the reactionaries of 'the core group' have been steadily 'picking off the petals of the [ConFest] flower' (DTE email-group, 30/3/99).

That which has been referred to as 'the condition of Cruise control' (Laurie, DTE email-group, 30/3/99) involves the devalorising of those who have not achieved DTE 'worker status', and the undermining and/or exclusion of a raft of 'alternative' contributions and projects which are likely regarded as threatening. Devalorisation and exclusion are processes which have created a lacuna of activity (volunteering) in DTE and at ConFest in most recent times. The lacuna can be seen to fortify the authority of those

who have achieved an elite 'true worker status'. If no one turns up to participate in 'the decision events' then a minority - those devalorising and excluding - make further claims to their 'rights of ownership', which leads to further suppression of different voices and noises. Ultimately, that which has been labelled 'the Cruise camp', a 'block' dominating the 'core group' of DTE for some time, requires a continual reproduction of an 'Other' in order to sustain its identity - and its ownership of ConFest.

The process as it is described here is consistent with that observed by Kurt Svendsen in his momentous 'letter' to DTE (1999). Kurt documents on-site processes whereby 'Core Group Gruppenfuhrers' would alienate potential volunteers (ibid:150). Newcomers would become distanced from DTE since their experience of it 'was so uncomfortably dissonant with their greater ConFest experiencing' (ibid:63). At Birdlands, participants approached DTE 'for some guidance in helping clean up ... only to come back confused, demoralised & shell-shocked at the ... hostility, indifference & intransigence that was meted out to them' (ibid:71). Potential participants in clean-up duties were seen as 'bludgers' and 'parasites' and thus immediately excluded from accessing the processes. Kurt recalls that on the morning of the final day of Gum Lodge I, 'a DTE posse was formed by David Cruise as ringleader [and] the purpose of the posse was to go around the site early in the morning & catch the "bums & bludgers" off-guard when they were still near their tents ... and expel them' (ibid:64). It is imagined that:

over the years a lot of inspired pro-active NICEs [Nobly Inspired ConFest Experiencers] have come and gone from the DTE Space, frustrated, alienated & exhausted, burnt out, demoralised & flicked off, anybody with the slightest aura of being able to foment real change being fanged by the representatives & vectors of the status-quo. (ibid:148)

Significantly, while ConFesters have been subject to systematic devaluation and alienation, suspected alienators deplore the lack of 'energy'. It is this 'lack' which enables members of 'the old guard' to indulge in a 'synthetic martyrdom' (Svendsen 1999:146-7), which sanctions their occupation of an elitist 'true-worker status', and, furthermore, which has generated the circumstance where an overwhelmed site clean-up crew have recently (Guilmarten's II) distributed Co-operative funds amongst themselves - a volunteers 'wage'.

Before concluding, I will address issues considered to place the survival of the Co-operative and its event in jeopardy: the 'greening' of DTE, and the divisive protectiveness of DTE's own 'parent culture'.

Greens of varying description (from radical activists to ecology educationalists and reformers) appeared in greater numbers from Toc IV. Indeed, as is evident in the factional alignment of activists to help dislodge the previous board, actions and interests of current members, loans and funding to activist groups, and content of recent newsletters, a growing green presence in DTE is unmistakable. Yet, though this influx of green commentary and support is apparent, as an organisation, DTE remains effectively neutral. It is considered that remaining bipartisan - detached from particular ideologies and agendas espoused by a cornucopia of politically active organisations and interest groups - makes for a stronger and more effective Society in the long term. This is apparent in posters promoting ConFest. It is also apparent in the Society's opposition to a strong undercurrent which pushed for a '96/97 ConFest on East Gippsland's Cann River.¹⁰ While numerous factors were posited to justify the opposition to this site, it is no secret that those interested in maintaining the Co-operative's neutral status felt such a move would effectively side DTE with radical Green elements opposed to old growth forest logging in the region. The greening of DTE is becoming a source of rising tension in the Society. How will DTE negotiate this? Will it accommodate environmentalists and become, as many see it, more 'down to Earth'? What are the implications of placing DTE's neutrality in jeopardy?

It seems likely that the protective strategies employed by DTE's emergent 'parent culture' (persecution, prohibition etc) - deployed in apparent efforts to shield the Co-operative and ConFest from perceived threats - may very well have contributed to the shortfall in 'energy' that the same members have lamented. The insular, negating and elitist conduct of a core-group minority and concomitant participant alienation replicates events leading to the termination of DTE's first two phases. It remains to be seen whether the Co-operative will draw lessons from the past by seeking to avert the recurrence of 'the tyranny of structurelessness', and the DTE worker/ConFest workshop cleavage.

¹⁰ Which was even pre-empted in advertising in the December 1996 *FOE Newsletter* (15).

Conclusion

Though possessing derivative characteristics, Down to Earth is grounded in the broad acres of Australian radicalism. Over the course of its history, the movement has undergone significant mutations. While it began as the Australian ACM's millenarian movement, a cultural revolution, a conscious attempt to create a 'New Society', DTE later became the custodian of its subsequent biannual 'new society'. In the movement's first phase, Jim Cairns, and others following him, sought to mobilise skills and resources to create alternative communities, participants saw themselves acting on an historical stage - they were struggling towards 'a sane future'. Though the principal, intentional efforts to realise the New Society (Mt Oak and Rainbow ConFests) suffered huge setbacks, many new communities were conceived within the immediate network facilitation and recruitment capacity of ConFest. In its second phase, DTE became a neutral host organisation, energising and facilitating ConFest - a temporary counterworld accommodating a multitude of NSMs, subcultures and lifeways. In addition to the many DTE *Bünde* or 'families' scattered over a vast landscape, this powerful social laboratory yielded a multiplicity of postliminal experiments and generated an event-diaspora. In its third phase, DTE is perhaps the most unlikely custodian of the Australian ACM's principal ACH. Yet, despite ConFest's gravitation towards a *festival* of alternatives, and the emergence of an insular and 'protective' parent culture, DTE's ConFest continues to provide an open, heterogeneous forum on the margins.

Though not in the way envisaged by the original inspirators of the Down to Earth movement, a 'new society' has emerged, and this has happened in two senses. 1) Weathering particularly turbulent episodes, DTE has emerged as a unique Co-operative Society. 2) A protean ALE, the Co-operative's event became, itself, a temporary 'new society' now biannually recycled in indeterminate patterns. Despite ongoing conflict and mounting tension, the 'new society' remains the *élan vital* periodically reinvigorating the Society. Moreover, DTE's 'new society' is seen to possess tremendous possibilities for further movement developments. According to Les, ConFest is an 'ideal model' for the celebration of cultural diversity and the development of 'community wellbeing', a manifestation of the type of processes which will introduce 'a new way of being for the next thousand years'.

Chapter 4

ConFest: Alternative Cultural Diversity Celebrated

Introduction

This chapter offers a summary ethnography of ConFest. Focussing specifically on five events (held between April 1994 and April 1997), I provide a detailed description of ConFest in two parts. In the first, I discuss event foundations: the events researched, participants, the effects of social organicism, preparations and the volunteer ethos. In the second, I describe the cultural topography of ConFest in detail, with particular attention to key event zones and villages.

Consequent to DTE's democratic impetus in this period, I note two basic themes apparent. First, a diverse spectrum of alternative neo-tribes and subcultures (owning a vast range of discourse and practice, beliefs and motives) have been accommodated on site, a result of the Society's empowerment of multiple 'units' (villages) within the greater counterscape of ConFest. Second, in some respects a result of the first, ConFest is contested. Participants do not hold an homogenised interpretation of the meaning and purpose of the event, the polyphony of extant groks resonating ongoing disputes over that which constitutes 'alternative'. The existence of diverse cultures and interpretative frames renders ConFest radically inconstant, yet the persistent *return* of those holding divergent 'alternatives', and their on-site coexistence, insinuate the enduring logic of *organicism* underlying and conditioning a commonly desired experience.

Part I. Event Foundations

The Events

All five events detailed were held on or near the NSW bank of the Murray river (see Maps). Tocumwal III (Easter 1994) and Tocumwal IV (Easter 1996)¹ were five day events held on private bushland adjoining the Murray 11 kms from the town of Tocumwal. Featuring a secluded billabong, the site had been occupied first at Easter 1993. To avoid overburdening the land, Toc IV was concentrated on a different region of the site. Both

events were attended by about 4,000 people and there were 12 and 17 villages at Toc III and Toc IV respectively. Toc IV, a demonstration of the 'new' ConFest, featured a greater diversity of villages, many of which had community food kitchens (food supplied by DTE) and community base radios.

Tocumwal 'Birdlands' (New Year 1995/96), held on a nearby property, and the first week long event, attracted about 9,500 people (with thirteen villages). There are many retrospectively ambivalent about Birdlands. Following events discussed in chapter three, DTE were unexpectedly deserted by several key co-ordinators, only two months prior to New Year 1995/96. While ultimately liberated by this departure, the Society was left in a state of confusion as they sought a new site for the summer event. Though a site was found, much of it was marshland and lacking adequate tree cover. As Param said 'Australians are a swimming culture ... this is a swamp'. After the landowner failed to honour an earlier agreement to lower water levels, DTE and ConFesters had to contend with a wide irrigation channel running the entire length of the site. The channel, separating the market and car park from the rest of the site, was spanned by a makeshift one way bridge which broke several times during the event precipitating frustrating bottlenecks and long detours.² However, due to the manner in which participants responded to 'the bridge' (see Chapter 8), and with subsequent events widely acclaimed, the new Society avoided a potential disaster.

Moama IV (New Year 1996/97) and Moama V (Easter 1997), attracting 6,000 and 5,000 people/and 21 and 16 villages respectively, were held on Pericoota Station, 25 km west of Moama on the Murray. The site was a virtual island, bushland almost completely flanked by a billabong and the river. The 'island' was gained at one end by a land bridge or hand operated punt, and by a small footbridge at the other. As a planning design, more of the site's terrain was used for camping and villages than at the three prior events held there.

There is significant variation between the Easter and New Year events, mirroring the way such periods are celebrated in Australian culture. The New Year ConFest has a 'party atmosphere', a fact which attracts scores of young people searching for hedonistic pleasures - the 'good time'. Since there are greater numbers attending, the market is larger and it is generally a popular occasion to promote therapies and herald prophetic visions, to hawk local political agendas and global spiritual panaceas. The Easter event, on the other

¹ The abbreviation 'Toc' for Tocumwal will be used.

² To make matters worse, a teenage girl was allegedly sexually assaulted on New Year's Eve.

hand, is smaller in scale and family orientated. Commonly regarded as a more 'intimate' and harmonious event, it is a time for serious healing.

Participants

Though accurate demographics are difficult to establish, with an average age in the early to mid 20s,³ and predominantly Euro-Australian, during the research period there are about 5-6,000 regular ConFesters: a diverse amalgam of students and teachers, artists and scientists, accountants and anarchists, ferals and professionals, musicians, activists, crafts people and the unemployed. A great proportion of ConFest participants are tertiary educated, or as George commented, 'those who can afford the Hippie uniform'. The Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy, St Kilda, Northcote, Brunswick and Sydney's Newtown are common sites of emigration. Here, the two components of the 'new middle class' - 'humanistic intellectuals' (those involved in the teaching, helping and personal service professions) and 'technical intelligentsia' (administration and technical experts like bureaucrats and scientists) (Gouldner 1979) - are present alongside 'decommodified' groups.⁴

Participants are predominantly, though not exclusively, middle class. Most identify with the ACM, participating in workshops, site work and performances. There is general consensus between participants in the need for tolerance and to be responsible in one's actions (see ConFest Ethos below). Such value requirements probably capture the essence of the 'like-mindedness' many survey respondents appreciated in their fellow ConFesters.

Tolerance, however, has its limits. Due to the high ratio of tertiary educated participants (especially in the Humanities), and the inevitable deep impressions effected by the feminist, ecology, peace, human rights and alternative health/spirituality movements, the majority of ConFesters sustain elements of a culture of critical discourse. Within this discourse, anything deemed 'natural' - 'organic', 'green', 'earthy', 'vego', 'folky' - is valorised, and to express one's commitment to such, via apparel, diet, music, courtship, childcare, and conversation, garners acceptance and respect. The identity of the alternative lifestyle is here revealed to be a DiY assemblage of desirable argot, icons and gestures. As practices which controvert the 'correct' critical discourse tend to be

³ Based on observations and confirmed by Berry's questionnaire results (1979:20). From a sample of 317 ConFesters surveyed at Berri, Berry found that 47.3% were between 20-24 and 22% were between 25-29 years old.

distasteful or offensive,⁵ practitioners - who may also be suspected of indulging in a range of other homologically 'incorrect' pursuits - may not be accorded respect.⁶

Marked variation in on-site behaviour is largely determined by differential motives and expectations - which are controlled by a participant's interpretation of the purpose of the event. One way to work through this is to investigate these expectations disclosed in the form of questions participants may arrive with. In fact, at a general level there is a rather extreme division of inquiry, a division which tends to reflect differential commitments to either of the Conferencing or Festival dimensions of ConFest. As Coquito suggests, for many, the central and pertinent questions remain: 'Where's the family? Where's the tribe? What are we doing for the planet? What can we do?' However, for a growing number of those participants who are primarily seeking hedonistic pleasures, 'Where's the party?' (sexual gratification and intoxicants) constitutes the leading question. New Year's Eve has become the prime time of the *space invader* - particularly young males from local and surrounding districts. For most such attendees, ConFest is pure spectacle, an event 'put on' for their entertainment, the entire affair approximating an exotic/erotic circus.⁷ Such participants are content as access to an informal drug economy, especially small scale trafficking in 'grams' (marijuana), 'trips' (LSD or 'acid') and 'e' (ecstasy), is never difficult.

Yet divisions are more complicated as there is, on the one hand, dissension over that which is believed to constitute the serious business of the event. And the disparity is made obvious by the presence of a miscellany of neo-tribes with which participants are affiliated (like Friends of the Earth, Spiral Dance, the Church of all Worlds, the Australian Nudist Federation, Food not Bombs, the Prostitutes Collective, Willing Workers On Organic Farms, The Vegan Society). On the other hand, there is considerable debate over the definition of a 'party' (e.g. between yobs, bikies, ravers and ferals). Furthermore, one person's serious pursuits are, for others, mere diversions.

⁴ Those outside the labour market such as students, the unemployed, the retired and those marginally employed like itinerant traders, fringe artists and street performers, for whom ConFest, according to Hakea, is 'the answer to Moomba'.

⁵ For example: cooking and eating meat, displaying corporate logos, listening to 'ghetto blasters', discussing the cricket scores, male predatory behaviour and displayed gestures of possessiveness.

⁶ Participants are somewhat similar to Gillespie's 'folknik', defined as someone holding 'a vague commitment to left-wing politics, peace, truth and beauty' and holding the belief that 'American [here, read mainstream Australian] culture is plastic and artificial' (1987:157 in Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:202-3).

⁷ Other groups displaying different hedonistic behavioural patterns at this time include ravers and the Highwaymen motorcycle club.

Planning Chaos: Proto-Community

The principal term denoting the way a ConFest unfolds and operates is 'organic'. The word is an extremely appropriate metaphor. It immediately invokes several related terms and processes - 'local' or 'grassroots', 'self-determined', 'interdependence', 'balance' - all of which are integral to the unfolding or 'growth' of a ConFest. ConFest possesses DiY status. I have already referred to Les' relevant description of ConFest's social organicism as 'local action that works' in Chapter 2. There, I drew attention to the core traits of ConFest (co-operation, tolerance, autonomy and immediatism - see Appendix D), all of which are dependant upon the vouchsafing of a relatively spontaneous community process.

The ongoing negotiation of such organicism reproduces a *proto-cultural* community event. Proto-cultural events are, according to Handelman:

occasions and happenings which are yet to be given form but are emergent and divergent configurations of routine and mundane life ... [P]erformance [is] the seedbed of form [and, over time] ... logic coalesces ... the structure of performance tending to give way to the performance of structure (1990:20-1).

Despite the qualification that one's experience within the 'closed phenomenal world' of ConFest is far from mundane, the definition is relevant for ConFest in two senses. First, there are many proto-performances and concretisable or replicable processes occurring simultaneously on-site, as the moments when 'action in concert supersedes reflection in common' (ibid:20) are manifold. Second, *the entire event* is on every occasion *proto*, as a result of its organicism. Being perpetually in-composition renders the event distinct from most other community events, since, despite divergences from this ideal, the received strategy is to embrace fresh ideas, to welcome autonomous units (individuals and groups), and, ultimately, to encourage the contributions of all participants who 'work for ConFest'. Over successive events, and perhaps years of repetition, the infrastructural arrangement, workshop operations, market set-up, the presence/input of locals and authorities, and the Conference/Festival balance itself, were all negotiated *in situ*. Original enactments, impromptu spaces and subevents, often by a process of refinement, became successful working mechanisms of the total ensemble. Through compromise, ad hoc innovations became recognised components of the ConFest script. The result of such processes is that which participants know as 'ConFest' - the collection of negotiated 'structures' which are 'performed' - yet there is always something unexpected to be discovered around the next bend in the path.

ConFest is an extraordinarily unpredictable social landscape, generating a desired feeling of uncertainty amongst liminaries. And, the peculiarity that seduces participants back to this environment, another consequence of its organic logic, is its *unpredictability*. Its predictable quality is its very unpredictability. Cestrum, commenting that the event is permeated with a ‘sense of organised anarchy’, provides a common grok on the experience. Though ConFests possess familiar landmarks and presupposed arrangements (even though the site itself may change), every event is characterised by disorderliness, a derangement of the familiar, a sense of chaos that is indeed cultivated by DTE’s ConFest Committee; an experience highly sought after by ConFesters who have invariably interpreted this as a kind of ‘magic’.

Event Preparations

In parallel logic to the Rio Carnival, ConFest ‘requires a great amount of order to produce sweet disorder’ (Turner 1983a:118). The infrastructural arrangements for the events researched began evolving from a couple of weeks to several months before the events. As a result of DTE’s current internal changes, events, including the last one considered here (Moama V), have benefited from an elevated commitment to organic pre-event and on-site processes as evidenced by organisational structures, most notably, the ConFest Committee. This central body, comprising members interested in being part of the ‘site crew’ evolved a set of guidelines approved at an RGM in March 1997 which stressed that the Committee: would have no leaders; will attempt to function by group consensus; may appoint subcommittees or individuals for special functions; and will have a budget allocated to it by an RGM of DTE to cover all costs associated with running a ConFest (Moama V ConFest Committee Guidelines - 11/3/97).

Since ConFest has traditionally been a nomadic gathering, there never being any permanent ConFest location, an appropriate site has first to be located and secured. DTE members explore possible sites (months in advance) on private land to be rented from the owner.⁸ Site searching may lead to disputes between members favouring different proposed sites. If such is the case (as it was for the ‘96/97 event) then it ‘goes to a vote’ or the result is dependent on the first successful permit application.⁹

⁸ This contrasts with North American Rainbow Gatherings which are held on ‘public lands’. Since these are ‘ostensibly held in trust, everyone shares equally in their ownership’ (Niman 1997:184).

⁹ Only one of the three different locations detailed here was on a fresh site - Birdlands. A strong push for a new site in East Gippsland (for 96/97 and 97/98) was defeated.

There are several important criteria for selecting a site. It should be in bushland distant from major cities, though it seems that somewhat equal distance between Melbourne and Sydney is desirable.¹⁰ There should be adequate flowing waterways, tree cover and firewood. It should also be accessible by vehicle (yet vehicles should be parked in a location separate from much of the camping space, though a space, *Gypsy*, is provided for buses, cars and camper vans).¹¹ Facilitators believe that the site should be selected on the basis of its 'context for possibilities'.

DTE must gain approval from the local council (possess a permit) and establish operating procedures with police, fire and health authorities, ambulance operators, conservation and environment departments, the landowner and neighbours prior to the event. Local organisations are often informed and locals invited. As ConFest has been a financial windfall to local businesses, retailers and councils have generally been receptive to the event. Following Baringa I and II, retailers in Wangaratta and Everton claimed the district stood to lose a potential \$1.5 million after DTE, partly on the face of objections from local landowners, decided to move on to the Daylesford area in 1986 (*Wangaratta Chronicle* 1985:1). Maintaining a good rapport with local police is desirable. Although 'there is a lot of negative attitude towards the police' the feeling is that if they are aggravated, they 'could give us a real hard time ... so we keep them on side'. Actually, continued Gundabluey, after strolling through the site on duty, 'some of them come back and bring their families'.

Once a site is found or secured, tickets are designed, printed and distributed (to numerous vendors including St Andrews market, Spiral Dance, Fuzzy's Farm (SA), vegetarian cafes, environment centres, book shops, galleries). The event is promoted via the DTE newsletter and web page, posters, alternative magazines (like *Grass Roots*, *Soft Technology*, *Earth Mother*, *Green Connections*, *Beat Magazine*, *Tekno Renegade*), community radio (e.g. 3RRR and 3PBS), newspapers (e.g. *Nimbin News*), and local rural newspapers. Prior to the site set-up, the budget for site infrastructure and villages is allocated at a ConFest Committee meeting at an RGM. Those present seek to achieve consensus, or if unachievable, vote on capital outlays and village proposals submitted over a number of weeks (see below). Recent budgets for a ConFest average around \$100,000.

In early reconnaissance of fresh sites or unused regions of past sites, the landscape is surveyed and evaluated for the suitable positioning of key sub-site locations and facilities.

¹⁰ Consequently, most participants must travel hundreds of kilometres (by car, train or bus). This is unlike Woodford/Maleny which occurs relatively close to Brisbane.

Many take the opportunity to ‘walk the site’ and cast an eye over the terrain with the purpose of locating the appropriate topographical contexts for different villages and performances. Early site visits encourage the exchange of ‘visions’ and the imagined uses of space.¹² In this pre-liminal period, individuals and crews of volunteers, both in Melbourne and on-site, make considerable logistical preparations, laying the foundations for the gathering. Fragile or potentially hazardous areas may be identified and eventually taped off and signposted. As the momentum builds, volunteers combine skills and talents to devise plumbing and showers, provide power, dig toilet and fire pits, install base radios, position rubbish and recycling points (including the ‘dickhead bin’ for people dumping unseparated rubbish) and build/maintain roads and paths. About a week prior to ConFest, more people arrive and a temporary counterworld gradually takes shape, as the Gate, Information Centre, Market, *Healing*, Community/workers kitchen(s), Pt’chang (peacekeepers camp), performance/entertainment arenas, and all the other villages appear. Though infrastructural mechanisms are often not in place by the first event day, at the events researched they were usually operational, maintained and, finally, dismantled, via a co-operative ethic.

ConFest Ethos

The product of 30 events, a distinct community ethos has gradually coalesced resonating the broader concerns of the alternative sector. This ethos has several aspects.

First, participants are expected to adhere to several rules or agreements, normally conveyed in the newsletter and information sheets handed out at the Gate. These rules generally cover health and safety issues, environmental responsibilities, and the contingencies of ‘living together’. Participants are informed that they should observe: alcohol and drug restrictions in certain zones; the ‘no pets’ policy; fire and car free zone regulations; and the instructions for taking home non-compostables or separating garbage for recycling (according to the Toc IV fact sheet, ‘rubbish is *Very Bad Bad Karma*’, as is, for that matter ‘sneaking in’). They are also encouraged to: avoid using biodegradable cleansing agents in or near waterways; use ground wood or firewood provided rather than damage trees; and drink/cook with drinking water only.

¹¹ Unlike Rainbow Gatherings where participants are required to trek some distance (at least two kms) from the car park in order to reach the site.

¹² As an example of appropriate place making, a wide glade with a slender tree standing at its centre was the area chosen for the *Pagan* village at Moama I (1993/94). The site was selected

In the main, DTE is concerned with the gentle *encouragement* of appropriate behaviour as opposed to the oppressive *discouragement* of inappropriate behaviour. There is a tendency to avoid blanket prohibitions, as the ticket message ‘alcohol and other drug abuse is not welcome’ (rather than ‘no alcohol and drugs’) indicates. And what are popularly regarded as appropriate behaviours are encouraged, especially in new-comers, by the example that is set by many. I think this lies at the heart of the ConFest ethos, and is revealed in the information communicated to entrants. For instance, a handout ‘ConFest Agreements’ states:

We care for all children - especially near the river ... We consider the needs of others and allow them their own space. We don’t make loud noise late at night. Those of us who smoke and drink consider others (we don’t smoke in workshops or enclosed public space). We take communal responsibility for observing these agreements and for the work involved in running ConFest.

This last theme is perhaps the most critical measure of a successful event. After all, ConFest, in all of its stages (planning, building, operation and dismantling), relies upon the input of volunteers, upon people taking *responsibility*. Therefore, along with the expectation that participants observe the various rules listed above, everybody is encouraged to contribute their skills, labour, and interest to the unfolding and maintenance of the ConFest community, and, thus, assume equal share in the ownership of the event-space. Volunteering is promoted as a crucial and, ultimately, rewarding experience as conveyed in the statement:

[r]elax, volunteer, participate and enjoy every minute of *Your ConFest*. [It’s] a labour of love. Volunteers are the lifeblood of ConFest. Volunteering is a unique experience. Everyone is granted the privilege to volunteer. (Toc IV ‘fact sheet’)

Volunteering engenders a sense of belonging and purpose, a fact exemplified by Graham, a long time ConFest worker and director. Formerly harbouring ‘a feeling of worthlessness and lack [of] ability’, his involvement with ConFest provides him refuge and proved to him that his skills and abilities were valued. Indeed, ConFest’s rewards are immediate and of the immanent kind - they are not delayed or transcendent, as a Maleny maxim ‘all volunteers go to heaven’ (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:203) would suggest.

DTE, as they are keen to stress, is not a service provider ‘putting on’ an event, and participants are not clients. Indeed, participants are reminded upon entry that:

on the basis of its possibilities, an appropriate context for a range of workshops and rites that may occur there (Les).

[a] ConFest is a self governing, self starting, self generating, self organising group of people ... The ideal ConFest site development is to do nothing and let people develop what they need ... Facilities develop as people get together and plan and start the work' (Toc IV 'ConFest on a page' gate hand out).

Accordingly, 'despite breakdowns in organisation, the people themselves create ConFest and overcome difficulties. The people themselves are the most powerful ingredients for a ConFest' (Sage). As such, ConFest Committee members and other ConFesters are generally indistinguishable from one another.¹³ New processes coalescing in DTE - devolved powers of responsibility, horizontal organisation, interdependence, the championing of an 'organic' group process - provided the nourishment for processes on-site.

In their commitment to specialised tasks, many ConFest Committee members and other workers demonstrate a noble ethic of selfless service, often emulated by others. Indeed, some ConFesters modify their own behaviours as they are swept along by individuals' enthusiasm for making 'it' happen. There are those who are inspired by the random acts of kindness of those who care more for the realisation of a successful ConFest than any personal recognition for their laborious contributions. Laurie is a notable illustration of this. He conveyed to me that, at his first ConFest, it took him twenty minutes to find 'the emitter of the pattern', David Cruise. Three years later Laurie was a director and a key site crew member. Instrumental in establishing Earthlink (Community Food) and committed to garbage recycling, his desire is to see others adopt such duties, to find his own replacement: 'you just make sure ... the thing carries on going. It's not dependent on you as a structure. And that's the hardest thing to do when you play these roles in ConFest, is not to get people dependent on you'. A selfless, transitory custodian of the organic process and the Spirit of ConFest, Laurie desires to see ConFest reproduced such that the experiences of novices are not unlike his own.

Part II. Spaced Out: the ConFest Topos

The event topography harbours familiar landmarks, but out here on the interstices there are plenty of surprises. This section, comprising the remainder of the chapter, introduces

¹³ Though directors and co-ordinators remain largely inconspicuous throughout the event, and usually do not seek to assert public authority, the possession of a hand held radio - a kind of techno-sceptre - does communicate, an official role, and therefore, conveys status.

ConFest culture by way of its spatial configurations. First, I detail the principal infrastructural mechanisms or key event zones and their functions. Second, I detail each village centre and its workshops.

The Gate

The gate wants everyone inside, in their own open format - the gate wants people to leave their baggage there - the gate can handle the baggage. (Paula, DTE email-group 24/10/98)

The Gate is a marquee and portable room set up on an entrance road some distance from the open road to accommodate volunteers who collect and issue tickets, pass out and handle the money.¹⁴ David Cruise explains The Gate's interstitial status well: 'The Gate is not ConFest. The Gate is not the outside world. The Gate is both, a kind of half way place that one must pass through to reach the mythical land of ConFest'. Referring to the subtle protective network and flexible induction process honoured by gate volunteers, for Paula:

[T]he gate is a magical world and time zone all of its own.... a doorway - a window - the entrance - like Orryelle's gateway [see *Labyrinth*, below] - a magical separation between the two worlds - the *magic* of it being one of the MOST critical parts - ensuring the difference between confest and the other big festivals I've been to. (DTE email-group 24/10/98)

It is at the entrance to the event-space that one may pass into the 'ConFest time' zone. There are two meanings to this. The first is the twice introduced ConFest-specific daylight savings of one or two hours.¹⁵ The second is the sensation of atemporality, or suspension of normal time that takes effect upon entrance for those more familiar with the ConFest journey. By transferring to ConFest daylight savings time, or by making early threshold adjustments (which includes the temporary discarding of watches) at The Gate, ConFesters enact something like that which Falassi (1987:4) calls rites of 'valorization' or 'sacralization', which, he avers, are common to festivals where 'daily time is modified by

¹⁴ A three tiered price structure exists. For the events researched, the price of admission was \$50.00 (gate price), \$30.00 (preurchased tickets), \$20.00 (for DTE members) or free for children under 16 accompanied by adults. Since there are many people who arrive with genuine issues (cars that break down, luggage lost, money stolen, tickets left on the fridge), these people may be issued an 'X-file' ticket (a special set of tickets printed with their own serial numbers but no sale price). Permitting gate crew to use their own discretion, 'X-file' tickets indicate that this event is remote from profit driven non-ALEs.

¹⁵ David Cruise explains that turning back the clocks around the site (at The Gate, Information and workshop wall) conserves energy as less artificial lighting is required. This also had the effect of making people adjust back to 'real time' upon leaving.

a gradual or sudden interruption that introduces “time out of time”, a special temporal dimension devoted to special activities’.

Gate volunteers, besides ensuring every person entering ConFest has a ticket (DTE’s policy is that *everybody*, including site-crew and workshop holders, has to buy one), must contend with certain difficulties. Since DTE do not hire professional security to search cars or patrol perimeters, the issues of ‘freeloading’ (10% get in without paying according to George) and those looking for cheap entrance, exist. As David Cruise explains, some ‘would try the patience of Job [as they] stage performances that could get an AFI award’.

David has helped facilitate the gate process over a few years. Interested in evolving appropriate strategies to deal with ‘difficult situations’, he argues people ‘must enter your reality, you don’t enter theirs’. Trev’s disarming approach is exemplary. Trev is ConFest’s naked ambassador. Guardian and translator of the ConFest Spirit to neophytes, he has rarely missed a ConFest since 1981, and he spends most of the time at the Gate. He even camps there now. By his reckoning ‘it costs me 80c a week to go to two ConFests, and I make sure I’ve got that in the kitty’. But, besides the freeloaders who sponge on the community, there are those who come for the free or cheap ‘PerveFest’:

We’ve often had six, eight, ten car loads coming when the pub closes ... [but] the yobbos don’t know how to talk to a naked guy, so I’ve never been physically accosted. It’s disconcerting to them. I’ve got the upper hand ... ‘Hi guys, welcome to ConFest. Got a ticket ... Just come for a look have you. Well you had your look. We’re gonna turn you round here. But what can I tell you about ConFest? ConFest can change lives. It’s a caring, sharing community of all sorts of people’ ... And we’ve had beautiful wins out of this.

Usually unclad himself, David reasons ‘most people in our society cannot deal with a naked male. It’s just so outside their reality, when they enter our reality of a naked ticket box, they kind of lose all their control and reference points. It’s just outlandish’.

Sited on the other side of the car park from the gate, is the Welcome Tipi, a recent feature (at Moama IV and V). At the edge of the car park this second entrance threshold is the doorway to the village space. Entrants walk under the sign ‘Welcome Home’ (A Rainbow Gathering import) and encounter the guardian of the *Tipi* who imparts basic information and controls traffic. A map and doss down area for those arriving late at night are found here.

Information Centre

The nerve centre of ConFest, this area is designed to facilitate the exchange of information. This happens in several ways. Participants are provided information on a range of issues regarding the day-to-day aspects of ConFest. There is a map of the site, usually an example of what Niman calls 'participatory cartography' - a map updated by various people as the festival unfolds such that it is 'completely out of scale, bearing no resemblance to the actual geography of the area' (1997:16). There are also signposts to villages, a base 'radio on a stick' and a telephone. It is the location for ConFest's 'non-verbal communication exercise', as hundreds of personal notices informing friends of camping locations or pursuing lifts home, are posted. Most important, a wall of blackboards ('the wall') is usually positioned nearby upon which those who elect to run workshops over the week make their intentions known by scrawling the workshop/performance name and its time of day in columns identifying the location (normally a village). 'The wall' connects ConFesters to a live switchboard of alternatives. The area is also a storage space for community equipment (cool room, barrows, bicycles, four wheeled motorbikes or 'quads', tarps, tools, supplies etc.), the location for a worker's kitchen, and the principal point for recruiting novices for site work - especially The Gate crew.

Pt'chang Peacekeepers

The DTE funded ConFest Safety Project (CSP) formed the Pt'chang camp at Moama IV and V, merging with the existing 'fire and security' team (known as 'Pt'chang')¹⁶ and also attracting the input of those involved with the previous *Community* village. The CSP is 'an informed and pro-active community controlled safety project' designed by people within the ConFest community to create safety and to empower ConFesters to respond constructively and nonviolently to unsafe situations. Anthony, instrumental in developing the CSP, says it was created by a small number of activists within the grassroots Australian Non-Violence Network. Anthony claims 'a lot of the techniques and skills and stuff that we are using here have been used in war zones'. The CSP, he said, has been inspired by the Gandhian Shanti Sena, a grassroots peace army which spread throughout

¹⁶ Chris, who coined the term 'Pt'chang' explains - referring to the instant an individual arrives at a problem's solution - it is 'the sound [of] a realisation'.

India intervening in conflicts, including that between Hindus and Muslims¹⁷ and the ‘world peace brigades’ including the nonviolent interventionist Peace Brigades International.

An ideal social laboratory for applying their techniques, ConFest was chosen as a response to the real threat of sexual harassment and abuse. ‘Women friends of mine [explains Anthony] have been really clear in telling me that it’s the perfect place for rape, and it’s been highly dangerous for women ... Sexual harassment’s rife’.¹⁸

Prior to Moama IV, as a result of funding from DTE, 40 people were trained in a range of skills. According to the *Pt’chang Handbook* (ConFest 96/97: produced by the CSP:19) the appropriate protocol is to employ ‘actions that work consensually’, using an ‘enabling wellbeing’ frame rather than one of ‘conflict managing’. Accordingly, the training was a movement away from ‘security guard’, *power-over* strategies, toward *power-with* strategies. Anthony explains:

We’re not police ... We’ve got a totally different way of using power than police or authority figures and use fundamentally different methods, such as simply using listening skills to intervene in violence, and peacekeeping skills.

The training drew on a diversity of experience and networks, covering Aikido centring, briefings on drug and alcohol issues and harm minimisation, debriefing, sexual assault, non-violent intervention skills and crisis response strategies. The radical departure from *power-over* strategies of ‘crowd control’ is clear in a passage from the *Handbook* (7):

Nonviolent interventions are fun and we can be as creative and adventurous as we like. We can interrupt the old, boring, scripted patterns of violence with something that is new, different and unexpected. We recognise that there is thrill and excitement in taking risks and being scared, and finding the spontaneity and excitement of intervening nonviolently.

Pt’chang provided several key facilities: a ‘safe place’ marquee; a 24 hour crisis response network of co-ordinated peacekeepers (in pairs, on foot and on bicycles) trained for crisis intervention; a communication network connecting all peacekeepers and First Aid (the hub was the communications or ‘coms’ tent, where a log book was kept), and; the ‘Wellbeing Collective’. Forming Pt’chang’s core, the latter was itself comprised of three

¹⁷ A Sanskrit phrase glossing as ‘peace centre’, Shanti Sena is also the name adopted by North American Rainbow Gathering peacekeepers (Niman 1997:118).

¹⁸ Incidents at Moama IV were relatively minimal for a community of 6,000 over the New Year period. Pt’chang responded to and recorded: a sexual assault, an assault on two gay men, petty theft (burglaries of tents and cars), small fires, and ‘a few minimal family disputes’. They also had a role in locating lost children, recruiting volunteers for site work, dealing with ‘runners’ at The Gate and dogs on site (Anthony; *The Pt’chang Report*: 39-41).

groups: the Support group (counselling, debriefing, healing); the 'Purple Collective' available in cases of sexual violence, assault and child abuse, and: the Conflict Resolution and Mediation group, acting as a mediation service (*Handbook:2*). Workshops were held on a range of safety issues. They liaised with DTE, and the Bush Fire Brigade and undertook 'fire patrols', disseminating information about fire regulations. A workers' kitchen was set up and maintained in their space. They perceived their most important role is in encouraging all ConFesters to take responsibility and initiative for their own safety.

Community Kitchens

The 'Earth Link Cafe' was conceived at Moama III (Easter '95), evolving out of a perceived need to supply volunteers with meals (food supplied with DTE funds). It was set up and maintained by a core of experienced people many of whom were connected to various alternative community groups from the Dandenongs: such as Mountain Co-op, Alternative Options for Youth and Mountain Net. Its principal co-ordinator, Laurie, designed it such that there were two fires: a fire 'of the hearth' 'being from the mother's spirit', and the masculine 'fire of the hunt'. The 'Cafe' idea has given rise to Community Kitchen developments at subsequent ConFests where huge 'feasts' have occurred towards the end of the event. The idea of distributing food to participants, a portion of the Society's 'invisible hand', has precipitated the occurrence of events where several kitchens have appeared in different village centres (Toc IV being a good example).

Community Toilets/Showers

There are normally about 20 toilets around the site. Before the event, pits are dug with back hoes, which are then skirted with hessian or tie-dyed cloth wrapped around star pickets. ConFesters are urged to 'adopt a dunny': keep toilets clean and maintain paper supplied from Information. Since pits are deep, covered and participants urged to cover their faeces with the lime provided, diseases often reported at Rainbow Gatherings - the 'Rainbow Runs' (Niman 1997:67) - are prevented. Toilets are finally filled in and pulled down by site crew. There are a small number of showers located around the site also. Toilets and showers are non-gender specific and users are often visible to one another and to those walking by. Often there are no barriers separating multiple toilets which means defecating can be quite a fear-confronting experience for novices who are accustomed to

excreting waste in lonely cubicles. According to Chris, 'I think having a crap beside a stranger is about the most disarming thing ConFest gave [me]'.

Fire Circle

A gathering area, the Fire Circle serves as a focal point for the collective release of energy. At Toc III and IV it was adjacent to the market, at Birdlands it was at the centre of the site on 'the sacred mound', and at the Moama events there was no single gathering space. The Fire Circle has been the site of collective daytime performances such as the meditative 'morning sharing',¹⁹ Spontaneous Choirs,²⁰ Tai Chi, Yoga, belly dancing and children's parades. At dusk this space metamorphoses into a mischievous nocturnal playground where the boundary between performer and spectator is fluid or non-existent - a spontaneous combustion of youth, colour, sound and spirit. At Toc III, following an invocation of the original inhabitants of the area (the Yorta-Yorta), hundreds gathered to perform a fire walk under the fullness of the moon. Vertiginous dancers, many of whom were naked with mud, ochre and paint-based body-murals and facial designs, gestured frenetically to the accompaniment of tumultuous orchestras. On this, as with most evenings, the air dense with dust and the ringing of bells dangling from a thousand limbs, necks and foreheads, and with the roar of firesticks overhead, there occurred one rapturous Dionysian cacophony in which the fire remained a central element.²¹

For ConFest's duration, music is nearly always audible, especially the rapid strain or distant booming of drums accompanied by the intermittent roar and shriek of delirious crowds. The gathering spaces are pulsating centres of percussion. Every night a host of musicians appear in possession of a bizarre spectrum of instruments. There is an eruption of African djembe, dun dun (double ended talking drum) bongo, congas, doumbek, kalimba and chekere, together with steel pan, cow bells, clapping sticks, xylophone, rainmakers (carved hollow wooden tubes filled with beads), 44 gallon drums, frying pans, cooking pots and anything loud when beaten. I have seen and heard a range of wind instruments (flute, saxophone, tuba, horns, bagpipe, didjeridu), and an equally impressive range of vocals, from tonal chant to rebirthing scream. Together with fire jugglers and

¹⁹ Not so popular these days, the convention of gathering in a circle, linking, hugging, chanting and sharing thoughts and feelings can be traced back to Cotter, where 'tribal councils', akin to Main Council at Rainbow Gatherings, were held.

²⁰ Facilitated by Peter Gleeson, the Spontaneous Choir are a fluid extra-ConFest tribe who meet and perform at various Melbourne locations.

²¹ Firewalks also took place at Toc IV and at both Moama events. These were longer, more controlled rites with fewer walkers.

breathers, the convergence of hundreds of skilled and semi-skilled musicians in the Fire Circle, around camp fires and at other locations (like the chai tent or Market centre), especially on New Years Eve, generates an infectious frenzy.

The Market

In the market, itinerant stall holders trade in goods and services palatable to New Agers and 'greenies': handicrafts, candles, folk-jewellery, leather goods, crystals, incense, hemp products, cheesecloth garments, recycled fabrics, herbs and oils. Here, one can find numerologists, aromatherapists, tarot, palm, rune and aura readers; buy 'tribal staffs', 'rainmakers', 'medicine sticks', roo-bone 'amulets', Feng Shui meditation products, a range of percussive instruments and didgeridus; and get one's body pierced or hair tied. Food and drink sales are strictly vegetarian, wholemeal and non-alcoholic - meat, animal derived and disposable products are prohibited, and inorganically produced foodstuffs are disfavoured. Bio-dynamic juices, like wheatgrass, are popular, as is chai tea (in the 'chai tent' - a familiar meeting place). The converted 'bus with the lot' of the bohemian 'Vege Out Cafe' and the Earth Oven bakery are also favourite venues. Most vendors are itinerant traders following a circuit of alternative events and markets (like St Andrews market near Melbourne). Some are operated for the benefit of non-profit, ethical and community organisations. Stalls include Friends of the Earth (FOE) dishing up vegan fare, Ananda Marga²² who erected large marquee restaurants serving Indian cuisine, Hari Krishna, The Dzogchen Community,²³ the Sun Cafe, which dispensed 'solar powered smoothies', and the Performer's Cafe. At these events, GECO and HEMP (Help End Marijuana Prohibition) also had tents wherein their own agendas were placed on display. At Moama IV, the market centre featured The ConFest Prayer Wheel. Upon writing their 'good feelings, prayers and wishes for the planet, us and the New Year', market patrons were invited to slip their wishes into the makeshift cylindrical device and give it a spin.

²² Ananda Marga is 'a spiritual and social service movement' (from leaflet) founded in India by Shrii Shrii Anandamurti (P.R.Sarkar). Its teachings are based on the 7,000 year old science of Tantra Yoga, and the purpose of its practice is to 'change our inner nature - and the society we live in; in order to foster the emergence of a new civilization, one based on spiritual and universalistic values, rather than on narrow dogmas and short sighted materialism' (from Wangaratta '83/'84 handbook:36). They promote the annual Ananda Mela (Festival of Bliss) held at their Ashram and spiritual community in Stanthorpe Queensland.

²³ The Australian Dzogchen community follow the teachings of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, himself a reincarnation of a great Dzogchen master of the early 20th century, Adom Drugpa. Dzogchen ('the Great Perfection) is 'the culmination and essence of Tibetan Buddhism and is a complete way of knowledge of an individual's state of being' (from pamphlet).

Along with conforming to health and safety regulations, and requiring a public liability insurance policy, food vendors must, in their application to the Market Committee, satisfy several criteria: no meat, no disposable products, no personal generators, environmentally sound cleaning products only and sullage should not disrupt the aquatic and terrestrial environment. From Toc IV a divisional recycling system and compost area was situated in the market. At that event, a 'participation policy' was also introduced. Each vendor was required to provide one breakfast, lunch or dinner for site workers, with the larger stalls obliged to take bigger sittings. Vendors were charged rent according to the stall's type and size. At Toc IV there were four types:

- Non-profit organisations, community GEN²⁴ types, and co-operative groups that use organic and biodynamic produce' (as much as \$100.00).
- Non-profit organisations, community GEN types and Co-operative groups.
- Other traders who use organic and biodynamic produce.
- Other traders (as much as \$300.00).

Many vendors are regulars and have evolved long-standing social networks wherein they camp together, share stories about the health of the market and 'look after each other'. Sociality is similar to that described for car boot sales in Britain by Crewe and Gregson (1998). Far removed from the hostility of the conventional market-place, friendships between vendors often cut across any competition.

During this period of research, an area was demarcated in the market for the purpose of screening video footage of past ConFests. The film was narrated by a long time DTE elder and custodian of visual history, the late Gordon Ballard. Images, actions and concerns of participants at past events (including the original event at Cotter and the presence of controversial ancestral figures such as Jim Cairns) were projected. Participants, especially novices, were reminded of their heritage and provided the opportunity to position themselves historically. Videos on Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, vivisection and footage of UFOs were also viewed.

Villages and Workshops

Villages form the cultural topology of ConFest. As 'social sculptures, dynamic social installations' (Marko), these theme-specific camping zones are the sites of both Conference and Festival. No ConFest is the same, as most of these on-site locations and

their features undergo mutation between events. Each event is characterised by the appearance of new villages, mergers, clusters and satellite groups who have perhaps not yet achieved or desired the status of a 'village'. Some villages may disappear altogether, perhaps only to re-emerge in the same or a different guise. Proposed productions/areas are usually designated 'villages' after they have been allocated funding, sought, via proposal, from the DTE budget at meetings prior to the event. Regardless of funding, villages - home to the manifold organisations, therapies, co-ops, collectives, tribes, individuals on-site - are spontaneous productions providing supportive environments for the transmission and exchange of 'traditional' or more proto-alternate knowledge and praxis.

According to Cockatoo, ConFest is a 'vast school of consciousness'. The curricula appear in an extensive corpus of workshops (up to 300 at summer events). Many workshops are conventional fare and have gained popularity. Others are novel, obscure, positively strange, even fantastic. The format of workshops varies (open discussion, debate, lecture/demonstration, game, body movement/dance, theoretical/applied) and is often multiple (with shifting emphasis throughout their duration). Workshops are a popular psycho-spiritual educational forum wherein the nineties 'esoteric tourist' (Goodman 1990:51) of the mind, body and spirit, has a smorgasbord of personal development stratagems from which to select. ConFesters have always had their 'choice of gurus, avatars and panaceas' (Wendy 1984). Some run healing workshops as primers for rural weekend retreats or city businesses. Others experiment with novel psychotechnologies. Yet, workshops also facilitate discussion on a range of social and political issues contesting spiritual pathos, nuclear family, drug prohibition, sexual repression and environmental abuse.

Many are not attracted to villages as such. Novices, especially, may rather choose a site for its geographical desirability. Also, there are many, particularly the site crew, who do not 'do workshops'. 'Never done a workshop. I've never had a massage', boasts Janet. Alleging he had never attended one either, Spinifex voiced the sentiments of many, claiming 'the whole ConFest is a workshop'.

The following list provides a vignette of each village present at the five events,²⁵ sketching their composition and purpose, and noting the events at which each appeared (see Maps). Some villages were characterised by a miasmatic flurry of workshop themes. In some cases there was no clear explanation, other than practicality, why many workshops

²⁴ Green, Ethical and Non-exploitative ('non-exploitative of people or planet').

²⁵ Since it was one of the few different villages appearing at Moama II & III, the inclusion of the *Women's* village is the exception.

occurred in a particular village space. For example, workshop holders may just happen to be camping nearby; or other, more appropriate locations, may be reserved.

Alternative Technology (Toc IV)

A display run by the Alternative Technology Association, an organisation promoting the use of renewable energy technologies. The 'Energymobile', a nine ton mobile energy and technology display vehicle, and the 'Solar Shuttle' were present.

Art (all events)

Situated on the bank of a billabong, this has been one of ConFest's most popular zones. Normally, it features a mud pit ('primal ooze'), body painting, evening fluoro parties, 'the fridge' (a giant Coolgardie safe for people), a sauna, a kid's water slide and a 'sweatlodge'. Accommodating up to fifty people, the 'sweat' is a wood fired steam tent, often scented with essential oils.²⁶ After lying in the mud pit, it is common for people to stand at the edge of a bed of hot coals to dry the mud, creating a natural body plaster which later acts as an exfoliant. This is a collective process. Once dried, many have their bodies painted, by themselves or others. They are painted naked, partially clothed or mud splattered - using water based or fluorescent paints or even ochre. Many people, particularly at the summer events, wandered around the site in such chthonic uniforms.

Celestine Prophecy (Toc IV, Moama IV)

Also called *Macchu Picchu* (after the Inca citadel in Peru believed to be a global sacred site), the facilitators of the village were inspired by the insights contained within the prosaic New Age religious tract *The Celestine Prophecy*, a book which prepares its readers for the coming spiritual reawakening.

Circus (Birdlands, Moama IV)

With a geodesic dome at its centre, a fluoro-coloured space for workshops and performances on fire juggling and twirling, tight rope walking, and kids games.

Community (Toc III & Toc IV)

Sited on the periphery at Toc III, this was an experiment in communal living (called *Community Springs* at Toc IV). It was stressed that those camped at the village (about 35

²⁶ Although it has similar purifying potentials, the structure is not designed to accommodate rituals modelled on Native American or Celtic 'sweatlodges'.

people) must be committed to a community process of shared tasks and responsibilities. Cedar explained, since DTE ‘wasn’t going to change, what we had to do was change ConFest from within ConFest’. Therefore,

we camped right off the edge ... There was regular workshops there, and we had dinners every night which worked really well. We built ourselves a Coolgardie safe. We got some resources, scavenged them from around the site. And I put on the board most nights, ‘communal dinner - come and bring some ingredients’. And that worked really well, and we got about the same number of people every night for dinner. Some of the people from the area would go off and eat elsewhere, but we’d have people from elsewhere coming and eating dinner with us and cooking and stuff. And just the cooking and working over something simple like that can really bring people together.

Workshops here included discussions on economic reform, unemployment and permaculture, and it was the site for Les’ ‘spontaneous drama’, a workshop designed to improve individual wellbeing and community relations through ‘re-living the stories of past tragedies and traumas [and, in the process] creating new endings’. Les figures that the process originated in the Philippines, where historically opposed villages would come together to re-enact past conflicts, but with the crucial twist of exchanging roles. This process, he suggests, places participants in ‘sustained reflection’.

Cosmic Celebration (Toc III)

A space available for a diversity of workshops, such as I Ching, ‘ancient chanting and harmonics’, ‘astrology chart reading’ and a ‘discussion on dream symbolism’. Yet, the ‘main event’ here was a Psychedelic Spirituality workshop consisting of lectures (neurochemistry, responsible usage and spiritual and political ramifications) and ‘hands-on’, or experimental, phases. Co-chairing the early phase, Pipit had a fascination with the connections between spirituality and psychedelics:

I felt there was a great expansion of interest and experimentation associated with in particular the rave movement from the early 90s, and its subsequent evolution and fusion with the hippy trance thing. I think I was envisaging a 90s neo-psychedelic revolution. The ideas of Terrence McKenna for example were just beginning to gain currency. But at that time, there wasn’t a lot going in the way of accurate science and experienced, reasonably level-headed people with sensible (e.g. harm reduction) advice.

