

## 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,<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 1992a; psychoanalysis - Schwartz-Salent and Stein 1991; neuro-phenomenology - Laughlin et al 1990).

and conventional economics and politics transcended. They are occasions where people, 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

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).<sup>2</sup>

## **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)

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<sup>2</sup> 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).

preoccupations with consistency, congruence and cognition as evidence of his contribution to post-structuralist theory in anthropology. His contribution, he suggested, amounted to '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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B.1(iv).

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 resilience [which ceases] to be an effective metalanguage or an agency of collective reflexivity' (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.<sup>5</sup> 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).<sup>6</sup>

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-

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<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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'



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 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'

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(1983a:105).

performance).<sup>7</sup> Within this arrangement, he justified the analytical dismissal of what 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

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<sup>7</sup> 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).

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).<sup>8</sup>

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 multiframe 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.<sup>9</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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).

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 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 Apoliticism**

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 liminar 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).<sup>10</sup>

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

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<sup>10</sup> 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;

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 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).<sup>11</sup>

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).<sup>12</sup> 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

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Sardiello 1994; Palmer 1998).

<sup>11</sup> 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 utopics, 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).

<sup>12</sup> 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

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)<sup>13</sup>

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).<sup>14</sup> 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)

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resolving’ contradictions and conflicts (Parkin 1996:xix).

<sup>13</sup> 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 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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).



### 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 - one which possesses its own 'internal logic of design' (1990:7).<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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).

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.

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.<sup>17</sup>

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).<sup>18</sup> 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.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix C for brief informant biographicals.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix D for emic elaborations of these characteristics.

Described as ‘the Marco Polo of the marginals milieu’ (Black 1994:105), the enigmatic Bey<sup>19</sup> 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).<sup>20</sup> In advocating ‘creative destruction’ of the ‘old Consensus’, Bey has been labelled a ‘postmodern “anarchist”’ (Zerzan 1997/98:79) - or in Bookchin’s (1995) denunciation, a proponent of ‘lifestyle anarchism’.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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)<sup>23</sup> and Media Creed (MC). While all experience is

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<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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/>>

<sup>21</sup> 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.

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

<sup>23</sup> 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

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).<sup>24</sup>

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).<sup>25</sup> 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

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art (1994a:8;1996:8).

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix B.2(ii) for an explanation of this.

<sup>25</sup> 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).

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” (1991a:109),<sup>26</sup> Bey reveals the TAZ to be a higher form of ‘immediatist organisation’, which may emerge from other ‘action groups’.<sup>27</sup> 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

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<sup>26</sup> 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).

<sup>27</sup> 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).

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)

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.<sup>28</sup> 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 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*.<sup>29</sup> 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'.<sup>30</sup> 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

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

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> 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.



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 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),<sup>31</sup> 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

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

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 what they believe to be more apt or interesting "designs for living"' (Turner 1987:22,24).<sup>32</sup>

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 (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

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<sup>32</sup> See also Appendix B.1(v).

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.

