

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

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'.

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).

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 psychologism,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)

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

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

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

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:

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.

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).

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:

He therefore pursued a cultural 'revolution'.

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.

‘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 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

⁶ From the personal archives of Ewen Richards.

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 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

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.

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'.

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

⁸ Handbooks had, especially in the eighties, become a popular means of communicating relevant

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 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

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 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

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 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

will 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

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 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)

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).

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 Aboriginals but more subtle ... [if] we dont 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 workshops 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

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

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, 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 (Griffith 1988a:4).¹⁶ In a remarkable series of events, claiming the Mt Oak experiment a

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).

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

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] 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

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.)

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.

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, 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

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

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.

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.

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 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)

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).

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 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),

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.

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 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.

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

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.

- 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 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)

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

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, 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, '[I]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

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.

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:

[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)

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).

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 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'.

Baranga 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

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 planet at 'Peace Camps' like Britain's Greenham Common (cf. Roseneil 1995:101-2), and Seneca in New York State (Krasniewicz 1994).

'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 intoned 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 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 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 meetings³⁸ 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

³⁸ 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.

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.³⁹ 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 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.

³⁹ It should be made clear that the spectrum of allegations I have received over the course of my research remain largely unsubstantiated.

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.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Several important additions and/or amendments to the Society's constitution were pushed

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 now holds trademark rights).⁴¹ 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).⁴² 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'.⁴³

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.

⁴¹ 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).

⁴² 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.

⁴³ The first Earth Haven (Australia Day weekend 1996) coincided with DTE's ChatFest (held on

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.⁴⁴ As Isha remarked, 'DTE is much more open to people coming in and speaking their truth and being heard' rather than being '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 1993,⁴⁵ and sponsored the annual St Andrews Music Festival. In June 1993, the Co-operative took up residence at CERES in Brunswick.⁴⁶ 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 Fawcner 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.

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).

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ 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).

⁴⁶ 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

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-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

time of writing (1999), with an interval (from 1996-97) at the Organ Factory in Clifton Hill.

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.⁴⁷ 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.

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,

⁴⁷ Which was even pre-empted in advertising in the December 1996 *FOE Newsletter* (15).

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'.