The latter, ‘shared experience’ attracted 50-60 people who were requested to BYO LSD ‘sacraments’. The aim was to ingest the sacraments and explore ‘the epiphenomenality of a group of conscious people, communing meditatively & focussing on each other and

common themes' (Svendsen 1999:40). Though an 'extraordinary event', apparently the larger meditation circle dispersed into smaller circles and groups who wished to traverse the wider event. Kurt, the principal facilitator, held similar workshops from Toc III through to Moama V, becoming the victim of an extraordinarily vicious rumour campaign (ibid:26-7) (see Chapter 8). He is skilled in designing spaces which he claims 'maximise the high semantics potential of the experiencing, so that the journeyers can walk away with greater self-organising integrity in navigating the terrestrial reality they are privileged to be incarnated in' (ibid:39).²⁷

EarthSharing (Moama IV & V)

A solar powered stage for spontaneous ensembles, poetry and theatre sports. The space also promoted EarthSharing, the local branch of a world movement inspired by social philosopher and economist Henry George. *EarthSharing* is

dedicated to achieving economic justice for all people, and to reforming the way we treat our limited planetary resources. [It] connotes that we have a responsibility to share access to natural resources equitably - and to be mindful of the rights of future generations by caring for the global environment. (brochure)

Affiliates subscribe to the laws of geonomics ('Law of the Earth') holding that 'the Earth (land and natural resources) should be the equal and common birthright of all humanity'. Associated with Tax Reform Australia, they believe that the primary source of community revenue should be an annual rent on natural resources over which title is held, rather than through an employment inhibiting production tax (from pamphlet). Workshops on geonomics and tax reform were held on this site (Jessika).

Food Not Bombs (Toc IV and Moama IV)

Also called the *Anarchist* village, such a presence goes back to the mid-eighties when the Redfern Black Rose Anarchist Collective organised the *Self Management* village at Baringa I and II, and Glenlyon III. Food Not Bombs (*FNB*) consisted of a kitchen/communal eating area and workshop/bookstore space. Each day at Toc IV, the *FNB* kitchen provided meals (organic vegan food supplied by DTE) at midday and in the evening to ConFest participants and workers (including food sent to the Gate crew). Their aim was to encourage 'a sense of community' around the village by providing free chai and fresh fruit throughout the day. There were several workshops per day conducted on a

²⁷ According to Pipit, the 'hands on' workshop 'made it into a soft-porn OZ magazine, as reported by an attendee, under a title something like "sex and drugs crazed hippies go wild in jungle

range of themes (including: vegan cooking classes, animal liberation, women and violence, ecosabotage, the politics of drugs, legalisation of hemp, alternative medicine, Koori land rights, squatting, theatre, permaculture, punk, alternative media, transnational corporations and boycotting, and the abolition of work). Both events had an anarchist library stocked with a range of material from Brunswick's Barricade Books.²⁸ Most of the material was given away at Moama IV.

Prior to Toc IV, DTE provided *FNB* with funding for cooking ware and utensils which they used at their village, and borrow to outfit their urban mobile kitchen. According to their information sheet:

From that moment [Toc IV] Food Not Bombs had gone from strength to strength. Armed with a mobile soup kitchen, a van and a fast growing collective of people, Food Not Bombs is out on the streets providing free vegan food for anyone in need.

Inspired by anarchist free food kitchens operating with the same name in the US,²⁹ *FNB* Melbourne began in January 1996, and by 1997 they were operating four kitchens a week (Fitzroy Street St Kilda, Swanston Walk outside Timezone, Smith St Collingwood and Church St Richmond outside 'McDeaths'). They collect otherwise discarded vegan food from markets, shops and wholesalers and re-distribute it through these kitchens and by drop-offs to community centres and schools.³⁰

Anarchists like those at *FNB* are most critical of ConFest, questioning what they see as the transient frivolity implicit in the Market and workshop culture - suggesting 'ConsumerFest' as the more apt title. For Acacia, 'a lot of people now come to ConFest with the idea that it's kind of a theme park ... the Disney World of alternative lifestyles, and they just move from workshop to workshop and rock up at them and say what have you got to give us?' Indeed, for many ConFesters, who select from a chic smorgasbord of vegan fare, DiY techniques of spiritual enlightenment, neo-hippie paraphernalia and fashionable words of wisdom, the commitment to an 'alternative' lifestyle is as temporary

orgy'" (cf. Brumer 1994).

²⁸ Including extracts from Bakunin, Rudolf Rocker's 'Anarchism: its Aims and Purposes' - the first chapter of his 1938 libertarian classic *Anarchosyndicalism*, E.G Smith Press' *Animal Ingredients: A-Z*, W. Kemp's *Message Sticks in Cyberspace*, *The Squatters Handbook*, *Green Anarchist* newspaper, *Angry People* magazine and a copy of *The Celestine Fallacy*.

²⁹ What is now a loose network of autonomous groups throughout America, Food Not Bombs emerged there in 1980/81 after a few people concerned about homelessness, hunger and militarism, decided to recover and redistribute abundant quantities of discarded food. In addition to feeding the poor in public parks, *FNB* have a reputation for feeding activists at peace camps and other political demonstrations (Lawrence-Butler and McHenry 1992).

³⁰ They have also supported several community events such as Critical Mass, Koornung Creek Festival, the Anarchist Black Cross Conference, Wellington Street Squat Eviction.

as the event. This freewheeling egocentric consumer attitude was the subject of a workshop 'why your alternative lifestyle won't change anything' held at *FNB* at Moama IV. Acacia explains:

The label 'alternative' is overused, misused, and has come to mean very little ... [A] lot of people come up to ConFest and it's their one week of living a different life, and experiencing a different life, and then they go back to living a really normal life in Melbourne. And I guess we really have problems with that idea, and we also have a lot of problems with people who really don't have any politics apart from, you know, they see wearing hippie clothes and occasionally going off to a festival and doing a bit of fire twirling is ... creating some kind of alternative to the mainstream paradigm. And it's just not true. It doesn't change anything. So ... they should maybe think about extending their politics just a little bit further to ... creating actual alternatives to mainstream things.

Forest (Moama IV & V)

[T]he more activists get involved in DTE the more ... you're gonna get people actually doing something, rather than just believing having seven days walking around in the nude is fucken alternative. (Banyalla)

Activists from GECO (Goongerah Environment Centre) merged with other groups such as FOE, OREN (Otway Ranges Environment Network) and TWS (The Wilderness Society), to form *Forest* at the Moama events. *Forest* is the principal node for activists on site. The village has functioned as a fund raiser and recruitment centre for logging blockades mounted in East Gippsland and has promoted the defence of the Otway Forest. It has consisted of an organic/vegan kitchen and workshop spaces where information (including photo displays and films) about the current state of forest management, boycotts, blockades, and skills in regard to tree climbing and rigging are disseminated by experienced activists involved in a host of anti-logging campaigns and protests. Banyalla is a GECO stalwart. A one-time Greenpeace canvasser, he is frustrated with DTE's inertia - what with:

old hippies still running around the place, ya'know, the old pot bellied men, that ya'know like to get their gear off and walk around ... They've got good capabilities in running a ten thousand [participant] ConFest right, but that's as far as they want it to go - just fun loving, all that sort of shit, right. (Banyalla)

Belalie is generally critical of ConFest:

It's a really escapist culture ... I don't think it's sustainable. Like all of the food just gets trucked into the place. It's still very cash orientated ... It's a holiday camp rather than like a community village. But [he concedes] it's good, I mean it opens doors.

As Banyalla descrys, despite the political vacuum in DTE and for all the shortcomings of ConFest, it actually holds the potential to open the floodgates. Generally, he argues, since there are various social justice and environment problems in Victoria, 'you have got great political clout' if you take 10,000 people from a New Year festival and 'challenge the status quo'. You can 'do some pretty heavy negotiations'.

Great Walk (Toc IV)

The Great Walk Network (GWN) acquired funding from DTE to co-ordinate a free food kitchen and to obtain equipment to continue and improve Great Walks in Australia. At *Great Walk* there were workshops on deep ecology, circus skills and story telling and the space was used to promote walks, especially a walk conducted in East Gippsland following Toc IV. The GWN is a 'loose conglomerate of forest activists and social change workers' who organise fully supported (often 10 day) walks through wilderness areas. The walks are described as 'a moving village' with walkers using a 'communal T-pee'. 'Often [they claim] people do not know each other before a walk but by the end there is a strong feeling of unity akin to the feelings which may be experienced by people living in a tribal village'. They provide 'a unique opportunity for people to experience the Australian environment in a way which is social, interactive and educational'. The GWN is 'non-profit', they 'celebrate and support ongoing environmental action' in Australian forests (from the GWN village proposal Feb 1996).

The Grove (Birdlands, Moama IV)

The village accommodated those connected to a ConFest inspired drug and alcohol free healing community north of Sydney called *The Grove*, which holds small gatherings (of 100-200 people) through the year, including Pagan quarterdays. One Grovey says of the gathering: 'it opened me up a lot more. You can just be yourself and people won't think anything of you, no matter what you do, what you wear or what you don't wear'. At ConFest, Groveys are free to reproduce their habituated permissiveness. Workshops included shamanism and Celtic chanting. Indeed Profth, who has 'a fair amount of knowledge of the old rites of England', says *The Grove* 'tends towards the pagan' and the shamanistic. Having travelled around America in the sixties when Ken Kesey gave him his

Prankster name, Proft eventually ran Street Communes (about 30 communal kitchens, squats, networks on street level) which were set up all over England in 1969. This was before migrating to Australia in the late seventies where he met his partner, and Grove co-founder, Sassafras, at one of the Baringa ConFests.

Gypsy (all events)

This space on the event-periphery accommodates ConFesters who wish to camp in or near their vehicles. Hundreds of buses, kombis, vans and cars 'park up' in this zone.

Healing (all events)

Healing was combined with *Massage* at Toc III (where workshops included 'flower essences and gem elixirs', classic homoeopathy and 'life without therapy'). At the Moama events, the first aid centre accommodated a complementary approach to healing. With knowledge in both western (a medical degree) and eastern medicine (Chinese acupuncture), Dr Marc has been instrumental in supervising this merger. At Moama IV there were 4 doctors and a variety of other healers (including naturopaths and Reiki practitioners) all volunteering to provide a free 24 hour medical service (though the doctors were paid a small sum from the village budget). Commenting on his position at ConFest, Marc says

I've always been the sort of alternative person amongst the western healers. And I came to ConFest and I was the western healer amongst all the alternative people. Even though I was into alternative stuff I had the western background, and, 'cause I was the only one with the western medical background, I was 'the western doctor' ... That's not really the way I look at myself, but for me it was a really good balance ... So I've found myself a little bit of a niche here.

Marc's confidence in the multimodal approach is such that 'we try to do the alternatives first, and only in a desperate situation go to the western drugs and western medicine'. In this open field of medical modalities, one sees suturing performed, antibiotics dispensed, poultices applied and herbal remedies prepared all under one roof. As Marc declares '[w]e're doing what any general practice would do and more I guess, cause I refer people for didjeridu massage and stuff'.

Kids (all events)

A conventional ConFest space providing specifically for children. At Toc III it featured a steel framed geodesic dome draped with a multicoloured silk parachute. Co-ordinators organise games, and clowning, maskwork, story telling and ‘Oki-Do yoga for kids’ take place. Most events are host to costume parades or even a ‘rainbow serpent pageant’ which spill out into the festival.

Koori Culture (Toc III)

Featured a ‘bora ring’ and was barely populated. Workshops here included ‘Koori astronomy’ and ‘intercultural sharing’. The latter workshop - involving the painting of two multi-totemic murals at *Arts* - was initiated by two women (one Koori and the other from PNG) who later in 1994 organised the Cairns Indigenous People’s Festival, modelled in part on ConFest.

Labyrinth (Moama V)

It’s a return to the womb. And often people have a rebirth experience by that.
(Orryelle)

The *Labyrinth* was an interactive ritual initiation cycle weaving ‘a multi-cultural and multi-subcultural tapestry of ancient mythologies and modern technology’ (from ticket). Located in a tightly wooded grove on an elevated region of the site, the installation was demarcated by a hessian wall, and trees within were webbed with ropes and string to form spirals around a centrally positioned geodesic dome. The production incorporated a conglomeration of groups: the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre Company (MRTC), Mutation Parlour, band Dwellers on the Threshold and Mozart Project, Mutoid Waste Co (see *Tek Know*), DJ Krusty and Clan Analogue.³¹ According to its designer, Orryelle Defenestrade, the *Labyrinth* is

a total interactive journey that people can go on where they meet all sorts of strange characters in different locations throughout their travels through the maze, and interact with them and become a character for themselves, in the process.

³¹ *Clan Analogue* is a national collective of electronic artists who facilitated ‘PolyTechnic’ workshops involving teaching synthesiser skills. Rather than playing automated rhythms, their idea was to generate electronic music with ‘a human feel’. With one person playing a base ‘groove’ and other ConFesters encouraged to ‘tweak’ a number of synthesisers, all constantly monitored and mixed to maintain ‘respectful musicality’, they boasted that the overall effect may have been ‘the most “live” electronic music in Australia’ (Wallaby and proposal).

As it was repeated over three nights, hundreds of initiates were able to experience the journey.

In designing this installation, the MRTC were inspired by both the stone labyrinths of Ancient Greece (like that created by Daedalus entrapping the half-man/half-bull Minotaur), and forest labyrinths created by the Druids. As such, the *Labyrinth* is said to be an ancient pagan tradition. The usually spiralling maze is said to represent a womb, and the 'initiate's journey in then out of the labyrinth was a symbolic death and rebirth experience for them' (web site). Although possessing similar mythological/magical premises to an initial *Labyrinth* performed at Moama III (Easter '95), the Moama V production, with its use of modern technology and greater collaborative input, was a more spectacular event. Drawing upon various sources (an interview with Orryelle, the *Labyrinth* web site,³² the entrance ticket and my own experience) I reconstruct the concept and journey here.³³

Initiates entered via the 'Labia Gateway' ('a long fully-enclosing red stretchy fabric tunnel'). Out into the Gateway Chamber they met Clotho (the maiden), 'The Spinner of the 3 Fates', who sat at her spinning-wheel spinning the threads of destiny. The maiden requested they spin the Wheel of Fortune to determine which of the four elemental pathways they were to travel. Bearing the 'etheric' or life-threads given them by the Spinner, the objective was to achieve the centre of the maze. Each elemental path, lined with strange characters and installations, spiralled into the centre, 'the dome globe egg web'.³⁴ At the crossroads of all the elemental paths, there was a 'Mutation Parlour' where initiates could 'be physically and psychically mutated as a part of their journey' (web site). Once inside the dome they were calmly greeted by Lachesis (the mother), 'The Weaver of the 3 Fates', who took their life-threads so as to weave them into 'the web of relationship'.

Initiates then faced the Minotaur (half-man, half-bull) representing 'the beast within' ('peoples' shadows or primal selves') and were symbolically killed by him. At this point, Death, Atropos (the crone), 'The Cutter of the 3 Fates', came and cut the thread ('the lifeline') and gently led them into 'the mirror chamber', the *axis mundi* of the dome.

³² <<http://www.paradigm4.com.au/crossroads/lab.htm>>

³³ Prior to entry, many initiates were handed 'tickets' which included Orryelle's brief narrative translation of the coming journey. However, others possessed no or little prior knowledge of the intent of the *Labyrinth's* designer. For such people, the experience was somewhat confusing.

³⁴ Many characters encountered on the paths played acoustic instruments (drums, didjeridu, violin, piano-accordion) their music blending with the throbbing electronic soundscapes created in the backstage area behind the dome. Beginning as soft background noises (as initiates started entering the *Labyrinth*), the volume and intensity of the music increased throughout the night, later culminating in a chaotic amplified onslaught (web site).

Inside a tall chamber, its interior walls encrusted with slabs and shards of mirror, the dead initiates ascended a spiral staircase ‘surrounded by infinite reflections of themselves’ (said to represent ‘the journey to “Caer Arianhrod”, the spiral castle of Celtic mythology where you go when you die’: web site). Emerging on top of the dome, initiates then climbed down rope ladders to ‘the Netherworld’, a space in front of the dome described as ‘a kind of cosmic waiting room between incarnations’, where they were reunited with other initiates/travellers.

They waited there until the hero Theseus, who was chosen from the initiates, entered the dome with a golden thread and an ‘electrosword’ (which sparked and crackled as it was scraped along the dome’s metal structure) to face the Minotaur. As Theseus appeared, the Three Fates converged to form ‘an eight-limbed (six arms, two legged) triple-headed kama-kali spider’. When Theseus lopped off the Minotaur’s head (a costume appendage above the actor’s head), the battle was over and he was crowned the new Horned God by Ariadne (also The Spinner). At the moment of the Minotaur’s demise, the generator was switched off:

causing all lights and sound to de-generate into blackness and silence. From this rose an acoustic chant chorused by all the people involved in the Labyrinth’s construction and enactment, the sound circulating as they formed a human web around the dome. Seven different chakra tones ascended the musical scale as the Minotaur ascended the seven steps of the spiral staircase, climaxed by a red flare shot off into the heavens with his spirit. (web site)

Atropos then cut the threads surrounding the Netherworld. Hermes, ‘messenger, guide and psychopomp of the Labyrinth’ (played by Orryelle himself), sent the initiates down the spirit path, back through the spinning chamber and out the labia gateway, ‘to be reborn into the rest of the festival’.

Pagan tradition was honoured for, on the following night Theseus became the new Minotaur, who was then killed by a newly chosen Theseus. Thus ‘the old Horned King dies, the new Horned King rises’. But on the final night of the performance, Theseus, now ‘Thesea’, was played by a woman. Upon slaying the Minotaur she became the new ‘Horned God/Goddess/Demon/Demoness of the PandemonAeon: Baphomet!’ (Web) who paraded around the dome with bare breasts wearing a large phallus (carved from a cow bone). This was ‘the Age of the Hermaphrodite’, of The Twins, Horus and Maat. And Hermes himself, who became ‘HermAphrodite’, displayed a symbolic bellybrand, performed a Caduceus dance with snake-skins (stitched onto his arms) and owl wings (invoking ‘Quetzal Coatlicue’), and finally proclaimed: “Fuck the Patriarchy; Fuck the

Matriarchy; Let's just have An -archy!" As the web site conveys, this transpired around midnight initiating 'the transition into an all-night de-construction doof'³⁵ in the *Labyrinth*. And so April Fool's Day 1997 was ushered in.

Massage (all events)

Described as a 'sharing, caring, safe area' (Barry in *DTE News* 82:4) this is a covered space with about 30 massage tables where people gather to receive and reciprocate massages. According to George, past director and teacher of holistic massage techniques, ConFest possesses 'this fantastic opportunity for everyone to live out their internal needs' and the need for *Massage* is suggested by:

the gross neglect in our society of any kind of touching and physical contact despite all the evidence before us, where it is patently clear that the less touching, the greater the psychological disturbances.

Music (Birdlands, Toc IV, Moama IV)

The village has reproduced the type of music productions appearing at the Walwa events. A stage was set up upon which there occurred concerted performances by billed acts, spontaneous combos, and unplanned ensembles of amateur musicians. It has also been a site of fringe theatre performances. In concordance with the music, pop and folk festival genres, and in contrast to the unifying propensity of the Fire Circle, this zone is characterised by the presence of an audience, who, while variously engaged, are demarcated from the authorised performers, acts, and 'stars'.

Nothing In Particular (Moama IV & V)

A non theme-specific camping zone. A banner first appeared at Moama II, indicating a region for ConFesters who wished to camp without any obligations of being 'for' or 'with' anything.

Pagan (Toc III)

The village incorporated a curious, ad hoc, mixture of themes including anything bordering on the occult. Workshops included knife massage, circle dancing, Celtic mythology, 'meditation for pagans', tantra, 'wild women - celebration of the Goddess' and rebirthing. Loud screaming in the night associated with rebirthing relegated *Pagan* to the

³⁵ 'Doof' is colloquial for rave, a techno dance event traditionally held outside established club

fringes. The village has not appeared since that event. However, as a great many participants sympathise with paganism - Earth based religiosity - in some form, it has pervasive on-site manifestations (see Chapter 7). This is despite some misconceptions as Cedar's story reveals:

I was at the gate one day and the police turned up and these freaked out Christians on acid had walked all the way to Walwa, the town, and told the police that the Pagans were sacrificing a baby, which is part of the stigma that the Pagans have. And it turned out that one of the babies had fallen down a toilet pit ... and the parents [were] carrying it by a hand and a foot down to the creek to wash [the shit] off. And somebody saw that and thought 'OH they're sacrificing children'. And it's the sort of story and rumour that would go around about them for a long time.

Queer Presence (Birdlands, Toc IV, Moama IV & V)

A centre for the open celebration of queer (homo/bi/trans) sexuality. The emphasis on being obvious and public is crucial and particularly apparent at Moama IV where the village had a prime location next to the market. Mimosa, a Gay Spiritualist who had been distributing condoms and Coca-Cola flavoured dental dams, described *Queer Presence* as: 'sex workers, poofs, drug users, all of the people that most of society doesn't like to look at, being very obvious'. Promotions for the village emphasise an exposure or 'release' of almost millenarian proportions:

Unique persons, double spirited ones. All you who push at the boundaries of sexuality and gender ... For too long our message and teachings have been left unheard ... But do not despair kind folk, fear not good people, for the spirit is moving and evolving, we are coming together and our stories will be heard from the highest places to the quietest corners. Bigotry, corrupt morals, fascism and the climate of domination and power will be dispersed. We will be *thrust* into freedom. So rejoice, celebrate and prepare. Talk to each other in your places of meeting. Keep the spirit moving and live, share your dreams and desires. The time will soon be at hand. The time of our *release*. ('Queers' leaflet)

At Moama IV the village attracted people from the Melbourne Prostitutes Collective and Radical Fairies, they highlighted safe sex issues, and workshops were held on transgenderism (Norri May Welby), queer spirituality, bisexuality, sex-industry myths, IV drug use and crisis intervention.

venues - often warehouses or the bush.

Sculpture (Birdlands/ Moama IV)

A camp set up by the multimedia sculptural group Futurelic who specialise in constructing large scale artworks from scrap material. They used low voltage equipment with welders and oxy torches to create site specific sculptures. Dressed in army fatigues, Africa Core desert hat and jungle boots, Cooba, like many other artists here, is enthused by the potential of that which can be scavenged from places like the 'rust belt', a wasteland of abandoned factories in Melbourne's west. Commenting on a fellow artist's piece - a metallic skeleton which lay in a shallow grave (which he refers to as Robo Erectus) - Cooba explains: 'basically we like to dig up the past via junk and find out what we can from it and put a different twist on it, turn it into things monstrous or turn it into things delightful'.

Most objects and installations are sculpted out of 'locally found metals, scrap, factory offcuts, wire, gaffa, paints, plastics, pvc pipe, wood, natural stuff' which are then suspended in trees and placed around the site as landmarks (Nipa). Futurelic encouraged ConFesters to participate in creating sculptures, such as in 'the house of wax' body plaster casting, and, at Moama IV, they had an exhibition area. On the night before New Year's Eve, they lit up their site with:

little kero candles, little silver candles, kero lights, twelve volt spots and smoke effects ... we call it the twelve volt apocalypse ... And we did some spoken word stuff and performance and Tony had his percussion set made from bits of drums and ... metal equipment we found ... and we were all in outfits dragging chains around and it was really dark and smoke was pouring out over everything ... [And] it came across as a really strange vibe cause we've got so many things that are like graves and dark creatures and the house of wax ... That night we sort of gave this impression as being some sort of weird ghoulish low voltage cross between technology and barbarianism with all the noise and the screaming ... And for a whole four or five hours we just had something going on that's hard to describe. (Nipa)

Self Development and Therapy (Toc III)

Popular central workshop space. A regular ConFest fixture himself, the Right Reverend Dr J. J. Fu (a Chinese Catholic priest) took workshops on past life regression therapy, 'Agape love and healing meditation', and taught self hypnosis designed to help people quit smoking, aid study and overcome asthma. 'Women's mysteries and spiritual midwifery' also transpired here.

Sexuality (Toc III)

Located at a relatively remote *cul de sac*, a variety of ideas were exchanged and propagated about sexuality. Tantra and tantrik massage were popular. There were discussions on bisexuality, homosexuality and gender politics. Other workshops included 'the relevance of bondage and discipline to sacred sexuality', sensual massage, erotic techniques, 'radical intimacy and non-monogamy' and 'flirting'. According to its facilitator, Cedar, 'flirting' (which attracted up to 300 people at a time) was not a 'meat market' but was designed to explore what he called 'the politics of flirting'. Cedar has participated in orgies at past ConFests, but says 'they're not really my thing ... because I like to get to know people first'.

Spiral (Birdlands, Toc IV, Moama IV &V)

Referred to as 'a sacred communal place', *Spiral* first appeared at Moama III. It is a drug and alcohol free community performance space precipitating the development of a larger drug and alcohol free zone at ConFest. *Spiral* is a collective of people, many in recovery from drug and alcohol addictions and broken relationships, who hold drumming and dance nights in Melbourne. Commenting on the philosophy of the group's name, Prion explains:

'spiral' relates to just about everything on earth. It's in everything. It's in our DNA, sea shells, just about everything that grows. It's also an old word used for dance - growing in spirals instead of going round in circles. There's a lot of symbology around the world. It's an ancient recognised symbol. A lot of what we're doing here is very community, tribal. We operate in circles. Whilst most workshops use the 'Roman system' where a speaker sits on a chair with an audience, as in schools [and] politics, with us ... guidance is through eldership and it's earned, and the idea is to get out of the way as quick as possible and allow things to happen. And our stuff is experiential - learning through experience rather than being lectured to and creating a passive audience. (Prion)

According to Prion, *Spiral* is about recreating 'sacred space in our community as a whole'. *Spiral* usually features a central medicine wheel, a broad ring of sticks and rocks with a central pole functioning as a 'dance, drumming celebration space'. According to Daemian - who first organised such a ritual space at Bredbo - the medicine wheel is a 'ritual healing circle ... based in the common lore of virtually every tribal culture and every timeless spiritual culture' (Daemian 1987:5). At Birdlands, this feature, purposefully fashioned to resemble American Indian and Celtic practices of contriving 'sacred space', was 'initiated into the four directions [in] an opening ceremony'. These rites consecrated

the space, and the wheel, which 'builds with energy as the days go on', was furnished with respect, such that most people avoided entering it outside ritual moments. Such a 'sacred space' is designed to effect healing via 'primal drumming'. As Prion says, 'the symbol for the spiral is the snake - and that's working with the kundalini and the primal drumming is working down in the base to get people connected to the earth, in touch with themselves'.

At Moama V the medicine wheel was the location for Wankan Tanka, a Native American Indian ritual play performed by the Rainbow Ritual Theatre, in co-operation with Spiral Connections. Wankan Tanka sketched a warrior's quest for 'self realisation and his journey back home to the body of light'. On his quest, Wankan Tanka met with 'the shaman' who granted him a vision into a state of consciousness which took him to 'the beginning of time and the birthing of creation'. He encountered helpful totem figures (Father Spirit, Mother Earth and the 4 winds) who revealed to him that 'to sustain this consciousness' he must undergo initiation by battling and finally liberating 'the negative elements within himself': being the ego (the shadow), the body (the bison), the emotions (the serpent) and mind (the raven) (quotes are from a poster).

Spirituality (Toc III, Birdlands and Moama IV & V)

A quiet meditative area usually set up on the periphery in the drug and alcohol free zone. There is normally a large marquee, the interior of which is akin to a shrine, with portraits and photographs of the spiritual leaders of different world religions who look out over the large open space within. Sri Param Eswaran, who has co-ordinated *Spirituality* for years, claims the village's purpose is 'to let people understand the environment within themselves - the stars, meditation, chakras within the body ... [but] it goes deeper than that ... Each day here is ruled by a particular planet'. A spiritualist with diverse influences (Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism), Param co-ordinated workshops in WA at the inception of the DTE movement. At Moama IV, he still held purification rites (fire meditation), took tantra, cooking classes (with dahl and halva) and did counselling work. Massage (Reiki) and chanting techniques (eastern and western) were also taught there.

At Moama IV, 800 people gathered in this area on one evening to feast and participate in a ceremony which eventually saw Ananda Marga 'marry' several couples. Participants arrived holding candles earlier distributed and made a circle around a large earth mandala image which had taken many ConFesters several days to complete.

TAZ-Cyber (Birdlands)

Named after Hakim Bey's book (1991a), a 'cyber tent' was pitched housing around eight terminals connected to the Internet via a main server. The idea was to provide support and encourage casual use and exploration with one computer set up as an electronic notice board allowing ConFesters and Internet users around the world to obtain information about ConFest. Those supporting the presence of this village are keen to point out the networking and communication transfer potentials precipitated by the distribution of cheap 2nd hand hardware and the free circulation of necessary user skills (like html editing). According to the village proposal:

[t]he Internet is a fundamental paradigm shift in human communication. It marks the transition from the top-down information flow of traditional mass-media to new methods of information flow and exchange which are not mediated by the traditional authorities ... One individual with minimal technology can communicate with millions of people across the globe, and access information with a freedom beyond anything previously possible ... The Internet provides an unparalleled opportunity for individuals and groups who wish to pursue alternatives to our current social and economic structures.

The facilitator Epacris, who has a background in systems administration, and who made an unsuccessful attempt to get a cyber-cafe off the ground in Melbourne, declared 'ConFest validated my choice to drop out'. He regarded *TAZ* as 'a nexus point for ideas to converge, modelled on the Spirit of ConFest ... [It is] a place to link up with others, to form networks'.

Tek Know (Birdlands, Toc IV, Moama IV)

This event appeared in somewhat clandestine circumstances at Moama III (Easter '95) - at the site's epicentre) and *Tek Know* (or *Techno*) was present at each of the following three events (called *Rainbow Dreaming* at Toc IV) before undergoing later mutations. At Moama IV, *Tek Know* attracted around 2,000 people over New Year's Eve. The music started at nine pm (stopping about nine am the next year) and could be heard from a great distance (as far as the other end of the site, a strong source of indignation and anger). After dark, *habitués* were guided in by the throb, typically around 140 bpm, as well as the fluoro stickers and fabrics lining the ground and trees on the approach. The village had a main 'doof' and two 'chill' (or rest) spaces, one with a separate sound system and DJs (but with more, ambient, 'astral' 'fluffy trance' music), and the other with no immediate music. There were about 10 DJs all together.

Speaking on the techno crew, Krusty - *Tek Know's* principal architect and 'Dr of shamanic dance' (Richard) - remarks 'we're just basically artists. And this is our late

twentieth expression of art'. In fact, the site featured numerous installations, many good examples of industrial sculpture. Commenting on the most outlandish piece (which members of Futurelic helped construct), Dama remarked:

I think there's quite a lot of insect consciousness starting to happen. So we built a giant praying mantice on the dance floor with a Volkswagen beetle for the body, trussing legs, and a long, long neck with a big head on the end with feelers and flashing eyes and such like. And ... the lighting on the legs was on a chaser, so that at certain angles it actually looked as if the legs were moving when the lights flashed.

A scaffold tower was positioned nearby, a platform for fire performances around the base of which there were attracted many fire stick and mace twirlers and fluoro club jugglers over New Year's Eve.

Krusty regards ConFest as 'a unique entity' and perceives the *Tek Know* crew to be a 'fractal' of that entity. In Krusty's view, the dance ground is 'a sacred space, a place to connect with our power'. He is keen to explain the import of this event and the seriousness with which participants regard the global 'fluoro-rainbow tribe' Trance Dance.³⁶ 'I think they need us' he reflects. 'Without any fresh energy, something dies ... it doesn't evolve, it doesn't move foreword, it just stagnates'. And when he offers, in reference to *Tek Know*, 'I think people especially when they come to a festival, do like to have a focus point of celebration', he is intimating that this event has become a principal node in the ConFest counterscape.

Tipi (Toc III)

This riverbank area provided a site for the erection of several *tipis*, though many others could be found spread over the site. Here one could find serious imitations and interpretations of Native American Indian culture. While there has since been no *Tipi* village as such, these structures (old, new, or mock *tipis* locally fashioned from logs, bark, scrub and corrugated iron) have taken on a pervasive presence. Many temporary dwellings or bush shelters constructed from local materials of varying shapes and sizes are evident. As Wirilda remarked, 'houses don't have huge mortgages when they're made out of sticks'.

Warrior (Toc IV)

³⁶ Aspects of *Tek Know* are elaborated upon later. Trance Dance is discussed in Chapter's 7 and 8. The threat that this music and culture is perceived to hold for ConFest is also discussed in Chapter 8.

By the river beach, an imposing tree house was constructed by a ConFester who had encountered the event two years before while competing in the Murray River Marathon.³⁷ Following that, Cypress discovered a niche at ConFest. Having completed ‘inner work’ and martial arts training, he is an archetypal warrior of the vigilant and peaceful kind, and therefore his name for this area was fitting. Significantly the ‘warrior’ theme was a central component of a firewalk which took place in a small clearing nearby.

Where the Wild Things Are (Birdlands, Moama IV)

Paula, the initiator of this village (being the title of Maurice Sendak’s classic children’s book), explains:

I have a big thing about staying wild ... If you stay wild you stay in connection with the raw emotions and I think ... the raw emotions are your measure. Staying wild is one of the most important things in life.

At Birdlands, this village became the centre for various community based organisations from around the Dandenong region to congregate, holding a feast on the final night. It was a food kitchen centre at Moama IV.

Wolfgang’s Palace (Birdlands)

Wolfgang’s Palace are an interactive theatre troupe, based at an old cheese factory converted into their ‘palace’ near Colac, where the key points of the pagan calendar are observed with celebrations and dramatisations of original interpretations of Ancient Greek mythological themes. At ConFest, they set up a performance space where they performed a play on one night. They also hosted theatre sports and the Freak Olympics, which involved four teams (membership being determined by each participants’ Zodiacal element) competing in a series of games.

Women’s (Moama II & III)

Also called ‘Wimmin’s’, this was a ‘men-free zone’ where ‘women’s drumming’, ‘meditation and the temple of Delphi’ workshops took place. On defending the presence of *Women’s* as a separate, women only, area at Moama III, Jenny argues that it is not ‘anti-men’, but:

a celebration of being a woman. It is anti-patriarchy, but not symbolic of the desire, for women to hold power. All we seek to rule, control, have power

³⁷ An annual kayak and canoe race.

over, is ourselves. And so we shall! ... In going back to Australia's sacred bushland, Aboriginal culture is very relevant to ConFest. Think - there has always been men's business and women's business in Aboriginal culture, in fact in most indigenous traditions around the planet. It makes sense that men and women are able to have separate spaces at ConFest. (Jenny J. *DTE* 83 March 1995:16)

As such, a *Men's* village appeared on the map at Moama II. Little appeared to occur there, although a workshop on 'freemasonry' was listed on the blackboard.

Yoga (Birdlands, Moama IV)

Distinguished by the Rainbow Tipi and ochre pit, the village was located in the drug and alcohol free zone at Moama IV. According to its co-ordinator, Marko, *Yoga* is a 'sanctuary'. Marko's first encounter with ConFest at Walwa III was a catalyst: 'I felt "fantastic there's a tribe here", there's a group I can identify with, people who are really open to change'. Inspired, he later elected to co-ordinate *Yoga* so as to create a context for exercise classes where a range of styles, including representations from Iyenga, Hatha and Oki schools, and sharing circles eventually appeared. At Birdlands, a yoga cafe appeared: 'a nice clean white atmosphere. It wasn't a place to go and smoke and bong out. It was very open, very supportive, light, clean'.

Conclusion

It is clear that ConFest is an immediate melting pot of alternatives, a vast autonomous cultural heterotopia. It accommodates a multiplicity of spaces (village centres) inhabited by a heterogeneity of neo-tribes, which, due to conflicting and often inimical interpretations of the meaning and purpose of the event, hold inconsistent expectations about what is appropriate within its spatio-temporal parameters. At such an event, that which defines and signifies 'alternative' is disputed and is undergoing constant revision. This state of affairs is the effect of two interrelated factors: a) the Society's enduring neutrality, coupled with its nascent open and flat organisational structure, renders it responsive to diversity, and; b) ConFest's organicism makes possible the coexistence of competing interpretations and inconsistent behaviours within the event.

Despite their differences, participants are allied in their common desire to *return* to ConFest, collaborating to continue to 'make it happen'. ConFesters seek to return to what has become a desirable 'location' (which is likely to be held at different places). This

'location' harbours familiar faces, landmarks and readily identifiable spatial arrangements. Yet, more than this, participants hold ConFest (which is a time as much as it is a space) desirable because it is *predictably unpredictable*. And it is the *organic* design, favouring a loose open-ended framework, which guarantees innovation. As such, the entire event is protean, inconstant, both its composition and its margins forever shifting.

Chapter 5

Going Feral: Eco-Radicalism and Authenticity¹

Introduction

Though ConFest accommodates diverse alternative orientations, I suggest that if there is an archetypal condition of authenticity on site, it is *ferality*. This chapter is organised into three parts. Part one introduces the radical ecological confrontationalism characteristic of an emergent Australian self-marginal youth milieu. Part two sketches the feral emergence detailing its subcultural assemblage. Following speculation about origins, I attend to respective traits: the feral *spectacle*, semi-*nomadic* subsistence, postcolonialist valuations of *nature* and *eco-tribalism*. ‘Going feral’, is a process which simultaneously indicates detachment from a state of domesticity, ‘the parent *culture*’, and identification with the *natural* environment. This biographical transition undertaken by thousands of young Australians, is a contemporary rite of passage pre-figuring reconciliation with indigenous ecology and peoples. Part three discusses the context ConFest furnishes for accessing and performing this desirable condition of human being.

Part I. Australian Radical Ecologism

The global environment of Reaganomics and Thatcherism provided the background for the emergence of post-seventies eco-millenarian movements. In 1980, with their doctrine of ‘no-compromise in defense of planet Earth’, Earth First! emerged in the US.² By the early nineties, Britain was experiencing the presence of self-marginal *eco-tribes* like the Dongas, the Flower Pot Tribe and Dragon Environmental Group.³ In the local context a

¹ A condensed version of this chapter is published elsewhere (St John 2000).

² Believing that we are ‘in the midst of an unprecedented, anthropogenic extinction crisis’ (Taylor 1995a:16), Earth First! is an environmental apocalyptic movement consisting of a network of quasi-militant autonomous affinity groups practising ‘primal spirituality’ (Taylor 1995b:151; 1997:191). Earth First!ers are influenced by deep ecology and bioregionalism, and were originally inspired by the writing of Edward Abbey (1975).

³ The Dongas Tribe, ‘the nomadic indigenous peoples of Britain’, emerged to oppose the extension of the M3 Motorway at Twyford Down in Hampshire in 1992 (Donga Alex, in McKay 1996:137; cf. Lowe and Shaw 1993:112-24). The Flower Pot Tribe are a ‘collection of nomadic Earth defenders’ who emerged in 1993 to defend the habitat of Newcastle’s Jesmende Dene from the destructive Cradlewell bypass (*Earth First!* 1993:13). Dragon Environmental

contemporary face of defiance percolated throughout the eighties. By the end of the decade, these antipodean 'edgemen' (Turner 1969:128) had a name - 'feral'.⁴ To my knowledge, this metaphorical application, now acknowledged in the nation's dictionary,⁵ is exclusive to Australia, referring to a subcultural assemblage the adherents to which (often, yet not exclusively middle class youth) express an eco-radical inspired dissonance from the 'parent culture'.

It seems probable that this exclusivity derives from the unique historical response to and cultural interaction with introduced/domestic species running wild and turning pestilent across the breadth of the continent (Smith 1999). Yet, as I indicate elsewhere (St John 1999), human ferals are an enigmatic lot. They have experienced diverse reception: vilified as 'pests', green devils and 'terrorists' by rural and regional Australia, or adopted as 'wild' exotica in metropolitan centres. The diversity indicates that *ferality* is cloaked in ambivalence. Source of fear or subject of desire, ferals may be loathsome or lovable, a polarity fully recognised by *The Macquarie* where, colloquially, 'feral' may be either 'disgusting; gross' or 'excellent; admirable'!

Foremost, a critical discourse and praxis characterises *ferality*. Though feminist, peace, native title and New Age movements have contributed to the feral concourse, the radical ecology movement has been particularly formative. Since the 1960s, *local* urban middle class populations of advanced capitalist nations have been the chief proponents of a *globalist* sensibility decrying 'the death of nature'. Awareness of environmental degradation has precipitated the advent of what Beck calls 'long-distance moralities' (1992:137), and has raised an ecological consciousness wherein *nature* has become the principal 'field of collective action with which new social groups are engaged' (Eder 1990:37). A key manifestation of this growing cultural anxiety over environmental 'risks' is 'ecologism' which Dobson (1995) regards as an ideological commitment to ecological balance and diversity, sustainable levels of production and consumption, and non-exploitative practices.

On the fringes of this 'culture of the environment' (Jagtenberg and McKie 1997:91), lies *radical ecologism*, a multi-faceted critical standpoint delineated by Merchant (1992). I

Group are a more recent Pagan inspired collective combining environmental work with eco-magic' (Harris 1996:154).

⁴ Other labels have included 'new age hippie', 'bush punk', 'eco-warrior' and 'crusty'. According to 'Meri' (actually Neri - Nerida Blanpain - from the band-collective *Earth Reggae*), the label 'rat people' preceded that of 'feral' (Murray 1994:54).

⁵ 'Feral - a person who espouses environmentalism to the point of living close to nature in more or less primitive conditions and who deliberately shuns the normal code of society with regard to dress, habitat, hygiene, etc' (*The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edn 1997).

take this system of discourse and practice to possess several elements. First, an acute awareness of rampant ecological devastation under the colonialist imperatives of industrial modernity - devastation constituting the apocalypse. An understanding of the abuses of ecological rights is closely linked with a growing knowledge of human rights abuses, suffered especially by indigenes. Second, an intimacy with, and attachment to, native biotic communities. The subscription to the *eco-spiritual* principles of deep ecology, and a Pagan-inspired kinship with maternal nature (Gaia) is common. Third, a personal and prescriptive 'anticonsumerism'. As Purkis (1996:210) suggests, rather than 'just buying green or ethically produced goods, different ways of living, trading and working are advocated in order to "live more lightly" on the Earth and to be less dependent on buying things to feel good about ourselves'. Low impact living (captured in the phrase 'refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle') involves ethical limitation⁶ of the consumption of mass-produced commodities and fossil fuels, and conscientious waste management practices. Fourth, a culture of eco-celebration and defence. In their methods of defending 'the rights of nature',⁷ this 'earth volunteer army' (Hoare 1998:19) are the radical offspring of the conservation movement, and the product of grassroots resistance actions mounted over nearly two decades. Finally, gravitation towards decentralised, non-hierarchical co-operatives. The coupling of global consciousness with decentrist habitudes is enshrined in the maxim of Nimbin Star Earth Tribe's Tipi Village Sanctuary: 'think globally - go tribally' - perhaps *the* feral catchcry.

Critical discourse propagates a distinctive confrontational attitude. They are 'hippies with attitude'. In a Hot Wired website, Doyle (1995), claims that to be feral thou shalt 'espouse peace and love ... but don't take any shit, and never turn the other cheek'. Rather than seeking total isolation (as is characteristic of many communitarian experiments of the 1960s and '70s) or 'disappearance' (as has been described of ravers of the 1980s and '90s [Melechi 1993]), *ferality* is about creating a 'public new sense': obstructing, boycotting, desiring and actively promoting change. Pursuing a transgressive lifestyle, theirs is an acute 'risk identity'. Yet, it differs from that which is, according to Hetherington, cultivated by new travellers. The latter are said to actively embrace chaos by 'putting

⁶ While there are variations in personal codes of conduct, a 'green' ethos is conveyed via certain forms of avoidance - or anticonsumption - practices. These include avoiding: products derived from the slaughter of, or cruelty to, animals (e.g. meat, leather, cosmetics); products made from rainforest species; inorganic produce (dependent on chemical fertilisers and pesticides); disposable non-biodegradable packaging; non-separated garbage disposal; and the overconsumption of and dependence on non-renewable energy sources. Avoidance also takes the form of 'boycotting' the products of corporate eco-vandals.

themselves in danger from the things others fear so much: transientness, eviction, ostracism, placeless identities, poverty, harassment and uncertainty in one's life' (1992:91-2). Not a directionless and 'placeless' pursuit of hedonistic excess, the feral project is an activist life-strategy of (re)connection and defence.

This culture of activism seems to have generated two types of role: protester and educator. The former are perhaps spurred on by something like the directive 'turn on, tune in and lock on' (from the English DiY zine *POD* - in McKay 1996:131), which, inciting *direct action*, or non violent direct action (NVDA), is a declaration of disassociation from hippy forbears who are rather unfairly typified and dismissed as passive. According to Mardo, unlike the Rainbow tribe, who are 'more into spiritualism and inner growth', ferals, who are 'out there doing things on the Earth plain, here and now', derive from the 'more hard core end of the seventies hippies'. This provocative 'new warrior spirit' is sometimes extended to incorporate diplomacy, mediation and commitment to the latter, educational, role.

Banyalla is a notable example of the *protest activist*. Inspired by the Yippy movement,⁸ Earth First!, and a veteran of the Franklin conflict, he once canvassed for Greenpeace but became disgruntled with 'leaders and bureaucracy'. Since Greenpeace did not train him for anything other than 'knocking on doors raising money', he led a 'sort of industrial revolt' for which he was sacked. Banyalla is now a staunch defender of East Gippsland's remaining old growth forests and a key member of GECO. He believes in the feral movement, but he says it must 'challenge the status quo'.

Quenda exemplifies the *educator activist*. Quenda suspects she was conceived at the Aquarius festival in 1973. Raised in a rock house on a Queensland permaculture community, she completed a degree in environmental science at Lismore, specialising in conservation technology. About her current life she says 'I've lived in my car for a long time [and] I know how to shit in the bush'. Though possessing the qualifications, she has so far resisted taking up a professional position as 'nothing really fits in with my ideals'. Quenda stresses that:

[if] you're not interacting with lots of people and you're living in a little plot of rainforest and you're just sprouting your own sprouts - you've got your own simple herb garden and you're completely isolated from other people and temptation - then you're not the ideal feral.

⁷ Including the rights of indigenous land claimants, especially when regions under claim are the sites of current or potential ecological crises (e.g. Jabiluka).

⁸ The Youth International Party of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman ushered in the youth protest movement of the late 1960s.

Close to the ideal, she commits to raising ecological issues with ‘red neck farmers’, who, now she’s shaved off her dreadlocks, aren’t threatened by her approach: ‘Hey! Ya’know if you plant x ya’know at x time of year you’ll have heaps more nutrients and you can even have cow fodder. And then you can keep the cows off the creek at the same time!’

Many demonstrate a convergence of both roles. Take Mardo, a communicator and ‘hard core’ activist, for example. Brought up in housing commission flats, Mardo took to the streets and then the bush at an early age. His ‘love of the land’ and the knowledge of ecology and life on the planet developed working on cattle stations in outback Queensland and the Northern Territory. Once having objected to the cattle industry, he later became involved in several campaigns including Goolengook forest blockade in East Gippsland. By April 1997, he had been 15 months with GECCO teaching people climbing techniques, bush survival skills, designing lock-on devices and building platforms for ‘tree-sits’. He also liaises with police and loggers at blockades. In 1997, Mardo conceived the inclusive grassroots group CIDA (Concerned Individuals for Direct Action),⁹ to provide equipment and training to communities protecting natural heritage from development. He cited the support given to members of the community at Bannockburn defending the remaining 400 hectares of old-growth yellow gum in the region, as an exemplar:

They didn’t want it chopped down, and they fought and they fought, and it came down to confrontational tactics - being on the ground out in front of dozers. And they didn’t really have any idea of how to approach that sort of situation. I guess they had a few ideas, but not the expertise ... And I went down and, under the banner of CIDA, we went through and we helped them get what they needed, like lock-on boxes and told them how they worked, and tactics - how to play with the police or to use against the police - and what their legal rights were.

Part II. The Feral Emergence

Roots

That ferals first appeared in the Northern Rivers area of northeast NSW is probable, as that area has been Australia's primary geographical repository for alternative enclaves and cultural lifeways since the 1960s. According to Merrin, co-founder of Nimbin's Star Earth Tribe, a multiple occupancy community near Tenterfield in northeast NSW, Om Shalom, was 'the parent of all the feral movement'.¹⁰ As for the label, Neri refers to a story in Cape Tribulation 'a few years ago' when 'some kids ... were not allowed to get on a plane because of how they looked' (Murray 1994:57) and where the term 'feral' was apparently first used by the media. There are two key historical factors to keep in mind when attempting to comprehend the feral emergence: a hippy/punk/pagan exchange throughout the 1970s and '80s, and the appearance of travelling anarchist/activists in the late 1980s/early '90s.

As ferals possess multi-subcultural roots, genealogical research is necessarily complicated. Here it will suffice to say that the seventies and eighties occasioned 'commerce' between, and eventual mergers of, disparate youth cultural dispositions - namely, the idealism of 'hippy' counterculturalists, the confrontationalism of punk, and the eco-spiritualism of local Pagans. As the feral milieu lies downstream from their confluence, we will likely discover a range of formative radical indices: the struggle for individual liberty and freedom of expression, a largely imported culture of dissent fermenting in the sixties which included genuine opposition *and* outright disengagement (militant and bohemian elements); the culture of *refusal* and often directionless confrontation apparent in the late seventies and eighties 'blank generation' and urban squatting scene, and; the dutiful commitment toward, and identification with, the natural environment inherent in Neo-Paganism - the 'spiritual arm' of the ecology movement (cf. Hume 1997:56). Early evidence of convergent streams, the first and third in particular, is discernible in that which Lindblad (1976) described as 'a new bush para-culture ... of geodesic domes, A-frames and Kombi vans' (32). In the mid seventies, he observed an:

eclectic religiosity which blends Zen Buddhism with the primitive tribal belief that man is essentially a part of nature. Just as nature was the basis of beliefs of the Aborigines, so you can still find mountain and mushroom worshippers among these new people of the bush, and their beliefs correspond directly with their geographical location. Children are given such names as Possum, Sunshine and Rainforest. (Lindblad 1976:34)

⁹ Which was funded \$1,000 for hardware by DTE for a village at Gum Lodge II.

¹⁰ Om Shalom, inspired by the Baringa period of ConFests, was the location for the first Australian Rainbow Gathering in November 1996, where I noted there were probably more ferals gathered, and tipis erected (about 50), than had ever been seen in one place in Australia.

Shifting attention to the eighties, another factor in the feral emergence - mobile activism - became apparent as occupants of urban squats were set even further adrift. Cedar clearly remembers:

a particular type of people who were like squatters but they travelled. And they would go from action to action ... Whilst the squatting movement in Melbourne were very activist, and they were into things like resisting evictions, it was all still local and it was much more city based ... Suddenly the squatters would go feral and that was it, they'd start travelling.

Harbouring a strong cold-war survivalist mentality and transience akin to Britain's new travellers or 'rainbow punks' (Stone 1996:193), and an eco-defensive apocalypticism akin to Earth First!,¹¹ activists mobilised throughout the eighties to form counter-development (clear-fell logging and uranium mining) protests. Many began occupying and defending those biotic contexts of identity formation - the Australian forests.

Conservation issues have had an especially radicalising influence in Australia. Threats to valued areas of natural heritage sparked an effective series of 'greenie' civil disobedience campaigns/occupations: the anti-logging campaign at Terania Creek in NSW 1979 followed by the Nightcap National Park struggle in 1982; the Wilderness Society's celebrated Gordon-below-Franklin Hydroelectric Scheme protest in Tasmania's remote southwest in 1982-3, and; the blockade of Errinundra forest in 1984 (Cohen 1996; Kendell and Buivids 1987). The latter protest, Victoria's first, was mounted by 'a multi-coloured crew of "hippies" fresh from the [Baringa I] Confest. Sarongs, headbands, and dreadlocks were their marks of distinction' (Redwood 1996:7). According to Redwood, their 'tenacity and conviction' resulted in the creation of the Errinundra National Park. The suspected danger that an aggressive growth orientated political mainstream poses to natural heritage sites, and the successes of local direct action, has had a formative impact on Australia's recent self-marginals.

Protests followed one after another. By July 1991, there was a successful blockade mounted at the Chaelundi Forest conflict in northeast New South Wales dubbed 'Feral Camp' (Cohen 1996:189). According to Cohen, it was Chaelundi which spawned 'a new generation of young, alternative environmental activists'. Amongst these he includes the 'punks for the forests':

¹¹ While Earth First! have inspired local wilderness activist groups like RAG (Rainforest Action Group) and GECHO, the Australian movement's successes provided early inspiration for demonstrations in the US (Zakin 1993:249-50). In 1982, John Seed allied the local movement (including groups such as NAG: Nightcap Action Group) with Earth First! In 1983 Earth First! supported the Australian Rainforest Campaign (Lee 1995:70,80-1).

[A] wonderfully rare breed of wild young men and women, outrageous to the extreme, who shocked everyone, from police to protesters. Wild and often drunk, they surprised all with their outlandish humour and bravery. Under the rough exterior of rags and skull earrings, nose rings, boots and beer were some of the finest people I had encountered (when they were sober). (182-3)

Terra-ists of the nineties, many came to inhabit, if only temporarily, threatened regions where strong attachments to both native landscape and co-defender/celebrants were formed.¹²

The Feral Spectacle

Emerging as a unique subcultural phenomenon by the mid-nineties, ferals were eventually *media*-ted. Concentrated coverage occurred between 1994-96, the spectacular style of this mobile theatre of the weird providing the stimulus. Although there have been informative accounts,¹³ popular mediations have maximised the visual impact provided by the milieu's strangeness, its *otherness* (Murray 1994; Gibbs 1995), sometimes chronicling the exploits of intrepid reporters returning from our outer-terrestrial regions with tales (and images) of Euro-Australian primitives (Whittaker 1996), other times consigning them to a notorious leisure status. For instance, in 1995, the Nine network's *Sixty Minutes* sent a crew to Nimbin to probe tipi dwellers about dole bludging.¹⁴

So what constitutes the feral spectacle? They are often talented musicians, didj players, artists, dressed in recycled garb, dreadlocked, adorned with multiple piercings and folk-jewellery: feathers, birds feet, skulls and umbilical-cord necklaces (feralia). A wild rustic appearance is desirable. For many, this transpires as fabrics fade and hair tangles in unkempt locks. Others will go to great lengths to achieve a turbulent look - a 'cultivated crustiness' (Hetherington 1996a:43). The feral rig is an ensemble of materials discovered dada-esque in garage sales, op' shops, or fashioned from the hide of road-kill or dead animals found in the bush. Outfits range from the sartorial splendour of brightly imbued

¹² I wish to avoid a fixed image of ferals as incontrovertibly heroic. Hitting the road, many youths have taken their drug addictions (including heroin) with them. And since 'its harder to get drugs on the road' (Cedar), some were headed for dereliction. Addicts at the fringes of festivals and blockades have been a persistent problem. Om Shalom is itself renowned for its population of heroin users.

¹³ For informative accounts, see Woodford (1994), Hill (1996), Sheil (1999), and the incisive documentary *Going Tribal* (produced by M.Murray) first broadcast on SBS TV in May 1995.

and offbeat garments, to dirty green and brown hued favourites. Army great coats with personalised patches sewn on the rear are not uncommon, nor are silken night dresses and fairy wings. They revel in an iconography of otherness and authenticity. The identification with various indigenous peoples and historical cultures - their cosmologies, rituals and artefacts - is apparent in multiple appropriations.

Performing wherever they go - especially hand drumming and fire dancing - these are youth for whom life is akin to theatre. They are spectacular. Hebdige's discussion (1983:86-7) of the intrinsic ambiguity in subcultural gesturing casts light on the spectacular sheen of *ferality*. Youth subcultures are 'insubordinate' - they 'drive against classification and control'. Yet, pleasure is derived from 'being watched', from being spectacular. There is pleasure in being watched and power is, as Hebdige (ibid:96) avers - in reference to a comment attributed to Foucault - 'in fashion'.

It could be suggested that the feral ensemble illustrates 'symbolic' resistance, their marginal corporeality, their 'fashion statements' resembling the apparently inconsequential 'rituals of resistance' which Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies researchers located in the leisure time of working class youth. This is qualified by Banyalla who makes the distinction between a 'fashion feral' (which he says he's not) and an 'alternative lifestyle feral'. Banyalla does agree outward appearance is critical, since this signals a conscious challenge to society. He says of ferals:

you can be totally fashion conscious and still not have to spend three or four hundred dollars on a fucking dress or a fucking flash pair of pants or something ... they stand out in a crowd ya'know. They're fucking stunners! ... And just by the fact of doing that ... you have to be activists in some way.

Like other subcultural ensembles, feral is an intentional sign system. *Ferality* 'stands apart'. It is 'a visible construction, a loaded choice. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read' (Hebdige 1979:101). However, at the risk of inciting a shallow rebellion, an 'alternative lifestyle feral' must be politically active, must celebrate *and* defend. Ultimately, the feral spectacle must be in service of the cause. 'Weekend ferals' do not pose a threat. According to Banyalla, the 'rebellion' of the narcissistic 'fashion feral' remains substantively empty: 'they're just rebels, ya'know ... like Dean. James Dean was a rebel, but what was he fucking rebelling against? No idea, ya'know - politically fucking inept'.

¹⁴ Varnished productions, which have arraigned ferals as fleeting and infantile and have aligned them with the now pejorative (commoditised and quiescent) 'New Age', have resulted in a detectable wariness of, and disassociation from, the 'feral' label.

Like other middle class subcultural milieux (e.g. hippies), feral resistance is not confined to the field of leisure (Cohen 1972). Nor is it merely 'symbolic' or 'ritual' (Clarke et al. 1975) and, therefore, containable. Furthermore, though edged into the media spectacle, in the large, feral remains in the subterranean marginalia of 'immediatism' (Bey 1994a). As such, its anarchic confrontational potential has been spared the degree of 'recuperation' via commodification that is the experience of other subcultures (e.g. mod, hippy, punk and raver). This is the case as: there is no distinctively commodifiable feral literature or music; there is little evidence of an entrepreneurial ethos; clothing is DiY, inexpensive and recycled; hair is not usually styled professionally; and there have been few feral 'pop stars'. Feral signs are not converted into mass produced objects on any scale comparable to punk. They have not, at least yet, been 'rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise' (Hebdige 1979:96).¹⁵

As the feral assemblage is *significant*, it is abundantly clear that style cannot be easily dismissed. It 'speaks' of the values shared by adherents, radiating a transient, eco-conscious, non-material atavism. However, while *ferality's* spectacular aesthetic predominates in popular media representations, pivotal social, political and cultural traits have gone largely unnoticed.

Semi-Nomadic Subsistence

A key characteristic of *ferality* is transience. The rejection of 'the parent culture' - especially 'the great Australian dream' of home-ownership - has sent these 'nomads of the '90s' (Woodford 1994:17) spiralling out from their domestic origins. *Ferality*, which approaches the transhumant resistance to a settled life so strongly endorsed by Chatwin (1987), is cognate with the earlier 'rucksack revolution' declared by Kerouac in *Dharma Bums* (1956). Indeed, their immediate solution to dissatisfaction with a settled urban life - mobility - corresponds with that of their Beat antecedents (Creswell 1993). Yet, also like

¹⁵ 'Feral Cheryl', complete with oregano stash, pierced naval, pubic hair, tattoos, string bag, nose ring, joint, dog and dreadlocks with feather (McCullagh 1995:13), and 'Feral Faeries', original designs described as 'a new generation of ancient peoples' available in greeting cards, stickers and T-shirts (from promotion in *DTENEA* Sep 1996:17), may represent exceptions, though marketing strategies are moderate to say the least.

Beats and, not to mention 'drifter tourists' (Cohen 1973) and new travellers (Earle et al. 1994), ferals seek stability and belonging with 'like-minded' others.

On the road, they reside in their station wagons, kombis, converted buses, trucks and tipis. Australia's sparsely populated interior deserts and coastal rainforest provide geomorphic contexts. Destinations (festivals, protests, communities, seasonal work) are often remote from cities, and travel duration protracted. Many have their 'home bases' in or near forests where they get 'grounded' (e.g. Northern Rivers NSW, East Gippsland Vic, Cairns hinterland Qld). Others are 'located' in the city, or oscillate between bush and city. There, they reside in low rent share housing and urban squats. Many are tertiary students (largely arts/humanities). The inner city feral is accustomed to a 'rootless cosmopolitanism' - often verging upon the destitute. They support independent artists, attend benefit concerts and Reclaim the Streets celebration/protests, are members of food co-ops, and are not out of place in Smith St (dividing Melbourne's Collingwood and Fitzroy).

Movement and residence are also patterned by subsistence strategies. The fact that most are Centrelink 'clients', and therefore State dependent, challenges a purist definition of 'feral' as uncontrolled. Though welfare dependency tends to curtail mobility - with the requirement to submit 'dole diaries' and the pre-1998 threat of Case Management - the dole is an accepted part of the lifestyle. Welfare payments are often supplemented or superseded by other informal, often temporary, sources of income. These include itinerant trading at small alternative markets or events like ConFest, seasonal fruit picking, small-scale illicit substance trade and busking.

The receipt of welfare, especially over the long term, is a circumstance around which conservative elements launch offensives: 'greenies' are 'bludgers', 'taxpayers liabilities'. However, insiders rally around the conviction that the work involved justifies taking 'the government scholarship'. This is the case for Quenda. People in receipt, she argues 'are working real hard ... I couldn't explain to the typical person what I do'. There are actually two means by which Quenda personally 'works for the greater'. First, she performs 'healing work' with Bohemia, a group of healers who, after forming at an All One Family gathering, combined their talents and travelled to festivals to heal people via massage (including didjeridu massage), drumming and chanting techniques. She revealed to me one source of her healing powers - Mt Warning in northeast NSW. There, 'at night time, I talk to the Kooris in my dreams and they teach me special songs. And because I heal with the song vibration, that's really sacred to me'.

However, doing her bit for the planet, ‘environmental work’, is Quenda’s chief preoccupation. In 1996, this involved ‘scouting’ and laying ‘traps’ around the Timbarra Plateau, the site of a proposed gold mine.¹⁶ The ‘traps’, or hair tubes, are designed to seize hairs from endangered species like tiger quoll, which are then taken to a laboratory in Coffs Harbour for identification. She is resolute - ‘I’m hoping to deter [Ross Mining] any way I can’. Since industries whose activities threaten already endangered species must possess expensive licenses to do so, the higher the number and frequency of endangered species known to exist in the region, the heavier is the burden placed on companies like Ross Mining. Though she has spent many weeks trapping to defend species diversity and Aboriginal heritage, it is not a livelihood: ‘I’m working for Australia ... So I feel fine taking the dole’.

Postcolonial Primitivists: Heritage Defence

Growing numbers of youth are disenchanted with the parent culture’s predaciousness. They challenge neo-classical scientific interpretations of nature which seek to snuff out its mystery and indeterminacy, which generate ‘a global ontology of detachment’ (Ingold 1993:41). They object to monotheistic religions deferring responsibility to transcendent creators. They dispute neo-colonialist infringements upon sites of cultural significance. In response to what has been regarded as ‘a spiritual crisis’ implicit in the way ‘Western religious assumptions have divided humans from other creatures and ... the natural world from the divine realm’ (Taylor 1993:226), a milieu of localised identification and action has arisen, a culture variously committed to the defence of the rights of native ecology and peoples, of natural and cultural *heritage*. The defence of indigeneity draws upon the Earth conscious confrontationalism of radical ecology, the eco-spiritual proclivities of Neo-Paganism, and displays solidarity with the native title movement.

This movement expresses a desire for re-enchantment, a (re)attachment to the ‘natural’ (including ‘natural’ healing and immediate, ‘natural’ sociality). The ‘real business’ of feral eco-radicalism is not simply *being*, but *going*, wild. It involves a voluntary traversing of the borders of Culture (cultivated, predictable, bound) and thereby, becoming ‘closer to Nature’ (uncontrollable, animal-like, wild). Though a threat to both propriety and property

¹⁶ In 1996/97 Ross Mining Co began developing a gold mine on northeast NSW’s Timbarra Plateau, an area of ‘outstanding and unique conservation value’. According to the Timbarra Protection Coalition, the mining project threatens clean water systems, endangers wildlife and flora species, and imposes rigid restrictions on local Bunjalung from accessing sacred sites (*Tribe* 1997:12).

(St John 2000), this process is highly desirable - ultimately rewarding. Principally, the Culture/Nature transgression is one of reconciliation. Human improvement is the result of a *re-place-ment*, an implied 'return'. This point is taken up briefly by Bey (1991a:137) proposing that the TAZ 'involves a kind of *ferality*, a growth from tameness to wild(er)ness, a "return" which is also a step forward'. Approximating 'nature' provides the foundations for a (re)turn to authenticity. Though this quest may reveal signs of neo-primitivism,¹⁷ the temptation to categorical reduction and excoriation should be avoided.

The process of *return* evidences transition from ontological detachment to an eco-conscious lifestyle and identity. Take Bandicoot, who has mounted tree-sits in the threatened Goolengook Forest north of Orbost since 1997. Raised in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, Bandicoot eventually worked nine-to-five as a building hardware salesman. His recollections are that of inherent detachment:

My life took me away from the earth. It put me into a four bedroom house, it fed me. You know, meat and three vegetables every night. Showed me a TV. Taught me how to live and how to protect myself ... to put a roof over my head, and a doona around me. And I wasn't exposed to the outside. And when we did it was in a car, you know, and in a cabin.

Yet, with a 'desire to understand more about the earth', Bandicoot shed his suit, grew dreadlocks and gravitated towards the rainforests of East Gippsland. 'Out there', he reveals somewhat skittishly, he found 'something magical', a 'specialness'. And, with a realisation that we are 'of the earth', he has become ensconced in the forest's defence. Bandicoot's nascent eco-activism sees him travelling between forest and city on a regular basis to gather support.

Rationales for the identification with, and defence of, landscape prove rather sophisticated, sometimes contradictory. This is the case as 'wild' landscape and 'Aboriginaland' are variously imagined and invoked. On the one hand, many eco-rads express their desire to be 'at one with the wilderness' - meaning 'pristine', 'untouched' nature. Here, 'wild' landscape is valorised - local 'wilderness' is perceived to be a place of worship, a temple, its disciples privileged to an Australian 'wilderness experience'. 'Wilderness', associated with being lost, unruly, disordered and confused, is thus a

¹⁷ There is a certain extropian edge to these postcolonial primitivists. As Doyle (1995) says, 'ferals may run from modern Australia, but they aren't running from the modern era: life is a paradoxical blend of savage-meets-silicon'. The passion for electronic music, especially at forest raves, provides clear evidence of this curious alliance. One group, Electric Tipi - who travel to various alternative communities holding dance parties and sound and light shows - are depicted as 'a tribe sustained by a mix of [techno] music and Mother Nature' (Leser 1994:60).

powerful source of psychic re-creation. Others, however, recognise the limitations of this ill-fated concept, a recognition matching the growing acknowledgment of prior occupation by Aborigines and, therefore, of a 'humanised realm saturated with significations' (Stanner 1979 in Rose 1996:18). As Pearson (1995) and others (Salleh 1996; Rose 1996) have begun articulating, 'wilderness', or 'untouched' nature, simply 'reiterates the logic of *terra nullius*', ultimately serving the interests of bioprospectors. As Rose earlier remarked (1988:384), since 'Aboriginal people were everywhere', there is no true 'untouched' or 'pristine' country in Australia (cf. Morton and Smith 1997 for a relevant discussion). Today, knowledge of prior occupation and dispossession - our 'black history' - is superseding the blind invocation of 'wilderness'. This awareness confers emotive value upon a beleaguered landscape, elevating the commitment to its defence.

Yet attachment is very personal. *Terra-ists* of the nineties, many ferals dwell in forested regions where, for prolonged periods, they may form affinities with native biota. Strong attachment to place arises as a result of such 'dwelling in the land', such ecological 're-centring'. An eco-spiritualism can be traced back to at least the early eighties with John Martin's comments in the first edition of *The Deep Ecologist* (Martin 1982). A champion of the ideas of ecological anarchist and Buddhist-Animist Gary Snyder, Martin stated, '[w]e need to be *For Nature!* Let the inner voice out and let it speak in terms of committed action based on a deep awareness of the awesome plunder of the earth and the hurts we have to heal' (ibid:3). Extended periods in the bush often convince people of the interdependence and sacrality of all life, and personal ecosophies - akin to deep ecology or eco-feminism for instance - are thus founded and/or confirmed by experience. Australian radical ecologists assume a position not dissimilar to that of Earth First!ers who believe 'animals, including humans, are only authentic, only sacred, when undomesticated, living life wildly and spontaneously in harmony with, and when in defence of the natural world' (Taylor 1995b:102). Earth First!'s position is best conveyed by co-founder Dave Foreman, an advocate of bioregionalism: by 'reinhabiting a place, by dwelling in it, we become that place. We are *of* it. Our most fundamental duty is self-defense. We are the wilderness defending itself' (Foreman in Taylor 1994:204).

Yet, as postcolonial re-evaluations of nature transpire, it is increasingly an indigenised landscape that is valorised and defended. In eco-radical reconciliation with nature, we are perhaps witnessing a subterranean manifestation of the kind of redemptive strategies located in nationalist discourses (Lattas 1990; Morton 1996; Morton and Smith 1999). For

Although mixed feelings prevail, 'trancing out' to a persistent electronic beat in the bush does not ordinarily compromise respect for nature.

instance, the didgeridu, an Aboriginal icon now widely embraced by alternates, is often perceived as ‘a bridge to facilitate the journey of white Australians back to the land’ and is thus an ‘instrument of expiation’ (Sherwood 1997:150). Their mutual ambivalence effecting an attractive partnership, common preference for dingo companionship amongst self-marginals also enhances an experience of reconciliation and (re)connectivity. Such an alliance signifies ‘true’ continental inhabitation. Yet, it must be remembered that ferals are also conscientious citizens of the planet. Indigenous to Gaia, and not especially sympathetic to nation building, it is to Earth that their loyalties ultimately lie.

Many venerate ‘the old ways’ of pre-Christian Europe, especially Celticism - to which most adherents may reasonably claim descent. Yet, an identification with various other indigenous peoples - their cosmologies, rituals and artefacts - has intensified. Amid feral argot, body-art and material culture, a customised ensemble of beliefs, architecture, musical instruments, dietary habits, cooking methods, medical knowledge, clothing and hair styling deriving from various indigenous peoples, is discernible. Apart from Native American Indians and Aborigines, other oppressed, ‘heroic’ peoples/religions like Jamaican Rastafari are valorised, and eastern traditions (e.g. Hindu, Buddhism, Tao), following beat and hippy pathfinders, continue to be mined for their personal spiritual value.

With respect to Australia’s indigenes, according to the creator of the ‘Rainbow Temple’ near Lismore, ferals are ‘strongly connected to the Dreamtime - Aboriginal dreaming’ (Murray 1994:58). Indigenised landscapes are indeed sources of enchantment. For instance, Nimbin Rocks and Mt Warning - reputed Bunjalung male ritual initiation sites - have become sacralised ‘energy’ sources or ‘power spots’ for many of the region’s post-sixties settlers. According to Quenda, Mt Warning (or *Wollumbin* - Bunjalung for ‘cloud catcher’ or ‘rain gatherer’) is:

a really sacred mountain ... the first place of ritual, where ritual came to this planet ... It really crosses on a ley line there and it’s very significant in terms of the whole planet ... I think Aye’s Rock is like a crown chakra and Mt Warning is like a third eye.

Such discourse has drawn criticism in recent cultural commentary which endeavours to target and condemn instances of cultural appropriation (e.g. Cuthbert and Grossman 1996). While it is true that ‘fashion ferals’ are no strangers to essentialising and

homogenising indigenes, even becoming ersatz Aborigines,¹⁸ as discussed in the following chapter commentary has tended to be selective and misleading. Though ferals may be our new chthonic others, this should not be interpreted as ‘new *autochthones*’, thereby effectively supplanting Aborigines in the ‘search for *lebensraum*’. The Northern Rivers band *Earth Reggae* are enlisted to clarify my point. Their song ‘Always Was Always Will Be’ features the lines:

Ain’t no mystery
What we’re standing on
Always was, always will be
Aboriginaland. (written by A. Evans, from ‘Indigina - Planet Magic’ 1992)

The same CD features the track, ‘Indigina’, the chorus of which runs:

State what you are
And then stand tall and strong
For it’s not to skin colour but to land
That we belong. (D. Mackenzie-Cochran)

Juxtaposed, the lyrics suggest that while acknowledgment of prior and continuing Aboriginal occupancy is never in doubt, conscientious Earth-orientated descendants of recent migrants too claim their human right to inhabit place. The message of *Earth Reggae* seems to be: ‘while we respect the rights of First Peoples, this land is *our place* too’.

Eco-tribes

There is a predilection among ferals to become affiliated with alternate collectives and ‘disorganisations’.¹⁹ Typically they are anarchic, non-hierarchical associations within which resource pooling is favoured and ecological issues foremost. They are marginal ‘neo-tribes’ (Maffesoli 1996), ‘*Bünde*’ (Hetherington 1994) or ‘DiY communities’ (McKay 1998), wherein membership is non-ascribed. They are highly unstable, yet

¹⁸ Often the indigenes worthy of ‘kinship’ and support are conceptualised as noble-environmentalists, who, essentialised as such, are potential sources of ‘ecological salvation’ (cf. Sackett 1991; Jacobs 1994:313). Practically legitimating the occupation of an essentialised other, late ‘black hippy’ Burnam Burnam, once held the view that some white environmentalists, like those protesting uranium mining in Kakadu, ‘are more Aboriginal than most urban Aborigines in their treatment of, and respect for, mother earth - and in their personal relationship with her’ (Burnam Burnam 1987:96-7). Voicing a similarly perilous sentiment, though seemingly with greater awareness of the inevitable paradox, at the Australian Rainbow Gathering held at Om Shalom in November 1996 human-sculpture activist Benny Zable had it that many feral activists were ‘non-Aboriginal Aborigines’!

¹⁹ An ‘unstructured protest group of the mid-Nineties without the leadership of a conventional organization’: from the *Guardian’s* ‘Glossary of the Nineties’ (McKay 1996:176).

strongly affectual resource hubs and, through long periods of voluntary work, valuable skill sources. Some collectives are performance orientated (like Bohemia, Wolfgang's Palace, Earth Reggae and various dance collectives like Vibe Tribe and Oms not Bombs). Others are intentional communities, including the Star Earth Tribe near Nimbin and Feral Wymyn, an Anarcho-Feminist Collective who, in 1996, intended to establish Victoria's first all female community (Feral Wymyn 1996). Yet, more genuine 'eco-tribes' are radical green outfits like OREN, NEFA and GECO, or more established Co-operatives like FOE. These are DiY communities of resistance interconnected in a growing network. They are typically engaged in natural heritage conservation and anti-development campaigns: including anti-logging, mining and road protests.

Harbouring a legacy of swift occupation and peaceful obstruction, one node in this network is the East Gippsland based GECO, which represents the last line of defence of Victoria's remaining high conservation-value forest. Like Earth First!, GECO have become a vehicle for translating broad ecocentric and bioregional principles into an 'operational environmentalism' (Seager 1993:224). With their familiar screen-printed folk-dicta 'old growth - fucken oath' and 'tragic happens', GECO emerged out of blockades mounted in 1993/94. One activist, Belalie, conveys a common perception:

[There is] a really hostile local community [in East Gippsland] ... I mean they're living on massacre sites. It's just an area of such dark history. It's an area where, like, colonisation continues. They continue to destroy the sacred things. They continue to wipe out the native species. It's the same attitude which [early settlers] approached this country with ya'know, and it's just ongoing.

Dedicated to NVDA, GECO also engage in political lobbying, police and forestry worker liaison, conduct surveys for endangered species ('scouting') and public education. They founded an organic food co-op and have established a permaculture garden. They recognise the prior occupancy of the forests by the Bidawal (from flyer). In 1997, they united with other groups to form a community of resistance at Goolengook. With the signing of the Regional Forest Agreement, and against the recommendations of DNRE (Department of Natural Resources and Environment) botanists and prominent scientists, Goolengook forest has been exposed to clearfell logging and slash burning. A large percentage of trees are destined for the government subsidised export woodchipping mill at Eden in southeast NSW owned by the Japanese Harris-Daishowa.

The Goolengook base camp blockade was established when all other political processes failed to protect this forest. The camp experienced constant flux, with numbers swelling as

'Goolengeeks' assembled for imminent blockades²⁰ and 'event-actions'. The latter has involved occupying the DNRE office in Orbost, and, more importantly, 'hitting the chippers' (actions on woodchipping mills at Orbost and Eden). These passionately executed actions involved conveyor belt lock-ons, banner dropping and eco-political theatrics. Instances of the feral spectacle serving the cause, they are designed to attract media attention and engineered to increase the operating costs of an environmentally destructive industry. They are often collaborations of groups representing people from diverse backgrounds - GECO and more conventional conservationists such as members of The Wilderness Society - yet it is often the ferals who commit to the lock-on. With cruel irony, on June 5th 1997 - World Environment Day - police 'broke the blockade'. Since then, there have been over 170 arrests.

Encampments are a strong source of identity formation and belonging. Like road protests in Britain, GECO's direct action can be seen to possess a ritual function:

[T]he inherent risk, excitement and danger of the action creates a magically focused moment, a peak experience where real time suddenly stands still and a certain shift in consciousness can occur ... Direct action is praxis, catharsis and image rolled into one. (Jordan 1998:133)

Indeed, eco-defensive actions, with all their trials and tribulations, have a purpose reminiscent of a rite of passage. Taylor communicates this idea drawing upon a passage from *Earth First!*:

Rites of passage were essential for the health of primal cultures ... so why not reinstate initiation rites and other rituals in the form of ecodefense actions? Adolescents could earn their adulthood by successful completion of ritual hunts, as in days of yore, but for a new kind of quarry - bulldozers and their ilk. (Davis in Taylor 1994:193)

A form of civil disobedience, a successful 'hunt' constitutes the delaying of logging activity via the 'lock-on'. Risks taken at 'actions' are a strong source of kudos and acceptance in these communities of resistance. Great respect is reserved for those who perform the most valorous feats 'in the field' - who, 'by deploying their bodies in precarious settings ... convert themselves into flesh and blood bargaining chips' (Williams 1998:9).²¹ Yet domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and washing-up, earn members equivalent respect. For instance, Bandicoot suggests washing dishes, cooking, fetching

²⁰ Strategies included tripods, mono-poles, cantilevers, treesits and 'lock-ons' (invariably attachment to bulldozers using chains, kryptonite bike locks and home made devices).

²¹ For example, during the Daintree Skyrail protests of 1991, one dedicated activist was said to have 'superglued his testes to a bulldozer blade' (Doyle 1995). Perhaps a prime candidate for the title of 'ego-warrior'.

water and chopping wood are his foremost responsibilities at a blockade. Mardo lives by the Zen Buddhist philosophy: 'Before enlightenment - chop wood, fetch water. After enlightenment - chop wood, fetch water'. Along with obstructions accomplished, harassment's experienced, arrests and fines accumulated, kitchen duties and camp maintenance are important sources of kudos within the protest milieu.

Such communities of resistance are autonomous zones of warmth and solidarity. This was reported to be the case at a recent anti-logging campaign at Giblett WA in 1997, where, at any one time, in a stand off with the WA Department of Conservation and Management, there were said to be 150 people scattered throughout the old growth, many on tree platforms. One platform dweller, Zac (aged 20), revealed that 'for the first time, I feel like I actually belong somewhere ... There is such a sense of belonging and such a sense of family in this place that I haven't found anywhere' (Pennells 1997:5). While the loss of forest compartments or coups to which deep attachments have been formed occasions a 'crushing sense of grief and despair' amongst forest defenders, the desecration often binds together those who have 'borne witness' (Hoare 1998:23).

Together with blockades and other protests, forest raves, festivals and gatherings are important hubs of eco-radical sociality. Ferals will likely celebrate the season's cycle - the pagan year, the path of the sun and phases of the moon - at small gatherings, doofs (like Earth Dream events), communities (e.g. Wolfgang's Palace) or at larger ACHs (like ConFest). Immediate centres on the margins, such events provide the context for meeting new friends and/or partners, for forging alliances. Further to this, they provide opportunities for the disenchanting and directionless to form and maintain vast 'extended milieux' (Purdue et al. 1997) and to (re)turn to spiritual and activist paths. They are, therefore, recruitment thresholds. Consistent with the party/protest amalgamation of 'DiY culture', such thresholds typically combine festive celebration with political consciousness raising. With the rallying promo 'Celebrate and Defend', the Goongerah Gathering of January 1998 typified such an alliance as it hosted live music, a doof and was the kick off for a renewed forest campaign. ConFest is a magnified model of this kind of alliance.

Part III. Authentication at ConFest: the Feral Return

Australians have sought authentication at various locations. These are invariably temporary and geographically marginal spaces they make pilgrimage to as tourists/holiday makers. They make journeys both out/inside the nation's borders seeking cultural,

historical, ecological and psychological authenticity. Internal destinations range from the centre (especially Uluru), to the hinterlands (mountains/rainforests), to the edge (the beach/coast), to the past ('heritage' sites). In the quest for a purer, more 'natural' existence, those sympathetic to alternative lifestyles have a range of destinations at hand, most of which are socially and physically marginal. Many have attempted permanent authentication by emigrating to communes and multiple occupancy communities. Munro-Clarke argues such places provide residents suffering from fragmentation and the personal estrangement of modern-industrial society with the potential to develop 'an inner quality of strength and coherence', a 'fully realised personal identity', an 'authentic self' (1986:36,219,34). In more recent times, 'self-actualisation' may be the intentional outcome of much briefer sojourns: from weekend workshopping and rural retreats offering spiritual guidance (e.g. Vipassana courses), to practical education camps furnishing an 'ecological self' (e.g. Nimbin's 'permaculture youth camp'). Recent times have also seen alternates travel to temporary festive centres where multiple qualities of self-authentication are accessed and performed. ConFest is such a transitory, marginal centre.

Many participants are attracted by the sense of *return* ConFest evokes - a return to a desired space, to *nature*, manifested as the 'natural' environment, 'natural' healing, diet or even immediate, 'natural', sociality. Liminalities celebrate their distance from the parent culture and their affinity with one another. As local authenticity *par excellence*, *ferality* is championed and performed at ConFest. At a space on the edge and time in-between, participants are permitted to be, or quite literally go, feral.

Therefore, there are several ways in which we can conceptualise ConFestian *ferality*. First, ConFest is a temporary juncture for ferals, a haven accommodating various semi-nomadic tribes. Rarely subjected to prejudice at this populous marginal centre, 'the ferals, the gypsies, the people on the fringes of society, seem to be quite comfortable' (Yallara). For itinerant activists it is a transhumant 'gathering of the tribes'. Yet, perhaps more than this, ConFest, says Spinifex, 'is a kind of a link for city based people to have that connection with the Earth and to rub shoulders with the very few that are actually living with the Earth'. In their open defiance of a mass-consumerist mentality and the apathetic disposition upon which economic rationalism relies, in resisting and ridiculing bureaucratic structures and 'power over' processes, ferals are like beacons. With their integration of living theatre, Earthen spirituality and anarchist social and political projects, they are, to use Banyalla's phrase, 'fucken stunners'. Adherents of an expressive and conscientious youth culture, they represent an attractive subcultural career for the disenchanting.

As a result of its conferencing dimension, ConFest is a significant point of accessibility. Dominant culture expatriates encounter eco-radical alternatives and may become enlisted in 'the volunteer earth army'. As a recruitment centre for contemporaneous campaigns (e.g. protests at the WMC uranium mine at Roxby Downs SA in 1983/84 and 1997, the Errinundra forest blockade in 1984, and the protest at ERA's Jabiluka uranium mine in 1998), ConFest has featured in Australia's feral emergence. From Moama IV, activists from GECO (in receipt of grants and donations from DTE for equipment for blockades and educational tours) and other ecotribes (FOE, OREN, and TWS), formed *Forest* (see Chapter 4). An 'outpost for the forests' (Bandicoot), the village has functioned as a fund raiser and rallying centre for native logging blockades mounted at Goolengook. With the precedent already set back in 1984, Banyalla makes no bones about the possibilities:

If we get down to East Gippsland we can lock off the whole of the logging industry, right. A thousand people the coppers can't deal with. It takes 20-30 coppers to do one blockade, so it's impossible for them to knock out six or seven.

At a further level, *ferality* is nearest to that which might approximate a 'dominant symbol' at ConFest. For participants, *ferality* is an archetypal mode of *otherness*, 'natural' corporeality, a most authentic condition of human being. *Ferality is freedom* - a freedom embodied in those who have 'cut loose from common or garden varieties of human' (Nelumbo). At ConFest, such freedom is given root and permitted to flower. In an organic autonomous zone, where other 'truths' are enacted and alternate forms of sociality are (re)discovered, one is free to take a risk - to stray from the paths.

The fragile, eruptive character of this permissive topos is laid bare when participants spill over its perimeter. Transitory occupancy of immediate locales is often threatening to locals. Outside opinion on ConFest and its inhabitants is mixed. Since ConFest is a financial boon for small towns like Tocumwal and Moama, and ConFesters are usually friendly, locals are most often favourable. However this is not always the case. As Spain earlier reported, from the first moment of the DTE movement alternative lifestylers have encountered hostility:

The Establishment authorities treat us like a load of excrement. They are not even concerned to consider our usefulness for composting a garden ... the media show little interest in relating our positive attributes, preferring to exploit our sensationalist image of being dirty, useless, irresponsible, drug-addicted, ratbag, ragtag dropouts. (Spain 1976)

In 1985, DTE withdrew continued permit applications for the Baringa event near Wangaratta following objections from local property owners and residents. Apart from the alarm generated by the proximity of a 'nude camp', locals took exception to the abject feral body 'loitering and hitch-hiking in the area'. One couple even discovered someone 'asleep under their mailbox' (*Wangaratta Chronicle* 1985:1). In 1991, after Walwa III, a town resident wrote to DTE reporting cases of 'people sleeping in the streets and in various front gardens around town. In fact we were a bit concerned at the number of people who lingered on after ConFest had finished, in some cases for weeks' (*DTE News* 67, Aug 1991:5).

Outside the festive atmosphere, the freedoms sought and assimilated by participants presents a potential threat to privileged order, propriety and property. But inside, transhumant participants - distanced from routine social life, outside the confines of suburban enclaves, centres of learning and business districts - are provided the opportunity to experience an immediate communion with 'the natural' and 'fellow travellers': they are safe to get and be 'dirty', to assume wildness, to cultivate 'crustiness'. *Ferality* is an authentic transitional/edge identity (re)constituted via ConFest's liminal/marginal coincidence. In Chapters 6-8, I investigate a triad of liminal modalities (outlined in Chapter 2) which respectively condition key aspects of *ferality*: embodied alterity, eco-spirituality and neo-tribal sociations.

Conclusion

Feral is a characteristically confrontational attitude intimately connected to the critical discourse and practice of radical ecologism in Australia. It has appeared at the crossroads of several historical trajectories: the local confluence of hippie, punk and pagan youth cultures, the emergence of a nomadic squatting/activist movement, and the valorisation of indigeneity. Via discussion of this relatively immediate and largely non-commodified spectacular/activist subculture, special note has been made of its efforts to celebrate and defend natural and cultural heritage.

We are witness to a contemporary transition which indicates detachment from the domestic 'parent culture' and identification with the natural environment. This Australian eco-radical project promises to bequeath similarly disenchanted individuals with an understanding of their kinship with the natural world, an attendant range of responsibilities, and a defensible *place* in the scheme of things. For those embarking upon co-operative eco-tribal trajectories, this subcultural career is rewarding, a risk worth

taking, a source of belonging and purpose. Evidencing a subterranean process of reconciliation (with ecology and indigenes), ferals are antipodean *terra*-ists seeking (re)connection with place.

For many alternates, *ferality* has become an authentic category of human being - evoking disorder, unpredictability, wildness, otherness - freedom. Its desirability lies in the transitional/trespassory status achieved by the straddling and undermining of an established Nature/Culture boundary. Permissive and immediate, ConFest is a site wherein ferality can be accessed and performed. It contextualises the expression and realisation of principal elements of *ferality* - spectacular aestheticism and life theatre (art); eco-spirituality and activism (religion/politics); and a quest for belonging in community (sociality) - discussed here and elaborated upon in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 6

Playing Out: Carnality, Alterity and the (Re)created Self

Here were people who had drawn a line and at last insisted on their right to determine their own identities ... They would love, dress, speak, work (or not work) as they chose. They would make their own music, dance to their own rhythm. They would become gypsies, mendicants, savages, witch doctors, rebels, clowns, freaks, and they would do so openly ... asking nobody's permission, making no apologies. (Roszak 1979:xxvi)

Introduction

In a liminoidal counterworld of permission, participants *experiment* with desired sources of authenticity as a means of (re)creating their identities. In this chapter I am interested in the explicitly festive component of ConFest - wherein participants may 'stray from the paths'. There are three parts. In the first, I suggest ConFest privileges Turner's *subjunctive mood*. It is a ludic realm of pure possibility in which participants are permitted to 'play out' ('down', 'across', 'up'). Yet, I expand upon Turner's insights in a focus on the transgressive body. I thus detail a unique social synapse occasioning extra-ordinary, and potentially transformative, corporeal experience. In the second, I detail two interwoven strategies via which the 'other' is implicated in ConFesters' desires: *carnality* (getting 'in touch' with other participants), and *alterity* ('othering' the self, especially via indigeneity). Special consideration is given to appropriation which, I argue, is a complex process requiring reconsideration in cultural theory. With particular attention to performative appropriation, or *mimesis*, in the third part I discuss the on-site presence of complicated DiY identities, fashioned via identification (often fleeting) with multiple nodes of difference.

Part I. Subjunctive Mind, Body and Spirit

ConFest is a paroxysmic exemplar of society's 'subjunctive mood', by which Turner meant a mood of 'wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis', a world of 'maybe', 'could be' and '*as if*' - the mood of *were*, in 'if *I were* you' (Turner 1982c:83; 1984:20-21; 1992:149). As opposed to the indicative mood, according to Turner, subjunctivity is a

transcendent and reflexive circumstance.¹ Yet, what of the body's role in subjunctive performance, in art, in play? Though Turner was not exactly an anthropologist of the body, there is little to prevent the extension of his ideas to embrace embodiment. Indeed, it could be argued that at ConFest, since one's art is public - on display, on parade (or 'presented' as in Goffman [1971]) - the body, as 'the least mediated of all media' (Bey 1994a:2), is the principal medium of communication.² Nevertheless, I take subjunctivity to implicate the conceptual, transcendent and physical spheres simultaneously. The subjunctive 'mood' is, therefore, a ludic³ circumstance which may be ideational, numinous and corporeal.

The subjunctive culture of ConFest is a unique product of licensed *transgression* - the 'gay abandonment', reversal or 'negation' (Babcock 1978) of 'form' common to seasonal/calendar celebrations and to tourist behaviour. As Turner had it, such events carry 'the essence' of liminality: they are characterised by 'free or ludic recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird' (Turner 1982c:82). Categorical confusion reigns as liminaries may be androgynous, at once ghosts and babies, cultural and natural, or human and animal (Turner 1977:37). In a 'time out of time', with the world turned upside down, mere mortals may become deified (cf. Meyerhoff 1978:231). Bakhtin's (1968) rendering of the medieval carnival is analogous. According to Bakhtin, the carnival celebrated 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions ... it was hostile to all that was immortalised and completed' (1968:10). At such a juncture, '[t]he order of things is dislocated and everything becomes full of emotion, allusive ...

¹ For Turner, play is basically transcendent and reflexive. It involves Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow state' (1974), yet also provides a 'metalanguage' (Bateson 1958) for commentaries on self and society (Turner 1985e:263-64). In Turner's view, the inherent sacred and 'instrumental potency' of playing, inspires the imagination. Play is then *elusive* (a term derived from the Latin *ex* for 'away' plus *ludere* meaning 'to play'). From the point of view of neurology, it cannot be pinned down by left brain 'thinking' nor is it fully of right brain 'arationality'. Taking another tack, play is described as a slippery 'Trickster', 'a Puck between the day world of Theseus and the night world of Oberon' (ibid:268). The 'supreme bricoleur of frail transient constructions', it is an incongruous potpourri of 'mimicry and mockery' (ibid:264) paralleling the indivisibly transcendent and dialogical cultural mode of Bakhtin's (1968) carnivalesque.

² As Bey remarked, 'real art is play and play is one of the most immediate of all experiences' (1994a:4). ConFest is an immediate micro-social topos where barriers between artists and 'users' of art are removed. It thus approximates the TAZ which, for Bey, is 'the only possible "time" and "place" for art to happen, for the sheer pleasure of creative play' - where art is not a commodity but 'a condition of life'. In this democratisation of artistry (music making, singing, healing arts etc.) the artist is not celebrated as a special sort of person, but every person is celebrated as a special sort of artist (Bey 1991a:70).

³ Note that 'ludic' is not synonymous with carefree frivolity. For Huizinga, 'we might call [play] a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary life" as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly' (Huizinga 1950:13).

representational' (Da Matta 1984:238, my emphasis). Such 'representational' events (Handelman 1990) may sustain the status quo as 'the aspects of order that are inverted remain the mould for the inversion' (ibid:52). Nevertheless, an inversion may become disconnected from its origin, emerging as an 'authentic, transformative alternative, one that attacks in all seriousness the foundations on which it was erected' (ibid:49).

At ConFest, one passes across a threshold into unpredictable 'banana' space-time, a 'bohemian moment' (Moore 1998a:173) wherein 'the forces of uncertainty in play' (Handelman 1990:70) are valued and consequential. Outside (or in modernity), where play is tightly framed and uncertainty 'domesticated', it has become 'frivolous' and 'inconsequential' - dismissed as irrational, mere 'fantasy', 'pretence', consigned to the devalued territory of 'make-believe' (ibid). ConFest is a 'play-ground', a 'crazy' peripatetic zone where there may be little preoccupation with 'the act of arriving' (Da Matta 1984:223). As Huizinga remarked, play invariably takes place within 'forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain' (1950:10). Once inside the 'forbidden' zone, participants discover or expect that the subjunctive mind, body and spirit is permitted and valued, that one may wander without need for direction, that routine dictates of (re)productivity are placed in abeyance, that normative gender configurations are openly ruptured, that the boundary between play and work is blurred, that risks may be taken.

In this way, ConFest approximates the open-theatricality of Neo-Pagan gatherings, where participants:

delve into aspects of other cultures and mythologies that they find captivating [and] become ensconced in the excitement of *becoming* amid a highly charged atmosphere. Reality is momentarily suspended or abrogated ... one steps out of one time into another and enters an enclave within which it seems anything may happen. (Hume 1997:6-7)

And such enclaves may be ruled by chaos, hosting unbridled destructiveness. One commentator, 'on several hits of liquid 2CB, DMT, and hash oil', narrates his experience of the apotheosis of the Burning Man Festival:

It was as if the pits of Hell opened up and fire shot out into the sky ... [T]he air was filled with smoke and incense and sweat and screams and laughter, there were people wandering around in all stages of insanity from slight drug-induced hazes to downright schizophrenic babbling, burning everything in sight, revelling in the total annihilation of all structure. (Tussin)

Yet, such threshold crossings and cataclysmic moments wherein the death of structure is engineered are highly consequential. They potentiate renewal in highly idiosyncratic forms. This is precisely the sentiment Orryelle received in feedback to his *Labyrinth*:

Some people freaked out a bit, went through some kind of cathartic death, but ultimately emerged stronger and stranger. Many tales of joy and fascination, of having discovered 'another world'. Those who got really lost mostly eventually found ... themselves. Some have even expressed 'life-transforming' experiences, while others just had fun!

Of course, the total experience promises analogous effects. Gum drives the point home:

[ConFest] is a transformation point. Where people are transformed 'cause they're loosened from the constraints of society, and they're then allowed to become something else. And they then go back and they're different. I mean they get back in society and ... they're never the same again. I don't think anyone that comes here is ever the same again.

In a general sense, ConFest effects a break down of routine rules and practices, followed by reformation or readjustment, a process echoing the 'programmed deconstruction' (Handelman 1990:65) and reconstruction of identities in passage rites. Novices are especially known to experience 'disequilibrium' (Schechner 1993:40). They approximate *paidia* (Greek for 'child') which, according to Caillois, stands for 'an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, carefree gaiety ... [and] uncontrolled fantasy' (in Turner 1983a:106). Deconstructive turbulence is evident in the alterations of the habitual, balanced body. The body is 'opened, made provisional, uncreated ... so that it can be re-created according to plan' (Schechner 1993:40). Yet, like Burning Man, there is no telos, no institutionalised sequence of aesthetic/performance modes orchestrating 'resocialisation' within a single cosmic order, as in Sinhalese exorcisms (Kapferer 1983). There are certainly 'transformative consequences for contexts and identities beyond the setting of ... performance' (Kapferer 1979:13). However, given the plenitude of performance venues, genres and workshops/playshops (many of which operate via deconstruction-reconstruction principles), there are many possible sources of de/reformation, effecting uncertain consequences.

Part II. Desiring the Other: Carnality and Alterity

People are given permission to do virtually anything, and as a result, they start to become more themselves. And a lot of them explore being like this and they explore that, and you know, they want to know what colour they are, and what ... their origins are: who they are. So they explore and they paint themselves, and they dress differently, and they even act differently and loosen right up, because there doesn't seem to be any judgment on anyone doing anything. They can see people doing much more bizarre things than they'd ever dreamt of. And clearly no one's gonna look twice at you no matter what you try ... You have to be real good to gain attention around here. So you find people are allowed to be something else. (Gum)

ConFest occasions the satisfying of otherwise unfulfilled, or even the discovery of hidden, desires. There are a number of ways in which otherness is implicated in the desires of participants. They desire *carnality* (getting 'in touch' with other participants) and *alterity* ('othering' their selves).⁴ These are considered to be 'natural' states, complex interwoven processes of self-becoming, of individuation via authentication. In each, the body is paramount: a site of experimentation, medium of expression, fulcrum of mutuality. By carnality, I mean the manifest desire for physical contact with co-participants: ranging from non-sexual tactility to erotic sensuality. Alterity involves an express identification with difference (an 'othered' self) which itself takes a number of complex forms. Carnality and alterity are discussed in turn.

Carnality

ConFest is an experimental 'festal culture' where 'carnal knowing' is permitted. 'Carnal knowing' is, according to Mellor and Shilling (1997:56), 'a form of gaining information about the world which is thoroughly embodied and connected to people's senses and sensualities'. It is a form of public knowledge suppressed in Protestant modernity and to which nostalgic contemporaries desire to return. ConFest is a unique site for such a return as its culture is carnal, is promiscuity. Not 'abstract, fleshless, mediated by machine or by authority or by simulation', festal culture is corporeal. It is 'face-to-face, body-to-body, breath-to-breath (literally a conspiracy)' (Bey 1994a:30). It is then Bakhtin's material realm of the infinitely permeable body. It is also pure carnivalesque, a licensed Batailleian world of taboo breaking 'a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually

⁴ Of course, participants also desire the immediate sociality of *communitas* - *being with* others. I give special attention to this in Chapter 8.

degraded and defiled' (Stallybrass and White 1986:8). That permitted behaviour is taboo or discouraged elsewhere, confers a sense of demarcated clandestinity to which participants are privileged. And there is a spectrum of activities pursued.

Massage is popular - the *Massage* village being the principle locus for such sensuousness. There, various techniques - from Reiki to Tantric, and more idiosyncratic - are practised and reciprocated. ConFest has conventionally 'showcased' a plethora of tactile therapies and healing-arts.⁵ Sensuous communions may however, take highly erotic forms. The *Queer*, *Pagan* and *Sexuality* villages have been repositories for playshops providing the opportunity to explore 'flirting', 'gay flirting - with Shaun and Bazza', 'radical intimacy', 'polyfidelity', 'queer collaboration', bisexuality, Tantra, 'macrame and bondage - BYO rope'. *Queer* was host to numerous workshops and educational sessions on queer sexuality, cross-dressing and transsexuality - including those facilitated by self-designated 'queer-hippie' Nori May Welby. At *Pagan*, it was not unusual to witness a 'guy dressed in little leather pants whip himself over a woman lying on the ground in a pentagram in front of a small crowd of onlookers' (Baekia).

This festal 'banana time' is the realm of carnal possibility, a bacchanal 'coming out'. Cedar explains this well:

I remember walking from [a workshop on bisexuality] past the *Massage* village and there was this guy sucking off another guy just off the side of the path ... I couldn't believe it. I was stunned and amazed. I thought 'wow, this is fantastic' you know. Like people feel free to do that ... I've never seen it again at ConFest, but what got me was that there was room to be radically different.

Such intemperate disinhibition may be even more 'public'. The celebrations at the Fire Circle adjacent the Market at Moama II over New Year present a pertinent example of Rabelaisian abandonment. The celebrations lasted well into the new year. Thousands of people, many nude, adorned with mud and paint participated in a percussion driven tumult well past midnight. We encircled a huge bonfire with an orchestra of the weird congregating at one end producing an incessant and often chaotic hand drum rhythm. There was an inner ring for wilder celebrants, primal voguers and temporary exhibitionists to circumambulate. It was an atmosphere where one was both exhibitionist *and* voyeur, actor *and* audience. Some performed stylised dance gestures (like belly dancing, Butoh, Capoeira). Others were just 'going off' - no longer an audience to themselves, some participants were in or near states of entrancement. Entertaining bravado, some younger

males took to leaping the fire. Later, after hundreds remained to see in the dawn, a few 44 gallon drums became the main source of percussion (noise). Two women fell in passionate embrace in front of the 44s. They seemed oblivious to onlookers, one of whom was a disconsolate male who was previously mauling one of the now erotically engaged.

In conjunction with such proprietorial dissolution and queer coalitions, there is much evidence of gender identity disruption. Male performance of femininity is encouraged and pronounced. According to Fulmar, at ConFest ‘you can live out your fantasies ... I wore a dress for a while (why not?)’. Crossdressing is one⁶ overt indicator of the body’s potential as ‘a site of resistance’. For Grosz (1990:64), the body ‘exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways’. As Butler (1990:141) suggests, at sites ‘outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality’ such alternate gender configurations are enabled. At ConFest, ‘disruptive’ gender performances are made possible, in a space where divergence from rules governing sex, gender and desire is encouraged.⁷

Here is a promiscuous and disruptive topos, where ‘the unclosed body of convexities and orifices intrud[es] onto and into other’s personal space’ (Shields 1990:57), where ‘rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder’ are made possible (Butler 1990:17). Evocative of the insurrectionary TAZ (Bey 1991a), it surely is a most visible instance of society’s ‘orgiastic’ substratum which licenses the profligation of sensual alterity in the ‘transgression of imposed morality’ (Maffesoli 1993:92).

Alterity

MacCannell holds that (1976:5) ‘a basic theme in our civilisation ... [is] self discovery through a complex and sometimes arduous search for an Absolute Other’. Accordingly, an essential category of *difference*, typifying authenticity, is considered to be a source of self discovery (or even ‘rediscovery’) for contemporaries. This leads especially to tourism which, as Bauman argues, is a ‘mode of life’ in postmodernity:

⁵ For example, in a workshop at Cotter, The Farm’s James Prescott endorsed the view that ‘the more physical touching shared by people for the purpose of pleasure and understanding, the less the tendency toward violence in their society’ (*DTE Canberra* 3, Dec. 1979:14-15).

⁶ Other strategies include piercing and innovative body painting.

⁷ For Butler, gender is not an ‘expression’ of an inner ‘essence’ or ‘substance’ - it is performed, it is produced. Therefore, to follow her argument, gender discontinuities such as those ‘performed’ at ConFest expose the fiction of an interior gender ‘essence’, dramatising the

The tourist is a conscious and systematic seeker of experience, of a new and different experience, of the experience of difference and novelty - as the joys of the familiar wear off and cease to allure. The tourists want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element ... on condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish. (Bauman 1996:29)

I take this further by suggesting that states of social, psychological and cultural alterity are required for the (re)creation of identity. Othering is a requirement of selfhood. As ConFest demonstrates, one need not make pilgrimage to distant, international cultural productions to experience such othering. Of course, following Bauman's logic, one need not even travel so far as ConFest, yet the point I wish to make is that several *pathways* of alterity intersect at ConFest. I shall discuss regression (to childhood), alterant use, dressing down (nudity) and dressing up (indigeneity).

Childhood

There are occasions when the entropic birth-death trajectory is momentarily reversed. These are moments when 'one dies to become a little child' (Turner 1974:273). Childhood and play are normally considered to be profoundly related. Turner acknowledged the serious transitional implications of childlike abandon: 'this is why Jesus said "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven", the un-kingdom beyond social structure' (1983a:111-12). In the 'un-kingdom' of ConFest, participants are granted permission to relinquish the affectations of adulthood such that, according to Karrabul, ConFest is 'a whole body experience ... [it's] kindergarten again'. Along these lines, Les reveals that 'in many respects the whole ConFest experience is an age regression ... It's an opportunity to play again, for adults to play, to do bizarre and crazy things, to let your hair down'.⁸ Indeed, it amounts to a vast playground - a magnified *Children's* village. As such, the following description of the *Children's* village at Walwa III (90/91) is a curiously befitting description of the entire event:

Story telling, singing and sharing circle, adventure playground, mysterious tunnel, parasol totem puppets, fabric printing, cubby shelters, face painting, procession, festival dragon, costumes, masks, music, follow the pied piper,

performative construction of an original or true 'sex': 'In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency' (Butler 1990:36).

⁸ Of course, one might regress as far as the womb (e.g. *The Labyrinth*) or even past lives (Dr Fu's popular 'past life regression' workshops).

join the frog circus, puppet theatre, arts and crafts tent, treasure trail - collect natural material. (from *Walwa 90/91 handbook*)

Re-creational Alterant Use

There is also a pervasive Dionysian propensity for altered states of consciousness effected via conspicuous re-creational substance use (especially cannabis but also psilocybin ['magic mushrooms'] acid and ecstasy). It can be quite reasonably stated that ConFesters are the descendants of 'the psychic disaffiliates' who, in the 1960s, 'took off in search of altered states of consciousness that might generate altered states of society' (Roszak 1995:xxvi). Svendsen (1999:38) argues that what he calls 'Psychedelic Spirituality' has 'always been at ConFest & will always be at ConFest ... the only thing that varies is to what extent the 10% of the ice-berg is above the visible water line'.

It would be erroneous to assume that all alterant usage is enacted with similar intent. For instance, LSD may be ingested for purely hedonic escapades, or as a sacramental tool for intentional spiritual transportation - to *re-create* or create anew consciousness. A common thread is that psychedelics can expand the boundary lines on the fields of possibility, potentiating self-transformation within a 'rave-safe' environment. Yet, there is an uncertain and random quality to the experience. In the only literary depiction of ConFest to date, Dando (1996) describes ConFest as a wild acid trip: the author and his friend were 'two feral goblins on acid ... we paint[ed] our faces tribal colours, became other people ... it's just like lord of the flies. It's chaos, anything could happen' (149). Isha recalls a young woman she knew who came to ConFest and, 'dropped a tab of acid and ... we didn't see her for days. Then I heard stories ... someone had seen her coming out of the bushes growling and snarling like a tiger. And she was a tiger for days'.

Well conceived and facilitated workshops can provide a safe environment to explore the consciousness enhancing, spiritual dimensions of psychedelic alterants. Kurt Svendsen, has, for instance, offered workshops which provide:

a gateway so that people so motivated to swim against the currents of mere sensory pleasure & entertainment could find a dignified clear-spot &

exploratory oasis, a Meta-ConFest within the greater ConFest, a pure, albeit obscure Conferencing-Festival (Svendsen 1999:41).

A report on one such workshop ('Conscious Tripping' at Moama III) provides an account of the 'half-life awakening of one individual into transpersonal or god-consciousness' (Professor Ceteris Paribus 1996). Another Psychedelics graduate relates that a subsequent workshop, an 'intense six-hour voyage of self-discovery' at Moama IV, 'opened the doors of perception into the world of the unknown within'. As an opportunity to discover 'some truths about good and evil', it stimulated 'a profound understanding of balance ... open[ing] a door to a higher level of compassion and feeling for other people' (Nagy c.1996). The 'bad trip' notwithstanding, alterants have been known to amplify ConFest's catalytic capacity. Holding the firm belief that the event is nothing less than 'a catalyst for change', Mundarda, for instance, conceived his youngest child at ConFest during a 'psychedelic journey'.

Nudity

If you and your friends have got nothing on over the new year holidays you're more than welcome at ConFest. (Trev Hemer, DTE email-group 16/10/97)

ConFest is conventionally a 'clothes optional' event. The open relaxation of dress codes and prevalence of full nudity inverts the sanctioned norm of covering up (especially genitalia) outside the private sphere. The theme is reflected in workshops - such as 'nude years day', 'nude drum and dance party' and 'naked sensuality'. While many participants feel comfortable with the idea of the 'free' festival - there being many practising nudists ('naturists') present - for novices the experience may approximate the kind of 'ordeal' associated with passage rites. Apprehensiveness is common as novices entertain false expectations of obligatory nudity and confront fears of first-time public *exposure*. Here, public nudity (which it should be stressed is not at all obligatory) involves the temporary disclosure of the 'self' - the vulnerable, unfortified self stripped of social disguises and pretence. Thus, for Oriibi, it 'gave me a chance to step out of my bra and drop all the bullshit pretences'. According to Wogoit:

People drop pretence and falsity because there's no need for it at ConFest. We are who we are here. Allowing us to be like that makes us stronger inside and reasserts our purpose to us. Because it doesn't matter who you are, you can really relax and grow.

Following possible embarrassment, resolutions are often achieved as dress behaviour is modified, and as participants may adopt various styles of undress.⁹ As Trev explains:

There is nothing morally, religiously, or socially wrong with nudity. No one should grow up without knowing and respecting what a human body looks like ... naked is natural - we have to be taught to wear clothes. Overcoming this conditioning is often threatening but it changes lives and outlook on body image, self esteem, acceptance, respect and worth of ourselves and others. (Trev, DTE email-group 16/10/97)¹⁰

Female participants are more likely to hold reservations. Initially Saffron:

was a bit worried ... I expected everyone to be naked and thought that would be expected of me, but I found the nudity wonderful as everyone was so unselfconscious; I wish society wasn't so moralistic about such things.

Similarly, for Peregrin, 'it broke down my body image - no one is "hung up" on bodies. It also made me more adventurous with my clothes'. Ambrosia had strong reservations about the whole thing at first: 'I was apprehensive because of the nudity thing. I thought I might have felt pressure to be nude all the time, because everyone else was'. Eventually she gave up a cruise she won on 'The Wheel of Fortune' to come to ConFest:

[A]nd now that I've got here I've realised, well there's a lot of people clothed and ya'know, you don't necessarily have to do that ... I also think it's an attitude. [Since people are] really comfortable with it, you start to feel really comfortable with it.

Yallara inquires 'where else can people be nude without being conscious of it? Where else can someone like me, just from straight suburbia, really do that?' Recalling his first ConFest, Cedar admits a common male apprehension and revelation:

Walking around naked, I was terrified that I was going to have an erection all the time. But I didn't, which, mind you, was a bit of a struggle at first. And then I since found that underwear and bathers are much more sexually

⁹ In my own experience, such taboo-breaking 'modifications' were ultimately satisfying - even liberating. I discovered at my first ConFest (Moama I) that, following anxieties about going around, as a friend deemed it, 'tackle out', being naked in the presence of strangers was not as difficult as I had been conditioned to believe.

¹⁰ According to Trev, Australia is 'a country that's been nudist for 99.9% of its inhabited history - 40,000 to 100,000 years ... The Americas, South Pacific, Australia, S.E. Asia, and Africa were all inhabited by naked people, living in respect for their land and people'. Acacia provides a rather different insight however, stating that Aboriginal people are often 'shocked and are really angry about the nudity', which she says is 'kind of interesting in terms of the fact that that's really been appropriated from indigenous cultures'.

attractive cause they actually focus your attention. Well, for me they do anyway. And I actually changed my outlook.

For experienced site workers, nudity is a celebration of the body. Trev says 'I don't believe there's anything imperfect, indecent, or obscene with the human body. I can't believe we are the only species that have to wear clothes and cosmetics and jewellery to increase our sex appeal. So [in reference to his gate duties] I even go on buses now. No worries'. Graham refers to his body as his 'uniform':

When I'm working I'm in uniform. Yeah, I love nudity ... I'm not an exhibitionist, I just love being naked. It's free. You can feel the breeze on your body, and the sun, and the dirt, and the dust, and what else. And I work a lot better ... when I'm naked. I don't like being naked when people object to it. That's fair enough. But this is an accepting atmosphere ... nudity is a freedom.

Nudity is not as prevalent today as it has been in the past, however. Cedar notes that over the last ten years it has become more unusual to see people walking around the site naked. In the past, one third of the people were naked all the time at summer ConFests, whereas now most people only go naked when they're swimming. This is a shame as 'everybody is forced ... to confront their fears. And so the standard is set high in terms of confronting yourself through nakedness. And that standard has lowered a lot' (Cedar). People are, nevertheless, less inhibited in their choice of body covering a fact which becomes apparent over successive days of the event. Cockatoo suggests a good reason for this:

The majority of the people now are a lot younger, and they go through a cultural process of shedding their clothes, and that could take the whole festival ... For lots of young people, it's a cultural barrier to break through - very important though.

Though less universal, nudity retains popular acceptance. The *Art* village and adjacent beach area is the principal site of concentrated nudity. In *Art*, bodily exposure is accompanied by group mud plastering and skin murals. Back in 1979, Claudia revealed her prime remedy for inhibitions:

[T]ake one huge mud puddle, 20 to 30 naked people, have them jump about a lot, singing to the tune of 'Mud, Mud, Glorious Mud', ensure that only the eyeballs remain uncovered, lots of spectators, bemused expressions, hearty laughter. (Claudia 1979:19)

To be covered with wet earth (which one nine year old girl called ‘special mud’) subverts instilled rules of cleanliness and sterilisation to which novices have learned to strictly adhere. One is reminded of Turner’s description of liminaries who are melted down to a generalised, anonymous ‘prima materia’, who become lumps of human clay, ready to be moulded anew (1977:37). By negating conventional standards, including that of the ‘classical body’ (Stallybrass and White 1986), participants engage in a kind of ‘resistance through dirt’, a celebration of the ‘marginal [dirty] body’ which for Hetherington (1996:43-44), is almost a requirement for ‘marginal identities’. And, reminiscent of a trait common to ‘fantasy island’ narratives:

mud seems to signify the indulgence of an atavistic impulse - *nostalgie de la boue*. White people who roll on mud not only revert to an infantile relationship with excremental soil - they literally soil themselves - but also, if only temporarily, become ‘primitive’, which is to say black. Mud reminds them, not only of their roots in their own polymorphous perverse infancy, but also of their Darwinian origins among primitive peoples and, looking even further back into pre-history, among the primates. (Woods 1995:141)

ConFesters thus possess a family resemblance to Nimbin revellers who ‘coated their whole bodies with ... dark brown mud and transformed themselves into anonymous “natives”’ (Newton 1988:63).

To be decorated with water based or fluorescent paints - in a combination of styles and colours on any anatomical location - engenders an almost infinite array of possibilities in refiguring and recomposing one’s experience of the primitive body. The curious attraction of such integument is that participants are provided with the convenient option of being simultaneously unclothed (exposed) *and* totally covered (protected). *Art* is located on the beach, itself a liminal zone (between land and water) often constructed as a topos of pleasurable activities (cf. Shields 1990), a most ‘visible site of hedonist culture ... [and] cheerful eroticism’ (Booth 1997:172). Here, the undisciplined body is celebrated in a grotesque degradation to the material level of earth and flesh. The clay clad masses mingle and dance, spilling out into the festival, wandering around all day in such temporary body modifications.

Indigeneity and Appropriation

A white male Toc III participant posed a curious sight. With his body covered in mud, didgeridu painted in a black, yellow and red pattern, and penis decorated in matching hues, he emblematised the sensuous simulation of, and experimentation with, primitivity

discovered on site. Here, participants manipulate a repertoire of symbolism (paint, musical instruments, clothing, dance styles, architecture) assuming aspects of the valorised primitive, seeking indigeneity.¹¹ While workshops like ‘Koori astronomy’ and ‘intercultural sharing’ - involving the construction of multi-totemic murals - appeared at Toc III (in *Koori Culture*), body decorations using ochre (hence the experience of getting ‘ochred’) and dot painting technique have become ephemeral recently. And, like primitive antennae seen on backpackers commuting to and from ConFest, the popularity of the didjeridu has escalated. Non-indigenous Australians (usually males but increasingly females also) desire to create the vibrating drone to which Aborigines have always attributed sacred significance, a trend that is underscored by the popularity of workshops on ‘how to play didjeridu’ and ‘didge healing’,¹² and stalls like ‘Heartland Didgeridoo’ which, at Toc III, was signposted:

It’s time for Aboriginal spirit to rise in us all ...The didge is the sound of Mother Earth and is bringing forth the heart spirit, from the depths of our land. The Didge Spirit will guide us if we put aside our ego and be humble ... The vibrating sound of the didge is stirring for it reflects the wonderful sound of creation. Even the earth rotating as taped from outer space sounds like a didgeridoo ... By using it in creative ritual in day to day life and going into meditative, reflective and feeling spaces it becomes our soul companion helping open and clear the doorway to our spirit.

In sympathy with such logic, the didjeridu, a chief ritual tool used in a fire walk at Toc IV, was played over the bare feet of prospective coal walkers with the purpose of guiding their journey. Such discourse and practice is consistent with essentialising patterns like those located in contemporary world music where the instrument is often perceived to resonate Mother Earth (Neuenfeldt 1994), and whose originators are imagined to be so ‘in-touch’ with their natural environment that they themselves are Nature. However, as a conduit between the sacred and profane (1994:93), the didjeridu’s specified use in nascent performances (‘didge healing’ and the Toc IV fire walk) delivers us upon fresher ground.

For the disenchanted of Euro-origin, the world’s aboriginal peoples have become the embodiment of the sacred. Indigenes are mobilised to serve varying purposes in different

¹¹ That which is variously perceived to be: timeless (a source of spirit, wisdom and moral teaching - keepers of ‘the dreaming’); primordial (possessing animal instinct); autochthonous (from the land); conservationist (the ‘ecologically noble savage’: Redford 1990; cf. Sackett 1991:242); and nomadic.

¹² In ‘didge healing’, or ‘didjeridu resonance therapy’, the subject’s body, or afflicted region, is offered up to the didjeriduist who provides a methodical ‘sonic massage’. See Sherwood (1997:148-9) and Neuenfeldt (1998a:35-40) for discussions of alternative lifestyles’ use of the didjeridu in therapeutic contexts.

orbits. They are 'fetishised' at the global level (Beckett 1994); discursive mediators for the national imaginary (Lattas 1990; Hamilton 1990); and models for developing 'indigenous selves' (Mulcock 1997a).

As reflected in the popular imagination and consumption habits of contemporary Australia, non-indigenes have taken increased interest in Australian indigenous culture (religion, history, art, politics etc.). Aborigines are a highly desired source of inspiration. Andrew Lattas seems to have dominated much of the discussion here. Analysing the discursive products of contemporary 'bearers of nationalism' in Australian culture, Lattas commentates on the way Aborigines ('the primitive') have become a site for competing discourses about 'who we are' (the primitive ranges from the feared 'killer ape inside us' motif to a desired 'original' and 'sacred' essence). It is the latter to which Lattas devotes most attention, especially the ideas of those 'merchants of authenticity', leftist intellectuals and artists. In a discursis on what might be called the politics of truth and nothingness, Lattas is concerned with the forging, by these elites, of that which has become 'one of our most powerful myths' - the superficiality and spiritual corruption of the modern self. Pursuing a Foucauldian approach to power, those discourses rely on the positing of this sense of 'lack' - on a continuing belief that westerners are alienated from their selves and require the spiritual truths of the 'other' - to sustain their power and influence (Lattas 1990; 1991).

Aboriginality is thus mobilised to fill the void. 'Entrenched apocalyptic images of self-annihilation authorise selective appropriation of Aboriginal culture' (Lattas 1992:58). Settler Australians find, in Aboriginal culture, the perceived psychic healing qualities of timeless archetypal symbols (ibid:57), indigenes becoming a 'space of pilgrimage' wherein lost otherness is recaptured and the lacking, alienated settler self made whole (Lattas 1990; 1991:313; cf. Hamilton 1990:22-3; Marcus 1988). Lattas further argues that a 'redemptive function is being assigned to Aborigines' (1990:59). '[C]loaked in the shroud of Christ', the Aborigine, once 'crucified' (read slaughtered) is now 'resurrected' as the source of white redemption from the 'fall' of imperialism and 'the ravages inflicted by modernity' (1991:312-13). And, this 'interiorisation of Aboriginality', which is said to imprison Aborigines in a reductive healing role, 'is the means by which the West cannibalises this imaginary Other in the process of trying to constitute its own being' (Lattas 1990:61; 1992:57). Yet, what happens when we attempt to apply this interpretation to real circumstances of cultural borrowing?

Along with Aborigines, American Indian cultures, ever-popular repositories of essentialist meaning as a result of their fashionable co-option by North American and European countercultures,¹³ also provide a desirable range of signifiers at ConFest: tipis,¹⁴ cow hide garments, beads, hair styles, chants, percussion, and ‘sweat lodges’¹⁵ are typical mediators. However, the subscription to American Indians (like other indigenes) is characterised by a diversity of motivations - subscribers possessing different reasons for ‘playing Indian’. A brochure dating from the late 1980s (when ConFests were held at Walwa) seems to have targeted ‘wanna-bes’ with specious promises and temporary fantasia: the reader being introduced to ‘Good Medicine Tipis of Walwa’ and ensured that the proprietors hire and sell ‘authentically constructed’ tipis and canoes designed for ‘a real Indian adventure’. Yet, for the growing numbers of alternative Australians who have become committed to the more permanent ‘adventure’, tipis are practical - they’re ideal homes. Accordingly, the founder of ‘Trident Tipis’ (a New Enterprise Incentive Scheme [NEIS] funded enterprise) proposes that not only do his shelters - ‘scaled to the original Sioux design’ (though with acrylic canvas rather than buffalo and animal skins) - offer ‘a return to a way of life that honours the cycles of nature, that puts us in touch with the Source of Energy that gives rise to all of creation’ (from leaflet); they are also economical, durable and transportable.

Such processes are far from straightforward. There is indeed a tension characterising the process we know as appropriation, one recognised by Richards (1995:63) who finds that a ‘fine line between reconciliation ... and plunder’ underlies and problematises the endeavours of people like Daricha, ‘New Age shaman’ and director of the ‘Centre for Human Transformation’, who is said to borrow ‘without shame, ready to wear anything that fits his evolving vision of the cosmos’.¹⁶ On the one hand, in the wake of Said (1978) cultural imperialism and its implications cannot be ignored. The recent history of pirating through which the ‘other’ has been removed, distorted and commodified as noble and

¹³ American participation in ‘the occult power’ and ‘mythic radiance’ of the Indian, of ‘Caliban the Wild Man’, has, however, a long history - in fact traced back to the first English colony at Roanoke who had ‘Gone to Croatan’, who deserted civilisation and ‘went native’ (Bey 1991a:116-23; cf. Wilson 1993), and more recently clearly apparent in films like *Dances With Wolves* (Alexeyeff 1994).

¹⁴ As evidenced in the *Tipi* village at Toc III, as well as a pervasion of old, new or mock tipis locally fashioned from logs, bark, scrub and corrugated iron.

¹⁵ ConFest ‘sweat lodges’ are really just wood fired steam tents, though serious purificatory rituals of this type are becoming more popular amongst non-American Indians (Lindquist 1995).

¹⁶ Daricha, who takes workshops at ConFest including ‘the modern shaman’s journey’, was spurned by the Anangu Pitjantjatjara for attempting to harness local initiatory themes (the *Wanampi* Dreaming) in a ten day workshop in Central Australia in 1994.

wise, as profitably 'pure products' (Clifford 1988:ch.1),¹⁷ and marketed to those seeking spiritual growth, restoration and status enhancement, deserves attention as an appendage to darker, more conspicuous, histories of dispossession.

On the other hand, a great deal of 'othering' is conditioned by deep sympathetic awareness, first-hand knowledge and a serious commitment to social alternatives such that the appropriation involves spiritual (e.g. personal belief in spirits, gods and divine cosmos), practical (e.g. diet, medicine, agricultural methods, architecture), social (e.g. public ritual and communal living) and political (actions in solidarity) lifestyle tactics.¹⁸ And many alternative lifestylers (often widely 'travelled', and who may have themselves, to some degree, 'gone native' like Cohen's 'existential tourist' [Cohen 1979]) are as captivated by the religiosity and impressed by the simplistic practicality of the 'other' as they are sobered and horrified by the socio-historical contexts and consequences of colonialism. In a period recognised as one of mounting crisis for all of the planet's inhabitants, wherein a cornucopia of discourses, personal philosophies and nascent political, scientific and cultural agendas have drawn inspiration from the knowledge and practice of others (including indigenes), such cultures have become valorised and defended for their real and/or imagined social/ecological record.

There is then a need to traverse the 'morally muddy landscape' (Taylor 1997) of appropriation, especially within the context of 'alternative Australia', with the purpose of revision. An investigation of the way anthropologists and cultural commentators have interpreted the appropriation of Aboriginality by alternative cultural adherents is required. Marcus (1988), in a discussion of the way 'Ayers Rock' (Uluru) is 'becoming the sacred centre of a rapidly developing settler cosmology' (1988:254), attends to the way 'New Age pilgrims' rework Aboriginal law and cosmology through the distorting prism of an 'international mystical tradition'. Just criticisms are launched. Focusing on 'a feeling of the timelessness and essential universal truths' that Aboriginal beliefs offer, 'Aquarians' ignore the unique social, political and religious context of people's such as the Pitjantjatjara. Furthermore, they seek a unity which 'transcends all local differences' and

¹⁷ In cultural mining strategies, indigenes are consigned to the status of essential difference - they are reified as 'wholly other'. This denies a people's capacity for innovation and change, to absorb 'elements' from the outside in the continual development of their 'traditions'. It denies their agency. It also disadvantages those who deviate from the 'real' or 'authentic'.

¹⁸ Tactics include what Hetherington (1998b:71) calls a 'politics of metonymy', whereby 'those not in a subaltern position identify with one or more such positions as a means of valorising their own identity as real and significant'. However, the approach is somewhat diminished as the cultural politics involved in the transference of marginality, where 'the idea of ethnicity and the idea of Otherness become important symbolic resources', is overlooked.

encompasses all religious traditions (ibid:265). The implications of such processes are not to be taken lightly:

The universalising and egalitarian sentiments of mystical doctrine are used to deny the specificity of Aboriginal belief, to disregard entirely the wishes of Aboriginal custodians, and to insert settler Australia into the very heart of the secret Aboriginal knowledge on which their only recognised claim to land rests. (Marcus 1988:268)

Yet, the approach is ultimately dissatisfying. First Marcus adjudges ‘Aquarians’ collectively guilty of the crime of ‘cultural appropriation’, by which is meant the undermining, via theft, of a people’s belief system. Second, the people she accuses of such crimes are strangely absent from her article (except via newspaper reports). Third, without comparative evaluation, a vast range of other discourse and practice - from popular music and tourism to gender discourse (reflecting ‘a conservative movement in Australian politics’ [ibid:272]) - is also cast within a ‘shame file’ of ‘cultural appropriation’. Therefore, not only does Marcus conflate ‘appropriation’ with expropriation and employ a somewhat empirically distanced approach, she adopts an homogenising strategy of her own. Unfortunately, a balanced discussion of such a complex issue is compromised by protective advocacy. We are left wondering what direction we should take, and what is the value of this kind of analysis. And what of ‘the Rock’? Should non-custodians (including non-custodian Aborigines) forgo the pilgrimage, forget it exists, intentionally purge it from our ‘idiosyncratic geographies of significance’ (Gelder and Jacobs 1998:123)?

In a prejudiced attack on new social formations, Cuthbert and Grossman’s work (1996) suffers from similar shortcomings. The authors point out that the New Age ‘occupation’ of indigenous ‘others’ is a result of the inversion of imperial discourse whereby those who once were characterised by *lack* and envy (and therefore targets of derision and hate), are now perceived to be *rich* in purity and verity (and, as such, a source of strength and wisdom [ibid:20]). Despite the validity of this interpretation, the authors have produced a selective and misleading account of a complex cultural phenomenon.

Cuthbert and Grossman introduce the concept of ‘new feralism’ to describe contemporary Australian New Age primitivism, claiming that, through their pre-lapsarian return to the wild and ‘metaphorical search for *Lebensraum*’ (1996:23), ferals are the cardinal boogey-men of neo-imperialism. Though it is early declared that ‘the new feralism’ is ‘a domain *partially* aligned with New Age’ (ibid, my emphasis),¹⁹ ferals

¹⁹ Though the New Age too, does not receive adequate definition here.

ultimately become the wanton juggernauts of an incursive essentialism, leading the New Age occupation of indigenes.²⁰ As ‘feral’ becomes effectively synonymous with ‘New Age’, ferals are dismissed as politically quiescent. In fact, the ‘new feralism’ relies upon the portraiture of morally bankrupt self-seeking aesthetes. Enter Neri and Reggae AI, whose comments (featured in Gibbs 1995) represent the evidence upon which ‘the new feralism’ rests. For Cuthbert and Grossman, the ‘new feralism’ seems most transparent in a phrase attributed to Reggae AI: ‘Going tribal is what it’s all about. The forest is a giant playground’. Performing intellectual gymnastics, the authors not only infer that all ferals regard all tribal peoples as child-like, but that their interests do not extend to redressing the history of dispossession by supporting native title and self-determination.

It should be acknowledged that ‘connections’ or identifications with indigenes are diverse. Towards one end of the spectrum we see fabrication, distortion and dubious claims to indigeneity, (Kehoe 1990; Rose 1992), ‘fakelore’ (Niman 1997:131-48), the reductive trivialising of complex religious systems into shallow therapeutic devices (Jocks 1996; Ziguras 1996:70), imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989), the adoption of a ‘salvage paradigm’ (Root 1996:100) and the commodification of imported cultural property (cf. Neuenfeldt 1998b). Identifications may be characterised by the kind of conflation of difference and denial of history found in indigenously inspired eco-nations expounded in New Age, environmental and eco-feminist tracts (Jacobs 1994). ‘Post-settler’ narratives of entitlement (Cuthbert and Grossman 1998) which resist and undermine the cultural authority and rights of indigenous peoples (Marcus 1988), lead to the erosion of cultural values and community cohesion as young indigenes are exposed to European (e.g. New Age) interpretations of their spirituality (Taylor 1997:200).

Towards the other end, one finds a sensitive cultural awareness and validation of indigenous authority in regard to knowledge and practice subscribed to. Recently, social commentators have begun to rethink ‘appropriation’ which, after all, as Morton reminds us, means to take something ‘unto oneself and devote it to a special purpose’ (1996:134). As he suggests, ‘reconciliation necessarily entails a logic of redemption ... [which is] at the same time, personal and political, not simply subject to “discourse”’ (ibid). Further, a ‘mutually satisfying future’ for Australians, he argues, depends upon appropriations.

²⁰ The authors seem to conspire in a strangely familiar invective, albeit dressed up in a legitimate academic tongue. A tiresome *feral as pest* discourse is adopted as ferals become invasive New Age pests.

Mulcock (1997b:15,n8), pointing out New Ager's 'genuine attempts to honour indigenous people', laments:

[w]here are the balance of voices, the multiple perspectives that critical academic practice has the potential to portray? I feel the need to look for less judgmental and more complex models of cultural appropriation that embrace the diversity of voices and the lived experiences of people participating in this discourse.

Furthermore, there is much evidence of a postcolonial attitude where, in contradistinction to Said - and Cuthbert and Grossman - appropriated cultures are positively valued and even benefit from borrowings. Ziguras (1996) suggests there may be an 'important difference between those from privileged groups who romanticise and exoticise abstracted images of another culture, and those whose sympathy is with the actual people who live that culture'. He asks 'can cultural appropriation foster closer ties and political solidarity between oppressed and privileged groups?' (1996:73). Taylor (1997), elicits a positive response. Researching the partly Native American inspired 'primal spirituality' of Earth First!, he argues cultural borrowing promotes *respect*, furthers the establishment of concrete political alliances, and can even enhance the survival prospects of indigenous cultures.²¹ Thus, he argues, cultural borrowing should never be dismissed out of hand as pernicious. In Australia, alternative lifestylers, besides playing the didgeridu and appreciating Aboriginal art and Dreamtime stories, are often engaged in struggles for native title rights, improved health-care and self-determination - for reconciliation. Many alternates, including eco-radicals, acknowledge prior occupation, are cognisant of histories of dispossession, and are consequentially empathetic. Such awareness and empathy has inspired support for Aboriginal land claims, especially where 'bioprospectors' are involved (e.g. WMC at Roxby Downs, Ross Mining at Timbarra, and ERA at Jabiluka).

As I have argued, cultural appropriation is essentially an ambivalent process; indeed 'painfully complicated' (Mulcock 1997a:6).²² Caution is therefore required. Blanket

²¹ Also see Taylor (1995b). For accounts of radical ecology movement alliances with other cultures deemed to possess a nature beneficent spirituality, see Taylor (1995a).

²² And there are further complexities. Demystifying a process routinely associated with 'distortion, inequality, theft, repression and coercion', Morton refigures appropriation as an 'aspect of exchange', ideally involving mutual agency (1996:133). Appropriation is here assigned an unusually positive value given the conviction that an 'equivalence of agency' is impossible (Johnson 1995:164) or that 'appropriation goes hand in hand with colonialism' (Root 1996:102). The economy of appropriated signs - the system of imports and exports - is a

condemnation of 'New Age', 'Aquarian' or 'feral' appropriations of indigenes is not justifiable. Careful contextual research is required. Ethnography clarifies the status of cross-cultural borrowings as 'pernicious, beneficent, or something in between' (Taylor 1997:n9). While a critical awareness of the politics of othering should be retained in research, unbalanced assessments, 'witch hunts' and approaches relegating people to the status of self-redeeming cannibals should be avoided.

Part III. Mimesis, DiY Identity and Multi-Alterity

I wish to point out two further themes associated with the subjunctive process of othering at ConFest - both of which render existing models of appropriation problematical.

First, assuming otherness is central to play and, therefore, indelibly human. At ConFest, there can be observed a variety of forms of mimicry (from the Greek *mimos*, meaning imitator or actor). By 'dressing up' as Aboriginal, American Indian, Celtic Pagan, female, child (or fairy, witch, animal), imitating the desired 'other' - via corporeal inscriptions (dress, adornments, piercings, body paint, known icon of the other) gestures and practices (rites) and elaborate symbol systems (mythology) - ConFesters enter, via the laws of sympathetic magic, into physical contact with that 'other', whose raiment, whose very image, enhances condition. Such othering demonstrates, in a phenomenological sense, the possibilities arising out of what Taussig (1993) calls the 'mimetic faculty'- the very human capacity and desire to other. In the 'mimetic faculty' lies the potential for 'copying or imitation and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived' (1993:21). Mimesis, the 'art of becoming something else, of becoming other' (ibid.:36), a condition wherein otherness is copied and contacted, makes possible the altering of the self and the manipulation of the world. The processes of imitation here are processes of (re)creation and (re)formation. And, as Taylor (1997:198) points out, cross-cultural borrowing and the blending of myth, symbol and rite is a 'rarely escaped dimension of religious life' (and more so at a time when few societies remain insular).

subject worthy of further research. As agents, 'others' may be involved in 'selling' (e.g. Aborigines as producers of New Age artefacts), 'spending', (e.g. strategic disclosures of secret land/business [Jacobs 1994]); or 'giving away' (e.g. the Krishna movement founded by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada offered to the west as a form of 'consciousness expansion' [Ziguras 1996:74]) their 'cultural capital'. They may also be themselves consumers of the New Age (Mulcock 1997a:6). Conklin (1997) complicates matters further. Addressing the new face of Amazonian identity politics, she discusses the tactical deployment of an embodied 'eco-

Second, identification is not unitary or fixed. The ‘postmodern personality’, argues Bauman (1996:32), is restless, fickle and irresolute. Displaying or performing one’s self, an individual participant may simultaneously interiorise or exteriorise more than one ‘other’ (e.g. via curious combinations of Celtic symbolism, didgeridu use, Hindu pantheon, Rastafarian hairstyle and tipi dwelling), or, illustrative of the indefiniteness of identities now ‘adopted and discarded like a change of costume’ (Lasch in Bauman 1996:23), they may manipulate different sets of symbols at different times. ConFesters are very much bricoleurs energetically committed to a DiY lifestyle. They display desired vestiges of otherness in an externalised pot-pourri of exotic tattoo, or change their skins like ludic chameleons. Drawing upon multiple sources of authenticity, like new travellers, their identities are ‘heteroclite’ (Hetherington 1996a:43). Participants’ identities, as they are performed on site, are an embroglio of signifiers/inscriptions. To be feral, is itself most evocative of such unruly syncretism.

This relates to my feeling that the origin of ‘artefacts’ adopted (e.g. clothing, jewellery, icons, instruments, cuisine, language) is too often unclear as the meanings of such have been refashioned and reinvented in a diffuse, undocumented, and steadily exponential tangle of migrations and fashionable concatenations. In such a creative cultural dynamic, where the ethnicity/culture of the ‘displayer’ (the ‘self’) is becoming as diverse as the favoured ‘other/s’ acted out, a preoccupation with origins (much like the 19th century search for the origins of religion) verges on the pointless and futile. Though we can clearly perceive Taussig’s ‘magical power of replication’ (1993:2) at work in the recreational space of ConFest, that which is represented/reproduced is constantly distorted, refashioned, reinvented by the representer/reproducer. It is thus a context for the mimesis and synthesis of elements of imagined otherness. As such, it engenders multi-alterity, the protean effect of costuming, mask and paint work not unlike that of Halloween mask work which endows American children ‘with the powers of feral, criminal, autochthonous and supernatural beings’ (Turner 1969:172).

Conclusion

Processes observed in this chapter indicate the complex role of play in identity formation. I have explored ConFest as a salient context for the abandonment and recreation of the self via an investigation of the event’s subjunctive cultural space-time. I have stressed that the subjunctive mood - of inversion, fantasy, imitation, mimesis -

semiotics’ (723) by indigenes. Though effecting political and cultural benefits, this is a strategic claim to an authenticity which is defined by non-Indians.

involves corporeal (as well as cognitive, transcendent) possibilities. At basis, ConFest is a culture of permission, with participants in possession of a license to 'play out', to be 'other'.

I have discussed ways in which otherness, or the 'other', is heavily implicated in participants' desires. In an uninhibited topos of tactility and promiscuity, liminary voluptuaries may experience unconventional reconfigurations of their bodies, enact erotic fantasies or disrupt gender conventions. A variety of valorised 'others' are subscribed to, assumed, mimicked. I focused specifically on indigeneity, concluding that appropriation and/or cultural borrowing - less straightforward and openly dismissible than has been assumed by some researchers - is a theme requiring substantial revision. Since performative appropriation (mimesis) is indelibly human and identification not one-dimensional (in a time when identities are increasingly irresolute and restless), this requirement is made all the more necessary. Integral to the self's journey of becoming, it is clear that carnality and alterity are complex interwoven components of the ConFest experience.

Chapter 7

Sacred Drama: Self, Earth and Indigeneity

[O]ne constant experience threads through and occasionally surfaces from all modes of celebration, solemn or festive: a transcendent ecstasy rooted in deep physiological passions and charged up autonomic awareness but burgeoning and ramifying beyond them into transient imaginative apprehensions of the meanings inherent in self and society. (Turner 1982d:23)

Introduction

ConFest is a vast extra-ordinary moment contextualising the meta-performative communication of *authentica*. Attending to the liminal modality of drama, this chapter articulates the variegated on-site evocation of the personal, political and cultural *sacra* of ConFesters. A focus upon a range of performances and narratives is intended to demonstrate how the discourse and practice alternates hold ‘sacred’ are (re)produced. In the first part, I field the view that ConFest is a *multi-cultural drama* - that is, a many-genred topos facilitating hyper-reflexive inquiry into the profligate ‘ultimate concerns’ (MacAloon 1984 in Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:201) of participants. The remainder of the chapter maps the composition of these *sacra*. In the second part, the *sacra* of self-healing and Earth consciousness are discussed. Self and globe are regarded as integral, a symbiosis manifest in contemporary expressions of Neo-Pagan *eco-spirituality*. In the third part, I shift attention to the significance of indigeneity for alternates. Several extra-ordinary moments are partially reconstructed to convey something of the way Australia’s indigenous people and landscape are evoked, appealed to and solicited for the purpose of *authentication*, and in the name of *reconciliation*.

Part I. Multi-Cultural Drama

In drama resides the blurred juncture of narrative and performance. For Turner, ‘cultural dramas’ (e.g. rites, festivals, exhibitions, literature, film, theatre, sport), are meta-communicative devices informing participants (actors and audience alike) of society’s

most cherished symbols, beliefs and practices.¹ Cultural dramas are ‘privileged moments’ where we witness ‘men and women of a given ... culture, wholly attending ... to their own existential situation’ (Turner 1984:23). They afford individuals ‘opportunity to stand apart from themselves, to objectify their own experiences and that of others, to be an audience to themselves and to others’ (Kapferer 1984b:188). Indeed, they operate to facilitate collective inquiry into social dramas - inciting personal and public introspection upon issues of ubiquitous consequence - and it is via this process that meaning is (re)constructed. Thus, action never merely reflects or expresses culture, but is reflexive, or re-evaluative, of socio-cultural systems.

Turner argued that it is via the cultural drama (especially life/death cycle rites and seasonal festivals), that knowledge of two forms may be communicated. First, ‘sacred and eternal law’ may be presented to initiates or participants. Here, the *sacra* are transmitted: mysteries, origin myths and cosmic law are taught to the uninitiated, and cultural and religious values, axioms and principles are communicated. Drawing upon the observations of Harrison (1903), Turner takes the *sacra* to include: mythically significant objects (‘what is shown’); actions, such as dramatic performances (‘what is done’), and; instruction, such as oral histories and the teaching of theogony, cosmogony and mythical history (‘what is said’) (Turner 1967a:102; Turner and Turner 1982:204).

The second form of knowledge communicated is that which is potentially *sacrilegious*, that which may be subversive, threatening to transgress ‘the most sacred texts, the mightiest rulers and their commandments’. Here, usually in cultural modalities contingent upon a ludic atmosphere, liminaries are granted freedom to scrutinise and question the conditions of their existence (Turner 1985d:236). Such a context parallels the ‘gay freedom of thought and imagination’ conditional of carnivalesque consciousness (Bakhtin 1968:49), a ‘carnival spirit’ which ‘offers the chance to ... enter a completely new order of things’ (ibid:34).

We can observe both forms within ConFest’s hyper-reflexive environment. ConFest is a circumstance where the transmission of ‘truths’, of sacred ‘objects’, ‘rituals’ and ‘texts’, coincides with variegated dissension from hegemonic, and/or more popular alternative, discourse and practice. Indeed, that which is revered and that which is heretical are likely *the same* - ‘truths’ transmitted are those which agitate or rupture ‘truths’ the majority culture holds dear. There is thus no clear distinction between ‘law’ and ‘freedom’, the *sacra* and the *sacrilegious*. The *sacrilegious* is the *sacra*. This trait is not uncommon to liminoid events, appearing in an era when the ‘antinomian egg containing both law and

¹ See Appendix B.1(v).

freedom, which is ritual's tribal form ... [has] cracked open' (Turner 1985d:236-7). It is, nevertheless, a striking characteristic of ConFest - a *counter-spatial* event designed to posit challenges to entrenched ideas and practices - to accommodate the discussion of, and experimentation with, alternatives. In this, it is an occasion where the 'lived in world' (Handelman 1990) of alternates is self-'presented' - it presents lifestyle options to growing numbers of converted, or at least similarly predisposed, participants. As Amulla exclaims, 'ConFest is one of the ways I touch base with what is going on in the real world!' By that which is 'shown, 'done' and 'said', ConFest provides reflexive attention to dominant consumption patterns, social relations, economic platforms, sexual politics, environmental management, agricultural practices, health care. And the *sacra*, so presented, may eventually achieve broader appeal in what is a 'space of alternate ordering' (Hetherington 1997:52).

Available avenues of 'redress' and resistance are multiple - multifarious marginalia circulate under the greater marquee of ConFest. With around 300 workshops on offer at summer events, the options are dazzling. Browsing the latest *authentica*, ConFesters sample esoteric accessories, folk-theologies, funky fringe therapies, chic modes of enlightenment and fashionable words of wisdom. They champion the principles of a proposed new: 'Age', 'Jerusalem', 'cosmos', politic, 'tribe', 'spirit', ethic, 'consciousness', 'millennium'. In such a diverse and dynamic context, that which is sacred for one individual (e.g. techno-trance), may be profane for another. And what today is 'law' or the 'truth' (e.g. zone therapy and Rajneeshism), may tomorrow be dated or unpopular.

This *multi-cultural drama* also possesses the refractive effect of ramified performances. It is host to events transpiring at multiple venues: passage rituals (e.g. fire walk, 'wild women'), healing/curative rites (e.g. *Spirituality* - Tantra; *Pagan* - rebirthing; and *Massage*), community dance and percussion (e.g. *Spiral* and Fire Circle), games and parades (*Children's*), interactive theatre (*Labyrinth*), raves (*Rainbow Dreaming/Tek Know*), entertaining spectacles and theatre (*Music, Spiral*), exhibitions (*Alternative Technology*), demonstrations and educational forums. Demanding a range of participatory involvement (from total engagement to passivity) and uncertain shifts between 'deep' and 'shallow' play, between reflexive and unreflexive moments, this is the forum for communicating the contemporary *sacra* I attend to in the following sections.

Part II. 'Heal thy Self - thy Planet'

In this section I describe two principal *sacra* apparent at ConFest: self-growth and Earth consciousness. I seek to demonstrate that their trajectories are intimately connected, that they are symbiotically related. The Walwa III theme ('heal thy self - thy planet') represents a clear evocation of this relationship - that which I call *the self-globe nexus*. First, however, I will describe the respective 'components' of this nexus.

Heal thy Self - Alternative Healing

ConFesters are exposed to a diversity of alternative healing modalities.² As Professor Ceteris Paribus (1996, unpaginated) explains, 'all spectra of modalities find commodious nestling space in [the] capacious, multi-dimensional, loving bosom' of ConFest. While many of these modalities reflect an insurgent personalism approximating the monistic religion of the self, or 'Self-spirituality' of which Heelas (1996) speaks, and invariably promote an approach wherein the mind, body and spirit are held as integral aspects of the person or self, the self is often not considered to be separate from the wider socio-cultural, familial context. In an orgy of complementarity, a host of healers - practitioners of Chinese medicine, herbalists, sannyasans, urban shamans, spiritual alchemists, dream interpreters, itinerant psychonauts, self styled gurus and past life therapists (as well as biomedical practitioners)³ - converge with a synergy of holistic preventatives, panaceas and DiY remedies for the afflicted self. Offering 'psychotechnologies' (Ross 1992:539), they seek to empower or 'enable' individuals 'to mobilize internal resources' (McGuire 1988:16) to heal themselves. Traditionally, a kaleidoscope of preventative healing and growth workshops have been offered: religious and metaphysical practice, spiritual 'work', tactile therapies, dietary regimes, botanic medicines, psychedelics. At Berri, the *Healing* village accommodated:

colour therapy, chiropracting, massage, esalen massage, Reichian therapy, hypnotherapy, healing circles, sufatshana yoga, naturopathy, acupuncture, Bach remedies, homeopathy, herbal remedies, palmistry, shiatsu, zone therapy. (*Down to Earth Berri Handbook* 1979:10)

² While these are often referred to as 'alternative healing' systems (McGuire 1988), 'fringe medicine', 'folk therapy', 'unorthodox medicine' (e.g. Gevitz 1988), 'vernacular health belief systems' (O'Connor 1995), 'non-cosmopolitan medicine' (Ross 1992:539) and 'natural medicine' are terms variously employed .

³ Of whom, those like Marc (see *Healing* village, Chapter 4) possess complementary skills.

At Walwa III, the menu included 'earth meditation, golden light, crystals, hypnosis, cranial sacral therapy, the use of herbs, Celtic Chakras, Belly Dancing as a healing ritual' (*ConFest 90/91 Gate Handout*). And, the following are some of the holistic practices transmitted during the period of research: 'flower essences and gem elixirs', 'didge healing', 'somatic integration', holistic massage, Reiki, Zen Shiatsu, 'kundalini energising', 'pyramid meditation', chanting techniques and Shamanic journeying.⁴

There is an evident increase in the popularity of techniques, myths and rituals attributed to indigenous, Asian or other ethnicities (e.g. Tai Ch'i, yoga, chakra balancing, chanting, Tantra, Reiki, Shamanism, medicine wheel, Celticism, didjeridu). Workshopping neophytes build up a repertoire of self-diagnostic techniques, remedies, dietary patterns, therapeutic relationships and esoterica, and they may be initiated into or upgrade their awareness of 'the life force', 'hidden wisdom', balances and 'energies'.⁵ Akin to a spiritual 'supermarket', consumption is not dissimilar to that occurring at New Age festivals and centres like Glastonbury (cf. Bowman 1993:55).

As subtle and provocative gestures of refusal, the practices pursued and discourse digested in this 'vast school of consciousness' disclose a dissatisfaction with the curative and interventionist characteristics of professional allopathic medicine *and* with the doctrinal, hierarchic and paternal character of conventional religion. As such, biomedicine and the Church are both implicitly and explicitly contested. There is a tendency towards holism and voluntarism in the healing arts and new spiritualities. In alternative health care the emphasis is upon 'healing' rather than 'curing'. The latter generally refers to the removal or correction of organic pathology, and may not necessarily involve 'healing' (O'Connor 1995:28) which encompasses a holistic approach to human wellbeing.⁶ In alternative spiritualities, 'detraditionalising practices' (Heelas 1996:23) signify a turning away from the dogma of religious institutions, towards a privileging of the self (the 'inner'

⁴ Many items may disappear from the menu, or become less popular, as they move into 'the mainstream' (practice and education). This has been the case for chiropracting, acupuncture and naturopathy. Unfortunately, it goes beyond the scope of my thesis to explore these trends further.

⁵ O'Connor's (1995:29) spectrum of 'energies' identified within 'vernacular' systems is resonant:

Interpretations of pertinent energies may include a vital force that animates the body and provides the essential condition for health, energies that link individuals to the cosmos or to Nature; energies that flow through the channels within the body and whose blockage sets up conditions for disease and dysfunction; negative energies that are sources of disharmony and disease; and healing energies that can be tapped, channeled or manipulated by healers or by sick individuals themselves.

⁶ Alternative healing is more orientated to address wellbeing issues (including the way a person experiences illness) than the 'disease', and is thus inclined to take into account the socio-cultural meanings and conditions in the world of the afflicted.

or ‘higher Self’, and ‘intuition’) as the ultimate source of authority and nucleus of responsibility.

Neophytes are constantly reminded of the sacrality of the self and primacy of ‘growth’. And they are provided with many paths. As workshops like those located at Toc III in *Self Development and Therapy* or *Spirituality* demonstrate, individuals are responsible for self (re)growth via the performance of ‘inner work’. Spiritual work is considered to be important for individuation. According to one initiate, time spent at *Spirituality* with Param,

changed the direction of my life from one of ... isolation ... to one of reaching for the meeting between all ... [Tantra] brings a coupling of energies, the balance of femininity and masculinity, sustains sensuality and heightens awareness of one’s own consciousness and that of others. Through group practice of chanting mantras over the preceding days, an ecstatic reverence on new years eve was experienced, a beautiful lightening of reality which I continue to feel. (N. McKinnon 1995:13)

Processes by which individuals are enabled to (re)create their identities, to achieve spiritual maturity, to *become*, are critical. Many workshops are a powerful expression of the sanctity of the person and the valued ‘sovereign right to self-discovery’ (Roszak 1979:3) apparent in complex societies - where individuals can enhance personal autonomy as they ‘have the resources to invest in their own self-realisation’ (Melucci 1989:137). This accounts for the significance of the journey theme in performance (*Spiral’s* Wankan Tanka), interactive theatre (the *Labyrinth*), rites (firewalking), workshops (e.g. shamanic journey or astral travelling, ‘conscious tripping’, rebirthing, regression) and, moreover, for the distinct authority of Jungian psychology.⁷ Indeed, the journey is critical for the growth and/or healing of the self (to ‘move beyond ego’).⁸ Though the self (and the process of self-objectification) may be deified, the sacred self is not ego-centric, closed, inflexible, alone. Such is made clear in the barrage of therapies promoting the necessity for the dissolution of boundaries (e.g. between mind/body, self/other, *anima/animus*, local/global).

⁷ In contemporary times, Jungian analysis is a popular form of rite of passage via which ‘contact with a transcendent realm (the collective unconscious) and its powers (the archetypes) leads to an energizing renewal, rebirth or redemption (individuation)’ (Noll 1994:292). Contact with the collective unconscious (or the Self), also known as the inner deity or the God or Goddess within, is often said to be achieved by meditation.

⁸ This can be variously expressed - as in the following allegorical rendering of ConFest as ‘social LSD’: ConFest and LSD both are ‘methods of consciousness expansion, both are instruments of the Possibility Archetype ... Now ConFest as social LSD costs \$30 a go, it takes about a day

Heal thy Planet - Earth Consciousness

As was discussed in Chapter 5, an ‘ecological consciousness’ (Eder 1990:37), or *radical ecologism*, is a rejoinder to an advancing awareness of environmental despoliation and the emergence of a new global sensibility. Dobson (1995:45) articulates this position: ‘[T]he Earth is a living being of immense complexity that ought to be the object of our wondrous contemplation, rather than the source of satisfaction for our rapacious material greed’. It has been argued that attention to the Earth’s ‘limits to growth’⁹ and concomitant conscientious lifestyle adaptations were stimulated by the photographic image of the planet from space:

‘Spaceship earth’, photographed from outside the atmosphere and repeated endlessly on record covers and advertisements, has become a new outer membrane which circumscribes our consciousness, a new icon of finitude. (Vitebsky 1995:193)¹⁰

This was perhaps a key moment in the development of an Earth consciousness - a biocentric sensibility characterised by reconciliation. Lovelock gave expression to this in his ‘Gaia hypothesis’ (1979). Humans, he perceived, are part of a living self-regulative being. Once aware of our role in its ‘indigestion’, he speculated that we can be ‘guided to live within Gaia in a way that is seemly and healthy’ (1991:20).

In recommending *DTE* festivals, the international directory for New Agers, the *Pilgrims Guide to Planet Earth*, promotes such events as exercises in ‘raising our consciousness toward Planet Earth’ (Khalsa 1981:5). At ConFest, a global orientated ecological consciousness, or what one permaculturalist referred to as an ‘Earth friendly culture’, forged out of disquiet over dominant consumption patterns, is expressed through a profusion of narratives and performances, ranging from the political/instrumental to the personal/aesthetic. Participants are encouraged to ‘wholly attend’ to sacred and sentient Mother Nature, Gaia. The DTE logo is indicative.

to come on, it peaks for 4-5 days, comes down for a week and it takes weeks, if not months to recover!’ (Lord Kelvin & G 1995:4).

⁹ Acknowledgment of which runs concurrent with the continued desire for unlimited self, human or social ‘growth’. Ross (1992:548), for instance, discusses the ‘New Age’s’ ‘fiercely moral attachment to the idea of setting external limits’, while being simultaneously ‘devoted to limitless “internal” development’.



DTE logo.

ConFesters enact the ‘ultimate concern’ of ‘getting back to the Earth, the planet, nature’ (Wogoit), of experiencing ‘a closer tie with nature’ (Corella), through performances which have their goal in connecting with the natural environment. It is no mere coincidence that ConFest is held in the bush, at distant locations to which urban-dwelling participants must travel hundreds, even thousands of kilometres. Not merely a spectacle to be observed and appreciated, ConFest encourages people to actively engage with the landscape, with ‘nature’: mysterious, indeterminate and primordial, not completely knowable or controllable (cf. Grove-White 1993:24).

Workshops endorse eco-consciousness, as numerous activist organisations and ideologues use the outdoor conference environment to seek support for ‘green’ philosophical, political and/or spiritual agendas: deep ecology, eco-feminism, intentional community, alternative technology, permaculture, animal liberation, vegetarianism. Various villages (*Forest, Earth Sharing, Great Walk, Nuclear Free, Green Connections*) have been sites for the dissemination of ecological awareness and activist issues. The agendas of activist neo-tribes like FOE and JAG (uranium mining), GECO and OREN (old growth logging), HEMP, the Great Walk Network (whose motto is ‘less consumption - more joy’), and individuals like human-sculpture activist Benny Zable (whose

¹⁰ However, it has been reasonably argued that such global imagery reinforces ‘ontological detachment’ and is fundamentally colonial (Ingold 1993:38).

'Greedozer and Company' sign reads 'work consume, be silent, die - I rely on your apathy') and Nelumbo (a workshop holder who claims 'we're all barracking for nature'), all provide evidence of a robust eco-radicalism. There is general consensus that dichotomies like individual/environment, human/nature, personal/political must be overcome, and that, by 'acting locally', individuals can make a difference.

Self-Globe Nexus

Many of the themes described above seem to be, at best, rather reluctant partners or, at worst, totally incompatible. However, an apparent inconsistency may be the result of cursory perception, for it is my contention that there is strong contiguity between elements of such diverse strands of contemporary alternative discourse and practice, contiguity powerfully evoked by Walwa III's 'heal thy self, thy planet'. This popular aphorism, elevated to the status of a festival theme, communicates the strong relationship between self-growth and global consciousness in the pursuits of alternative lifestylers. It suggests that *self* (person) and *globe* (planet), as is intoned by Roszak's adage 'the needs of the planet are the needs of the person' (Roszak 1979:xxx), are embroiled in a complex 'web of significance', that each effects the other in such intimate patterns that they cannot exclude or oppose one another. Person and planet are related ecologically. Thus, what I call the *self-globe nexus* is characterised by *interconnection* (a sense of profound interdependence) and *responsibility* (an ethical self-commitment).

The contemporary desire to 'heal the planet' is taken to begin locally, and the locales are the self (mind/body/spirit) *and* the immediate environment. Commitments include: the (re)turn to spiritual path(s) (e.g. New Age¹¹ or Neo-Pagan¹²); the adoption of 'anti-consumption' behaviour (e.g. wise energy use, diet, a disciplined commitment to 'refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle'); and membership in autonomous eco-communities and environmental activist organisations. At the same time, eco-consciousness, expressed through various social, political and spiritual commitments, is a formula for individuation - for the self's wellbeing. Therefore, 'heal thy planet - thyself' is equally applicable. As

¹¹ In 'New Age religion', spiritual development - often amounting to a transcendence of self (or achievement of 'higher self') - is thought to engender 'harmony' between humans and nature. Accordingly, 'healing the mind leads to the healing of Mother Earth' (Hanegraaff 1998:22).

¹² According to Harris (1996), 'the ecological crisis ... is at root a spiritual crisis' (155). He believes that in the example of reconnection with our body, our physical self, provided by Paganism, 'we may come to heal our relationship with our planet' (155, 149).

Griffiths (1981:11) announced at Glenlyon I, '[w]e must join together and heal the Earth, which is also the only way we can heal ourselves'.¹³

The positive ramifications of *working* locally have been championed from the inception of the DTE movement. Cairns' Reichian inspired psycho-political liberationism (more accurately rendered there as 'heal thy self - thy society') is an early manifestation. At Glenlyon I, facilitators predicted that on-site 'work' (spiritual, social, community, political) may usher in a 'New Age'. In both of these examples, macro transformations (new social/global consciousness) depend upon micro labours (self/local behaviour). They conform to 'critical mass' theory, which holds that if enough individuals work towards a similar spiritual or social goal, a critical threshold will be crossed.¹⁴ And 'heal thy self - thy planet' clearly elicits the thrust of this theory. Though this may be translated in rather transparent fashion as 'the planet will heal itself when we attend to healing ourselves' (Cheryl), it also evokes responsive environmental ethics (signified by the now familiar axiom 'think globally/act locally').¹⁵

What I have called the *self-globe nexus* implies an intentional responsiveness which relies in large part upon a sense of interconnectivity. Various ecosophies emerging between the 1960s and 1990s (and promoted at ConFest), clearly articulate and promote interdependence and responsibility. These are deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism. According to Fox (1984 in Pepper 1996:23) 'the central intuition of deep ecology is that there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence'. Eco-feminisms provide an analysis of social domination which reveal 'the interconnected roots of misogyny and a hatred of nature' (King 1993:75). In both systems, all life possesses *intrinsic value* and has rights equal to those of human beings. Both philosophies provide foundations for the appreciation of the sacred in nature, the interdependence of all life, a 'biospheric egalitarianism' (Dobson 1995:63), with adherents couching their environmentalism in 'woman-identified' terms (Seager 1993:223). In social ecology, or

¹³ There are, however, a great many workshop themes (especially therapy) that are not immediately relevant to what I call the *self-globe nexus*, or at least don't appear to be. I am not suggesting that this nexus unites all discourse and practice. With such a diversity present (and disputation between advocates of varying strategies) this is obviously impossible. Nevertheless, in my reading of the evidence this is a significant underlying theme.

¹⁴ Possamai (1998) suggests two types of 'critical mass': (1) Critical Mass by Meditation (CMM) where a shift (specifically towards the 'Age of Aquarius') is brought about through meditation, the channeling of universal energies (e.g. Transcendental Meditation), and; (2) Critical Mass by Social Action (CMSA) where revolutionary social changes are accomplished via the everyday attachment and commitment of individuals to a network of activist and community groups (Possamai 1998:191-92) (e.g. Critical Mass - the anti-car and world fuel crisis activists).

¹⁵ It also evokes the 'energy' concentration, channeling and/or magic acts found in such diverse practices as meditation, Reiki and Wicca.

eco-anarchism, social injustice and environmental degradation are believed to be the result of hierarchical power relations, particularly those of capitalism. Here, moves towards bypassing the state via the creation of autonomous communities and informal economies, as well as civil disobedience, are advocated (Pepper 1996:31-3). Bioregionalism literally means 'life territory'. Its advocates promote the practice of 'dwelling in the land' (Sale 1985). It also necessitates decentralised, self-determined modes of social organisation. It is 'a culture predicated upon biological integrities and acting in respectful accord; and a society which honours and abets the spiritual development of its members' (Dodge 1993:114).

Communicated in workshops and redolent in the discourse of participants, these complementary and often conflicting strategies possess the unifying pretenses: (1) that self and globe are related ecologically, and, as a consequence; (2) that individuals can resolve current or prevent potential environmental degradation ('heal thy planet') by 'acting locally'.

Neo-Paganism as *Eco-Spirituality*

Manifestations of contemporary 'Nature Religion' (Albanese 1990) exemplify what I am calling *the self-globe nexus*. A nature oriented religiosity, or *eco-spirituality*, Neo-Paganism provides a case in point. A growing discontent with what are revealed to be the strong anthropocentric and patriarchal foundations of western science and Judeo-Christianity has fashioned the appeal of Neo-Paganism. The latter is a loose-knit polytheistic movement purportedly without hierarchy or doctrine, possessing diverse manifestations (cf. Hume 1997:54-7). Celebrating the seasonal, lunar and life/death cycles, its practitioners advocate an ontology of engagement with the world. For Luhrmann (1993:220,232), in Neo-Paganism:

there is no god, masculine, separate and transcendentally aloof, but rather an ancient divinity immanent in the world ... the natural landscape becomes a map for human feeling and aspiration, an environment for spiritual odyssey.

This view is endorsed by Cedar who declared that contemporary Pagans 'define themselves as different from New Age with its emphasis on transcendence ... For the Pagans that I've known it has been much more going into and inhabiting the world'. Not necessarily proponents of eschatology, Neo-Pagans consent to Bey's immediatist cause for 'presence' as they celebrate 'being at home in [their] bodies and in nature' (Harvey

1997:141). As a celebration of one's physical presence in nature, Neo-Paganism is an expression of 'sacred ecology' (Harris 1997), or that which Harvey calls 'somatic ecology' (1997:131).

Neo-Paganism might then be interpreted as a celebration of ecology, an eco-centric resacralisation of the world - an 'ecological spirituality' (Taylor 1995c). Thus according to Adler:

If ecology studied the interrelatedness of all living things and their environment, Neo-Paganism seemed to be a religion that would celebrate those interrelations, that would heal into synthesis all oppositions: primitive and civilized, science and magic, male and female; spirit and matter. (in Hume 1997:1)

It is apparent that Neo-Pagans subscribe to a system of correspondences within which all is believed to be profoundly related. They are deeply aware of the need for re-enchantment, for humans to acknowledge through symbol and action their connection to nature. It is, then, also apparent that adherents are determined to 'return to', 'live in balance with', 'defend' and 'heal' the Earth (Gaia). Take the philosophy of Australia's Pagan Festival Group:

The common bond that links all pagans is their vision of Earth as a sacred living being, the sanctity of all life, and the Oneness of both ... [And] we hold the responsibility for creating and nurturing the wellbeing of our society. (DTEQLD May 1986:15)

It is characteristic of practitioners and sympathisers that they accept responsibility for their own actions, which for many means taking particular precautions to avoid dishonouring the natural world. Indeed, as it promotes a respect and reverence for the Earth, pantheism is uniquely qualified to lend support to environmental ethics (Levine in Crowley 1998:178). Harvey (1997:126-42) argues Neo-Paganism evidences a nascent 'Green Spirituality'. Practitioners express this attitude: Paganism is the 'spirituality of the ecological movement' according to one witch interviewed by Adler (in Roszak 1979:41). For one of Hume's (1997:44) informants, ecological awareness is 'a religious duty'. Sensing the emergence of 'eco-Wicca', which she ties to the kind of *terra-ist* activism I discussed in Chapter 5, Crowley (1998:177) conveys the common perception amongst young Wiccans that 'to be at one with nature in one's innerself is no longer enough'. There is no denying the nascent popularity of *eco-spirituality* given the insurgence of environmentalism. Indeed, this nature oriented movement, argues Spretnak (1986:65):

is completely in keeping with Green principles of private ownership and cooperative economics, decentralisation, grassroots democracy, non-violence, social responsibility, global awareness and the spiritual truth of oneness.

It should be pointed out, however, that, though Paganism may be the 'spiritual arm' of the ecology movement, contemporary Paganism may also involve anything from eclectic shamanism to outright hedonism (Hume 1997:56).

Over the past two decades, Paganism has experienced growing popularity in Australia as the appearance of events designed to celebrate nature oriented spirituality indicate (cf. Hume 1995:7; 1997:36-9; Rodgers 1995:34).¹⁶ Attracting a large contingent of Pagans (individuals and groups), ConFest 'trades' in the kind of *eco-spirituality* intrinsic to Paganism.¹⁷ At Baringa II (1984/85), the shamanic group Dolphin Tribe and members of Dark Circle banded together under the sign 'Pagans - Wicca, Shamanism, Magick' (Tim 1985:18). Afterwards, Ennelle, in *Kindred Spirits Quarterly* (a zine collective which had set up in the Market's 'alternative media sector'), reflected upon the potentials for using:

the euphoric burst of energy we all received ... to recharge the batteries of our own little Earth Aware communities and organisations, who need all the love and encouragement they can get in their efforts to help Mother Earth. (Ennelle 1985, unpaginated)

The *Pagan* village has (at least since Baringa) accommodated ad hoc occultism. Here, and elsewhere around the site, full moon, seasonal and Earth rites, and rituals like 'wild women' (see below) have been performed. Workshops on 'Celtic mythology', 'meditation for pagans', 'survival as a modern witch' and 'men's and women's mysteries'¹⁸ have also transpired.

¹⁶ Billed as 'Australia's first National Occult and Alternatives ConFest', *Unicorn Star Enterprises*' Sky to Earth ConFest, a non-DTE event held at Glenlyon in 1984, was an early expression of this.

¹⁷ ConFest also inspired the All One Family Gathering, which, celebrated on the equinoxes and solstices since 1986, has been variously described as a 'purification of the Earth and its peoples' (*DTEQLD* Feb. 1986:7), and a 'celebration of the summer solstice and the wonder and joy of living and growing into total health in harmony with mother nature' (*DTE NEA* Nov. 1995:4).

¹⁸ The 'mystery of menstruation' is articulated as a rite of passage and revealed to be a source of wisdom and power. Women are encouraged to connect with their own cycles (and with the cycles of the moon, tides and weather), and are instructed on the value of washable cloth pads, which, whilst not only ethical in their reusability, satisfy the desire to get 'back in touch' as they can be used to transfer a woman's vitamin and mineral filled blood-soak 'back into the earth' (which is declared, on a pamphlet for 'Rad Pads' - 'the environmentally friendly modern woman's menstrual companion' - to instill 'a great feeling').

Though *Pagan* has not appeared after Toc III, Paganism is pervasive. Many participants approximate what Luhrmann (1989:76-85) has called 'non-initiated paganism'. As Orryelle remarked:

Probably almost everyone at the festival is 'pagan' in some manner or other. Definitely nature religions are a major focus at Confest. People there seem generally more connected with their roots and ancestry than in mainstream society.

While not necessarily members of Wicca groups, there is evidence that 'pagan's' polysemy presents a winning formulae for a rather eclectic constituency. Under this polysemous rubric one finds 'heathen' or 'a person of no religion', and 'one who sets a high value on sensual pleasures', residing with 'polytheistic', 'magic' (the 'Craft') and 'non-Christian' associations. The latter denotation makes for an especially attractive affectation. Moreover, sympathies are aroused by the sense of responsibility commonly associated with the identity, one translated as an ecological 'duty'.¹⁹ Also, 'pagan's' etymological roots in the Latin *paganus* ('villager', 'rustic') and *pagana* ('of the land') (Moore 1986:6) illuminate the centripetal attraction Paganism holds for many (e.g. ferals).

Celebrating the Goddess

An Earth-centred spiritual movement has been especially appealing to females. Challenging scientific and Judeo-Christian ideologies of separation and transcendence, Starhawk (1979) has been an erstwhile proponent of woman's connectedness to the world (to nature) and, as a consequence, her Earth-protecting and healing roles. The feminine is valorised in most Pagan manifestations. Indeed, an Earth-centred 'matriarchal Paganism' - 'the rule of the Goddess' (or the 'Chthonic imperative') - is even advocated (Roberts 1998).

Goddess rites were performed at Baringa II. There, members of Dark Circle and The Dolphin Tribe performed the Star Ruby ritual. That is, they 'cast the Circle' with the purpose of 'drawing down' the Goddess:

¹⁹ One instance of ecological 'duty' springs to mind. Anxieties awoken by contemplation of the environmental consequences of mindless consumption and waste is allayed through the serious undertaking, according to a sign at Toc IV, of 'returning the site to nature ... all welcome'. A responsibility upon which the success of ConFest is said to be dependent, such commitments are nothing short of *purification rites*. In this vein, at the signposted compost area of the same event's divisional recycling system we find: 'in celebration we give back to you Mother Earth that which is created from yourself and the energy from the sun'.

The Dolphin Tribe danced in the four quarters using the forms of the Eagle, Fire Lizard, Dolphin, Wombat & at the center a Spider Shaman. After, lead by the pagan women in the center, we drew down the Goddess into the collective unconscious of the circle as the men danced around. (Tim 1985:19)

In an engaging ritual conducted at the Toc III Fire Circle, over one hundred women danced in a circular formation, chanting a series of mantras to a steadily advancing djembe rhythm. Called 'wildwomen - a celebration of the Goddess', the ritual signaled several themes: each participant's physical attachment to the world (and each other); their responsibility as nurturers, and; the empowering consequence of internalising the Goddess. Initially the women pulsated toward the centre and out chanting:

We all come from the Goddess
and to her we shall return.
Like a drop of rain
falling to the ocean.

The chant affirmed the worldly presence of each participant (symbolised as a 'drop of rain'), who all come from and return to the same source, anthropomorphised as Mother, or she who gives life to and reabsorbs all: the Goddess.²⁰ That knowledge of such kinship engenders reciprocal obligations was transparent in another 'wildwomen' chant:

The Earth is our Mother, we will take care of her.
The Earth is our Mother, she will take care of us.

This chant signified the women's view of 'themselves and the Earth as nurturers of humankind' (Hume 1997:235).

Participants were also reminded that a 'divine spark' of the perennial Goddess lay within, empowering them. Thus 'wildwomen' also involved a repetitive chant, sung as the women circled and then merged in a clamorous throng to complete the ritual:

We are the old women
We are the new women
We are the same women
Stronger than before.

Myall relates the affirmational effect of this:

²⁰ Who, according to Greenwood (1998:101), is the 'ground of being': 'the ultimate reality connecting the universe in which all participate'.

It's empowering for me. It feels good to do that sort of thing. To say 'hey, I'm a woman and I appreciate being one'. It's really nice to be a female, to be feminine. I like being a woman.

As Hume clarifies, internalising images of female divinity within the context of a body-affirming theology 'gives women the strength to effect change in their personal lives and in the social and political climate' (Hume 1997:235). The Goddess is thus 'a symbol of self-transformation - she is seen to be constantly changing and a force for change for those who open themselves up to her' (Greenwood 1998:103). This includes males, as the 'drawing down' rite performed at Baringa II demonstrates. Yet, as Greenwood states, the Goddess 'represents an avenue to authority for women which has been denied in mainstream orthodox religions' (1998:101). 'Wildwomen' was thus an empowering expression of *eco-spirituality*.

Techno-Paganism

Rainbow Dreaming, the techno village at Toc IV, occasioned an all night 'tribal rave celebration'. Though contrasting with 'wildwomen' in that the context was decidedly masculine (e.g. the DJs were almost exclusively male) and high tech, in a logic that finds congruity with the former rite, according to its principal architect, Krusty, the purpose of *Rainbow Dreaming* was to 'create a sacred space for people to find their own sacred dance for healing themselves and the planet'. In promotional literature prepared by Krusty, it became apparent that this 'sacred space' would be established via inventive reclamation - via reclaiming a putative past. Appealing to atavistic demands, the literature stated that:

the all night dance ritual is a memory that runs deep within us all, a memory that takes us back to a time when people had respect for our great Mother Earth and each other. A time when we came together as one tribe united in spirit. We understood the cycles of nature and the power of the elements. We danced around fires, we chanted and we drummed, invoking the great spirit to empower ourselves and our community.

It thus ignited nostalgia for connectivity with nature and fellow humans, connections which are thought to have been severed or forgotten. There is little doubt about the causes of such a circumstance:

Then one day a new force began to take control and these great rites of community empowerment were suppressed. Our sacred sites where we once danced all night into ecstatic trance had been taken over by a new order of worship.

Sympathy for the imagined ecstatic predilection of a beleaguered pre-Judeo-Christian religiosity is thus expressed. Yet, though a 'new order' had deflated 'the spirit of the people', history must run its course:

gradually the spirit of the people would return as they recognised the sacred power of trance, once again opening up the channels to the Great Spirit ... The temples may have changed but the sacred earth they dance upon is still the same.

Sacralisation and remembering via 'trance' are possible again. Trance Dance, regarded as 'an ancient Shamanic practice which invites Spirit to embody us; to heal us through spiritual ecstasy,' is authorised as a practice employed by indigenous people worldwide 'for over 40 000 years' (and as a means by which 'significant memories of this life, lives past, even those of prehuman form' can be retrieved).²¹ And, Krusty and other 'techno-shamanic' conductors would use a sound system, electronic rhythm sampling, conceptual and ambient lighting, and artistic installations to create a sacred space for a 'modern day ritual':

where we can join as one tribe to journey deep into trance states just as our ancestors did long ago ... This will be a shamanic healing journey in the traditional sense, with people tuning in on mass to the dance energy: working from the physical to access the emotional transcending to the spiritual.

Ultimately, the outdoor dance party is a grounding 'ritual' where participants are invited to 'revere ... natural habitat' (Shell 1998), and where the nature/culture boundary is effectively dissolved. According to Shell, the sunrise 'transition from footwear to barefeet' is a significant grounding indicator. Moreover:

[t]he separation between nature and culture becomes blurred especially once we're all covered in a light film of dust which has risen from the dance floor throughout the night. We are all able to feel that nature isn't something separate from us, we are a part of it. (ibid)

In the 'futurist pre-modernism' (Rietveld 1998:261) of Trance Dance, an imagined past is 'reclaimed' such that meaning is assigned to the present - an all night dance ritual. A desire to connect with primal 'roots', 'the Great Spirit', 'nature' and fellow dancers is facilitated via modern technology - which perhaps makes them high-tech primitivists (and

²¹ The universalistic property of Shamanism is thus evoked to legitimate the experience.

a source of some consternation as I demonstrate in Chapter 8). Like ‘wildwomen’, the ritual is personally empowering. And, also like the former ritual, it evinces the *self-globe nexus*: healing ‘the self’ and ‘the planet’ are inseparable paths. ‘Wildwomen’ and Trance Dance are manifestations of new spiritual networks which hold ecology as an ‘ultimate concern’.

Finally, Krusty informed me that ‘energy’ located in and channeled from the Australian landscape is responsible for the ecstatic states associated with outdoor Trance Dance. To explain this he drew parallels with Aboriginal Australia:

I think there’s a sense of the spirit of the land. This land we now call Australia has a real spirit to being stomped. And if you’ve ever watched Aboriginal dance, its very much about stomping the earth and they do the shake a leg or what ever you want to call it ... And if you watch techno ... It’s very much about stomping the earth [It] brings energy into the body, Earth energy into the body.

Thus, a dancer’s body can ‘become a conduit for energy’. Krusty stressed that with or without the use of psychedelics, ecstatic states are achieved as bodies and crowds become ‘energised’. Therefore, a sense of presence is important. The ‘voyage’ of Trance Dance, he continued, depends upon moving into ‘an Earth presence ... it’s a special ritual being able to stomp the Earth’.

Part III. Indigeneity: Authentication and Reconciliation

On-site events and their interpretation disclose the significance (ultimacy) of indigeneity for alternates. In this section I will discuss numerous performances and narratives (other than *Rainbow Dreaming*) which invoke, appeal to or solicit indigeneity/Aboriginality. Two broad themes are covered in separate sections: 1) indigeneity as a source of *authentication*; and 2) the commitment to *reconciliation* with Aborigines. Within this broad sweep, instances of romanticism and the commitment to solidarity are uncovered. The panorama of examples I use conveys an awareness of a humanised (indigenised) landscape, and a desire among non-Aborigines to inhabit that place, a desire for *em-place-ment*.²²

²² It should be pointed out here that the proliferation of indigeneity at ConFest stands in contrast to the relative absence of Aborigines. The record with Aboriginal groups is not comforting to DTE. According to Cockatoo, a large group of Pitjantjajara used to come down to Daylesford, building *mimis* (bush huts). However, after a request for travel funding was refused, they stopped coming. Koories also travelled from Melbourne to Walwa to perform dances, but did not return after DTE failed to deliver on its promise to allocate ‘a certain percentage of profits’

Sanctified Land, Authenticated Experience

Acknowledging the indigenous inhabitants (to degrees real or imagined) of a place is a desired means of sanctifying space and authenticating experience. For instance, the collective invocation of the Yorta-Yorta on the night of the Toc III fire walk sacralised the collective performances there. This kind of sacralisation is frequently encountered in ConFest mythos. In 1981, Glenlyon was, for one commentator, an apt location for an event as it had been used as 'a tribal gathering place' for millennia: 'Once an Aboriginal meeting place and spa, more recently a village race track and now a ConFest site' (Robinson 1981:12). Later, ConFesters at Mt Oak 1987/88 were informed that on the Murrumbucca Creek leading up to the Snowy Mountains there was a path once used by Aboriginal people who gathered to feast on bogong moths, and that 'if we remember that every step we take is on sacred ground, we will be part of rekindling the dreaming' (*DTENEA* Dec 1987:4).²³

I will discuss two on-site occasions where indigeneity has been marshaled to perform a validating function

The Water Corroboree

to them. As rental for and recognition of prior occupation, and in agreement with the 'Pay the Rent' scheme formulated by Koories as an alternative to Government funding, DTE paid the Yorta Yorta 1% gross income of Toc I and Toc II (*DTE News* 70 July 1992:1). This gesture has not been repeated.

²³ These gestures are common place within alternative culture. The Aquarius Festival was said to have occurred on a Bunjalung initiation ground and organisers invited 'one of the old Aborigines from the area ... to open the festival' (*Byron Express*, 5th ed, May 1973:4). That Mornington Islanders performed corroborees, dancing around fires in proximity to a host of white bands such as The Magik Karavan (Shelmerdine 1973:4), was also heralded as significant. The 1983 Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration closed with the performance of a 'Rainbow Serpent' ritual (Newton 1988:67). And, local Murris, notably the Gabbi-Gabbi, have 'hosted' the annual Woodford/Maleny Festival, opening the event via a 'permission ceremony' (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:203-4). In North America, the Rainbow Family often send a delegation to meet with local Indians - sometimes the wrong ones - seeking their approval before holding a Gathering (Niman 1997:142-4). These examples indicate that Aborigines (and other indigenes), approving, opening and consummating events, have become sanctifying signifiers, performing the role of an authenticating 'presence' (physical or spiritual). They also take an important role as the 'absent referent'. Disappointed with the unacknowledgment of Aborigines at recent events, anarchists from *Food Not Bombs* at Moama IV fashioned a large banner hung near the Market: 'You are on Aboriginal land. Where are the Aborigines? Have we asked their permission?'

At the first ConFest on the Cotter River (1976), a sense of spontaneous community and a palpable sensation of inevitable social transformation was enervated through a series of gatherings culminating in what became known as ‘the water corroboree’. According to first hand reports, the event occasioned a sense of communion (between humans and with nature). I want to draw attention to the most detailed recollection of the moment I have found, according to which the presence of ‘spirit’ seems to have been validated by two authorities. One was an Aborigine, the other an esotericist, both of whom held communication with otherwise unseen forces:

On the second last day of the festival, Dec 13th, some Aborigines, probably from the Berri area, had been brought to the site. Early the next morning, I saw one of them, a middle aged man hugging a half drunk flagon of wine. For some reason he looked at me penetratingly - not like one who is drunk. And said fiercely: ‘Don’t you mess with the Spirit of Cotter!’ I said nothing, almost forgot the incident. (Rawlins 1982:31)

Rawlins then describes ‘the water corroboree’, nearly 2000 people in thigh-high water forming circles within circles, OMing then chanting ‘all we are saying is give peace a chance’, followed by a ‘celibate orgasm’ of water thrashing. He continues:

[T]he two hours or so we were all sharing in the water had been and remains today one of the most whole, fully-alive, totally transcendental experiences of my life. And, of course, the half-drunk Aborigine had somehow known that that benign Nature Spirit was giving us the extra energy we all felt during the festival. Far from ‘messing with’ Him, we all received His Benediction’. (Rawlins 1982:38)

If this wasn’t enough validation, the authentic spiritual experience was confirmed by the Rev John King, once President of the Theosophical Society, and a clairvoyant, numerologist and healer who founded the Healing Church of St. Raphael. The Reverend, who ‘stayed in a nearby motel and wore ecclesiastical garb in the midst of his naked “parishioners”’, informed Rawlins that, in reference to ‘the Spirit of the Cotter’, ‘He was manifesting very strongly while you were all thrashing about in the water’ (ibid.:39).

The remark of a ‘half drunk’ Aboriginal man, endorsed in turn by a past President of the Theosophical Society,²⁴ indigenised the site and thereby authenticated the experience. It thus provided the validation scaffold Rawlins required to construct a meaningful interpretation of a transcendent experience.

²⁴ It is not clear whether these ‘authorities’ were referring to the spirit of the festival or the river. Rawlins did not seek further information from either.

'The Sacred Mound'

The imagined Aboriginality of a raised area (known as 'the sacred site', 'the sacred mound' or just 'the mound') which became the Fire Circle at Birdlands not only legitimated the events transpiring there, but, as a consequence, seemed to accord participants with a chthonic status of their own. Awareness grew a few weeks prior to New Year on a pre-festival trip. Cockatoo, a retired geologist, and the researcher walked over to investigate a raised area with a barren, hardened surface and riddled with rabbit boroughs. Quietly excited about the area, Cockatoo was unsure whether the 'NSW authorities' knew about it. They probably didn't, he mused, since it was private land and the area in question was not fenced-off. Such mounds, he speculated, were used as cooking, ceremonial and/or burial sites, and may have been retreated to in times of flood as 'an island of survival' which could be occupied for six months of the year. He suggested that, 'according to the work we've done in Victoria, mounds [otherwise known as 'middens'] started to appear 3000 years ago'. Though there was no tell-tale sign of ash - which, he suggested, you would need to locate with a magnifying glass - 'there is', he told me later:

sign of nodules of fired clay ... which is the only evidence I found to say it was occupied by human action. And there's some tiny little white flakes that could be bone. But you'd have to look under a microscope to identify that. There is sand under this clay layer, so the Aborigines have built up this 4 or 5 feet of sand over an area of 200 feet by 50 feet probably - an oval shape, 5 feet high. So there's a lot of sand there, and it's taken them a long long time to build it up. So it's quite a significant area, in terms of ceremony. If they were having corroborees they wouldn't have them on the mound they'd have them back in the trees a bit. So it's quite significant. So I referred to it as a sacred site ... It's [now] fenced off and we're going to respect it. And treat it properly.

Cockatoo was of little doubt that the place was 'significant' - despite the lack of scientific evidence or corroboration from Aborigines themselves. As a consequence, he announced 'we are going to erect a large flag over it declaring that it's a sacred site'. Whose 'sacred site?' I inquired. He responded:

It could be a white man's sacred site, as well as an Aboriginal one. So we can behave as if it's our sacred site also, and have gatherings, workshops on it, sit on it, talk, conference, you can dance on it ... [But, he cautions] I wouldn't disturb the surface. No camping on it.

Rumours about the area abounded, and an embellished folk mythology arose intimating the raised area's primordality. According to one commentator (attributing the find to someone else), Cypress 'found some bone sort of implements that he knows to be Aboriginal, of a certain thing, and that if you find these ... on an area you should only use it for pleasure, you should never use it for [commerce] ... It's only to be used for pleasure, like for dancing'.

The place rapidly acquired the characteristics of a sacred site, areas normally 'hedged about with interdictions' (Maddock 1991:215). Indeed, restrictions were applied. A line of blue tape 'fenced' the area off from campers,²⁵ and a large 'flag' with the words 'Sacred Site' painted across it flew from trees nearby.²⁶ At the beginning of the festival, campers adjacent the site were instructed of the site's sacrality, a fact relayed by them to new arrivals. For instance, when I arrived at Birdlands I passed such a campsite and was informed by an awe struck young man that we had the privilege of being close to a 'sacred site'.

The mound eventually became a safe fire zone (in a fire danger period) for the Fire Circle. Indeed, the mound's elevation coupled with its perceived primordality (perhaps '3000 years old') made it the ideal gathering place. The recognition/invention of the place's significance set up a context whereby those who came into 'contact' with it, who passed across its perimeter (and who were made aware of its apparent status) would themselves likely become 'significant'. Its sacrality, its putative 'energy', was literally transmitted to those who would gather there. And many sought to become attuned to the place's 'power', its memories, to tap into its chthonic energy,²⁷ to be immersed in its sacrality.

It was thus invested with meanings that are the contemporary currency of alternative lifestyles. Such interpretations and effects are likely to arise in the context of:

a colourful amalgam of spiritual ecologists, modern-day Luddites, anti-rationalists, geomancers, nature-lovers and New Age mystics [who have] re-discovered humanity's spiritual roots through recognition of the sacral aspects of places of nature and a ritualistic approach to them. (Kolig 1996:374)

²⁵ There is some confusion over this, since the purpose of restricting access was believed by some to be a matter of safety on account of the rabbit boroughs.

²⁶ The mound became a 'sacred site' even though midden sites - traditionally gathering places - were not 'sacred' or religious places. Places may now be 'sacred' due to imputed religious, cultural, historical, even personal significance (cf. Maddock 1991).

²⁷ Though he does not refer to middens, for a discussion of ancient and indigenous sacred sites serving as 'energy transmitters' for both Aborigines and Euro-Pagans/New Agers, see Kolig (1996:371).

Of course, the sacrality of the landscape is magnified as it is perceived to have been occupied. The Birdlands folk theory is a demonstrable reflection of sentiments circulating in the alternative sector, where there is a strong desire to both acknowledge prior occupation and to enjoy the spiritual replenishment that may derive from contact with such places (cf. Tacey 1996). It is consistent with the ‘Spirit of Cotter’ hermeneutic and corresponds somewhat with what Robinson, in a report on Glenlyon I, called ‘the spirit of Australia’:

[T]he spirit of Australia moves within us ... We are coming together and realising our common spiritual heritage: this land with its millennia of continuous habitation by spiritually enlightened people. We cannot help but hear the voice of our land when it calls for help, screams for mercy from the devastation wreaked upon it by a vengeful and spiritually bankrupt society. We hear its voice and we awaken to its call. We recognise ourselves as spiritual beings and we realise that our destiny is tied to the spirit of this land, Australia. (Robinson 1981:12)

This parallels the attitude candidly stated in the *DTEQLD* newsletter (1988:27): ‘what is most urgently needed in this country is that non-Aboriginal people should also have the opportunity of having a spiritual relationship to the land’.

In these examples, I have documented two events which occasioned the sacralising effect of putative indigeneity. In the first, we saw how, in one commentator’s account, even fleeting, ‘half-drunk’ Aboriginality is enough to substantiate an authentic experience. The second demonstrates the inspiring effect of such sacralisation on a wider scale.

Didjeridus, Rites and Reconciliation

As I have noted (in Chapter 6), the didjeridu (or ‘didj’, as it is colloquially known) has proliferated in the alternative sector. It functions as a sacralising conduit in firewalks, is held to possess unique therapeutic qualities for the recipient (‘didge healing’), and may, as Sherwood (1997) conveys, provide the player with a ‘feeling of wholeness’ or groundedness - a ‘tuning in’ to the land. The didj’s Aboriginality provides the basis for the amplification of these qualities and effects. Yet, the didj’s potential as a ‘healing’ catalyst may extend even further. That is, according to manufacturers and players, taking up the didj amounts to taking up the cause for reconciliation. This is a message often promoted by ConFest workshop instructors. For example, according to Heartland Didgeridoo:

Aboriginal spirit is rising again through a greater respect for our indigenous people and an acceptance for their rights, their autonomy, their spirituality.

More Koori folk are feeling a greater sense of pride. With it they are taking their lives back into their hands ... Until all or the majority of Australians reconcile with Aboriginal people then every white person carries some degree of guilt or shame and every Aboriginal person carries some degree of animosity and this land is not united ... I challenge every one that takes up the didge that they take up a responsibility to be part of the reconciliation - the healing.

As Sherwood comments (1997:150), the didj is 'an instrument of expiation' holding the potential for users to be absolved of 'guilt' or 'shame'. Considering the majority of young non-Aboriginal didjeriduists are aware of Australia's 'dark past', the didj's adoption is a likely demonstration of empathy.²⁸ At the same time, from a position of detachment, the didj represents a 'bridge to facilitate the journey back to the land' (ibid). It is almost as if mastery of the didj generates a more 'geospherical' outlook - whereupon 'all knowledge and wisdom' and 'moral teaching' is considered to reside *within* the earth' (Swain 1989:348-9). The didj is thus an instrument via which one may achieve simultaneous reconciliation with indigenous peoples and the Earth.

I want to complete this section by drawing attention to two further extra-ordinary moments transpiring in the context of collective performances. Both are 'intercultural' experiences within which the didjeridu is deployed. In each, I rely upon on-site commentators' recollections of events, readings which reveal the contingent and uncertain trajectory of 'reconciliation'.

Defilement at Berri

The late Aboriginal activist Burnam Burnam attended the early ConFests. A cultural broker, in 1979 Burnam Burnam encouraged a group of performers from the Oombulgarrri-Kununarra area of the Kimberley region of Western Australia, who were at that time participating in an Aboriginal Arts, Crafts and Music festival in Adelaide, to perform at the Berri ConFest. He was to receive a 'devastating shock':

By arrangement they were to perform around a campfire hosted by white 'hippies'. The didgeridoo players, clap stick artists, singers and dancers were performing when, to my horror, a nude male crazily picked up the end of the didgeridoo while it was being played and placed his erect penis into it. The horror and shame of the single act made me hate whites. I was to miss the next

²⁸ According to Heartland Didgeridoo, 'remembrance and grieving is the start of the journey' to reconciliation.

five annual Down to Earth Festivals because of the sickness and irreverence of that one act. (Burnam Burnam 1987:97)

The sanctity of what has been referred to as an ‘ancient ceremony’ or ‘mini corroboree’ was thus defiled. This penetrative act seemed to be a most disturbing reminder of the history of psychological, socio-cultural and political violations suffered by the same people. Burnam Burnam makes this much clear:

My feelings of revulsion were all the more intense as I knew that the performers came from an area which has seen the destruction of their burial sites and hunting grounds by white men, following the non-consultative decision to dam the Ord River in Western Australia. (Burnam Burnam 1987:97)

Designed to generate an intercultural alliance, the ‘mini-corroboree’ instead provided an occasion where history was seen to be repeated in a most audacious and shameless moment of ‘acting out’. Though there is no evidence to suggest that it was the intention of the perpetrator to do so, for estranged spectators such as Burnam Burnam the event occasioned a lascivious dramatisation of past violations carried out by white men.

Burning and Building Bridges

The *Tek Know* village at Moama IV occasioned another unexpected incident. On New Year’s Eve, a large twelve hour clock was suspended from the top centre of a high scaffold tower from which an enormous Aboriginal land rights flag was also draped. The flag featured a smiley face (symbolising rave culture) on its sun. Near midnight, the rhythm became wilder as throngs of jugglers and fire-stick twirlers raised the tempo of their manipulations at the base of the scaffold, and two men swirled ignited catherine wheels at opposite ends of the tower. At this point, Dama approached with flame-thrower in hand. He intended to set the clock alight to signify the termination of the old year, a feat he achieved at midnight. However, when a couple of propane balloons backfired an unanticipated conflagration illuminated the amazed faces of hundreds of revelers as the flag itself went up in flames.²⁹

Dama later informed me that at the time of the incident, ‘Quoll the Koori’, who operates a St Kilda Market didj stall, was at the base of the flag playing didjeridu with his son. Although nobody was burnt and ‘the show went on’, Dama sensed Quoll’s pride had

been ‘naturally dented’. Nonetheless, something uncanny had transpired. As Dama recounts:

some of the women in the group came to me and sort of said ‘Oh my god! Dama, what have you done now?’ You know, ‘not only have you burned the Koori flag, but you’ve done so with a Koori underneath it at the time’. Oh my god, woe is us, we are doomed, you know. And I tried to sort of shrug this off because it all sort of felt a bit too sort of pessimistic for the tone of the event. I mean it was New Year’s Eve and something very strong had happened, and I wasn’t quite sure what it was.

Despite initial uncertainty as to what to make of the incident, a resolution was ultimately achieved:

The week before I’d been through South Melbourne market and I’d passed a stall with a lot of belt buckles on it and one jumped off the table at me. It was a beautiful oval brass buckle with a lovely rendition in enamel of the land rights flag in the centre. And I had this in my pocket. As I later found Quoll at breakfast at FOE, I looked him in the eye and said ‘well Quoll, sorry about ya flag mate’, you know, and ‘here ... here’s another one’. And he said ‘thanks mate’. And he took this belt buckle and he felt the weight of it and he said ‘right, yeah I’ll wear that’. And I should have been honoured and that should have been the end of the conversation. I should have said ‘thank you Quoll’, and this pesky little voice came up inside of me and I said ‘Quoll, you don’t need to wear that’. And he said ‘yeah, right’. And I looked him in the eye again and I said ‘that was total fucking anarchy last night wasn’t it, just total fucking anarchy’. And he said ‘yeah mate’. And I said ‘and we don’t need a flag do we’. And he said ‘no mate ... we’re all one peoples, and we don’t need no flag’. And that I think is what happened there. To me that was the truth of those moments. And he honoured and I honoured it, and we actually destroyed between us the last vestige of separation that may exist between the whites and the Koories ... So that felt very very very powerful to me actually. And I’ve seen Quoll since, and we’re good mates and give him a hug and we carry on. So it wasn’t a great ‘woe is us’ at all ... The girls however have since made a new Aboriginal flag, and I’m not gonna go any where near it in case I burn it.

In Dama and Quoll’s interpretation of this incident a positive resolution was achieved in the face of potential disaster. This stands in stark contrast to Burnam Burnam’s reading of the former incident.

The series of privileged moments reconstructed in this section convey, in disparate but often cognate ways, the ultimacy of Australian indigeneity for alternates. At Cotter and Birdlands, putative indigeneity was valorised for its sacralising and authenticating

²⁹ Though presaging disaster for some, many participants were oblivious, interpreting the flag’s demise as part of the proceedings.

legitimacy. There, ConFest folk-theories celebrated indigenous presence, and local practices indicated a non-Aboriginal desire for *em-place-ment*. I argued that didjeridu use may be a means by which non-Aborigines reconcile with indigenous peoples and ecology. The events at Berri and Moama IV of which Burnam Burnam and Dama speak occasioned unexpected ‘disturbances’ which threatened the reconciliatory processes of which these events were, in part, an expression. The first incident was interpreted as a sign of the perduring injustices experienced by Aboriginal peoples, therein indicating a fissured relationship, the second ultimately signified an alliance.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the lifestyle *sacra* of participants are presented, contested and (re)confirmed in a hyper-reflexive liminal environment. Alternative cultural discourse and practice, I have argued, are (re)produced in the context of a marginal *multi-cultural drama* performed via multiple genres at multiple venues. The entire event is an extra-ordinary cultural frame, within which a range of localised ‘ultimate concerns’ are evoked. I have explored three principle *sacra* communicated: the self, the Earth, and indigeneity.

Following separate descriptive assessments of on-site manifestations of self healing/growth and Earth consciousness (insurgent personalist and globalist sensibilities), I articulated how such a diversity of discourse and practice may be perceived to be contiguous. ‘Heal thy self - thy planet’, a ConFest theme signifying the ecological relatedness of person and planet, is a particularly apposite expression of what I called the *self-globe nexus*. ‘Healing the planet’, according to most discursive accounts, starts ‘locally’ - that is, via *work* undertaken on the self or one’s immediate environment. The *nexus* also implies that individuals in possession of the understanding that they are *connected* (to nature), resolve to take *responsibility* for their actions. *Eco-spiritual* manifestations of Neo-Paganism were canvassed to demonstrate the performative expression of the *self-globe nexus*.

Finally, addressing indigeneity, common sentiments on the matter were conveyed via a series of revelatory vignettes highlighting several extra-ordinary moments. Events partially reconstructed via readings performed by participants and the researcher disclosed the significance of indigeneity for alternates - as a valorised source of authentication and in the complicated quest for reconciliation.

Chapter 8

‘What Tribe Do You Belong To?’¹ Immediate and Contested Community

Introduction

This chapter attends to the unique tension of unity and discord characterising ConFest. As I argued in the previous chapter, though valorised and even deified, the self is not alone. In an autonomous festive zone, there exists a will to achieve *immediate* community - a self/other dissolution. However, as I contend here, it would be illusory to regard this alternate community as one homogeneous mass. The chapter has three parts.

Part one draws attention to limitations in Turner’s ‘*communitas*’ (the third liminal modality), while simultaneously advancing a fitting interpretation of the ConFest community. I attempt this by offering: (1) an understanding of ConFest as an alternative cultural *heterotopic community*, that is, an alternate social gathering invested with multiple meanings, and; (2) a heuristic approach to the unique *intercorporeality* occasioned by the event.

Part two draws upon research data to substantiate the view that ConFest is a tense exchange between positions of inclusivity and exclusivity. Circumscribing the prevalent alternative affectation of ‘the tribe’, I disclose this concept’s duplicitous attributions transparent in the homogeneity/heterogeneity dynamic specific to the festival. With the assistance of Maffesoli’s ‘sociality’, I argue that ConFest is a unique juncture of ‘mass’ and ‘tribe’ - an organic *network of nomadic* ‘neo-tribes’. It is also my contention that this network actualises the *being together* popularly articulated as ‘the ConFest Spirit’. Yet ConFest, like other communities, operates via differentiation and distinction. For one thing, internal unification implies boundary maintenance - the identification and exclusion of ‘foreign’ elements. For another thing, achieving consensus on boundary composition is highly unusual. I use the example of on-site disputation between proponents of competing music cultures to affirm ConFest’s status as a *contested community*.

In the third and final part, I contend that, despite adversity and disharmony, ConFest’s grassroots social *organicism* assures the ultimate ‘triumph of community’.

¹ From *DTE News* Special Edn (Nov/Dec) 1995:2.

Part I: *Communitas* or Heterotopia?

'*Communitas*' is a Latin term meaning 'a relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals', which Turner distinguished from 'community' or 'an area of common living' (1969:96). That which he deemed 'spontaneous' or 'existential *communitas*' is a 'direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities' (ibid:131), a social modality within which individuals interact free from socio-culturally constructed divisions.² Turner contended that 'the *communitas* spirit', manifesting in the interstices, on the margins and beneath visible structure, 'presses always to universality and ever-greater unity' (1973:202). Effusing a sacred anti-structurality and evincing *homogeneity*, its boundaries are thus 'ideally coterminous with those of the human species' (Turner 1969:131). *Communitas* involves the sharing of special knowledge and understanding - 'a flash of mutual understanding on the existential level' (Turner 1982b:48). As a timeless condition or 'a place that is not a place', and as a 'magical' and 'numinous' moment, it is said to approximate 'the religious experience' (1969:128).

That the rebellious sixties laid the foundations for the concept of '*communitas*' makes for a compelling argument. However, though it was associated with the 'energy' seeding the establishment of communes, Turner saw that this pan-human modality, a kind of 'shared flow' (1977:51), was experienced by pilgrims, tourists, wilderness explorers and patrons of major sports events alike. It is even perceived to be manifest in Zen Buddhism's 'prajna' ('intuition') and Confucianism's 'jen' ('love, goodness, benevolence, humaneness and man-to-man-ness') (Turner 1974:46,283).³

For Turner, *communitas* is a 'natural', albeit temporary, form of human relationship. 'Normal structural activity', he suggested, becomes 'arid' and is a source of conflict if those in it are not 'periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of *communitas*' (1969:139). If structure is exaggerated, there occurs 'pathological manifestations of

² According to Turner, there are three types: spontaneous, ideological and normative *communitas*. An ideological *communitas* is a group's ideal and utopian *model* designed to replicate the concrete experience of spontaneous *communitas*. Normative *communitas* is an attempt to establish permanent *communitas*, with systematic rules and legal structures. Via further *communitas* experiences, groups often split and factions arise, starting the cycle over (Turner 1982b:49-50).

³ Said to be closely associated with the lowering of status, Turner eventually extended the metaphor to cover: the relationship between those undergoing ritual transition; 'religions of humility' (e.g. Franciscan, Vaisnavism); institutionalised poverty (such as that taught by Buddha, Gandhi) and other monastic and mendicant states (these states are described as 'permanent liminality' and are an attempt to bring about sustained 'normative *communitas*'); the middle class countercultural movements of the 1960s and '70s; the status of autochthonous people and 'submerged' kinship links (1969; 1974).

communitas outside or against the law' (e.g. rebellion) and if communitas is exaggerated, for instance in religious or political movements, there may ensue 'despotism, overbureaucratisation or other modes of structural rigidification' (as in totalitarianism) (ibid:129).

Many Meanings, Many 'ConFests'

The homogeneity implied by an unqualified application of communitas has provoked a critical reassessment of the concept. As was pointed out in Chapter 2, pilgrimage destinations are not necessarily sites of all-inclusive sociality. While Turner saw that the anti-structural dimensions of pilgrimages were not characterised by total unity - as in the Hindu Pandharpur pilgrimage where a highly stratified caste system is reinforced⁴ - pilgrimage, counterculture, transition rites and so on are ultimately 'means of binding diversities together and overcoming cleavages' (Turner 1973:220). In this sacred sphere, unity and homogeneity prevail over the disunity and heterogeneity of ethnicities, cultures, classes and professions in the mundane sphere (Turner and Turner 1978:39).

While it is tempting to depict the contemporary ConFest as a vast communitas, the presence of 'multiple constituencies' holding sometimes conflicting and sometimes complementary readings of the event, renders such an interpretation problematical. I deem it more appropriate to view ConFest as an alternative 'realm of competing discourse' and practice, an ACH which rushes toward consensus and harmony, but which also yields discord and division. My approach is therefore consistent with that of Abner Cohen (1982; 1993) and Baumann (1992) who argue that public events are contested cultural arenas. For Cohen, carnival is essentially ambivalent - characterised by both *conflict* and *alliance*. Likewise, I find congruity with Henry (1994), who, with a particular local example in mind, regards the marketplace as a space of identity contestation. Events like carnivals, ceremonies and markets are, according to these commentators, characterised by ongoing apprehensiveness between converging constituents who stake claim to variant and often conflicting interpretations of the events, and event-spaces.

Other ALEs provide furtive parallels. With no 'official voice', 'high priests' or 'dogmatic presence', the Burning Man Festival is a case in point. There, the:

⁴ The Pandharpur pilgrimage, like the Muslim hajj, 'remains within an established religious system. It does not lower defenses between castes, just as Islam does not allow those beyond the Umma (the nation of Islam) to visit the holy places of Mecca and Medina' (Turner 1973:220-21).

sheer hybrid strangeness and polyglot weirdness of the participants and performances contradict and challenge one another, and, for a weekend, the desert becomes a contest of meanings. No one interpretation of the event can ever carry the day. If there is a definitive meaning of the Man, it is that there is no definitive meaning. (Wray 1995)

That such internal variation generates conflict, sometimes highly volatile circumstances, is a reality made clear by the example of Rainbow Gatherings, which, as Niman (1997) contends, express a 'fundamental schism' in the Family (between politics and religion): while '[p]olitical/environmental activists appreciate the networking and organizing potential of the Family and the Gatherings [many] spiritually centered Rainbows ... would rather keep politics out of "the church"' (Niman 1997:111). Indeed, Gatherings are revealed to be constituted by zones of almost irreconcilable ideologies and life-strategies (not unlike any other large community) - at 'A' camp, 'no one is baking cookies or singing songs. Young Rainbows in Patagonias or tie-dyes steer a wide berth around the foul-breathed drunks. It's dangerous. It's nasty. It's all about enslavement to addiction' (ibid:128).

ConFest is the kind of 'polymorphic' context Eade and Sallnow hold for pilgrimage and religious cults (1991), often characterised as much by 'mutual *mis*understanding' reinforcing differences between constituents as by forms of consensus (ibid:5). There is no consensus over the idea and space of ConFest. A pilgrimage destination in its own right, participants possess varying motives and expectations, and assign different meanings to the event, such that they experience different 'ConFests'. We might therefore identify several types, or *clusters* of ConFesters,⁵ an identification enhanced by Erik Cohen's tourist modalities (1992).

First, there are those who approximate 'recreational' or 'experiential' tourists. Many participants are 'on holiday', seeking 'a break' from the occupations and roles to which they shall return mentally and physically recreated. Their experience is generally vicarious. These ConFesters are like *flâneur* of exotica, tasting the authenticity of other lifestyles but not seeking to live it themselves. Otherwise, there are hedonists and bohemians, who revel in the joyful transgressivism the festival licences. These ConFesters travel the 'Bohemian path' (Moore 1995). As 'trippers', bikies, ravers, and all-round party people (as in Dando's *Snail* [1996]), they approximate the 'diversionary mode', which, as Cohen argues, is attractive to the younger tourist travelling the path of enjoyment, living 'in the here and now' and whose purpose or direction in life seems unclear (1992:54).

Others arrive with the ambition of ‘putting on’ or, moreover, ‘doing’ workshops - that is, getting involved in the conferencing dimension. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, the alternatives expected and pursued on-site are multitudinous. Some are committed to hawking their ideals, political agendas and cosmic panaceas. Radical environmentalists, for instance, work to recruit or convert participants to various political agendas and campaigns. Others are principally committed to conducting ‘inner work’. These ‘esoteric tourists’, like ‘the full-time drifter’ (Cohen 1973:100), engage in the ‘experimental mode’ of self-discovery via elective alterity. Obtaining a deeper awareness of self, it is their goal to become ‘experienced’, and their enhanced capability to mobilise internal resources increases their *spiritual capital*.

Finally there are the volunteers, those who, through their labour and service to the community, approximate the ‘existential mode’ and thus resemble the tourist who becomes a local - the ‘ideal pilgrim’. A peak category of ConFest volunteer is *the worker*. Though, ideally, all participants are encouraged to volunteer their services, *the workers*, most often DTE site ‘crew’ or ‘core group’ members, but also market vendors, are the post-tourist *par excellence* - *the locals*. Practical and resourceful, for much of the time occupied accomplishing site duties, *the workers* are more likely to assist in preparing and dismantling the event and to regard their input into the event’s operation as ‘their workshop’. These ConFest locals, some of whom adopt a ‘synthetic martyrdom’ (Svendsen 1999) for their personal sacrifices, are proud and sometimes condescending towards the tourist-participants.

Of course, there are variations within, and movement between, clusters. For instance, *the workers* are far from an homogeneous non-factional unit. The point is that, as suggested by the presence of multiple participatory ‘modes’, there are divergent expectations and interpretations of the event. This convergence of alternate lifestyles generates *discord* as tension develops between those subscribing to variant interpretations of the event, variant ‘truths’. Conflict surfaces as attempts are made to exorcise ‘foreign’ elements, especially when agreement over that which constitutes ‘foreign’ is absent. This is, therefore, not the homogeneous or apolitical landscape of Turnerian *communitas*.

Yet, despite such discord, shared experience within an autonomous, sensuous and bounded community does strengthen the possibilities of co-operation and *harmonious* relations between diverse constituents and clusters of constituents. ConFest is then a

⁵ Each of which, in the *lingua franca* of Bourdieu (1984), earn respect and ‘distinction’ for the achievements, style and ‘cultural capital’ that are the common aspirations of their milieu.

community or, more accurately, a heterotopic counter-community, which, by its own organic logic, is motivated by the desire for self-reproduction.

Sensual Solidarity: Return to ‘the People’s Second Life’

Questioning the valency of a concept which has diverted scrutiny from political mechanisms internal to events and practices to which it has been applied is one thing. There is also the matter of Turner’s inattention to the body, which, transfused into *communitas*, distends the concept’s limitations. In Chapter 6, I touched upon Mellor and Shilling’s (1997) account of the nostalgia for ‘carnal knowing’. In the modern world, where mind is separated and superior to body, where surface and image dominates, people experience personal incompleteness, feel ‘closed off’ from ‘embodied grounds of knowledge’ (ibid:29). There is a desire for:

the spontaneity and emotional passions often associated with medieval bodies. A desire for unmediated experiences and feelings, for a body which provides a sense of home, is understandable in a culture whose internal referentiality has made it banal. (Mellor and Shilling 1997:26)

And what they call ‘sensual solidarities’ are (re)appearing. ‘Disciplined bodies’, they argue, ‘are giving way to a ... re-formation, centred on an involvement in sensuous forms of sociality which echo the sacred corporeality of the baroque period, and which prioritise ... *tribal fealties* over individual contracts’ (ibid:162). These ‘solidarities’ ‘mark the resurgence of the “shadow kingdom” of effervescence, and of the sacred as a sensually experienced phenomenon’ (ibid:17). They are thought to ‘emerge from the immanence of the fleshy body within situations of co-presence and interdependence’. And, further, it is possible that, here, people ‘lose their individuality and cognitive control insofar as they choose to “open” certain aspects of their sensuality to flux, interaction and absorption’ (ibid:174).

As ConFest hosts such ‘solidarities’, it approximates the carnival of medieval Europe described by Bakhtin (1968). By contrast to the ‘romantic grotesque’ which is ‘marked by a vivid sense of the private and isolation’ and to the ‘individual carnival’ of literature, where laughter is ‘cut down to cold humour, irony, sarcasm’ (1968:37), the carnival is never distant from ‘the laughing chorus of the market place’ (ibid:439), it is ‘the people’s second life’:

While carnival lasts there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. (Bakhtin 1968:7)

In ConFest, we can see 'carnival' is never merely 'a mode of understanding', as in Rabelaisian carnivalesque, but a *mode of being*. Most significantly for Bakhtin, in this 'body of the people', a world-body correspondence transpires such that the carnival body outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits, becomes mutable. In what Bakhtin calls the 'archaic grotesque':

the stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other. (Bakhtin 1968:25)

The grotesque body is 'a mobile, split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange ... never closed off from either its social or ecosystemic context' (Stallybrass and White 1986:22).

Turner's general neglect of the liminal body has already been conveyed (Chapters 2 and 6). With *communitas*, Turner arguably had the greatest opportunity to chart the terrain of the collective corporeal. After all, he proclaimed that we may be 'beginning to learn the ambiguous, ludic language of what Bakhtin calls "the people's second world", which is ultimately *always charged with communitas, the likely possibility of immediate human communion*' (Turner 1983b:190, my emphasis). However, the communions Turner had in mind seemed to be clinically social, apparently not sensual. They were collectivities of minds and souls, but not bodies.

Orgiasm and Conviviality: Communitas Corporealised

In their attention to the corporeality of ephemeral and intense social moments, Michel Maffesoli and Hakim Bey have developed ideas complementary to, yet advancing upon, those of Turner. It is to these authors that I now turn.

According to Maffesoli, 'Prometheus has been put in doubt'. Positioned in the French tradition of theorising the everyday, Maffesoli promulgates a sociology of 'postmodern sociality'. Cannibalising numerous thinkers, especially Durkheim,⁶ and borrowing from Bataille,⁷ he expounds the re-enchantment of contemporary social life. Maffesoli claims that, today, 'Dionysian' forces of emotional renewal - signified by the 'relativisation of the work ethic, the accentuation of the body, polymorphous perversity, ideological disengagement, periodic groupings of consumption, networks of amorous camaraderie, the importance of dress and cosmetics' (1994:156 in Evans 1997:226) - are pervasive.

In Maffesoli's opinion, the relativistic emotional/aesthetic age of postmodernity is characterised by the appearance of nebulous 'neo-tribes' and 'neo-communities' resisting the universal codes of morality constructed and imposed by the Promethean rationality of the modern era. These protean aggregations are cultures of sentiment and aestheticisation, which he, rather controversially, argues are 'trans-political', distinctly disengaged from the political and returning to 'local ethics', or an 'empathetic sociality' (Maffesoli 1996:11). This sociality, or 'underground centrality', 'bestows, like the Freudian unconscious, strength, vitality, and "effervescence" to social life' (Evans 1997:227). In 'underground centrality', one discovers '*puissance*' the 'inherent energy and vital force of the people', which Maffesoli distinguishes from institutional power or '*pouvoir*' (Maffesoli 1996:1).⁸

The Shadow of Dionysus: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Orgy (1993) is of special interest, since it is here that Maffesoli sails remarkably close to the Turnerian project.⁹ At the beginning of the work, we are warned that a:

city, a people, or a more or less limited group of individuals who cannot succeed in expressing collectively their wildness, their madness, and their

⁶ A Durkheim, who, as Evans (1997:222) notes, is 'interpreted through the lenses of a surrealism, which was obsessed with exoticism, representation of otherness, Shamanic rituals, masks, and sacred sites'.

⁷ According to Evans (1997:222), Maffesoli's interest is in all those things Bataille represented as that which was "heterogeneous" to the order of rationalistic, instrumental and capitalistic "homogeneity".

⁸ The cosmic sensuality which Bakhtin assumed characterised the 'people's *second* life' is somewhat manifest in 'underground centrality' or 'black market sociality' which, for Maffesoli, is sociality of the *first*, and ephemeral, order.

⁹ Though apparently totally unaware of Turner.

imaginary, rapidly destructure themselves and, as Spinoza noted, these people merit more than any 'the name of solitude'. (1993:8)

The book details the necessary manifestation of 'passional logic', which it is claimed, 'has always animated and once again animates the social body'. Like 'a subterranean switchboard', 'passional logic ... defracts into a multiplicity of effects that inform daily life' (1993:1). Maffesoli ranges across a plethora of perverse human activities recounted in various texts (historical, sociological), connecting them via 'passional logic', a theme most manifest in the social 'orgiasm'. The 'orgiasm' is a universal form of sociality which, 'contrary to a morality of "ought to be" .., refers to an *ethical immoralism* which consolidates the symbolic link of all society' (1993:2). The 'logic' of such a condition is that, while 'anomic in many aspects', it 'allows for the structuring or regeneration of community'.

As Maffesoli has it, in 'the face of historic time dominated by production and parousia, there is a poetic and heroic time, a time of the amorous body, a second and hidden time around which are organised endurance and sociality' (1993:31). In this secret, ephemeral and 'unproductive life' of 'Dionysian ludism', there is a desire for loss, for spending. Therefore, it is the orgiastic which is the source of society's renewal. Though Maffesoli reveals little evidence of its presence in everyday life, the 'orgiasm' clearly reaches a licentious, contagious and unrestrainable climax in the festal - those moments occasioning transgressions of imposed morality (ibid:92).

Although attention to Eros and the sexualised body represents an advance on Turner, strong parallels are apparent. Echoing Turner's discourse on the prophylactic role of ritual/festive inversion and *communitas*, Maffesoli asserts that periodic resistance to power and the transgression of norms precludes revolt: to refuse festival 'is to expose oneself to the return of the repressed, to encourage a brutal and bloody explosion' (1993:95). In another way, Maffesoli produces a trademark Turnerian (Nietzschian) denotation of social reality, stating: 'confronted with the laborious Prometheus, one must show that the noisy Dionysus is also a necessary figure of sociality' (ibid:21). The opposing social phenomena carry a strong hint of Turner's 'structure' and 'anti-structure'. The orgiasm is regenerative - it reinstalls the status quo:

In the same way that revolt or revolution permit an energetic new elite to supplant a sleeping, exhausting dictatorship, and through this allows for a startling of the political and social, thus the disturbance or festive orgiasm is a sacrificial expiation which allows the proper virtue of the sociality to be restored. (1993:97)

‘Proper virtue’ is only a slight variation of the ‘society’ Durkheim saw recreated and given meaning via the sacred cult.

Maffesoli’s attention to a transgressively sensualised sociality resonates with Bey’s approach. Both the ‘orgiasm’ and ‘the TAZ’ are ‘unproductive’ - either depict an immediate demesne of joy and desire. For Bey, however, the ‘festal culture’ of ‘the TAZ’ is overtly pregnant with creative possibilities arising from ‘radical conviviality’ (1994b). The TAZ/Immediatist project is a struggle for presence. In Bey’s view, the physically divided are also the conquered and controlled. He contends that

true desires - erotic, gustatory, olfactory, musical, aesthetic, psychic, & spiritual - are best attained in a context of freedom of self & other in physical proximity & mutual aid. Everything else is at best a sort of representation. (1991b)

The awareness of such has meant that ‘all over the world people are leaving or “disappearing” themselves from the Grid of Alienation and seeking ways to restore human contact’ (Bey 1993b). And the most ‘appropriate architectural form’ for radical conviviality - what might approximate Fourier’s Harmonial Association and the Planasterian orgy - is that which has already been identified by Bakhtin as the ‘infinitely penetrable body’ of grotesque realism. It is in the festal space, the temporary autonomous zone, that a desired social mutability transpires. Immediatism, which can be likened to Bataille’s ‘eroticism’,¹⁰ the Beyan solution to ‘the addiction to bitter loneliness which characterizes consciousness in the 20th century’, is ‘the most natural path for free humans imaginable’ (1994a:19,23). And, as Bey confirms, the fulfilment of the desire for immediate sociality, ‘the group jouissance, the group coming ... [associated with] the joy of overcoming the law of the herd’ (1993a), where people are fully engaged and not separated, replaced by, or turned into, commodities, is *liberating*: festival ‘as resistance and as uprising, perhaps in a single form, in a single hour of pleasure [is] the very meaning or deep inner structure of our autonomy’ (1994b).¹¹

¹⁰ ‘Eroticism’, which can be physical, emotional or religious, refers to ‘a heightened experience which transgresses the self, wipes away the discontinuities that separate individuals, and accomplishes a temporary fusion of selves’ (Mellor and Shilling 1997:182).

¹¹ The founder of Burning Man, Larry Harvey, is a notable TAZ/Immediatist engineer. For Harvey:

modern society discourages active participation and encourages us to be passive consumers ... [W]e don’t participate in culture, we consume it. We live together in isolated stalls. The context of community, the vital interplay of human beings, has been forgotten. What we consume has no inherent meaning or transcendent value to us. It is no surprise we thirst for thrills. Consumption doesn’t lead to satisfaction, only more consumption. If we’re to break this cycle, we must somehow reclaim community and create culture out of that experience. (cited in Wray 1995)

As an immediate domain, ConFest is a *return* to ‘archaic grotesque’, to the natural ‘body of the people’. There, otherwise hidden, closed off and commodified, ‘the feral body’ is uncovered and celebrated. ‘*Puissance*’, or perhaps more astutely, ‘radical conviviality’, transpires in the heat of spontaneous fire circles, conferences, ‘funshops’ and conspiratorial conclaves. In this contemporary hub of clandestinity, there is a collective sense of ‘going back’, exuviating layers of cognition, ‘getting out of the head and into the heart’. As participants drop their defences and become mutable, shed finite personas and go grotesque, lose their selves and gain the world, this is a centre of ‘sensual solidarity’ - indeed, a most corporeal *communitas*.

Part II: Two ‘Tribes’?

‘Tribalism’ has some history in the ACM. The ‘tribe’ was presupposed in the thought and practice of 1960s and ‘70s counter-culture, as communards, like Gary Snyder, romanticised indigenous cultures as socially, morally and ecologically sound.¹² This was observable at Aquarius where it was also figured that similar ‘histories of oppression’ experienced by hippies and Aborigines warranted their ‘kinship’ (cf. Newton 1988:59),¹³ and where assumed mutuality resulted in alternates formulating ‘tribal rituals’ or ‘corroborees’ of their own.¹⁴ As Newton notes, such ‘kinship’ exposes basic naivety in alternate networks as, for instance, ‘tribalism’ at Aquarius was associated with the liberation of the kinds of social restrictions that are basic to ‘tribal societies’. ‘Traditional’ tribes possess status hierarchies, structural inequity exists between gender and age groups, and there are ‘taboos and fears surrounding the natural functions of the body’. The ascribed status of individuals in such societies contrasts to that which has been sought and achieved within counter cultures (and indeed within ConFest), where personal freedoms are fundamental (ibid:61).

¹² It is, likewise, a designation employed by new travellers (Hetherington 1993:152) and dance collectives.

¹³ The organisers of Aquarius actively promoted the concept of ‘the tribe’. Not only had they urged participants to organise themselves into ‘tribes’ to construct their own shelters, share food and be collectively responsible for the environment, ‘inter-tribal’ communication was stressed (James 1973:951).

¹⁴ The original Mullumbimbi community, from which the support base for Aquarius was provided, was described as ‘a white corroboree, the first meeting of the Mullumbimbi tribe’ (Jiggins 1983:3, in Newton 1988:61). The Homeland Festival, held annually at The Sanctuary in the Thora Valley NSW, has also been described as ‘a New Corroboree’ (from Oct 1989 festival poster).

Nevertheless, such idealised veneration of 'tribal life' is infused in the ConFest imagination. According to Cockatoo, ConFest is a 'celebration of tribal archetypes, with multiple options for expressing it'. As for Les:

ConFest is tribal in the sense of a closeness - a return, as the name says, down to earth. Some of the best aspects of the indigenous way of life are present at ConFest. It is tribal also in the sense of a respect for the Earth and the whole notion of nurturing everything.

Explicit here is the aspect of *return* - imaginative restoration to a desirable form of social organisation. As Lorikeet claims, 'we've lost the structure of a tribe in our society - what we're doing here in essence is trying to reform a tribal structure over a week'. For David Cruise, to become 'tribal' conveys a sense of belonging:

I've never experienced tribal life other than ConFest ... If we take tribalness to mean belonging ... entitlement ... then this is part of the personal journey of ConFest ... of getting to the point where you can lock into the tribal process of being a human ... ConFest is just a big tribal gathering.

Yet, it is discernible that the concept of 'tribe' is duplicitous as it conveys *two principal senses of belonging*. While some use 'tribe' to refer to a sense of all inclusive sociation (homogeneity), others use 'tribe' to denote multiple groupings (heterogeneity). I turn now to treat these respectively.

Coming Home: the ConFest Family

Some use 'tribe' inclusively to confer the idea of an emerging sense of extended kinship, such that all participants are members of 'the ConFest family', that the site is a place where one can merge with 'kindred spirits' or 'fellow travellers' (Schmidt 1983:9), or further, that - according to Katunga - 'we are all members of one Earth Tribe'. The sentiment is conveyed in the adage printed on the cover of *DTE* 90 (Nov 1996): 'In Freedom We Are One Tribe'. The extension of affinal ties therefore becomes almost limitless - a notion of expanding familihood that is inscribed in DTENEA's 'All One Family' gatherings. Such an extension demonstrates an implicit challenge to the nuclear family, which, if we recall the 'counterculture', had become an obstacle, 'restricting opportunities for the development of more personal and richer relationships with a variety of others' (Newton 1988:59). ConFest is then a gathering for anyone 'who is into connecting with the real family'. Cheryl points out that this is not necessarily your biological family, 'it's a family of the people who support you to be yourself, support you

to challenge your beliefs and fears'. And, the breaking down of barriers implied here is known to generate 'a feeling of belonging which was so unforced, so imperceptible, that I didn't notice it till it (or I) was gone' (Justine).

It is thus a most *familiar* environment. Michael intimates this in reference to his first ConFest: 'it was just like coming home ... It was all my friends in one place'. Indeed, as Cedar imparts, 'a lot of people feel like it's their home, that they are coming home when they come to ConFest, and that they are leaving home when they leave'. Paralleling the experience of the *Carnaval* participant, for the ConFester, it is likely that 'the whole world around him is turned into his house' (Da Matta 1984:238). And the domestication of public space, this licensed extension of the private sphere, sanctions, amongst other intimate behaviours, 'clothing optional' pursuits.

It is worth drawing attention to one of Turner's comparative insights at this point. In both counterculture and in tribal ritual, Turner thought sexual rules and the laws and vows of marriage may be 'liquidated' in two ways: they may be replaced by a kind of 'primitive promiscuity' or 'group marriage', or routine sexual behaviour may be prohibited, suppressed or altered by an extension of the sibling bond giving over to temporary abstinence or celibacy (1974:246). Newton (1988) argues that the Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration approximated the latter route. Contemporary sensitive attitudes and awareness of AIDS and other STDs increases the likelihood of abstinence or monogamy at such events. Though, I am uncertain as to whether ConFest 'sets asexual rules ... and greatly increases the number of people deemed to be within an incest taboo relationship' (Newton 1988:63),¹⁵ it at least seems probable that increased public nudity and tactility - the *familiarity* associated with the extension of the private sphere - correspond with a reduction in the occurrence of sexual harassment and abuse. Permitted carnality and sexual harassment seem to be inversely related.

Going Neo-Tribal: the Village People

Others stress heterogeneity. According to Saiga, if 'tribe' connotes singularity, sameness, then ConFest is the 'opposite of tribal [as] it's a coming together of many cultures'. It is thus a convergence of diverse solidary and orgiastic orientations, a

¹⁵ For one thing, incidences of sexual harassment have not been unknown at ConFest. According to Anthony, the lingering 'free sex' perspectives of the sixties are partially responsible for abuses, including the (alleged) rape of a fifteen year old girl on New Year's Eve at Birdlands (an incident achieving notoriety at a candle light vigil on the evening of January 1st). And, he

circumstance Condoroo refers to when he suggests 'the village system promotes a sense of group identification'. *Food Not Bombs, Forest, Pt'chang, Spiral, Tek Know, The Grove* and *Ananda Marga*, for example, attract those connected to networks external to ConFest. The topography then accommodates cohabiting groups, each with a nucleus of identifiable, sometimes conflictual, attitudes, beliefs and rites - a unique neighbourhood of alternate 'neo-tribes', a spontaneous counter-world of TAZs, or even 'minor jihad'.

These groups can then be conceived as band-like or 'tribal' in the Maffesolian sense of dispersed micro-groups, possessing a distinct system of values and ethics. By contrast to the relative fixity and longevity of pre-modern or 'traditional' tribes, postmodern or 'neo-tribes' are temporary, internally diverse, unstable, and organised to fulfil the desire to *be together*. For Maffesoli, neo-tribes reflect a populist movement tending toward rediscovering 'mutual aid, conviviality, commensality [and] professional support' (1996:69). They are 'less disposed to master the world, nature and society than collectively to achieve societies founded above all on quality of life' (ibid:62).

It is clearly the case that ConFest is attractive to the disaffected who search for security and meaning in 'elective centres' (Cohen et al. 1987), becoming affiliates of precarious but affectual tribal or *Bund*-like forms of sociation (Hetherington 1994). To maintain their self-identity and internal cohesion, these neo-tribes often engage in subterfuge, are tactically duplicitous, or remain aloof (Maffesoli 1996:96). However, neo-tribes gravitating to and forming at ConFest are characteristically alternate (perhaps *counter-tribes*). While some are characteristically hedonist, others (including eco-tribes like GECCO) display the kind of political strategies ostensibly foundering in 'the time of the tribes'. This environ, then, incubates a heteroglossia of alternate lifestyle tribes: feral, pagan, anarchist, queer, New Ager, Margy, raver, bkie, itinerant trader etc. Such tribes, ephemeral and tragic, practise the 'forbidden', and the secret aesthetic and ideals that their members share is felt to be non-replicable, resisting imposition. Such is the internal resolve of 'underground centrality', one example of which I now discuss.

Tek Know Trance Dance

A proximate festive node, Trance Dance is a unique 'rave-derived' (Luckman 1998:45) assemblage - a convergence of varying collectives and 'posses' (Clark 1992:70). Trance

adds, 'it's not just local yobbos that come in and create the problems, it's [also] New Age hippies [who] exploit each other'.

Dance typically utilises the ambient, psychedelic (or 'psy-trance') edge of techno music, a style of digitally enhanced aural sculpture with an hypnotically persistent beat.

Attracting bohemians and activists alike, participants are united by their opposition to the parent culture.¹⁶ Located at the edge of 'the movement of the dancefloor' (Jordan 1995:125), ConFest Trance Dance is remote from the excessive commercialisation that characterises techno, and the style restrictions and exclusivity of 'club culture' or 'clubbing' (Thornton 1995; Malbon 1998). If there is a *haute couture*, it is detectably anticonsumerist. Yet, this is not to suggest that display is unconsidered, for participants ascribe to the most sartorially insane body-rigs and outlandish adornments (often using fluoro colours, wigs, face paint, layered leggings and trousers fashioned from the most ridiculously juxtaposed fabrics and colours), bad-taste artefacts and insurgent t-shirt slogans (like 'ungovernable entity'). Deploying a manifestly 'retro' style, these bricoleurs display a nostalgia for a panoply of past youth cultures (e.g. hippy and punk) with the homological conveyance of a neo-sixties ethos foremost.

Despite this conspicuous display, the Trance Dance floor is a space where participants can dissolve into the body - one's own, and that of others. One can be induced into an ecstasy of selflessness *and* feel profoundly connected to those who are on the same 'track', who share the experience. Surrendering to the music (and other effects such as the lights, smoke, installations) occasions the dissolution of ego, or the disassemblage of otherwise requisite egoic proclivities among dancers. In this 'democratic dance movement' (Richard and Kruger 1998:167), where 'the body moves beyond the spectacle of "the pose"' (Melechi 1993:33), where the penchant for 'whole body vibrations ... allow no hierarchising or privileging of any given body part' (Gore 1997:64), and where females are infrequently constituted as dancing subjects by the male gaze, a quality of safe anonymity is experienced (although New Years Eve's high 'yob' count jeopardises this). And, in sharing such an experience, an intimate fellowship is potentiated between dancers whereby standard markers of separation based on gender, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, become insignificant. Being 'alone together' (Moore 1995:207) is an appropriate expression for the experience. The phrase signifies the unique 'passional logic' of Trance Dance - where participants *share* the experience of 'emigrating inwards' (Goffman in

¹⁶ Participants are often *habitués* of alternative dance venues - disused industrial spaces such as Global Village in Footscray, outdoor dance festivals such as earthcore, and protest events like Reclaim the Streets, Earth Dance (a global benefit dance for Tibet) and Goongerah Forest festivals.

Malbon 1998:275), each desiring the intercorporeal¹⁷ estate of the dance floor and the inviolable 'space' it offers them.

This dissolution into a temporary trance-community is implicit in Krusty's *Rainbow Dreaming* promotion. In a workshop envisioning revived Trance Dance, initiates would join together as one new tribe: 'The Rainbow Tribe': 'all colours, all races, all as one'. This was an inclusive Dionysian 'ritual of disappearance' wherein, as Melechi (1993:37) narrates, one can 'disaccumulate culture' and 'hide from the spectre of a former self'. In this 'wild revolution' of 'escape' from self identity, 'nobody is, but everybody belongs' (ibid). As participants merge into a collective body, they approximate Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body without Organs' (Jordan 1995:125). Yet this wider 'body' is not, as Pini (1997:124-5) suggests, just a collection of human bodies, but a 'mind/body/technology assemblage'. With the use of smoke, strobe-lights, slides, Mutoid Waste Co. fire sculptures and industrial waste art installations, an instance of 'an erosion of the limits between the corporeal and the technological' is realised. Where 'cyborgians' enjoy 'an ongoing inducement into a desubjectified state of something like rapture ... a communal state of euphoria' (Jordan 1995:129), the Trance Dance TAZ can be envisioned as a 'deterritorialising' assemblage, and therefore testament to the unlimited and unblocked productivity of desire.

Trance Dance is a typically non-verbal experience - though ambient 'chill spaces' are usually provided for low level conversation. Consciousness altering drugs, ecstasy and acid, are often used to enhance the experience. An 'entactogenic', ecstasy heightens sensory awareness, yet the shared intensity of the dance floor already conditions empathy between co-trancers. Acid often produces auditory and visual hallucinations that amplify the sensory stimuli of the assemblage. Drug use, however, is not compulsory. Quenda, for instance, says she doesn't 'go tripping' to 'trance out' these days: 'usually there's heaps of people just out there and I can just vibe on and start tripping more than they are and I'm not doing it to my body ... I like to mingle around the crowd like a bit of a spideress and just bring everybody all into that motion'.

Quenda's remark also touches on the broad safety margins and permissive parameters of this 'rave-derived' experience, and the possibilities it holds for 'unfixing identity categories' (Pini 1997:126), for safely exploring alternate identities (such as androgyny, mythical characters or personal 'totems') or even non-identities. For this is a highly charged exploratory zone of sometimes grotesque embodiment. By comparison with the

¹⁷ Part of Merleau Ponty's non-dualistic ontology, this is a term used to describe the embodied intersubjectivity characterising human being-in-the-world.

predatory sexuality associated with disco, Trance Dance can be said to leave participants 'suspended between ascension and climax, between childhood and adulthood' (Tomlinson 1998:201). The rave-associated component of regression is apparent - that is, with an abundance of fluffy toys, and even pacifier sucking, a temporary idyll approximating that of childhood is achieved. Though the experience may approximate what McRobbie calls the 'pre-sexual' and 'pre-oedipal' playground of raves (1993:419), since 'virtual' sex characterises these 'plateaux of intensity' (Gore 1997:62),¹⁸ it is perhaps more accurate to refer to the 'tacit sexuality' of the experience replacing sexual contact (Tomlinson 1998:201).¹⁹

The Organic Network and Nomadism

Tek Know is just one tribal node in the counterscape. But the question remains: is ConFest one tribe or a cluster of many? Its spontaneous vitality, or '*puissance*', nourishing the nuclei of relatively autonomous cells is evocative of both, since, in this organic 'protoplasmic' zone (an example of Maffesolian de-individualised society in miniature) the ConFest '*tribus*' of villages constitutes 'both an undifferentiated mass and highly diversified polarities' (Maffesoli 1996:88).²⁰ In describing something of this, it will be useful to outline ConFest's necessary interdependence of part (tribes) and whole (mass), and the distinctive inter-tribal membership.

Various spaces, organs and cultures of sentiment are interlaced forming the 'ambient' mass that is ConFest. The ConFest Committee and its several subcommittees, the key event zones and villages are inter-reliant. The successful operation of the festival, and the realisation of communality often deemed 'the ConFest Spirit' depend upon this delicate alignment.

Performing a subtle 'governing' role, the ConFest Committee facilitates the distribution of resources to multiple tribes and sites. Consisting of various impermanent

¹⁸ According to Richard and Kruger (1998:168-9):

[T]his culture transforms eroticism into a dance style, sexuality is expressed in ritual form. The dance itself becomes a form of sexual intercourse where beats and rhythms imitate different stages of orgasm. The dancers experience virtual sex on the dance floor, releasing their sexual tension through ecstatic shouts.

¹⁹ Thus, stories of aggression, homophobia and sexual harassment are rare.

²⁰ Maffesoli refutes claims that contemporary society is experiencing rampant individualism and/or undergoing an homogenised massification. Neither is the case since society is 'built on a fundamental paradox: the constant interplay between the growing massification and the development of micro-groups' (1996:6). 'All social life', he argues, is organised by a 'mass-tribe dialectic ... naturally inducing adherence and distance, attraction and repulsion' (ibid:127).

subcommittees or satellite crews, the Committee enables basic infrastructural amenities, including the provision of food and cooking facilities to some village based kitchen communal-network centres (see Maps). These ‘services’ effectively reward and encourage volunteers to perform roles for the community. Via the ConFest Committee, DTE reproduces a local ‘de-individualising’ *puissance*. There is thus an implicit reciprocal relationship between part (tribe) and whole (community ‘ambience’). Performing site work (e.g. separating garbage for recycling, Pt’chang peacekeeping, Front Gate duties, digging toilet pits) is a means by which individuals or groups - subcommittees, crews, villages (‘diversified polarities’) - become attached to the community (the ‘undifferentiated mass’). Taking ‘the co-operative path’, individuals, often strangers to one another, share responsibilities (such as child minding, waste management, community safety and hygiene, healing and first aid) and provide free education (workshops). While some volunteers may strive for or seek to maintain ‘true worker status’ - the acme of DTE elitism and source of differentiation - most volunteers are satisfied with little more than their ownership of an equal share in the community: they ‘work’ for ConFest. A profound sense of satisfaction and belonging is derived from the collective effort required to ‘pull off’ a festival.

In addition to the essential tension of part and whole, the event encourages cross-membership, a promiscuous inter-village fluidity (or a poly-centredness), which is what Maffesoli has in mind with the ‘network’ (1996:145): a ‘unicity’ or matrix in which individuals have multiple sites of belonging. The contemporary topography promotes such networking by inviting people to wander, to be peripatetic. Village distribution permits participants to ‘go through a little gap to another zone which has its own ethic, or thoughts or process’ (David Cruise). With this arrangement, they are constantly straying into unfamiliar territory. Furthermore, such *nomadism* may activate one’s connection to numerous locales of intimacy and a multiplicity of overlapping identity clusters. One participant may become involved, for example, in the ConFest Committee, Pt’chang, the Front Gate, Spontaneous Choir, *Spiral* and *Tek Know*, and/or may oscillate between the lifestyle nodes of the ‘diversionary’ bohemian, ‘experimentalist’ workshopper and ‘existential’ volunteer; between ‘tourist’ and ‘local’. Traversing the paths between such ‘polycentric nebulae’ (Maffesoli 1996:152), quite literally a network of networks, an individual may acquire numerous identifications and roles.

Being Together: the ConFest Spirit(uality)

Together, these elements (organic interdependence and nomadism) constitute the *being together* encountered at ConFest, a feeling captured by Corella. She writes:

I often say during a ConFest 'Oh God, *Never Again*'. It's all too much, too raw - too young, too juvenile. But I usually return. It's my one experience in the year when I can take off the mask of persona, let down my hair, get real dirty, rub shoulders with all age groups and all socio levels. A sort of melange of common denominator humanity.

The 'contact' - as opposed to 'contract' - community (Shields 1992:110) redolent in the sensate anonymity of the mud pit, uncovered body painting, Trance Dance and other communions, provides a patent rendering of Bakhtin's 'carnival spirit' wherein members of the crowd, archetypal liminaries - human *prima materia* - become 'an indissoluble part of the collectivity' (Bakhtin 1968:255). In this 'second world', 'free, familiar contacts [are] deeply felt and formed ... [as people are] reborn for new, purely human relations' (ibid:10).

Ostensibly opposed to closed, intolerant attitudes, DTE propagates the celebration of open sociality, an ethos of universal acceptance condensed in a bannered slogan 'strangers are friends you have not yet met'.²¹ This openness is also deemed to be indicative of 'the ConFest Spirit', 'the spirit of people leaving judgement behind, opening their arms and their hearts and embracing and welcoming connections with other people ... challenging [their] fears, [and] belief systems' (Cheryl). The 'Spirit' had its genesis in 1976 at Cotter after which it was given expression in the original 'manifesto':

We have in a few, short days, broken through into a consciousness that is so powerful in its newness that it is, as yet, difficult to describe ... The Down to Earth Movement has found, here at the Cotter River, that we can live in wholeness, in harmony with ourselves, the Earth and all around us. This sharing has shown us to be so diverse, and from so many walks of life, that we are obviously not an alternative but the possessors of a new and greater consciousness of human potential ... We are the seeds of change that will ultimately transform mankind. (*DTE Community News* 1977, no 1:1)

Such a unifying, vision inducing experience, is an apposite example of 'spontaneous communitas'. According to Rawlins (1982:30), seven thousand people walked around naked at the height of the festival. He was enraptured by:

the creation of extended families as single-parents joined with others of the same or opposite gender, homosexual and heterosexual often joining together;

²¹ The slogan echoes 'Everyone's your mate in Albion Free State', an early free festival motto (McKay 1996:156), and one new traveller's incentive for a life on the road: 'It's the thought of the thousands of friends I haven't met yet' (Stone 1996:153).

and [by spontaneous] meetings, the wonderful life-enriching joy of knowing one could go up and embrace anyone regardless of gender. (Rawlins 1982:31)

At one point there were about 1,000 naked people in the water, and Jim Cairns recounted to me that even the police 'in one or two cases, went in with them [and] put their uniforms on afterwards'. The experience, which Rawlins favourably compared to 'Eden', amounted to something akin to the Roman Saturnalia: 'a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon the earth' (Bakhtin 1968:8).

After more than twenty years of events, 'the ConFest Spirit' continues to manifest in a zone which, according to Svendsen (1999:39) - who likens ConFest to India's Khumb-Mela (the world's largest gathering of Hindu ascetics) - has become 'the pre-eminent Spiritual Convergence in Australia, if not the Western World'; a zone where social divisions (based on role, status, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age) are variously suspended. The associated numinosity is perennial. Following Moama II, for example, one novice wrote:

[U]pon dropping my scepticism like an old skin I had outgrown, I entered a new space ... I was overcome with emotion ... I passed through the eye of a needle into a blossoming new reality, a lucid dreaming in bliss. With that came an increasing lightness of heart which allowed my eyes to witness a living miracle on a grand scale ... I was witnessing the grounding of earth of the heavenly fourth dimension, the descending of the era of the new paradigm, city of the new Jerusalem ... I was witnessing miracles. (Andrew Elksin 1995:9)

Other pilgrim-novitiates may encounter a quality of experience which Cohen (1992:55) implies is desirable in 'elective centres': a 'sensation of timelessness-in-time, an eternal now, a dissolution of the structure of time [which is also] characteristic of the experience of liminality'. Therefore:

there was nothing to mark time but the passage of the sun and the ritual morning swim - after several days the thought of returning to the world I had left with the incessant regimes of time and timekeeping, appointments and schedules seemed appalling ... I felt like I had discovered the right way to live, timeless, among this calm, and welcoming community. (Simon K)

Yet another ecstatic novice considered Guilmartens I to be:

THE greatest experience of my life! ... I learnt that society is not solely consistent of superficial ... commodities and that there are genuine people in this world ... ConFest has taught me that the material world counts for very little (something that I always knew but had never truly believed until it was put into practise) and that emphasis on the internal spirit and beliefs are what

fashions a good person ... [M]y faith in the 'Human Spirit' has been restored through the countless acts of genuine kindness and humanity I was witness to. (Katya)

Alluding to a sense of transformation underlying this 'being together', perhaps Laurie's first impressions come even closer:

People come into ConFest at the level of the groin, the animal sexual level, searching for a fuck, friendship, a companion. After two or three days, as the natural human comes out and they go up from the groin, they come out at the level of the eyes and you get a lot of people unafraid to look back at you and not fearing the consequences of simply saying 'hello'. And so after two or three days, to me, the magic comes out. And everywhere you look you see postures, you see ... little magic cameos, you see archetypal conversations ... [people] being in connection with something different from the normal regular mode that we operate in.

Further participant commentary confirms ConFest's status as a periodical communitas/autonomous zone. According to Wendy, the:

greatest healing done at the Confest was the opportunity to drop all those mainstream facades and communicate with each other from the heart. Walking around naked to the world without having to justify or classify - sharing and communing openly and environmentally, finding strength in the networks created. (Wendy 1984)

Many enjoy the event's immediate sensuousity, its momentary potential to purify, redefine and revitalise. It thus acts as 'a recharge ... before re-entering the struggle forward' (Possum), and as a 'beautiful networking space, [it] recharge[s] the battery to withstand the next onslaught of society/reality!' (Emu). Reporting on Glenlyon III, an earlier commentator claimed the 'atmosphere anointed me with its healing balm, and I came away three days later feeling mellowed and refreshed. I wish we could bottle it and sip it all year round' (Jaye 1986). For Ariel, as one great workshop, ConFest enhances your 'spiritual insight': 'When you leave ConFest, you have something in your soul that wasn't there when you arrived. You take it with you back to reality. And *that* makes a difference'. While the tenor of these comments resonates the conservative 'release valve' interpretation of carnival, others envision a utopic modelling. ConFest, therefore, 'renews the spirit for people who feel oppressed by the conventions and values of the "straight" world, and perhaps can act as a mould for what a community can be like' (Boobiialla). Les is even more affirmational in regard to the potential of 'the ConFest Spirit', for it is:

one of the most powerful, useful forces on earth ... part of a global model for building wellbeing that is not utopian but is based on practical action. Unique in the world, it is a context for possibilities.

At each ConFest there develops a strong affinity between those participating in a host of 'grotesque symposiums', between those sharing the experiences of feasting (including beach potlatches and workers kitchens), mud bathing, firewalking, dancing (Trance or otherwise), sweat lodging, workshopping, market place rendezvous, volunteering - *ConFesting*. Playful, sometimes erotic, coalitions engender feelings of profound continuity. There is a sense of wild, collective anonymity associated with mud bathing, dancing and other nocturnal orgiasms. In the ConFest crowd 'the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself ... [as] the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community' (Bakhtin 1968:255). They quite literally come 'down to earth' (ibid:20).²²

Boundary Contests

Though this 'contact community' may accommodate diversity and even unify disparate elements, ConFest is not free from division and discord. Despite the co-dependent ambience, external differences and internal distinctions are transparent. The perception that 'strangers are friends you have not yet met' may be somewhat consistent with the ideology of the 'authentically social' promoted to maintain successful tourist destinations (Selwyn 1996:21). The reality is that ConFest is a contested community. In this section, I seek to demonstrate that: (1) ConFest exercises 'boundary maintenance' and thereby activates localised exclusion strategies, and; (2) its boundaries are subject to dispute. While the first point will be addressed through a discussion of the community's reaction to several perceived threats, the second will be advanced via the circumscription of one specific theatre of intra-community conflict.

Counter-Community Under Threat

²² Such experiences occasion permanent bonding. Despite the absence of strict controls, the process is not unlike that observable in such diverse phenomena as Ndembu circumcision rites and the army (Turner 1972:215-16). Referring to both boys undergoing lengthy initiation rites and army recruits, Turner points out that 'no longer were they grandsons, sons, nephews, but simply anonymous novices ... [who] looked upon each other as equals, each an integral person rather than a social persona segmentalized into a series and a set of structural roles and statuses'. Among the Ndembu, '[f]riendships made in these circumstances of liminal seclusion sometimes lasted throughout life'.

Communities are known to rely upon an 'other', the ongoing definition of which ensures self-identity. It has long been observed that a community's distinct identity is reproduced via forms of 'boundary maintenance' (Cohen 1985), and by excluding that which is believed to threaten its identity. According to Bauman, this demonstrates the dangerous dimensions of communities:

Because of inbuilt uncertainty ... a community lives under the condition of constant anxiety and thus shows a sinister but thinly masked tendency to aggression and intolerance ... [It is] therefore, bound to remain endemically precarious and hence bellicose and intolerant, neurotic about matters of security and paranoid about hostility and ill intentions of environment. (Bauman in Evans 1997:238)

Strategies, such as isolating and excluding 'foreign' elements, and concentrated enmity, generate and maintain a community consciousness - an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983).

Within DTE's ConFest Committee, there is a preoccupation with identifying, containing and/or expelling potential dangers (symbolic and physical) believed to violate the 'Spirit' of ConFest, or otherwise threaten its virtue or sacrality. Those reacting to perceived threats often warn of the denudation of 'traditions' that such incursions may occasion. The community must be protected from the threat of the 'mainstream'. Many threats are seen to be associated with the festival atmosphere of the summer event. Thus, for Sparrow, ConFest is at a 'turning point'. It risks being 'swallowed up by the mainstream and essentially lose its essence' unless 'a drastic change and step away from this party that its turning into at New Year's Eve is made'. Otherwise, the people who are 'the heart of ConFest ... the gypsies, the ferals ... the people who actually live an alternative lifestyle 24 hours a day, every day of the year, will be less inclined to come'.

For Ranji, ConFest used to be like an 'ashram', a 'refuge'.

I used to go to the ConFest and it was like ... a sort of a spiritual holiday. Then I would have to go back into town where all the shit was happening, and it was very hard to adjust, and I could get depressed, 'cause the difference was so pronounced. [But today] the difference isn't so pronounced. Some people really lament that.

Others, such as Lorikeet, bemoan the presence of vast numbers of recreational and diversionary 'tourists' who come 'for a holiday', to consume, rather than commit to a 'tribe'. He observes the incessant movement of people on the paths, 'always moving as if they're looking for something that is really gonna [reward] them ... [They're] like speed freaks, always going somewhere and never getting there'. Ranji regards today's ConFest

as an ailing microcosm of society: it has become ‘a little bit like Torquay or Lorne on a New Year’s Eve ... People come away from the cities ... and find that they’ve still got to deal with the problems that they have with society’. Indeed, according to Wirilda, ‘pollutions of the dominant culture/mind set infiltrate [and] ... sexism and addictions riddle ConFest polluting it like the piles of VB cans at the bases of trees’. Therefore ConFest’s distinct status as a *counter*-community is perceived to be under threat.

There are four basic threats.

1. *Space invaders*.

There is a general concern with the presence and proximity of spectating ‘strangers’, ‘outlaws’ or ‘parasites’.²³ As George had it, these days ‘we just don’t know who’s coming’. At Birdlands, according to a *TAZ-Cyber* emailer, ‘the ratio of yobbos to friendly people [was] too high’. Such commentary reveals that the totalised rendering of the event’s capacity to deliquesce ‘us’/‘them’ or ‘self’/‘other’ distinctions, is perhaps rather romantic, even illusory. At the Moama events, which transpired on public riverways, ‘yobs’ (‘rednecks’, ‘petrol heads’, and ‘river hoons’) stormed the Murray beach-head in flotillas of canoes, dinghies and high powered boats (with monikers like ‘hooters’, ‘hard on’, ‘krak-a-fat’ and ‘mongrel’).²⁴ Often young local males, these voyeurs and loiterers (a kind of yobbo *flâneur*) intoxicated on alcohol *and* the licentious atmosphere, are attracted by the prospect of observing a wild menagerie of abject ferals, or perhaps even a lewd exhibition of ‘tits and bums’.²⁵ Buoyed by expectations of prelapsarian sexuality, of polymorphous perversity, many of these ‘foreign bodies’ experience ConFest as a terrestrial paradise, a ‘fantasy island’. The fantasy of being a castaway, remote from ‘civilisation’ and its inhibitions, is exaggerated by the sounds of distant drumming and the sight of ‘primitive’ mud people. And, much like ‘fantasy islands’, the event is often regarded by such castaways with a mixture of fascination and revulsion (Woods 1995).

This circumstance has occasioned a series of bizarre and sometimes unsettling incidents between ConFesters and interlopers. There have been many reports of groups of ‘other’ males ‘fishing’ close to shore, late night spotlights and gate runners. At Moama III, in a

²³ Lewis and Dowsey-Magog (1993:205-6) use ‘outlaw’ to describe the disruptive groups of drunken youths, ‘with their baseball caps, baggy shorts, and American sneakers’, who rampage about Maleny on New Year’s Eve.

²⁴ Fatalities are associated with invasions. In recent years, two local males, both drunk, have died in separate incidents as they attempted to enter ConFest. One drowned in the Murray (at Moama II), and the other died from head injuries at Gum Lodge (Easter 1998) in a motor vehicle accident near The Gate.

rather dangerous manifestation of ‘pelting’,²⁶ dozens of frozen oranges were launched from a home made ‘canon’ set up on the Victorian bank of the Murray. In regular incidences of *offense*-ive disrobement, buttocks and genitals are exposed from the river’s opposite bank and from passing speed boats. In a counter-offensive, Kokako recalls how participants at Moama I decommissioned a paddle steamer, that, full of passengers, had navigated up to view ‘the nudist camp’ every day:

One fella ... he got about fifty or sixty people in a row and as the paddle steamer went passed they all dropped their drawers and turned ‘round and brown-eyed them. [We] didn’t see the paddle steamer again.

Another species of ‘space invader’ are the ‘bludgers’ who stay on-site after the final day of the event. These are participants who have not achieved ‘worker’ status. As one perceptive ConFester wrote, a successful way ‘of generating surface camaraderie and familial communion is for a group of people to have a scapegoating “other”, which they can all loath & resent’ (Svendsen 1999:62). A manufactured ‘other’ himself, Kurt Svendsen points out that the active devalorisation of post-ConFest participants as ‘bums’, ‘bludgers’ and ‘parasites’, serves the purpose of galvanising internal solidarity.

2. *Substance Abuse*

A growing incidence of the abuse of mind altering substances, particularly alcohol (but also acid and ecstasy),²⁷ is a source of anxiety. Indicating that the consummate ConFester is located at a distant remove from Australia’s risk-taking ‘real man’ celebrated in events such as the Darwin Beercan Regatta (Mewett 1988), DTE is alarmed by the growing presence of the alcohol abusing male. According to Prion, ‘for many people, “the ConFest Spirit” is ... vodka and scotch’. On this matter he maintains:

women are really outspoken, because alcohol just doesn’t support the women at all. It’s just abuse and we don’t need it, like people can go and get pissed anywhere. It’s very rare these days where people can come to a place ... and celebrate, dance and do all sorts of amazing things without the presence of alcohol or drugs ... I see ConFest heading in that direction.

²⁵ Some, however, argue that, since ‘yobs’ have the most to gain from such an experience, and that there are obvious signs of behaviour modification, they are more than welcome.

²⁶ Traditionally a permitted transgression for youth on such occasions, ‘pelting’ refers to the hurling of excrement, ashes and dirt in European Carnivals of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, or of flour, dirt and confetti in nineteenth century Mardi Gras (Shrum and Kilburn 1996:427).

²⁷ For most participants, marijuana or ‘dope’ is regarded as a benevolent narcotic. Favourable attitudes to cannabis are reinforced by lobby groups like HEMP (Help End Marijuana Prohibition) who promote cannabis as a valuable, flexible, renewable resource.

Birdlands exemplified the way mind alterants are perceived to injure the community. For one *TAZ* emailer: 'I've never known so much booze at a ConFest ... A drunk yobbo woman collapsed and spewed up near us on New Year's and we didn't even feel like helping her'. According to Angela Palmer, alcohol 'attracts negative energy to what was once a spiritual celebration' (letter to DTE). For Ranji, concerned with more illicit substances, 'drug pushing' and use is a little 'out of control':

A lot of young people go to ConFest now. I mean young people are very impressionable ... There's some pretty powerful people that get around and push drugs on to just about anybody. I'm really dead against that. I always was dead against that all my life, even when I was taking drugs myself.

DTE has responded to these defilements by creating a drug and alcohol free zone from Moama IV, an area comprising about a third of the site: 'Get high on the spirit of ConFest' (*DTE News* 91, Dec 1996:3).

DTE has waged its own micro 'campaign against drugs', a process possessing all the characteristics of a witch hunt. A campaign conducted by ill-informed and puritanical elements within DTE saw a Psychedelic Spirituality (or 'conscious tripping') workshop facilitator subject to a host of egregious rumours and accusations (ranging from spiking the *Spiral* water supply with acid to child molesting). The mood was set at Toc III where a 'counter workshop', whose co-convenor had presided over a gnostic celebration of the Eucharist at a previous Easter, took place in response to the visibility of Psychedelic Spirituality. The facilitator of the practical 'conscious tripping' workshop was aligned with the likes of Timothy Leary and denounced for engaging in 'false spiritual teaching'. As one observer remarked: '[q]uite frankly, I felt like I was back in Sunday school, with the next person eager to outdo the last with a description of the devil' (Pipit). Over several years, the same facilitator became a target of the Society's enmity, a scapegoat for the community's fears. His workshops (on Shame Healing) were 'sabotaged' (rubbed off the blackboard) at Toc IV, even though they had nothing to do with psychedelics (Svendsen 1999:61, 85). Kurt Svendsen eventually suffered an irregular banishment from ConFest (*ibid*:73) and was apparently struck off the shareholder's register and mailing list.²⁸

²⁸ According to the victim of this witch hunt, DTE should not forget that ConFest has some foundation in 'Psychedelic Consciousness'. After all, 'the Hippy movement & the endless Summers of Love entered western culture on a wave of psychedelia' (Svendsen 1999:46). Furthermore, 'tripping workshops', he maintains, are 'happening informally all over ConFest, all the time, as friends come together to chat, & share a joint or whatever'. And, these 'workshops' are just one of the 'many languages of sharing at ConFest, the hug, the massage, the joint, the rollie, depending & according to people's lights'. His 'Spiritual Psychedelics'

It is obvious that the two threats above are related. Though many ConFesters put the sentiment of accepting all ‘strangers’ into practice, extolling tolerance as one of ConFest’s principal legacies, and though ‘yobbos’ sometimes metamorphose into regular workshopers and site crew,²⁹ as Cedar remarks, what is really at issue is ‘the question of how much ConFest can carry, because people don’t feel safe any more’. In a space where difference is celebrated, some differences remain intolerable. The following poem captures the mood ranging against the space invading drunk:

Here’s a woman and man
carrying their gear with
a struggle.
Somebody comes up and takes
a load from each of them
& walks behind.

Heres an old man
walking with a stick
carrying a pack upon his
spine, bent over like a half
moon.
Somebody walks up, takes
his weight off
& and walks beside him.

Here’s a young man
in shorts and short hair,
carrying two slabs of beer
in his hard arms.
He keeps resting and swearing.
Nobody helps him. (Lysenko 1996:4)

3. *Unvirtuous Commercialism.*

Some express their contempt for any manifestation of capitalism. However, since the Market is a marginal vending and consumption zone accommodating community and environmental co-operatives dispensing second hand/recycled materials, and trade is sometimes characterised by negotiable prices and price deflation, this is tolerated so far as trading remains ‘virtuous’. ‘Unvirtuous economics’, in the form of rampant overcharging, using disposable containers, and trading ‘exploitative goods’ manufactured in third world

workshops were designed as dignified, ‘consciously experimental’, safe spaces to explore psychedelics (ibid:45).

'sweatshops', is a cause for alarm. There are common complaints about the omnipresence of the 'alternative lifestyle industry' and the availability of ingenuine artefacts located in 'New Age emporiums'. Railing against inauthentic commoditisation and frivolous consumerism associated with the city, David Cruise commented that ConFest risked becoming 'Daimaru³⁰ without the steak and styrene'. At Moama III:

[t]he shopping mall came to ConFest ... under the Sun the Stars and the Trees, we had a full scale replica of a modern shopping town. Complete! Fast food. Trinkets, baubles, bangles and beads. Just the thing for browsing and impulse buying. And to complete the replication, a band playing in the centre to amuse the shoppers. (*DTE* 83 June 1995:5)

4. *Modern Technology.*

Conspicuous signs of mass-produced commodities and techno-industrial sources of pollution are avoided. There are two main sources of anxiety and suspicion. First, cars and other private vehicles are the most visible reminders of modern mass-production, unsustainable energy consumption and obvious sources of pollution. Their on-site presence is contaminatory, an unwelcome intrusion on a pristine environment. Spatial sacralisation is therefore attempted by separating the 'profane' car park from the remainder of the site.³¹ Second, as will be seen below, amplified music is a bane of contention, as it is often believed to be invasive, and, powered by diesel generators, a waste of non-renewable resources. We can see that that which is often regarded as 'inappropriate technology' is founded upon a critique of technologism which itself rests on popular and, as Ross (1992:513) points out, rather dubitable dichotomies: nature:technology, purity:artifice, holism:science.

As I have argued, identifying, containing and even excluding 'foreign' agents, inauthenticities and other sources of anxiety - constructing and patrolling boundaries - are strategies by which the identity of the festive community is maintained *vis-à-vis* the non-ConFest world. Yet, boundary maintenance is a highly contested process - revealing this counter-world to be populated by subject positions widely at odds with one another.

²⁹ Much like the way Rainbow Gatherings have seemingly converted 'A camp' drunks and locals (Niman 1997:183).

³⁰ A huge shopping plaza in Melbourne.

³¹ There was a 'kombi circle' on site at Birdlands consisting of at least three multi-hued kombi vans and a *tipi* which encircled a fire/drumming space. The kombi provides the exception to the rule since, quite simply, it objectifies 'the sixties'. A hippy icon, it triggers 'peace' and 'love'.

Music Wars: the Battle of the 'Bands'

The debates raging over that which constitutes appropriate and authentic ConFest music provide a particularly pertinent case for the event's status as a contested community. Reminiscent of 'the clash of musics' transpiring between Notting Hill Carnival 'traditionalists' (the 'mas' bands) and younger British-Caribbean sound system enthusiasts throughout the 1970s and '80s (Cohen 1993:53), from the late eighties ConFest has been a centre of friction between converging constituents or 'bands' over genre, style and aesthetics of musical performance.

First, there is evidence that professional staged music is perceived to pose a threat to ConFest's folk ethos. The *Music* village has been the principal locus for 'stars' to entertain relatively passive audiences.³² According to critics, this is little more than a transference of 'the pub scene' to the bush, and is seen to compete with genuinely spontaneous music and dance (incorporating a range of indigenous styles and instruments) at spaces like the Fire Circle and *Spiral*. The latter accommodate what Les Spencer calls 'communal music' (1995), where the emphasis, by contrast to 'staged music', is on total participation not the passive witnessing of an entertaining spectacle. A contributor to the former *WA DTE News* called this dissolution of the performer/audience distinction 'the new tribal music':

No one is 'up there'. The musical leadership seems to rotate in an unpredictable way, unconnected with privilege, flattery or special status. To me it's anarchy, primitive communism ... It has to do with mutual respect and affection for all. Its spirit is emotional and cannot be commanded or organised. It may be recorded but no recording can convey the feeling of participation. (Thorell 1980:12)³³

Second, Trance Dance or techno at *Tek Know* (and *Rainbow Dreaming*) has been an even greater locus of antagonism. Reckoned to be a legitimate spiritual path by many,

³² Some criticisms, especially wholesale denunciations, are rather unfair, as the stage locations - formally the *Music* village, then the *Earth Sharing* stage, then the Solar Stage - have accommodated impromptu amateur ensembles of varying description.

³³ The scepticism expressed by members of the ConFest Committee toward the value of staged performance parallels, somewhat, the struggle waged by the Olympic movement (especially Coubertin) against the encroaching 'spectacle'. MacAloon (1984) discusses how, at the Olympics, 'the aggrandising ethos of the spectacle attacks the unities ordered by the festival frame, and the licensing of passive spectatorship contravenes the ritual command that all be *engaged*' (ibid:263). The spectacle is cheap, banal, a mere display trespassing upon the sacred 'transcendental ground' of the 'cult' of Olympism. Yet spectacle, an unforeseen recruiting ground for the intensive generation of 'ultimate concerns', is a triumphant cultural performance deserving further research, particularly as a component of 'neo-liminal' (ibid:269) performances from the Olympic Games to ConFest.

techno-trance's loud repetitive pulse, synthetic alterant and non-renewable energy use, and immediate impact on wildlife, are cited by others to justify exclusion or implement restrictions. While some directors, like Janet - who compares the reaction of older members to the hysterical response to the 'evils' of rock music by parents in the 1950s and '60s - have been supportive ('we cannot discriminate against what the young see as their ritual'), others have been far from sympathetic, even hostile ('I don't like it. I think it's a waste. It's a guru thing ... It has an Apollonian inspiration. It's just fucking horrible. It kills everything around [Laurie]).

I will now provide specific attention to this theatre of conflict.

Deterritorialisation: Slipping Out of the Nets

Through the mid nineties, from its nascent clandestine appearance near the Market at Moama III and its association with the *Labyrinth* at Moama IV, to its more recent outlet at *CIDA* at Gum Lodge I, Trance Dance has been implicated in a running battle of attempted elimination and recalcitrance. It is necessary to outline the sequence of events between 1996-97.

In mid 1996, Krusty attempted to shift the dance party assemblage to the DTE Winter Solstice Gathering. At an RGM prior to the event, however, DTE cancelled that event, with David Cruise arguing that the proposed event's poster - which featured an image of, and reference to, psilocybin ('magic mushrooms') - contradicted DTE and ConFest's 'family' orientation. Laurie, supporting techno's shift to a separate event, laments this decision:

Cruise resisted right down the line, to in the end banning the poster ... But they just wanted an excuse ... completely overreacting. I mean, you'd think better of parents. You'd think better of older people, and particularly people who espouse to be wise and clever.

Thus, 'manning the moral barricades' protecting the community from a new form of space invader, DTE stifled an alternative outlet for techno-trance. This decision eventually backfired when it became apparent that techno-trance would not go away quietly, if at all.

Events came to a head at Moama V when efforts to eliminate Trance Dance necessitated the collaboration of the latter with the MRTC in the *Labyrinth*.³⁴ The *Labyrinth*, however,

³⁴ The collaboration took place as a result of music budget limitations enforced by a small band of DTE techno opponents. Richard drew attention to this process contending that a form of 'generationalism' such as that described in Mark Davis' *Ganglands* (1997), characterises the

was constructed on the site's highest region. Along with time and power excesses, this provided the context for the ensuing 'theatre'. As the doof penetrated the festi-scape from atop the *Labyrinth* hill into late morning of April 1st, Bilby claims he attempted to find the generator and 'stab the beast in its belly'. Another vigilante claims he was convinced that the number of noise complaints justified his actions: driving his car into the *Labyrinth* honking the horn in an effort to drive off with the generator in tow. Commenting on the matter, Laurie suggests he 'was more interested in getting an off knob. And, not just an off knob during the festival to turn them off when they're running late, but an off knob to have them not in the festival at all'.

At Gum Lodge I, *CIDA* was home to the solar powered stage and a New Year Trance Dance event. During the night the battery was damaged by unknown assailants, incapacitating the sound system for an hour. This proved to be a significant affront to those who subscribe to the therapeutic and spiritual qualities of the music and dance, and who interpreted it as an act of aesthetic terrorism carried out by older non-understanding members of the ConFest community - by 'the parent culture' of DTE. For Mardo, claiming 'dance is a very very spiritual thing all through history, and [that] this is just the modern version of a trance', this sabotage justified a 'workshop' conducted by a band of direct activists the following afternoon.³⁵ This 'ritual of resistance' saw a sound system 'fire up' on the beach, a designated 'quite area'.

As the t-shirt design, 'ungovernable entity', encapsulates, attempts to suppress Trance Dance and its clandestine techno-corporeality have been continually resisted by its young adherents. The persistent desire to experiment with Trance Dance has inspired mutations and innovative manifestations. Like reggae sound systems in the Notting Hill Carnival, and subterranean dance parties in the UK, ConFest Trance Dance could be:

way 'a particular class of volunteers, who call themselves "the workers", operate to actively squeeze out the possibility of the Trance Dance workshops' by limiting the village component of the ConFest budget such that funding the Music Stage or Trance Dance becomes unfeasible (Richard, DTE email-group 13/8/98).

³⁵ Curiously, as it is subject to external imposition, Trance Dance becomes a 'ritual of resistance'. This parallels circumstances in Britain wherein state imposition politicised dance parties (Rietveld 1998:255) including the Blackburn warehouse parties of the early nineties which, under sustained police pressure, mutated from 'entertainment' to 'movement' (Hemment 1998:218). Historical precedents are easy to locate. As Stallybrass and White convey (1986:16), since the Renaissance:

carnivals, fairs, popular games and festivals were very swiftly 'politicized' by the very attempt made on the part of local authorities to eliminate them. The dialectic of antagonism frequently turned rituals into resistance at the moment of intervention by the higher powers, even when no overt oppositional element had been present before.

compared to the mythical many-headed Hydra, a creature which captivated and entranced, only to make disappear, all those who beheld it, and which mutated inexorably, by growing new heads, when its protagonists attempted to destroy it. (Gore 1997:51)

Trance Dance, like raving, is a 'deleuzoguattarian' 'desiring machine' (Jordan 1995). The dance is 'rhizomatic', it 'cannot be killed off [since] its stems will inevitably proliferate despite pruning' (Gore 1997:57). Yet, libratory 'deterritorialisation' may take different forms. Thus, adherents have sought to 'disappear' (evade restriction and control), engage in confrontation (e.g. the beach action), and achieve compromise (see 'Magic Happens', below).

The Trouble with Techno(logy)

There have been three combined objections ranged against techno-trance - that it represents a violation on physical, aesthetic and/or moral grounds. Many regard the musical assemblage as physically invasive. They cite the *Labyrinth* drama and beach action as forms of internal colonialism, denounce its organisers as a 'wave of predatory appropriators' (Laurie, DTE email-group 18/10/97), and dismiss them as selfish and deceitful. Thus, despite their 'smooth loving tongue', the 'techno people':

have shown callous disregard for everyone not at their do. It is totally invasive. It is totally at odds with the ConFest Spirit. Have them do their do miles away ... EVERYTHING at ConFest is SUBJECTED to it. I FOR ONE LOATH SUBJUGATION. You can not get away from it. (Les, DTE email-group 14/10/97)

According to David Cruise, while protagonists try to 'convince themselves and everybody else that it's a religious experience, and that it has some religious and spiritual merit', it is little more than an 'intrusion':

It's like smoking. If you smoke indoors, you breathe out and everybody else has to breathe it in. And techno is a very invasive process, 'cause it uses very high power levels of sound, which not everybody finds - if there's a word called discordant ... not many people find it very cordant. And you can't escape it. Particularly on these type of sites, because the low frequencies propagate over the flat areas and they go for miles. So you're stuck with 'voouur voouur voouur' whether you like it or not ... So I find that it's a very arrogant, aggressive, selfish process.

Yet, opponents often couch their objections in the idiom of aesthetics or style. The common view is that techno-trance poses a danger to ConFest's folk or 'earthy' communality. Various assumptions are held about the assemblage's (in)authenticity. In the following comment, techno is seen to be aesthetically misplaced:

The house-like disco at one end of the festival does not have the earth/beat energy that one goes to ConFest for. There are thousands of discos but only one ConFest ... [the 'disco'] greatly disrupts wildlife in a way drums and non-amplified sounds don't do and this seems contrary to a Down to Earth attitude. Also, any pre-recorded music saps the energy from the creativity and life that was so much a part of ConFest. (letter from A. Palmer to DTE)

Of the city, it is thus an urban profanity disrupting the spontaneity of ConFest's rural idyll. Pre-recorded tracks are presumed to compromise the authenticity of 'live' happenings.³⁶ Thus, another emailer laments the dearth of musicians who 'used to wander around various camp sites playing guitars, flutes, penny whistles, singing songs [and] ballads in the QUIET peaceful TRANQUILITY of the evening' (25/8/98). Bilby expresses a profound uncertainty about the technology driving the music:

I'm not entirely sure that I trust the machinery that the trance inducing stuff is coming out of. It seems to me that there is a lot of powerful machinery being used ... It's really alien, and it's really machine driven, and it's ... opposed to a lot of the values that I think we need to be preserving if we've got any chance of continuing existence on this planet. You know, this sounds a bit wild eyed and dramatic, but I don't trust techno. I don't trust it at all.

Indeed complaints about the technology upon which Trance Dance relies are not uncommon. A notable example of the charge of 'inappropriate technology' came in the form of a polemical document distributed prior to Moama IV, after techno-trance secured nearly one third of the village budget for that event. Denouncing techno as yet another form of parasitic, alienating Western technology, Les Spencer (1996) argues that the 'trance' to which the music's producers and consumers lay claim is specious. It is argued, contentiously, that this form of music is 'a-rhythmical' and disharmonic:

Our bodies are organically rhythmical. We respond to cord and withdraw from discord. We like harmony and withdraw from disharmony ... The techno-format is a-rhythmical (absence of rhythm) and discordant, either with or without simple down beat under-rhythm. From a distance this down beat sounds like industrial noise. In techno, up beats are virtually non existent. The

³⁶ An objection paralleling that of rock patrons and aficionados who venerate 'live' musical 'happenings', expressing their contempt for 'disc cultures' (Thornton 1995:8).

up beat is the spiritual. The up beat is for lightness and celebrating. The down beat is grounding. It is also the beat of the war dance. (Spencer 1996:1)

Genuine trance contrasts with this Anglo-European style of electronic and computer generated music, which can only give rise to ersatz trance. While the:

techno-trance process typically involves moving to trance via sensory overload - beyond threshold typically via the a-rhythmic and discordant ... [t]he indigenous trance dance tradition is typically complex rhythmic and poly-rhythmic (multiple variations on a base rhythm). [It is] rarely, perhaps never a-rhythmic and discordant. (Spencer 1996:1-2)

Above all, 'indigenous music' is esteemed because it is not 'amplified, prerecorded, technical and machine made' (ibid:2). Real 'trance', it is suggested, 'can be explored without any power at all. Indigenous and tribal people have been doing it for over 40,000 years' at no cost. And it is spaces like *Spiral* that are perceived to induce authentic trance. At *Spiral*, in a drug, alcohol and generator-free community performance zone featuring a 'medicine wheel' of Native American or Celtic origin, drumming impresarios and skilful rhythm collectives converge to generate hypnotic pulse 'African trance dance style' (Prion), launching dancers into states of ecstasy.³⁷

There, the didj (a form of 'appropriate technology' [Neuenfeldt 1998b:80]) and African drums (such as the *doumbek* - which is often used as an accompaniment to belly dancing) augment the authenticity of an experience, which is ostensibly closer to the 'heart energy' of 'tribal and indigenous' musics (Spencer 1996) than the implied artificiality of sounds produced by electricity and machines. Accordingly, to 'call trance induced by noise bombardment from electronic machines "ancient"' is nonsense' (Les, DTE email-group 27/11/97).

Furthermore, while the authentic 'tribal' musicality at *Spiral* may be seen to enhance community, techno-trance is deemed to have 'little to do with communal bonding during the dance':

[T]he indigenous communal rejoicing trance dance has a preponderance of rhythmical up beats. People move into the dance connected to the community. The community, as community, pulses together in entering and sharing other realms of experiencing and understanding together ... My personal experience of techno trance is profound dissociation from self and from others. It is not for me a 'community building' experience. (Spencer 1996:2)

³⁷ *Laceweb* (from Gum Lodge I), with its 'celebration of play' workshop space, explicitly accommodates drumming, didj and dance along with 'community healing action' (promotion).

Due to invasive sound systems, acid and ecstasy traffic and use, and the apparent hedonism of the raver milieu, some commentators are even prone to rather 'tabloid' outbursts. For instance, frustrated by the way techno has denied him his 'basic human rights' (to sleep, to choose, to be consulted), for one passionate opponent, the techno crew are imagined to employ sinister 'methods' like those used in 'the interrogation of prisoners to destabilise and disorient ... [Indeed] the way Techno has been done would be illegal under the Geneva Convention if Confest were a prisoner of war camp!!!'. DTE must, therefore, 'prohibit techno Nazis' (DTE email-group 30/8/98). This and other commentary parallels the kind of media manufactured 'moral panic' surrounding Acid House raves in the UK.³⁸ Take the following predicted scenario:

Moama, ConFest, young people, techno, ecstasy, 40 degree heat, dehydration, death in the darkness and found in late afternoon, not sleeping it off, but already stiff. Headline 'Five young teenagers dead at "Go to Heaven in 1997 Spiritual Festival"'. (Spencer 1996:1)

Although less 'sensationalist' than 'Killer Cult', 'In the grip of E', 'Rave to the Grave' - all British tabloid headlines (Thornton 1994:183) - there is a family resemblance here, an attempt to 'sell' an idea by making appeals to morality. According to Artemis, who 'felt dizzy' just looking at 'the electronic set up' at Toc IV, 'techno ... can trigger epilepsy'. Indeed, participants are deemed to fall victim to this decadent and diabolical dance assemblage 'endangering the sacred' (cf. Sibley 1997): '[o]ur young people are being misguided ... [we must] get back Down To Earth' (Artemis 1996:5).

ConFest is not a neutral field. Like the variant pilgrimage devotees to the rock shrine of St Besse, 'the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story' (Weber 1995:532) arises as combatants, taking up various vantage points in the authenticity war, 'try to dictate how the event is to be interpreted' (McClancy 1994:34). As such, competitive promotions are launched wherein techno-trance is variably wished out of existence *or* highlighted as an integral component of the total experience.

The 'Tribal' Beat Goes On ... and On

³⁸ Indeed, DTE's 'attention' to techno can be compared to the moral outrage which fuelled the Tory government's commitment to draconian legislation (the CJA) criminalising free raves (and new travellers) in rural Britain. The condensed topography (of Britain and ConFest), and the concomitant increase in the likelihood of spatial transgression, are similar factors in both cases.

In response to ‘some of the old ConFest farts [who] think we’re just dicken’ around doing fuck all’ (Krusty), Trance *habitués* reply that the experience holds a communal authenticity, and therefore legitimacy, of its own. As Krusty contends, despite techno’s dearth of the kind of sophisticated stories Aboriginal peoples exchanged when ‘there was corroboree all over the landscape’, what adherents are doing is principally ‘the same today ... Coming together and dancing ... communicating through dance’. Trance Dance is then perceived to trigger the unifying effervescence attributed to ‘corroborees’. Effecting an ‘emotional community’, according to Mardo, the techno beat ‘brings every other individual around you into that same beat, brings everyone to that same level, and brings them together like a tribe’. Indeed, outdoor parties like ConFest’s *Tek Know*, ‘allow us to reclaim ... carnival’ (Shell 1998). Such events:

succeed in bringing people together to experience the ancient ritual of dance ... During the party we become a community which can continue beyond a party. [The dance] connects us all together as we shed our urban skins ... [It is] the time and place where people who connect can dance under a canopy of trees, under a blanket of stars and feel a part of one tribe. (ibid)

And, so far as Krusty is concerned, Trance Dance potentiates trance. He describes how:

working from the body [you can] allow yourself to move into a state of bliss, or, if you like, ecstasy. And that’s what dance does. And ... the heart beat drumming, which is the bottom end of the techno, the ‘doof’, starts to sink and align the whole energy system of the body to a rhythm ... So you really can let go of a lot of your cognitive presence and just allow yourself to be open. And, in a ritual sense, if you’re coming into the space and people are energised either through the dance or the energy from working with psychedelics or shamanistic herbs ... you get a special energy that starts to lift ... There’s some therapy going on there in a way, because people can really release.

An empowering upliftment may thus be achieved, especially in an environment where ‘there’s no right or wrong way to dance’. It is not too difficult to perceive how the electronically advanced *percussion* in Trance music - engineered by ‘techno-shaman’ - induce the forms of effective impact associated with *transition* (cf. Needham 1967). Ultimately, however, Trance is collective. It potentiates a form of that which Kapferer (1984b:188) calls ‘self negation through adduction’, which is ‘most regularly a group phenomenon establishing a unity with others but above the level of the self’. As discussed earlier, Trance Dance is a node in ConFest’s own ‘underground centrality’, a manifestation of ‘sensual solidarity’. Posting a retro-Durkheimian perspective, Shell (1998) writes: ‘[o]nce you’ve experienced the collective trance state brought on by dancing to repetitive beats in the bush, you begin to understand the collective

consciousness that develops between people around you'. Therefore, adds Krusty, 'the total is far greater than the sum of the parts'.

As Laurie argues, 'toleration ... is the most intolerant of all virtues'. In other words, permission breeds chaos. As this example of competing music authenticities demonstrates, ConFest occasions a clash of 'communities'. And as tensions arise between music constituencies, pre-existing differences are amplified. Here, in a most transparent case, rival 'bands' mobilise their physical and intellectual resources to delineate the event's acceptable parameters, and thereby articulate contrary versions of the community. On the one hand, for one reason or another, techno-trance is regarded as a form of 'internal colonialism'. With physical, aesthetic and moral objections ranged against it, it is an intolerable form of difference, a violation. On the other hand, for *habitués*, Trance Dance is a highly valued experience with a 'passional logic' of its own. And the desire for its performance triggers a repertoire of tactics resistant to exclusionary strategies.

Part III: Magic Happens: 'the Triumph of Community'

ConFest's vast constituency is comprised of lifestyle clusters and cliques whose differences seem, in some cases, overwhelmingly irreconcilable. Like the Kuranda Market - this is a 'hot spot' of competing discourses (Henry 1994:295). Of course, much on-site squabbling is a direct reflection of differences and faction formation in DTE itself. Within the Co-operative there is a paucity of commitment to shared ideals - the kind of commitment observable, for instance, in many utopian communities (Kanter 1972; Metcalf 1986:Ch.8). While ConFest itself represents the 'common denominator' to which members are committed, as there is little consensus on its meaning - reflecting the panorama of values, backgrounds and motivations of members - it variously unifies disparate elements while at the same time reproducing Society-wide differences. The enduring expression of intra-ConFestian difference has generated fission. While some expatriates may go to Earth Haven at New Year, this example of centrifugence is not isolated. New Year events at Peacehaven and the Blue Mountains in recent times can be read as further fragments of a growing diaspora.

Yet the commitment to achieve a successful ConFest remains. In the face of perceived threats to community cohesion, and despite ongoing disputes between authenticity claimants, as the saying goes, 'magic happens' - 'the ConFest Spirit' endures. Given the

adversities and conflicts encountered by DTE and festival attendees, ConFest's survival is, as many have it, 'a miracle'. 'Miracles' can be seen to be a product of grassroots organicism effecting proto-cultural solutions, including temporary mergers or alliances, to immediate problems. Here I will draw attention to two such 'miracles' - one averting a site-specific logistical nightmare, the other an example of localised adaptation.

'The Bridge'

One adversity worth recalling arose in the form of a long and wide irrigation channel at Birdlands. This site-specific contingency possessed the potential to provoke community disharmony. Separating the Market, *Gypsy* village and car park from the rest of the festival, the channel was eventually spanned by two one-way foot bridges (see Appendix F, map 2). The main bridge, a long tragic structure fashioned from plywood crates and 44 gallon drums, was an 11th hour effort (the smaller 'feral bridge', consisting of fallen logs thrown across the water, was situated at the end of the site). 'The bridge' was heavily overburdened - an anxiety provoking circumstance not relieved when the intended hand-operated punts failed to materialise. As a consequence, 'the bridge' came apart several times during the event. Frustrating bottlenecks and long detours ensued.

However, though 'the bridge' was maligned by many, this 'anti-structure' became a focal point of solidarity. It was fabricated and repaired by participants taking responsibility and applying their skills *in situ*. A potential disaster was averted. 'The ConFest Spirit' rose to the challenge posed by 'the bridge' - and was strengthened. The banner - 'strangers are friends you have not yet met' - draped along its length provided an acute commentary on the way 'the bridge' was built and maintained, and on the way ConFesters complied to the difficult circumstance of standing in long winding queues in the burning sun waiting to cross - fifty one way then fifty the other. In fact, the queues were contexts for random meetings, immediate contact, *puissance*. As Sage commented '[m]any times I've said "it could only happen at ConFest"'.

The Compromise

In response to the ongoing disputation over the presence of techno-trance, and motivated by a desire to achieve an integral community, various ConFest Committee members have deemed it necessary to promote the benefits of compromise. Michael is an advocate of this approach. For him, ConFest is:

where people come to express themselves no matter what their background or tastes are. And I believe we should cater as much as possible to any new ideas ... and help young people to get out there and be creative ... I don't think we should fight it. But we should also encourage the techno people to come and have a look at the sort of thing you can do with drums and didj, and bits of wood banging together, and bits of metal banged together. Because I believe they can incorporate more live art into the techno performances, take it down a notch on electric power, and put some human power in there ... I think we can educate them - they can run on lower power, more efficiently. And be co-operative. Let us help them, 'cause this is what we're about. DTE is about helping people establish their village, or helping them get their message out. We're sort of a hub of a network.

Indeed, conflict generated by the presence of techno-trance has dissipated to some degree in recent times, as adversaries have moved to resolve issues, to 'settle their differences', to 'band together'. Amplified electronica remains a feature of the festive community, but in rhizomatic adaptations. On the one hand, it is widely perceived that techno-trance should be accommodated on site, a view supported by a DTE survey conducted in 1997 where 2/3 of the respondents supported the presence of techno - albeit with noise and time restrictions. DTE has acknowledged that sites where amplified music can be acoustically separated from 'quiet areas' are preferable. On the other hand, by applying for lower budgets, adopting 'appropriate technology', and through processes of fusion and amalgamation, dance music facilitators have evolved a more agreeable quality of tact and diplomacy.

The recent conversion to wise energy use through the employment of a solar powered, soft tech assemblage (*CIDA*, Gum Lodge I), the concomitant decrease in db output, as well as the provision of interactive 'hands on' workshops and the encouragement of amateur DJs and combined techno-acoustic performances incorporating drummers (*Hybrid*, Gum Lodge II) - a collaboration which, rather than just 'having automated rhythms ... [bears] a human feel' (from *Hybrid* 98/99 budget proposal)³⁹ - has actualised a music-dance experience that, not without its detractors, is widely held to be more 'appropriate', 'live', folky and thereby authentic.

The 'deterritorialised' acculturation in musical performativity and boundary ambiguity exemplified by *Hybrid*, evokes the 'triumph of community' of which Anthony Cohen (1985) speaks. It is apparent that, although advocates of disparate musics and

³⁹ *Hybrid* incorporates 'all technology without bias (from fire to wood to wire and electronics)' (from proposal).

'communities' give expression to their differences, 'they also suppose themselves to be more like each other than like the members of other communities' (Cohen 1985:21). And despite the diaspora, the persisting desire to 'raise the Spirit' means that ConFest, like the cultic pilgrimage destination of the shrine, retains an unusual capacity to 'absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses ... offer[ing] a variety of [pilgrims] what each of them desires' (Eade and Sallnow 1991:15).

It is apparent, then, that ConFest is an 'elective centre' engineering 'miracles'. A vast social organic laboratory, its co-operative ethos effects a mystical experience, the kind of ineffability participants unite around and return to. And, in the interests of harnessing and replicating this experience, Les envisions a national circuit with, perhaps, fifty sites set up around the country. With each staged for a week, '250,000 people' could spend 'a year in the ConFest circuit before returning to mainstream life with extraordinary skills'.

Conclusion

This chapter has questioned the value of an unqualified application of Turner's *communitas*. Via a critical assessment of this concept and an investigation of the ConFest community, I have identified two basic shortcomings in Turner's work: (1) he discounted the heterogeneity of liminal arenas and their potential for contestations of many kinds, and; (2) was inattentive to the bodily or corporeal aspect of spontaneous community. An acknowledgment of such shortcomings has energised an approach which takes ConFest to be: a *heterotopic community* harbouring diverse, variously complementary or competing, alternative cultural constituencies, and; a desirable *intercorporeal*-estate likened to the 'orgiastic' 'underground centrality' of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli) or the immediate 'radical conviviality' of temporary autonomous zones (Bey).

As a contemporary manifestation of the desire to reclaim 'sensual solidarity', 'the ConFest Spirit' is an affective and tireless, but ultimately enigmatic, phenomenon. And it is so since it is concurrently inclusive and exclusive, *massive* and *tribal*. While the festive counter-community may surge towards ever greater unity, the diversity of 'bands', lifestyle clusters, autonomous zones and authenticities convergent guarantee that its integrity will be jeopardised by proximate differences - indeed its identity necessitates the reproduction of difference. However, in the final analysis, the festival's organic logic nourishes networks and dialogue potentiating the resolution of internal conflict.

Illustrating the enigmatic disposition of ‘the ConFest Spirit, throughout the chapter I have attended to the constitution and fate of one theatre of corporeality, conflict and co-operation unique to ConFest. That is, I have circumscribed Trance Dance or techno-trance as: an autonomous ‘tribal’ node of ‘underground centrality’; a contested form of musical (in)authenticity, and; a nucleus of rhizomatic hybridity. The ‘Spirit’ lives.

Conclusion

The thesis has demonstrated that ALEs are ACH. That is, alternative lifestyle events are typically heterogeneous counter-sites. Moreover, it has demonstrated that DTE's ConFest is an inimitable local heterotopia, indeed Australia's marginal centre. A contemporaneous mirror to the Australian ACM, in a polydimensional, multi-subcultural performance matrix, ConFest accommodates a plurality of de-centrist energies championing conflicting and complementary discourse and practice oppositional to the parent culture. ConFest's inimitable character owes much to three factors. (1) DTE's evolved immediatist neo-tribalism: the Co-operative is affectual, unstable and schismic, mutating from a Cairns led millenarian movement to neutral custodianship, from instigator of the revolution to a now diasporic mediator of diverse alternative lifestyle options. (2) The amalgamation of conferencing and festive dimensions: healing-arts, disciplines and socio-political activism combine with the Dionysian abandonment and communion characteristic of the carnival; 'ConFest' has now entered the popular lexicon of the ACM, typifying such a desirable merger. (3) Social *organicism*: a proto-cultural grassroots logic has been identified, an anarchic design sustaining co-operative, tolerant, autonomous and immediate traits, and making possible the coexistence of variant lifestyle clusters and authenticities; the event's organic logic has inspired post-ConFest experiences, groups and event-spaces in the past and represents a working model for future projects.

The thesis, moreover, has sought to render ConFest's status as a centre on the margins intelligible via the elaboration of an appropriate heuristic model. That Turnerian processualism remains germane to an anthropology of alternative public events is indubitable. However, the thesis adopted a theoretical strategy distinguishable from past Turnerian approaches, a strategy possessing two related deconstructions.

First, I endeavoured to map the junctures of *liminality* and *authenticity* within an alternative cultural matrix via a conceptual excavation of the Turnerian perspective. The thesis documented the three modalities underscoring Turner's later ritual exegesis (the *limina* of play, drama and community), and, using a wealth of emic data, explored the means by which this triad contextualises and realises participants' desires for *authentica*. Furthermore, I explored the parameters of *ferality*, an archetypal transitional/edge condition accessed and performed at ConFest. The liminal modalities, as they are given unique expression at ConFest, potentiate principal components of *ferality* - embodied alterity, eco-spirituality and 'tribal' sociality - therein contextualising the (re)production of

eco-radicalism. I have demonstrated that the latter manifests as a postcolonialist, spectacular-activist milieu which possesses multi-subcultural roots and is attractive to youth desiring (re)enchantment and reconciliation with native ecology and peoples. The thesis thereby furnishes the fields of public event, performance, postcolonial and youth cultural studies with a unique set of conceptual tools.

Second, via a critical deconstruction, I responded to the Turnerian tendency toward the essentially exclusive, non-carnal and homogeneous field of liminal ritual. My research experience and investigation of complementary writing stimulated the exploration of new theoretical terrain. Indeed, as a unique ACH, ConFest itself demanded the renovation of Turnerian theory - in fact, the construction of an appropriately post-structuralist heuristic model, a model attending to the key and interrelated themes of *heterogeneity* and *corporeality*.

I therefore adopted the core concept of *hyper-liminality*, and investigated three circumstances of ConFest's hyper-performativity: (1) as a subjunctive 'forbidden zone' where multiple instances of carnality and alterity are permitted, participants access a vertiginous tableau of otherness/othering and, thereby, manifold possibilities for self-(re)creation; (2) 'collective reflexology' carried out on the 'ultimate concerns' of self, Earth and indigeneity within a context of ramified performance genres appearing in a labyrinth of zones evidences a *multi-cultural drama* - a vast meta-performative school of consciousness, and; (3) a multitude of neo-tribes and identity clusters in possession of diverse expectations and meanings (including definitions of 'foreign' elements) populating a conurbation of TAZs, ConFest - not a repository of homogeneous consensuality - is a demonstrably *heterotopic*, and therefore contested, counter-community.

In conjunction with these investigative forays, I found that the exploration of embodiment in threshold work, along with transcendence and reflexivity, provided a balanced approach. Attention to the liminal body, transgressive and hyper-sexual embodiment, advanced a performative sensuality and carnality mostly neglected by Turner. The circumscription of 'sensual solidarities', that is, the intercorporeality characteristic of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, the 'passional logic' of Maffesoli's 'Dionysiac sociality' and Bey's 'radical conviviality', were indispensable to the reconfiguration of an otherwise chaste communitas.

Furthermore, internal to this investigation, I explored three key themes associated with the quest for *authentica*, which ConFest - as a 'privileged point of penetration' into the alternative sector - has made available for analysis. First, I argued that cultural appropriation is a complex process the investigation of which should avoid selective and

reductive discursive analysis. I have supported this position via reference to: (a) the reconciliatory and alliance forming consequences of cultural borrowing, and; (b) the indelibly human process of mimesis wherein identities may be (re)fashioned via identification with multiple nodes of difference. ConFest is a theatre of reconciliatory gestures and concentrated performative appropriation. Second, I argued that diverse discourse and practice representing alternates' 'ultimate concerns' of self-growth and global-consciousness are demonstrably contiguous. That which I have called the *self-globe nexus* is characterised by a sense of profound interdependence activating an ethical self-commitment. At ConFest, the dramatisation of the *self-globe nexus* is staged via *eco-spiritual* manifestations of Neo-Paganism. Third, the dissension between subscribers to, and *habitués* of, different authenticity vectors effectively engenders a clash of communities. In my investigation of representative music centralities (techno-Trance Dance vs non-electronic 'indigenous' or 'tribal' performance), I argued that, while this arena may amplify existing differences, it, nevertheless, provides a unique opportunity for competing authenticity claimants to forge alliances, to 'band together'.

Approximating both the process *inside* rites of passage where the self is deconstructed as a precondition for reconstruction, and pilgrimage to a centre *outside* the parameters of the everyday where inspired travellers seek affirmation and wholeness, ConFest orchestrates the indeterminate (re)conditioning, the becoming, of self, identity, lifestyle, community. In a 'time out of time' and place, where the dissolution of persona - a stripping away of roles and status - is often experienced, the childlike, native, queer, earthy, pagan and tribal are appropriated for their (re)creative qualities. At this marginal centre, hyper-liminalities receive fashionable words of wisdom, become familiarised with transgressive embodiment, join sensual solidarities, augment inner resources and learn authentic codes of conduct all subject to shifting tides of consensus and dispute. Such a promiscuous, reflexive and contested community permits the imaginative inquisition of perceived fallibilities in dominant discourse and practice, and the exploration of new paths, thereby catalysing personal and socio-cultural change.

ConFest is, therefore, a journey, a (re)turn to a site where an abundance of alternative options are offered and chosen. As a remote social and physical space, and as an organic hyper-liminal matrix, it has evolved into a process which is both communitarian experiment and a highly individualised process of becoming. At this extra-ordinary juncture, extra-ordinary resolutions are achieved: 'magic' not only 'happens' - it flourishes. And, in this unique counterworld located beyond the confines of what is, for

many, routinised claustrophobia and vicarious lifestyle, participants, despite their differences, are engaged in the ConFest journey such that they nod and smile knowingly in their sharing of the 'ConFest Spirit'.

Appendix A. Background and Methodology

At 25, I lunged at the opportunity to make the journey to ConFest with friends over New Year 1993/94. Tales of exotica and high adventure had been conveyed by early explorers. While I was intrigued, it is fair enough to say that I was also more than a little anxious about various 'ordeal myths' which had filtered through to me, such as stories of obligatory public nudity. I had also anticipated politically quiescent hippiedom. Nothing prepared me, however, for what I was to experience that summer - random acts of kindness, gestures of refusal and pure unpredictability, almost every waking hour for five days. I was thrown into new territory, exploring a lifeworld to which I had not been privilege in my youth, but which I had steadily gravitated toward. The shock of difference was inspirational. For me, the effect of the ludic otherness encountered is comparable to that of a circus on a child-novice. Like the mesmerised child, I desired to run off and join the circus.

It was not until after that summer 'on the road', travelling north from Melbourne to the Northern Rivers of northeast NSW, that it began to dawn upon me that ConFest deserved closer investigation. I had been conducting uninspiring MA research (on mortuary practices) at La Trobe University at the time. From a theoretical perspective, my shift to alternative culture was not a radical departure, as I was able to pursue my interest in Victor Turner, liminality, performance and transformation. Yet, over five years, my views on the master ritual theorist were to undergo revision.

In that period, I attempted to combine, with varying degrees of success, appropriate academic disengagement with full immersion in 'the field', to resolve antinomies existing between my researcher role and ConFester status. As a researcher, I have been provided privileged access to the thoughts and feelings of a large contingent of participants. As a ConFester, I have made biannual pilgrimage to an event which is host to those who are, in the large, 'fellow travellers'. At ConFest, I have experienced the quality of regeneration for which it has popularly acquired credit and respect. Through my own presence and interactions, I have shared in the construction of ConFest as a collective experience.

Data for this thesis have been gathered via participant observation, interviews, questionnaires and archival, documentary and cyber (Internet 'billboarding' and feedback and email exchanges) research.¹

Participant observation

The first ConFest I attended (Moama I - 1993/94) inspired this research. Since then, over a period of more than five years, up to and including Easter 1999, I attended every consecutive event (12 events) and roughly 70 DTE meetings (RGMs, SGMs and AGMs). There were, thus, two broad areas of research involvement (ConFest and DTE) rendering my 'field' rather multi-sited. Though DTE meetings have been important, my principal field location was ConFest. Long periods of reflection, reading and analysis followed brief biannual periods of full-immersion. Sustained analysis in the 'off-season' enabled the re-configuration and synthesis of theoretical models. Although there were meetings, other events and chance encounters with research subjects and other participants throughout the rest of the year, seasonal distancing precluded the 'withdrawal from analysis' experienced by Muetzelfeldt in his research on Friends of the Earth (1989:51).

The thesis draws largely upon five events held between 1994-1997 (when the first questionnaires and much of the interviewing were conducted). However, since my experiences at other ConFests are important, those experiences are occasionally drawn upon. Also, my participation in numerous other alternative cultural events (e.g. Rainbow Gatherings, Earth Haven, All One Family Gatherings, earthcore) has enabled further comparative work.

As a ConFester, I have been involved in numerous workshops, funshops, rituals, performances and site work over the years. Something of my enthusiasm is conveyed in a letter published in the *DTE News* (May 1996:4) (see Appendix A.1). Dense organisational networks and complex informal webworks have made it necessary to maintain 'mobility' both on and off-site - traversing unfamiliar territory, adjusting to new situations. Casual dialogue with participants at key locations - like the Gate, the Information tent and around the camp fire - have been most helpful in aiding my understanding of an unfolding cultural phenomenon. Generating dialogue is perhaps the most effective means of gathering information. Of course, much dialogue has been entered into without being conscious of any research role. A great many friendships have been struck up at ConFest and within DTE. Many informants have become friends, and friends - by virtue of their ConFest attendance - informants.

As I planned to access the personal thoughts and feelings of a broad membership, I made a decision, supported by most of my informants, to avoid becoming a member of DTE in

¹ All research has been approved by the La Trobe Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Human Ethics Committee.

the early period of the research as I realised this would have diminished the distance necessary for conducting interviews. Since DTE is an adversarial democracy, personally voting and 'taking sides' in the organisation would have unnecessarily compromised my project. Despite my official non-membership, however, I felt like 'one of them' anyway. After the bulk of my data gathering, I decided to become a member of DTE in 1998. As an eligible ConFest Committee member I compiled the ConFest Handbook for Guilmartens I and II, and, with an interest in promoting ConFest, contributed an article in *Green Connections* (St John 1998/99) (see Appendix A.2).

Interviews

I have conducted 68 interviews in total. Most were single-person interviews, though 3 were with 2 informants, 1 with 3, and 2 were with more than 3 informants. There were 3 follow up interviews. Of varying duration (between ten minutes and four hours), interviews were conducted on and off site (and a few at other events - especially at the AOF Gathering in 1996). Many interviewees are DTE members involved in site infrastructure and workshops. As I considered oral histories to be important material for shaping a thesis, and as I believed it necessary to possess prior background understanding of individuals for the purpose of designing appropriate interview strategies, interviewees were often approached after lengthy deliberation and prior interactions. It was often the case, however, that strategies had to be discarded or modified as they were no longer suitable to changing circumstances (such as the political climate within DTE) or other contingencies (such as, interruptions, delays and the presence of others during interviews). Random on-site interviewing was also undertaken. I was specifically interested in biographical details, unique contributions, skills and roles at ConFest. Rather than asking standardised questions in a directive interrogation, a discursive interviewing technique permitted an iterative process of refinement such that the commentary, responses and themes raised by early interviewees gave shape to the direction of inquiry of later interviews. Some interviews were retrospective, with interviewees asked to recall personal and historical information. Most interviews were open-ended, with the line of questioning and scope for discursive elaboration being consistent with the qualitative goals of the research.

Questionnaires

There were two separate paper questionnaires, one electronic and one special questionnaire. The first paper questionnaire was distributed randomly at Toc III (Easter 1994) (with pre-paid envelopes attached) and Moama II (1994/95) (see Appendix A.3). The second paper questionnaire was distributed via the DTE newsletter (*DTE News* 83, June 1995) prefaced by my letter of introduction outlining my research motives to the broader membership (see Appendix A.4). The total combined response was 66. Almost all respondents were not those interviewed, and most were not DTE members. Specially designed questionnaires were distributed to a small number of DTE members between 1997-99 (6 returned). The electronic questionnaire, similar to what Neuenfeldt (1996) refers to as delayed 'electrographic interviews', conducted in 1998-99 (with 14 returns), was shorter and more theme specific than the earlier questionnaires. Most respondents were those I had never met. For the electronic project information and consent form see Appendix A.5.

Archives

During my candidature, I conducted four separate trips to the State Library of NSW in Sydney where I researched the Mitchell Wing's Rainbow Archives: newsletters, media reports, personal documents, ephemera and audio-visual material on DTE, ConFest and other manifestations of Australian alternative culture. I have also accessed DTE archives held by Cheryl Boston (DTE secretary) and the personal archives of several members.

Cyber-space

Computer mediated communication technology has added a most useful dimension to the research project. A small series of brief documents on DTE history and ConFest culture appeared on a GreenNet link as a promotion for Moama V. Between August 1997 and early 1998, Chapters 3 and 4 were posted on the DTE website (at <<http://www.dte.org.au/ConFest/History/history.html>>). The 'billboarding' of these chapters was undertaken to inform participants and members about the history and culture of DTE and ConFest, and to attract potential participants. The site has enabled constructive feedback for the purpose of the accurate and collaborative documentation of historical and cultural events.

Email has been a useful communication tool, as it has enabled extra-event contact with many ConFesters. The DTE email-group, formed in 1997, has enabled me to inform

members of my research progress, broadcast matters concerning the history of DTE, provide attachments of Chapter's 3 and 4 to interested members, and conduct electronic questionnaires. With the permission of authors concerned, I have also introduced comments from individuals (mailing to either the DTE email-group or myself) into the text of the thesis.

Agreement

It has been my intention to provide DTE with a copy of the completed thesis. As part of my agreement with DTE, in 1996 I provided the Co-operative with drafts of an eventually published article (St John 1997). An early condensation of the thesis was 'stationed' at the Toc IV Information tent for public perusal. Some participants provided valuable feedback.

Generally, the thesis employs pseudonyms in place of proper names. However, in cases where informants have requested my use of their proper name, or have expressed permission to do so, proper names are used. Where I have used published or publicly accessible material, the author's proper or stated name has been used.

Appendix B : The Limen and The TAZ

B.1 An Archaeology of the Turnerian Project

Turner's conceptualisation of liminality came about as a result of several underlying motivations, interests, fieldwork experiences and theoretical influences (sources are from Turner unless otherwise stated). Turner:

- i. disassembled 'ritual' with the aim of locating and documenting the role and meaning of objective pan-cultural *performance*. 'Ritual' here means rites of passage, not private liturgical rites, such as *puja* or communion; and is distinct from 'ceremony'. Following Dilthey (1985c), cultural meaning depends upon the expression of experience: for Turner, the meaningful action of 'Homo Performans' (1985b:187) evident 'from ritual to theatre' (1982). Such expressions (perhaps 'rituoid' [F. Turner 1990:152]) constitute many of the perennial moments by which people re-live, re-create, re-tell and reconstruct their culture (cf. Bruner 1986:9).
- ii. critiqued existing approaches to ritual, granting this complex process 'ontological status' (1978:578). Not epiphenomenal, or mere 'representations', ritual, and religious symbolism in general, are a source of meaning and inspiration. Therefore, the integrative 'all purpose social glue' interpretation of the structural-functionalists (1982c:82), and reductionist psychological approaches through which the same behaviour is regarded as a 'cultural defense mechanism' or 'safety valve' (1974:57), are challenged.
- iii. had a lifelong passion for dramatic performance - traced through several formative experiences and influences. Poetry, especially traditional meter, was particularly important. This is perhaps because 'meter is an ancient psychic technology to achieve that quasi-trance state of heightened awareness which [Turner] had found in ritual' (F. Turner 1990:156). A winner of prizes for his own poetry (earlier in his life), Turner was particularly fond of Blake, often quoting a line which became synonymous with his own lens on the world: e.g. 'Without Contraries is no Progression' (ibid:151). At The University of Chicago, Turner taught Blake and Dante as frequently as anthropological theory in his seminar on symbol, myth and ritual (Babcock 1987:40). Coupled with an expansive knowledge of the classics, he

had an interest in an immense array of culturally diverse drama and performance traditions (E. Turner 1990). It has been said that, his mother an actress, drama was 'in his blood' (E. Turner 1985:5). Stage drama like Greek tragedy and Japanese Noh Theatre possessed 'something of the sacred seriousness of rites of passage' (1982a:11). Influenced by Grotowski and in conjunction with the performance theorist/director Schechner - he became involved in staging experimental theatre/ritual 'ethnodrama'. Following initial fieldwork in Africa - where the ritual cults of the Ndembu of Zaire were studied - Turner became a practising Roman Catholic, placing himself 'inside the heart of the human matter' (1975:32). He remarked:

Deciphering ritual forms and discovering what generates symbolic actions may be more germane to our cultural growth than we have supposed. But we have to put ourselves in some way inside religious processes to obtain knowledge of them. (ibid)

iv. inherited the Durkheimian legacy. The latter's ideas on religion as 'eminently social' (1976) filtered through to Turner via several paths. The following are four basic Durkheimian themes taken on by Turner:

- As religious (and therefore social) phenomena, and as determined modes of collective action, rituals possess essential and permanent aspects.
- 'Ritual' has a function. Periodic ritual works to sustain commitment to social solidarity and is crucial to the continuity of the group.
- Society (indeed 'the universe') is divided into two distinct and alternating domains - the 'sacred' and the 'profane' (Durkheim 1976:37-41). 'Rituals' (such as initiation into the adult, religious community) serve to demarcate individuals from normal, 'profane' existence via 'negative cults' (enforcing interdictions, abstention and renunciation), which condition access to the 'positive cult'. Since the worshipper has been modified positively, he is purified - he accesses the 'sacred' (ibid:299-310). The 'sacred' is gained by the act of leaving the 'profane', and this is created and re-created in states of exultation and collective effervescence.

- And, a theme partly inspired by Töennies, there has transpired an historical movement from the 'sacred' (communal) to the 'profane' (associational), from the 'mechanical solidarity' characteristic of 'primitive' society to the 'organic solidarity' characteristic of 'industrial' society, wherein the religious function (and hence the 'sense of the sacred') remains but is weakened.
- v. was a student of Max Gluckman and the Manchester School. Challenging the distanced and static formulations of social life engineered by structural-functionalists, an interest in process, dynamics and conflict, is developed. This is clear in 'social drama' (applied to Ndembu - 1957), and later, its performative partner, 'cultural drama'. The social drama - with its phases of breach, crisis, redress, and resolution (reintegration or schism) (Turner 1974:38-42; 1984:23-4) - is society's 'primordial and perennial agonistic mode' (1982a:11). The 'cultural drama', culture's redressive mechanism, manifest as theatre, film, literature etc, provides a collective lens on ubiquitous 'social drama'. This inheritance was crucial to the entire dialectical campaign (structure/anti-structure) mounted. The human condition is perceived as the product of the necessary and 'immortal antagonism' between the 'fixed world' of structure and the 'floating worlds' of anti-structure (1969:vii). Society, he contended, 'grows through anti-structure and conserves through structure' (1974:298). Turner suggested that it is universal practice for 'social dramas' to be given the light of reflexive attention in 'cultural dramas', which then, he thought, provide fuel for renewed 'social drama'. This continuous feedback process, wherein 'life' and 'art' imitate each other, provides a perpetual cultural redressive mechanism (1982c; 1985g:291-301; Schechner 1977). Since reflexivity performs a redressive function, the redressive phase of 'social drama' was then abstracted to become a central component of 'cultural drama'.
- vi. was interested in social marginality, especially - in conjunction with his wife Edith Turner - pilgrimage (cf. Turner and Turner 1978). Travel to religious and culturally significant centres on the periphery was thought to induce an experience parallel to that of liminality. To be outside the constraints of structure is also to be between. Outsiders and liminars are then cousins. Such spaces may occasion the social egalitarianism and spiritual solidarity Turner called 'communitas'.

- vii.** experienced the countercultural insurgence of the American 1960s which confirmed his vision of periodically creative upheavals in history. More than simply confirmational however, the sixties were undoubtedly inspirational in conceiving the 'apocalyptic agency' of *communitas*.

- viii.** desired an holistic science of 'neurosociology' (1985f). In an effort to 'abolish the sharp distinction between the classic study of culture and sociobiology' (1985g:297), Turner harboured a curiosity for neurophysiological conditions or 'ergotropic' behaviour (1985e), and 'flow states' associated with 'dramatic time' (1982a:9-10). Such conditions engender transcendent (or 'Orphic', Turner 1982c:83-4; 1992:154-5) experiences - like the shamanic experience: travelling inward yet, paradoxically, to a distant place.

- ix.** maintained that ritual liminality is not only capable of reinforcing the status quo, but is also a source of real social change. That which exists 'betwixt and between' structured social life is a precondition for the affirmation *and/or* transformation of social order. It is the powerful interstitial region via which the norms, truths and values of culture are confirmed/re-evaluated through history. Liminality's functionality is not necessarily conservative, since Turner meant that liminality facilitates the (re)production of cultural reality as it is lived and perceived by its members: both the reproduction of social structure and the production of new cultural forms. It is liminality which mediates society's *becoming* and this is essentially a (re)creative process.

B.2 Hakim Bey and The TAZ

The TAZ should be understood in the light of Bey's inspirations, position on 'the Media' and shift in strategy.

i. *The Liberation of Desire.*

A 'rootless cosmopolitan' and comparative religionist abnegating fixed positions and hierarchical structures, Bey articulates his project via a chaotic compendium of spiritual and cultural insights ransacked from numerous sources. In Bey's theory of liberation, Blake, Nietzsche and the psychological existentialism of Stirner are inspirational. Further, he champions the 'radical subjectivity' of Charles Fourier (founder of the communal 'phalansteries' where passion is the founding principle of association), and Steven Pearl Andrews (who built a grand utopian scheme he called the 'Universal Pantarchy' and was instrumental in founding several intentional communities including the infamous 'Modern Times' on Long Island) (1991b). With Bakunin, Bey acknowledges the critique of the early Marx, yet reveals he is more sympathetic towards the erotic liberatory and mystical tendencies in the likes of Fourier and Pearl Andrews than to the 'cold atheism' or 'fundamental materialism' of Marx. The postmodernism of Deleuze and Guattari is rather implicit, as are pm's 'bolo-bolo' (a permanent urban utopian commune), the writings of Ivan Illich, William Burroughs, and the Situationist art movement. Finally, he draws on the heritage of the Ranters and Antinomians, and incorporates a cocktail of 'radical forms' of Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism and shamanism.

Bey is a proponent of a sophisticated 'individualist anarchism'. While stating that 'psychology precedes economics in [his] theory of liberation' (1991b), he denies subscribing to rigid ideological or psychological forms of individualism or egoism. He claims preference for a 'type-3 anarchism' (a term coined by Bob Black) - 'a radically non-ideological form of anarchism' which is neither individualist nor collectivist, but both (ibid). Advocating what he calls 'convivial individuality', Bey claims it is not merely 'Individual Sovereignty' that he propagates, but 'the free association of individuals' - that is associations that 'depend neither on Capital nor any other form of representation' (ibid).

Arguing that present autonomy can only exist on condition that 'we already know ourselves as free beings' (1991a:133), Bey is a champion of 'psychic liberation'. He inquires:

Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? Are we reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future? Must we wait until the entire world is freed of political control before even one of us can claim to know freedom? Logic and emotion unite to condemn such a supposition. Reason demands that one cannot struggle for what one does not know; and the heart revolts at a universe so cruel as to visit such injustices on our generation alone of humankind. (ibid:98)

For Bey, overcoming 'not individuality *per se*, but rather the addiction to bitter loneliness which characterizes consciousness in the 20th century' (1994a:14), is paramount. This amounts to an assault on the regulation of desire. Like Blake and Fourier, he seeks the 'total liberation' of desire (UB).

ii *The Enemy - The Media*

'The Media' has triumphed and presides over loneliness and alienation. Two general points are made. The first concerns disembodiment and the illusory promise of self-fulfilment. In the battle for the control over the circulation of images - with promises of liberation or self-fulfilment - 'the Media's' gain is the Church's loss. Accordingly, 'when it comes to real power, the churches feel quite empty. The god has abandoned them. The god has his own talk-show now, his own corporate sponsors, his own network'. Moreover, since 'the Media' 'denies meaning to corporeality, to everyday life, just as the Church once defined the body as evil and everyday life as sin', it now becomes the target of our contempt. 'If insurrection once spoke to the Church as heresy, so it must speak now to the Media' (MH).

Second, 'the Media' expresses a 'false consensus' or 'objectivity' (what he calls 'the Totality'). 'The Media' imposes an 'authoritative world-view, far greater than any mere subject - inevitable, inescapable, a veritable force of Nature' (MC). People have become engaged in 'a *relation of involution*' with 'the Media'. Our relation with it 'is essentially empty & illusory, so that even when we seem to reach out & perceive reality in Media, we are in fact merely driven back in upon ourselves,

alienated, isolated, & impotent' (1994a:29). Via simulation, recuperation and commodification, 'the Totality' is successful at subsuming and absorbing the subject or re-directing dissidence - which reinforces its own 'false objectivity'. 'The Media' 'actively recuperates the subject and reproduces it as an element within the great object ... [manufacturing] the perfect commodity: oneself' (MC). Although assaults on its power have been mounted (e.g. during the sixties), the Media resisted 'by opening all image-doors and ingesting its enemies. For, ultimately, one could only appear in the Media as an image, and once one had reduced oneself to this status, one simply joined the shadow-play of commodities, the world of images, the spectacle' (ibid).

iii *Shift: Disappearance to Revolution*

In Bey's writing, the chronological shift from *disappearance* to *revolution* is clear. The 'insurrection' is associated with withdrawal - 'the will to power as disappearance' (1991a:128). Bey's early advocacy of 'the third force' was premised upon the view that revolutions fail as their trajectory is 'revolution, reaction, betrayal' and the founding of another State (ibid:99). He thought liberation would be realised in insurrection and not derive from reactionary political doctrines. 'Absolutely nothing', he wrote,

but a futile martyrdom could possibly result now from a head-on collision with the terminal State, the megacorporate information State, the empire of Spectacle and Simulation. Its guns are all pointed at us, while our meagre weaponry finds nothing to aim at but a hysteresis, a rigid vacuity, a Spook capable of smothering every spark in an ectoplasm of information, a society of capitulation ruled by the image of the Cop and the absorbent eye of the TV screen. (MH)

However, Bey claims history has forced him to reconsider his attitude towards revolution. In *Millennium* (1996) a revolutionary/oppositional tactic appears - 'the necessary revolution' of the jihad (1996:30). 'Whether we know it or like it or not [he writes] we are the opposition' (ibid:18). Once distrustful of the leftist dogma of revolution, Bey now considers himself as revolutionary and his theory as revolutionary theory (ibid). Following the 1989-91 collapse of Soviet Bloc communism (the second world), and the triumph of the 'mono-culture' of Capital wherein 'money decrees itself the law of Nature, and demands absolute liberty', we

enter 'the millennium' (post 1989-91). A federation of autonomous, self-determined and non-communist enclaves, or 'lesser jihad', now become the 'second force', replacing communism in dialectical opposition to capitalism. Here 'presence' and 'difference' - specifically, a 'Proudhonian federalism based on non-hegemonic particularities in a "nomadological" or rhizomatic mutuality of synergistic solidarities' - is the 'revolutionary structure' and cause (ibid:43). The 'lesser jihad' - exemplified by the Zapatistas - seem to correspond to 'permanent autonomous zones' of *resistance*. And many such zones or groups may coalesce to form the 'millennium' or 'the greater jihad' (ibid:40).

B.3: Turner Meets Bey

How do the ideas of Bey compare with those of Turner? To begin with, these authors possess divergent religious, theoretical and disciplinary backgrounds. The anthropologist, Turner was a Catholic neo-Durkheimian dialectician and cultural performance theorist. An anarcho-queer Sufi-libertarian, Bey is a practitioner of heretical Islam, subversive poet and a proponent of 'outsider art'. Bey is clearly motivated by a contempt for oppressive structures - especially the alienating and immiserating consequences of 'the Media'. Turner, by contrast, acknowledges a recurring pull towards 'structure', the resolution of ambiguity and disorder. Drawing upon non-hierarchical earth and body oriented spiritualities, Bey is a champion of desire - the sensuous life. Though interested in 'lived experience', Turner, the Catholic, denied to liminality carnal 'transgressions'. Bey's 'rootlessness', hemp sacrament and all-round queerness makes Turner look virginal.

Despite his later claims, Turner was largely a pre-postmodernist. Bey, on the other hand, clearly articulates a postmodern cultural landscape inciting post-structuralist tactics for the realisation of autonomous community - the immanently 'Social'. As such, today's 'psychic nomads', claims Bey, have a desire for 'camps of black tents under the desert stars, interzones, hidden fortified oases along secret caravan routes, "liberated" bits of jungle and badland, no-go areas, black markets, and underground bazaars' (1991a:107). A complexity of anti-authoritarian and autonomist tendencies are envisioned, and they will derive from:

the mess of anarchist, libertarian, syndicalist, council communist, post-situationist, primitivist, extropian and other 'free' tendencies. A kind of insurrectionary 'noise' or chaos of TAZs, uprisings, refusals, and epiphanies. Into the 'final' totality of global capital it will release a hundred blooming flowers, a thousand, a million memes of resistance, of difference, of non-ordinary consciousness - the will to power as 'strangeness'. (1995b)

And the conflagration of weird units is united in its objective: presence and difference in communion.

This brings us to the striking parallels between the two. Besides their eclecticism, they share a utopian tendency. Both authors are motivated by a sense of loss, of fragmentation, of attenuation of community. In Turner, this is in part a Durkheimian derivation, and in Bey a libertarian-anarchist Situationist legacy. Yet, the same milieus have nourished a

healthy, albeit divergent, optimism. The 'utopian trace' trope is a good example of this. For Bey, the 'anti-pessimist' (1996:54), zines, books, theatre, film and radio retain 'the utopian trace' - 'the last vestige of an impulse against alienation, the last perfume of the imagination' (yet TV rapidly erases that trace) (1994a:36). Similarly, for Turner, liminoidal genres hold 'traces of the original': carnivals and festivals are the 'residues' of seasonal rites; theatre and film – the utopian trace of forgotten liminal ritual (1982b:25). Furthermore, Immediatism's demand for 'Utopia Now' (Bey 1993b) is not so distant from 'the apocalyptic agency' of *communitas*.

More specifically, in so far as their theoretical mechanics are concerned, both are disposed to dialectical thinking - despite Bey's claims that the TAZ is 'outside the dialectic'. In their resistant possibilities, anti-structure and Immediatism are noticeably resonant. For Turner, anti-structure, 'the primary void of precosmic freedom' (1992:133), is 'the necessary antagonist' in society, since it is the key to the reconstitution of structure. Similarly, for Bey, immediatist organisations and gatherings like TAZs, are the antithesis to the immiserating world of mediation, potentiating social transformation. Both are temporary; but the effect may be lasting. Though it is a subject to which Turner gave no direct attention, his efforts nevertheless highlight what amounts to temporary and periodic anarchism. 'Anti-structure' is analogous to 'anarchism' since, while not devoid of organisation, both pull away from, strip down and reveal hidden contradictions in, and perhaps 'overcome', hierarchy or 'The Totality'.

It is no wonder, then, that 'the TAZ' and the 'liminal' (or, more precisely, liminoidal) sound like remarkably similar qualities of human experience. Each writer evokes a compatible understanding of the potentiality of contexts of temporary horizontal sociality/community. For both, there is something essential in the human convergence of the cult, the rite and the festal. They regard the spontaneous, creative urges from below with equal respect. *And both the TAZ and limina are moments of becoming.* Liminoidal moments can also be TAZ-like phenomena. And the TAZ is most certainly a liminal state of affairs. What I have called 'the three modalities' are alive and well there. Yet it remains curious that Bey, a most proficient poacher of ideas, has not evidently encountered or acknowledged Turner. Therefore the meaning and background of liminality - its etymology, its roots in ritual analysis and its metaphorical telegraphing (especially as 'liminoid') - have gone unnoticed. This said, Bey has developed, quite independently, a postmodern anarchist take on it.

Ultimately, parallels extend to incorporate limitations. Although it would be wrong to suggest Bey has attempted to construct a universal social theory, the TAZ does suffer from weaknesses akin to those found in Turner. Like Turner's *communitas*, a TAZ is non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, and non-differentiated. It is homogeneous, utopian, idealistic. Bey does not account for the presence of 'constituencies', internal disagreement and conflict within *or* between the TAZs he offers as examples. Furthermore, that their participants are 'autonomous' raises the question of a state of heightened or 'non-normal' disputation between 'constituents' over such things as the meaning and purpose of the experience. Therefore, shortcomings in Turner's scheme are replicated in the TAZ.

Appendix C: Informants: Brief Biographies

This appendix consists of brief biographies of questionnaire respondents and interviewees whose comments are incorporated in the thesis. There are four classifications of respondent: 'int' (interviewee), 'pq' (paper questionnaire respondent), 'eq' (electronic questionnaire respondent), or 'sq' (special questionnaire respondent).

Acacia. Female, mid 20s. Activist, musician. Member of Food Not Bombs Melbourne chapter, Co-ordinator of *Food Not Bombs* (int. Moama IV).

Ambrosia. Female, 30s. Community development. Gave up a cruise she won on the Wheel of Fortune to come to this, her first, ConFest (int. Moama IV).

Amulla. Female, 34. Small business/student/homekeeper/mother (pq. 1994).

Anthony. Male, early 30s. Activist, committed to non-violent social change. Co-architect of the ConFest Safety Project or Pt'chang (int. Moama IV).

Ariel. Female, 23. Writer (pq. 1994).

Baekia. Male, 24. Student with interests in yoga, mathematics and computers (eq. 25/9/98).

Bandicoot. Male mid 20s. Cabinet maker turned activist. East Gippsland forest campaigner and GECO volunteer (int. Gum Lodge II).

Banyalla. Male, 40s. Veteran activist and blockade strategist. Long history with GECO. One time Greenpeace canvasser, inspired by the American Yippie movement and Earth First! *Forest* co-ordinator (int. Moama IV).

Belalie. Male, late 20s. Activist and GECO volunteer. Operates tree climbing workshops (int. Moama IV).

Benny Zable. ('Zany Bubbles'). Male, 40s. Environmental artist, human-sculpture peace activist, dancer. Cotter veteran (int. January 1995, Nimbin).

Bilby. Male 30s (int. Moama V).

Boobialla. Male, 53. Lecturer. Facilitated philosophy discussion groups at Toc III. (pq. 1994).

Cedar. Male, 31. Self-help groups activist. Facilitator of 'flirting' and 'radical intimacy' workshops and co-ordinator of community villages including *Community Springs*. Involved with Pt'chang (int. February 1996, Melb.).

Cestrum. Male, 37. Househusband (pq. 1994).

Cheryl. Female, 40s. School teacher. DTE secretary. Director from June 1999 (int. Birdlands).

Chris. Male, late 20s. DTE director from 1995-97. Involved in ConFest first aid and 'security' which he dubbed 'the Pt'chang patrol' (int. March 1996, Melb.).

Cockatoo. Male, 70. Retired geologist, promotes group therapy. Elder, involved in DTE Vic from 1981 and has been DTE director, treasurer and site co-ordinator intermittently over that period (pq. 1995, and int. December 1995 at Birdlands site).

Condoroo. Male, 43. Musician and music lecturer (pq. 1995).

Cooba. Male, 20s. Artist, associated with the multimedia sculpture group Futurelic (int. Moama IV).

Coquito. Male, 40s. Owns Earth Car Rentals in Byron Bay and is affiliated with Astro, an alternative technology group. Attended Bredbo, helped co-ordinate early DTE (Vic) events (int - Sep 1996, AOF gathering).

Corella. Female, 60. Mother, former teacher of languages at secondary schools (pq. 1994).

- Cypress.** Male, late 30s. Ex-Australian army. Bricklayer. Fire-walk officiant. Creator of *Warrior* (int. Toc IV).
- Dalgy.** Female, 27. Student and circus trainer. Juggler and fire dancer, involved in the Earth Circus (pq. 1994).
- Dama.** Male, 40s. Fire-ritual technician. Co-founder of the international industrial sculpture group Mutoid Waste Co. which constructed the 'car-henge' at Walwa III. Inspirator of EarthDream 2000 (int. Moama V).
- DC (David Cruise).** Male, late 50s. Sales background. DTE director in early nineties and between 1995-1998. Encouraged open democratic process in phase III (interviewed twice: June 1994, Melb. and Moama V).
- Emu.** Female, 34. Entrepreneur (pq. 1995).
- Epicris.** Male, 30s. Computer systems administrator. Facilitated the *TAZ-Cyber* village at Birdlands (int. Birdlands).
- Fulmar.** Male, 23. Telephone interviewer (pq. 1994).
- George.** Male, 67. Author, and teacher of holistic massage with training in Gestalt therapy. Founder of the School of Holistic Massage and the Massage Association of Australia. Member of 'the 12' and long serving director. Produced ConFest handbooks and short histories of DTE. Left DTE/ConFests in 1995 schism (int. May 1994, Melb.).
- Graham** Male, 60. Background in the self-help rehabilitation of criminals in PNG. First ConFest was French Island. Long serving director, secretary and site co-ordinator (pq 1994, and int. Moama V).
- Greenfinch.** Male, 43. Engineer (computer, sound and lighting) with an interest in alternative technology. Attempted to create a community food kitchen at Walwa III. Involved in Earth Sharing. Operates the solar stage (int. Moama IV).
- Gum.** Male, 41. Background in sales and landscaping, now taking 'a certain amount of joy in accepting the dole from the government'. First ConFest was at Berri. Member of the Spiritual Healers Association (int. Moama V).
- Gundabluey.** Male, 50s. Psychologist, criminologist, writer, with 4 diplomas and 'professionally unemployed'. DTE director between 1991-94 (int. Toc III).
- Hakea.** Female, 41. 'Artist, ex-art teacher, on the dole'. Poet, involved with Melbourne Street Poets (pq. 1995).
- Isha.** Female, 40s. Trained in stage acting, worked in professional theatre, a 'Zen-Buddhist Christian barefoot hippy cosmic kiddy'. Bredbo veteran. *Children's* village co-ordinator (int. August 24 1996, St Andrew Market).
- Janet.** Female, 27. Runs an entertainment and management agency for bands. DTE director between 1996-98. Information tent co-ordinator (int. Moama V).
- Jessika.** Female, 41. Research Assistant (epidemiology) with a MA in political psychology. Affiliated with EarthSharing, the local branch of the Henry George Foundation, and editor of *Progress*, the journal of Land/Tax Reform Australia. *EarthSharing* co-ordinator. DTE director from 1998 (sq. 1997).
- Jim Cairns.** Male, 70s. Federal Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister in the Whitlam Government. Significant involvement in the Vietnam War Moratorium campaign. Seeded and convened the first ConFests (int. July 12 1997, Prahran Market).
- Justine.** Female, 27. Business analyst. Interested in medieval re-enactment (eq. 4/10/98).
- Kanga.** Female, 23. Traveller, FOE volunteer. Attended European Rainbow Gatherings (pq. 1994).
- Karrabul.** Female, 38. Early childhood educationalist and activist (pq. 1994).
- Katunga.** Male, 53. Music teacher (pq. 1995).
- Katya.** Female, 17. Student and data entrant with a passion for musical theatre (eq. 21/1/99).

- Kokako.** Female, 40s. Long serving DTE director. Co-founded Earth Haven in 95/96 (int. Toc III).
- Krusty.** Male, 30s. DJ and fluoro rainbow warrior. Proponent of ‘ethnodelic’ psy-trance. Operated as Space Between the Gaps. Co-ordinator of *Rainbow Dreaming* and *Tek Know*. Co-director of earthcore (int. Moama IV).
- Kurt.** Male, late 30s. Computer programmer and writer. Facilitator of Psychedelic Spirituality and Shame Healing workshops. Persecuted by DTE between 1996-1999. His ‘ICBM’ to DTE (Svendsen 1999) was, in part, a response to my pq. 1994.
- Laurie.** Male, 40s. Ex-British army, vegetable grower, scrounger, poet, fractal-convert. Member of GreenNet collective. Works in a car co-op. Instrumental in forming Earth Link Cafe at Moama III and has co-ordinated garbage separation. DTE director between 1997-98, and secretary from June 1999 (interviewed twice: December 17, 1995 at Birdlands site, and Moama V).
- Les.** Male, 50s. Therapeutic community enabler, group facilitator and self-help wellbeing networker. Background in insurance and real estate sales, management consultancy, and degrees in behavioural science and sociology. Undertaking a PhD in social psychology. Workshop and *Laceweb* co-ordinator from Gum Lodge I (int. December 16, 1994, Melb.).
- Lorikeet.** Male, 40s. Artist and performer. With his partner, Sparrow, works with Zodiac archetypes and co-founded Wolfgang’s Palace ritual theatre troupe and community. Set up *Wolfgang’s Palace* at Birdlands (int. Birdlands).
- Maggie.** Male, mid-20s. Didj Healer. Undertook a three day shamanic journey at his first ConFest (Walwa III) changing his life irrevocably (int. AOF Gathering, September 1996).
- Manatoka.** Male, late 40s. Set up a small community, Fuzzy’s Farm, in South Australia. Attempted to start a DTE family in SA in 1996-97 (int. Moama V).
- Marc (‘Dr Marc’).** Male, 30s. Practitioner of western and Chinese medicine. *Healing* village co-ordinator and volunteer. Holds fire twirling and acupuncture workshops (int. Moama IV).
- Mardo.** Male, 27. Activist. Grew up on housing commission estates, worked on cattle stations and became involved in Timbarra, Iron Gates, Roxby Downs and Goolengook campaigns. GECO volunteer. Began the inclusive grass roots activist group CIDA and co-ordinated *CIDA* (int. Gum Lodge II).
- Mark.** Male, 41. Postgraduate student in community development. Skilled in computer assembly (sq. 1997).
- Marko.** Male, late 30s. Yoga instructor, performer and co-ordinator of *Yoga* (int. Moama IV).
- Merrin.** Female, 30s. Astrologer, yoga teacher, cabbalist and co-founder of the Star Earth Tribe. Envisages ‘nomadic villages’ (int. January 1995, Tipi Village Sanctuary, Nimbin).
- Michael.** Male, 40s. Self taught engineering and electronics expert. Qualified practitioner of Chinese medicine. Introduced the ‘radios on a stick’ at ConFest (int. Moama V).
- Mimosa.** Male, 30s. Influenced by Harry Hay’s Radical Fairie movement. Co-ordinator of *Queer Presence* (int. Moama IV).
- Mundarda.** Male, late 40s. Community visual artist, poet and psychedelics explorer. Cotter veteran. Was involved with the Children of God sect (int. Moama IV).
- Myall.** Female, 30s. Illustrator and graphic artist (int. December 17, 1995, Birdlands site).
- Nelumbo.** Male, mid 20s. Naturalist. Facilitated ecology and species identification workshops (int. December 16, 1995, Birdlands site).
- Nilgai.** Male, 68. Retiree from Germany (pq. 1994).

- Nipa.** Female, 20s. Industrial art sculptor. Member of Futurelic collective. *Sculpture* and *Futurelic* co-ordinator (int. Moama IV).
- Oribi.** Female, 25. Psychologist/manager (pq. 1994).
- Orryelle Defenestrade.** Male, late 20s. Artist, musician. Practitioner of Chaos Magick - subscribes to 'all religions/no religion'. Founder of The Metamorphic Ritual Theatre Company. Architect of *The Labyrinth* (int. Moama V, and eq. 10/11/98).
- Param.** Male, 51. Sri Lankan. Ran an interfaith temple (the Aathi Parasakthi Nature Cure Centre) in North Carlton. *Spirituality* co-ordinator, facilitating Tantra and cooking workshops (int. Birdlands).
- Paula.** Female, 30s. Internet service provider Member of GreenNet Australia collective. DTE director between 1996-98 (interviewed twice: February 9, 1996, Melb. and Moama V).
- Peregrin.** Female, 46. Teacher (pq. 1994).
- Pipit.** Male. Pharmacologist and freelance web developer. Co-chaired Psychedelic Spirituality workshop at Toc III (eq. 21-23/9/98).
- Possum.** Male, 19. Ananda Marga member (pq. 1994).
- Prion.** Male, early 40s. Primal drummer and advocate of drug and alcohol free zone. DTE director (1995-96) and *Spiral* co-ordinator. Co-creator of the medicine wheel (int. Birdlands).
- Profth.** Male, 50s. Ran community kitchens called Street Communes in London in the late sixties. Inspired by Paganism. Bredbo veteran. Co-founder of The Grove, healing community and gathering space. Co-ordinator of *The Grove* (int. Birdlands).
- Quenda.** Female, 23. Singer, healer, activist-educator with a degree in environmental science specialising in conservation technology. Raised on a permaculture community in Qld. Magic practitioner and member of Bohemia healing arts troupe (int. AOF gathering September 1996).
- Ranji.** Male, 40s. Folk musician, astrologer and Cotter veteran. *Music* co-ordinator (int. September 1 1996, St Andrews Market).
- Richard.** Male, 35. Internet services and website developer, and musician with background in community radio, student unionism and outdoor dance festivals. Convener of the recent DTE Co-operatives Act Collective and DTE director from June 1999 (eq. June 1999).
- Rick.** Male, 40s. Associated with ConFests since the early 1980s. DTE secretary in 1998 and maintainer of the 'backgate' (int. Moama IV).
- Rosella.** Female, 53. Laboratory assistant (pq. 1994).
- Saffron.** Female, 23. Actor and waitress (pq. 1994).
- Saiga.** Female, 74. Story teller, retired librarian (pq. 1994).
- Sage.** Female, 58. Social commentator. Attended every ConFest after Cotter. (responded twice: pq. 1994 and 1995)
- Sassafras.** Female, 50s. Healer. Engenders 'emotional catharsis' by tending to 'the walking wounded'. Co-founder of The Grove and co-ordinator of a village by the same name (int. Birdlands).
- Simon F.** Male, 42. Research fellow, behavioural scientist, computer technician and masseuse. Bredbo veteran. DTE chairperson. Village and first aid co-ordinator (eq. 17/9/97).
- Simon K.** Male, 27. Information technology contractor, writer, electro-acoustic musician with a degree in commerce and diploma in linguistics (eq. 28/9/98).
- Sparrow.** Female, 40s. Artist and performer. Co-founded Wolfgang's Palace ritual theatre troupe and community. Set up *Wolfgang's Palace* at Birdlands (int. Birdlands).
- Spinifex.** Male, late 40s. Healer and musician (Chinese flute). Lived with Fred Robinson (founder of the Universal Brotherhood of Man) on a commune in WA in 1971-72. Met a guru at Baranga I - a huge catalyst (int. Aug 1, 1996, St Andrews Market).

- Trev:** Male, 57. Agriculturalist, sales manager, stage manager of amateur music theatre and naturist. Guardian of 'the Gate' - communicates 'the ConFest Spirit' to initiates (int. Moama V).
- Tungoo.** Female, 30. Piano/music teacher and student (pq. 1994).
- Uroo.** Male, 50s. Cotter veteran. Editor of DTEQld (subsequently DTE North East Australia) newsletters and founder of AOF gatherings. Skilled sweatlodge ritualist (interviewed twice: Birdlands, and AOF gathering September 1996).
- Wallaby.** Male, late 20s. Electronic artist. Member of electronic music collectives, Clan Analogue, then Hybrid. Co-ordinated villages by these names teaching synthesiser skills and encouraging techno-acoustic performances (int. Moama V).
- Wandoo.** Male, 40s. Compensation administrator. Long serving DTE director, organised ConFests from Glenlyon II. Member of Permacroft community. Co-founded Earth Haven in 1995/96 (pq. 1994, and interviewed twice: Toc III and May 25, 1995 at Confab, Melb.).
- Wattle.** Female, 32. Massage therapist. Desires regular 'vision circles' as a means of retrieving 'grassroots visions and values' within DTE. *Children's* village co-ordinator and director from 1998 (sq. May 1999).
- Wirilda.** Female 23. Performance artist and healer (energy, tarot, psychic, massage, chakras and aura). Affiliated with FOE (pq. 1994).
- Wogoit.** Male, 29. Masseuse. Builds and uses meditation pyramids (pq. 1994).
- Yallara.** Male, 20s. Developing a technique for self-spinal alignment (int. Birdlands).

Appendix D: ConFest Traits

This appendix offers sequences of participant commentary selected to illustrate four key traits of the ConFest community: co-operation, tolerance, autonomy and immediatism.

- **co-operation** (as individuals take responsibility together collectively desired outcomes are achieved):

It is amazing that ConFests seem to *come together* and are self-governing - an organisational co-operative philosophy for the people by the people. (Karrabul)

[W]hen you *operate* something you control, and *co* means to do this equally with others. In a number of North American communes they use *co* as a personal pronoun instead of he, she, it and they. So here's to ConFest *Co-Operators*. I'm proud to be one of you. (Daniel *DTE News* 73, Nov 1992:4)

[It's about] doing your bit and not sitting back and getting entertained and served on like we do in the cities, ya'know, watching sport on TV and being passive. It's about being active and taking part. First timers get overwhelmed, but usually they go back with a whole different way of looking at their lives. (Prion)

You get this ambience of solidarity, this ambience of wanting to be somewhere and be part of it. (Rick)

The People themselves create ConFest and overcome difficulties. The people themselves are the most powerful ingredient for a ConFest. (Sage)

- **tolerance** (an open respect for, recognition and celebration of, difference/otherness):

I conceive [ConFest] as an ideal model for the celebration of cultural diversity. (Les)

[A]ll complementary contrapuntal dependent arisings [must be permitted to] dance in propinquity in the Confest space - otherwise it would not be a syncretic syzygetic synergistic GOD [Gathering Overcoming Differences] experience. (Kurt Svendsen 1999:163)

ConFest is a neutral zone where people from all walks of life can come together and ... glimpse other ways of living. (Fulmar)

[ConFest] is a celebration of strangeness ... [It's OK to be 'queer' or a 'freak'] it's even good to be strange ... the one thing that all of the organisers have in common is being strange. They're all strange. And we wanted space where it was OK, where our strangeness was acceptable, and therefore ... cause we

were all strange to each other as well, that needed a lot of tolerance and a recognition that there is valuable stuff in other people. (Cedar)

An approachable atmosphere [where] complete strangers often hug each other ... [and have] an open mind to the many different theories, and beliefs preached by the exponents of many different groups such as pagans, anarchists, Ananda Marga, Reiki, etc. etc. (Nilgai)

This is probably unique in Australia ... ConFest I think is unique in that doctors, lawyers, ferals, wrinklies like me, can mix together around community camp fires. And I feel comfortable walking into camp fires [with] teenie boppers to what ever mix. I'm accepted. And that's beautiful. (Trev)

- **autonomy** (a trusting and safe environment where people are accorded freedom to experiment and permission to express creative energies):

Ordinary human communities can create safety themselves without the need for a State or the police or social control methods. So what we're trying to create is a ... model ... that's non-violent, that's empowering and that builds safety ... Strongly anarchist if you know what I mean ... It's not about social control as in controlling people's behaviour. It's the opposite. It's about encouraging peoples to express and experience their life to the fullest. But it's saying that we've all got a right to feel safe all the time, and everyone's responsible for their own safety ... [Safety] is a prerequisite for rebuilding human communities that work ... We not only need to fight the state and corporations but we need to rebuild human communities on an ecological basis. And ConFest is a little bit of that. (Anthony)

I love coming here because I feel safe at any hour of the day or night and I don't feel the need to edit my thoughts as I do in mainstream society. (Anna. message left on confest.taz.net.au)

[There is] an appetite for the bizarre ... It's like a letting go of all of the constraints of normality and having the appetite for seeing the most bizarre expressed. But it's gotta be done, not pretentiously. There's a certain sense of authenticity. You can go totally wild in what ever way, as long as there's a true expression of yourself in there, that's the ConFest Spirit. Authentic absurdity. (Marko)

[It is] a safe place for releasing pain and dropping the facade. At ConFest you can't avoid intimacies, and I've noticed that in the safety of the caring nature of this place, people drop their guards and the real them comes out and with that comes a lot of pain of why they've had to wear a facade. (Sassafras)

ConFest is structured to give everyone a go at learning: practical things, intellectual things, spiritual things - all with the overriding principle of obtaining greater freedom of expression ... [As] an arena to develop one's gifts

... I was given here a chance to develop stories the way I wanted, and was given full appreciation for it! (Saiga)

I've known a lot of people to go to ConFest feeling isolated ... [and] find in the loving response of so many people [that they are] able to open up and come out and be ... themselves. (Isha)

We've always suppressed individuality in Australia, even um exceptionalism has been suppressed - the tall poppy syndrome ... I found that that's not the case here in this environment ... In this context I found out a few things about myself through the potential to create, which I can then take out with me. And I really wanted to enrich the society ... So ConFest made me feel like working for the planet cause I found a forum where I could actually work to enrich it. So I could introduce ideas, and my creativity, and I could work to create space for a process to occur. So I felt useful. Consequently, by the third ConFest I was involved in the site setting up. (Marko)

- **immediatism** (relatively unmediated experience - palpable, sensuous, familial connection with others and the environment):

I was immediately struck by the way people returned your gaze - intimate eye contact was the norm ... not an exception. Everyone there smiled at you, whether they knew you or not. I had never seen so many beatific people, so many healthy, untroubled people. (Simon K)

ConFest is about experiencing a closer tie with nature by camping in a simple way. It is about shedding the artificial social trappings and conditioning of a consumer-orientated society ... Dancing nude around the fire to a drum percussion group at night - I just love this and where else can one dance naked around a fire, with a hundred other participants, but at ConFest, and feel safe and happy? (Corella)

[Its about remembering that] we are one big family ... we are all brothers and sisters regardless of what tribe/group we identify with. [And] about getting back to the Earth/planet and nature. (Wogoit)

ConFest supersedes any other event in that 4,000 people can live in such a close village atmosphere, in complete harmony and simple organisation ... [It is about] connecting with those who might guide one to deeper, finer living and loving skills. (Rosella)

[It is] about connecting with others, sharing ideas and letting loose - taking off those clothes and inhibitions ... I hugged everyone in sight for two days and was in love with the world. (Tungoo)

A celebration of the life force and a sharing of healing energy. (Dalgy)

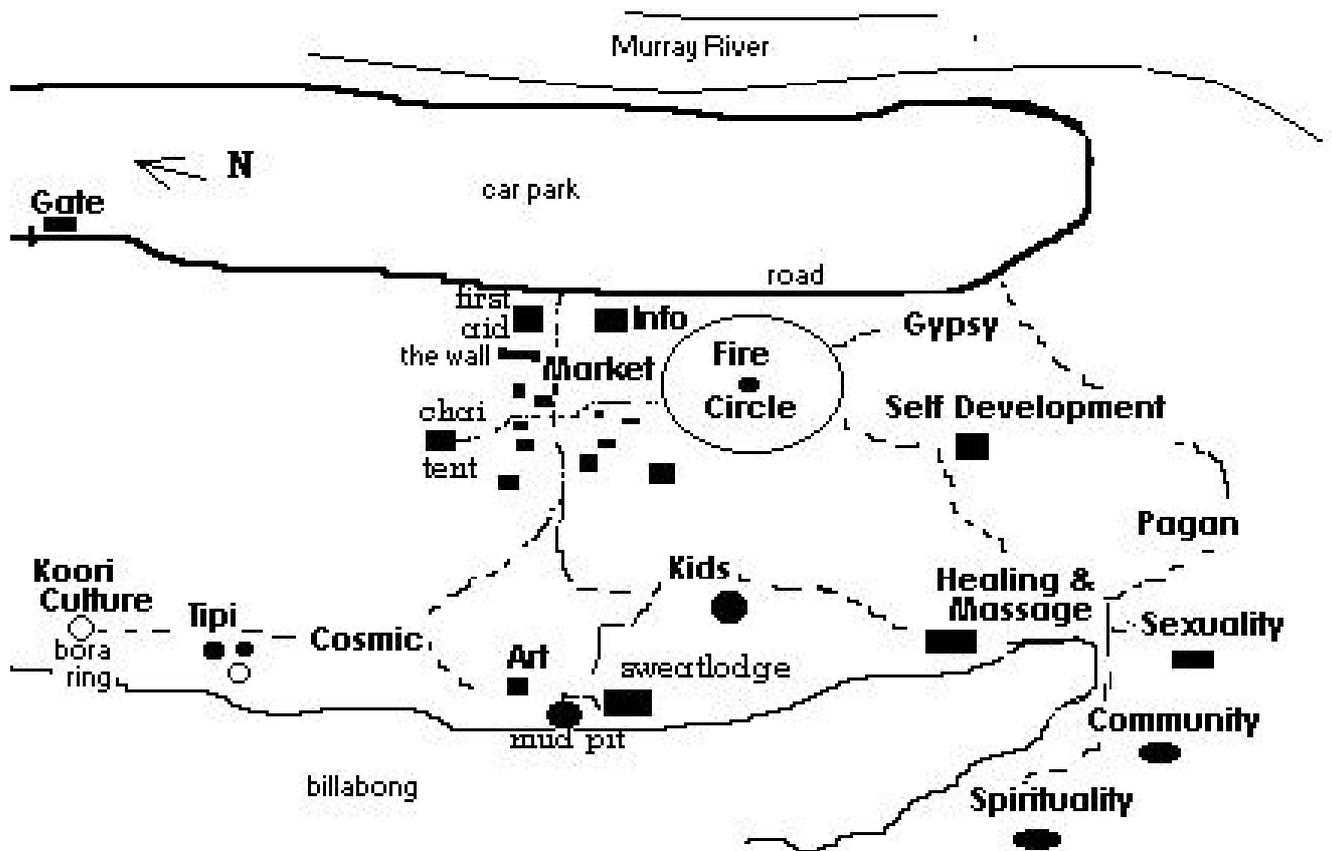
(Here) loving friendship is extended to more people than just the ones you know ... When you leave ConFest, you have something in your soul that wasn't

there when you arrived. You take it with you back to 'reality' and *that* makes a difference. (Ariel)

A converging of like minds in a modern village/market setting - New World tribal style ... [It is] important in the way of bringing people together in the realm of possibilities of new communities, events, projects, music, introducing new skills ... [and] supporting existing skills. A respite from 'normal society' [and proof] that there is an echoing growth of people demanding revolution from our Babylonian lifestyles. (Kanga)

Appendix E: Towards a New Society

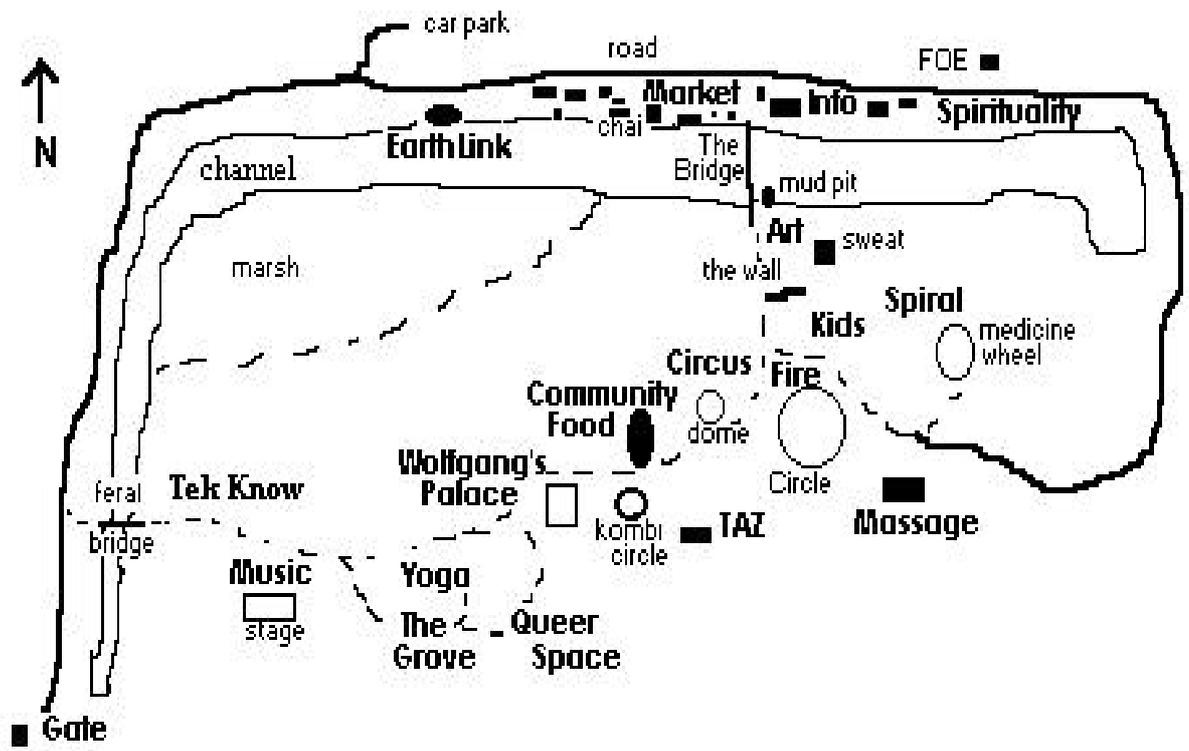
Appendix F: Maps



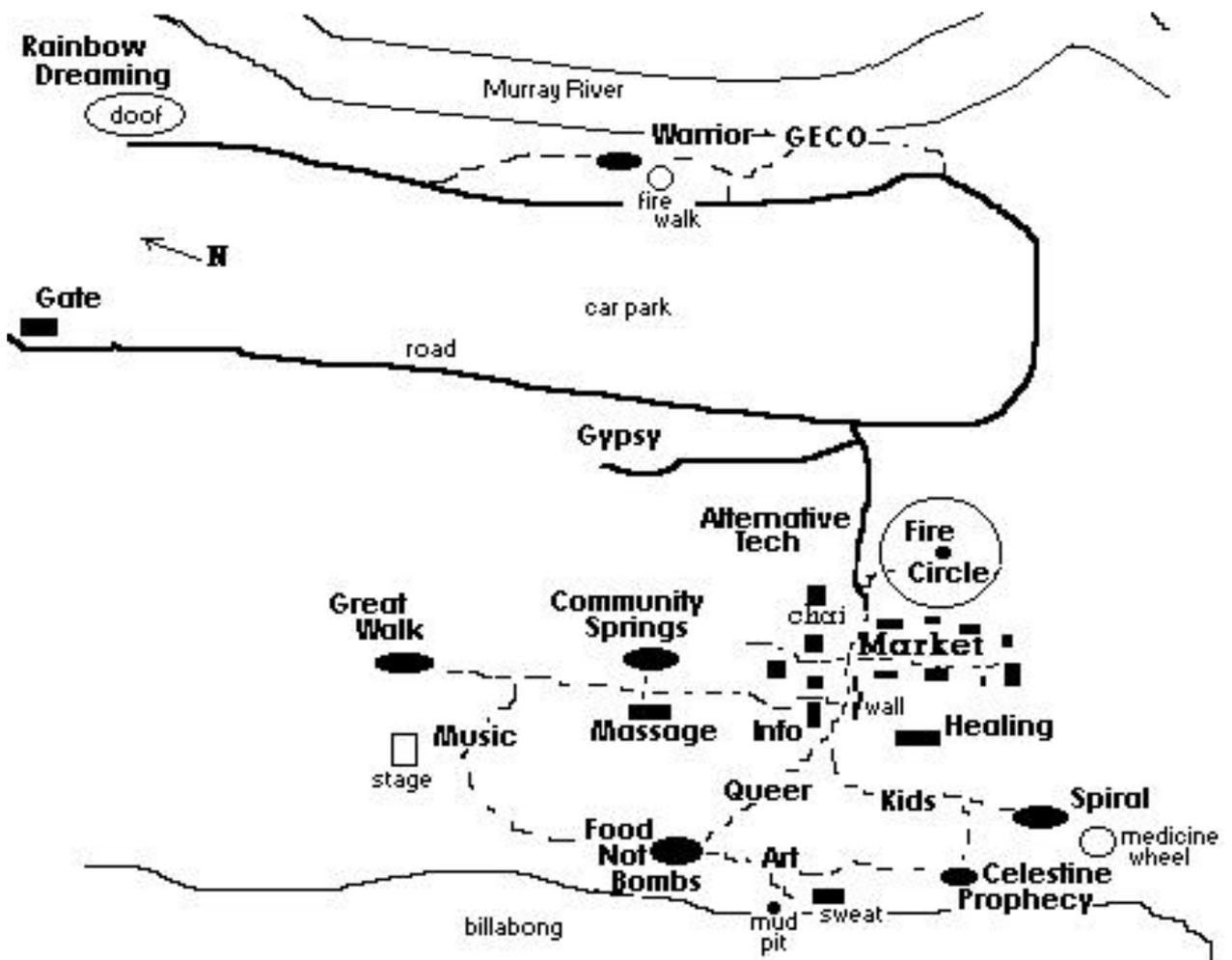
Map 1: Tocumwal III

KEY

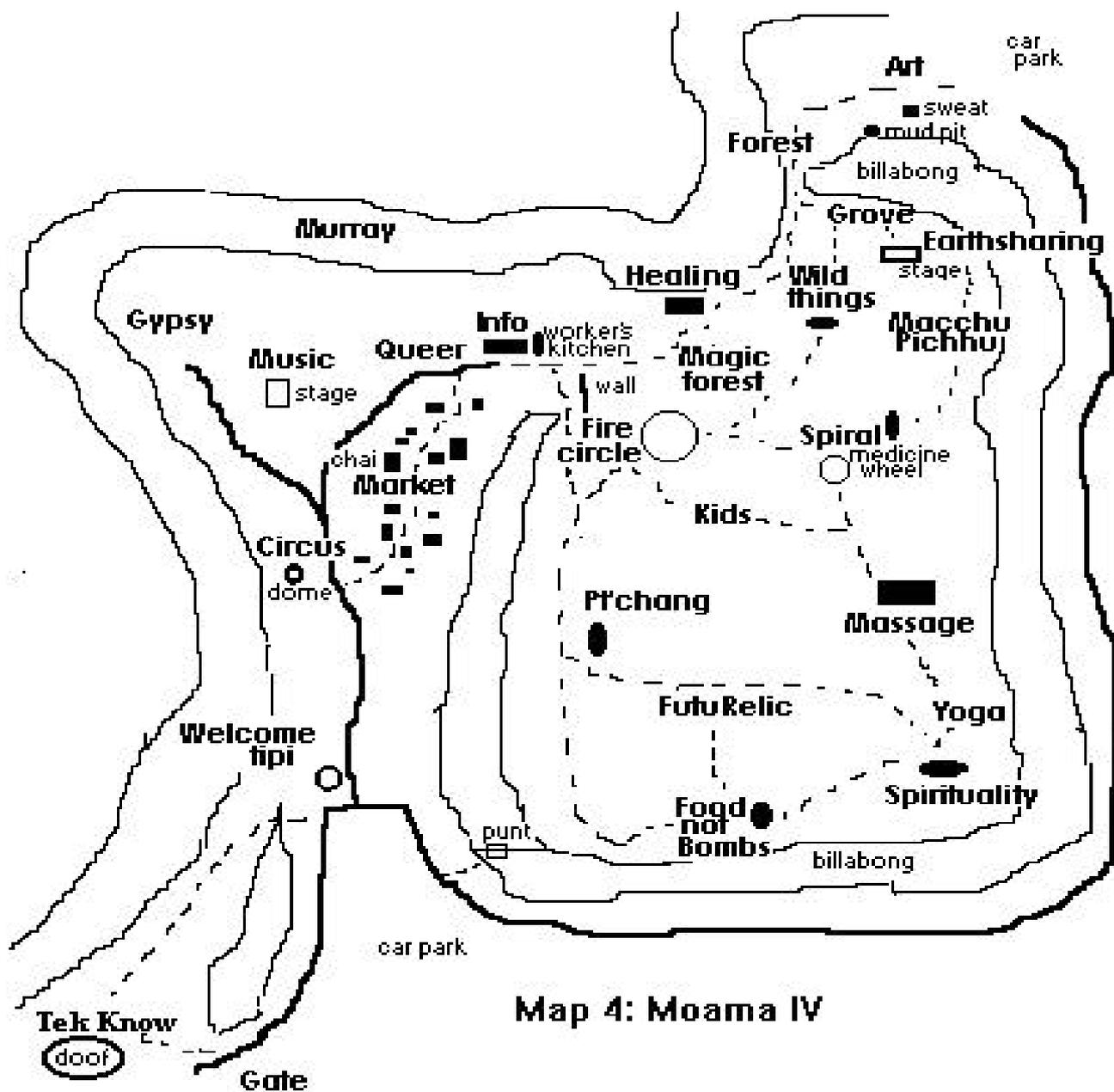
- Marquee
- Kitchen
- Path

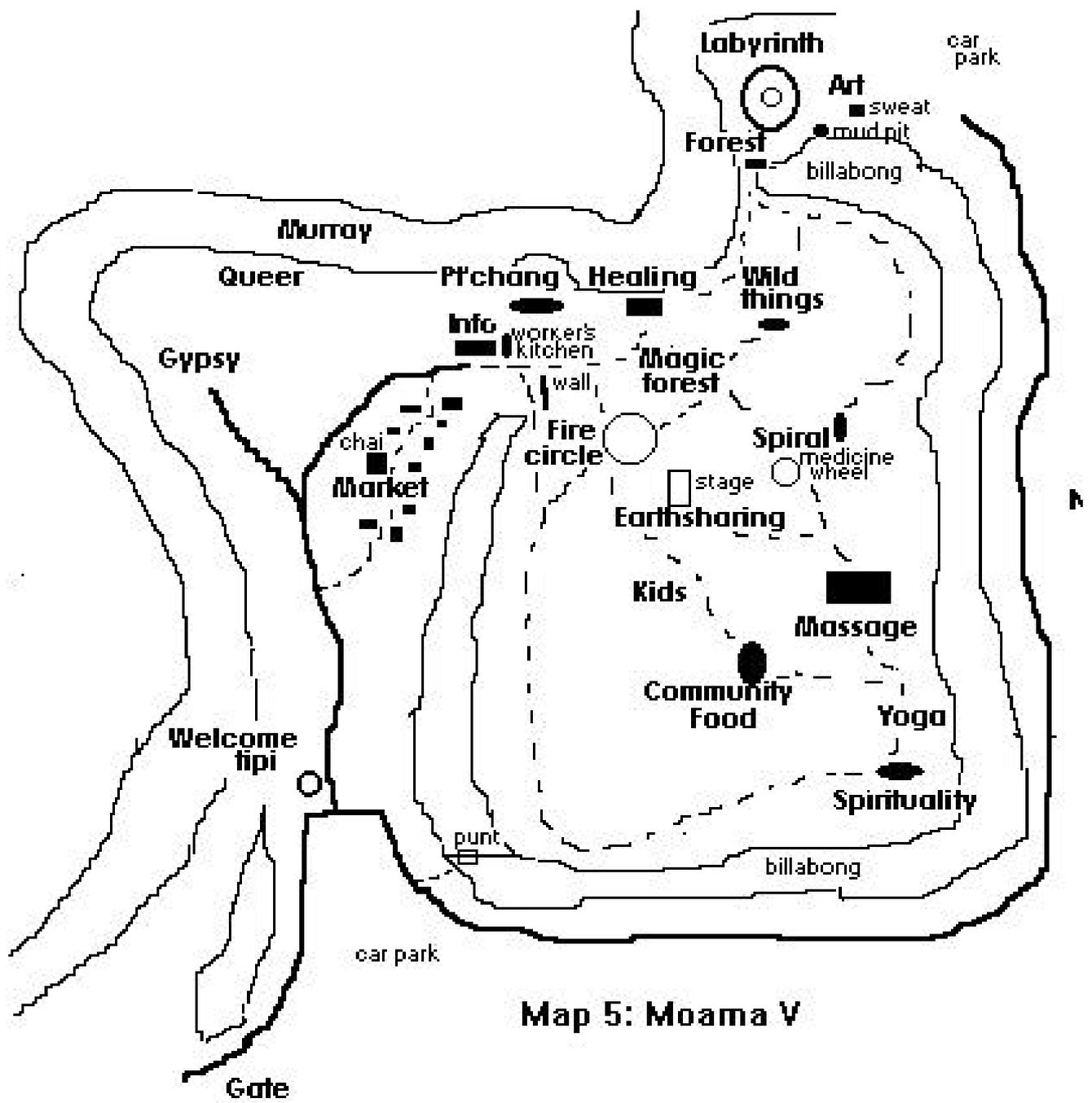


Map 2: Birdlands (Tocumwal)



Map 3: Tocumwal IV





Map 5: Moama V

Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACE - Alternative Cultural Event
ACH - Alternative Cultural Heterotopia
ACM - Alternative Culture Movement
ADTEN - Australian Down To Earth Network
AFI - Australian Film Industry
AFL - Australian Football League
AGM - Annual General Meeting
ALE - Alternative Lifestyle Event
AOF - All One Family
CAMP - Campaign Against Moral Persecution
CAZ - Calendrical Autonomous Zone
CERES - Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies
CIDA - Concerned Individuals for Direct Action
CJA - Criminal Justice (and public order) Act
CND - Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
ConFest - Conference/Festival
CSP - ConFest Safety Project
DiY/DIY - Do It Yourself
DJ - Disc Jockey
DNRE - Department of Natural Resources and Environment
DTE - Down To Earth
E - Ecstasy
ERA - Environment Resources Australia
FNB - Food Not Bombs
FOE - Friends Of the Earth
GECO - Goongerah Environment Centre Office
GEN - Green, Ethical, Non-exploitative
GWN - Great Walk Network
HEMP - Help End Marijuana Prohibition
ISKON - International Society for Krishna Consciousness
JAG - Jabiluka Action Group
LETS - Local Exchange Trading Scheme
LSD - lysergic acid diethylamide
MRTC - Metamorphic Ritual Theatre Company
NAG - Nightcap Action Group
NDP - Nuclear Disarmament Party
NEA - North East Australia
NEFA - North East Forest Alliance
NEIS - New Enterprise Incentive Scheme
NSM - New Social Movement
NSW - New South Wales
NUS - National Union of Students
NVDA - Non Violent Direct Action
OREN - Otway Ranges Environment Network
PAZ - Permanent Autonomous Zone
PM - Prime Minister
Qld - Queensland
RAG - Rainforest Action Group

RGM - Regular General Meeting
SA - South Australia
SGM - Special General Meeting
SBS - Special Broadcasting Service
TAZ - Temporary Autonomous Zone
Toc - Tocumwal
TWS - The Wilderness Society
Vic - Victoria
WA - Western Australia
WAND - Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament
WMC - Western Mining Corporation
Yippie - Youth International Party members
Zippie - Zen Inspired Pagan Professional

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