

## Chapter 6

# Playing Out: Carnality, Alterity and the (Re)created Self

Here were people who had drawn a line and at last insisted on their right to determine their own identities ... They would love, dress, speak, work (or not work) as they chose. They would make their own music, dance to their own rhythm. They would become gypsies, mendicants, savages, witch doctors, rebels, clowns, freaks, and they would do so openly ... asking nobody's permission, making no apologies. (Roszak 1979:xxvi)

## Introduction

In a liminoidal counterworld of permission, participants *experiment* with desired sources of authenticity as a means of (re)creating their identities. In this chapter I am interested in the explicitly festive component of ConFest - wherein participants may 'stray from the paths'. There are three parts. In the first, I suggest ConFest privileges Turner's *subjunctive mood*. It is a ludic realm of pure possibility in which participants are permitted to 'play out' ('down', 'across', 'up'). Yet, I expand upon Turner's insights in a focus on the transgressive body. I thus detail a unique social synapse occasioning extra-ordinary, and potentially transformative, corporeal experience. In the second, I detail two interwoven strategies via which the 'other' is implicated in ConFesters' desires: *carnality* (getting 'in touch' with other participants), and *alterity* ('othering' the self, especially via indigeneity). Special consideration is given to appropriation which, I argue, is a complex process requiring reconsideration in cultural theory. With particular attention to performative appropriation, or *mimesis*, in the third part I discuss the on-site presence of complicated DiY identities, fashioned via identification (often fleeting) with multiple nodes of difference.

## Part I. Subjunctive Mind, Body and Spirit

ConFest is a paroxysmic exemplar of society's 'subjunctive mood', by which Turner meant a mood of 'wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis', a world of 'maybe', 'could be' and 'as if' - the mood of *were*, in 'if I were you' (Turner 1982c:83; 1984:20-21;

1992:149). As opposed to the indicative mood, according to Turner, subjunctivity is a transcendent and reflexive circumstance.<sup>1</sup> Yet, what of the body's role in subjunctive performance, in art, in play? Though Turner was not exactly an anthropologist of the body, there is little to prevent the extension of his ideas to embrace embodiment. Indeed, it could be argued that at ConFest, since one's art is public - on display, on parade (or 'presented' as in Goffman [1971]) - the body, as 'the least mediated of all media' (Bey 1994a:2), is the principal medium of communication.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, I take subjunctivity to implicate the conceptual, transcendent and physical spheres simultaneously. The subjunctive 'mood' is, therefore, a ludic<sup>3</sup> circumstance which may be ideational, numinous and corporeal.

The subjunctive culture of ConFest is a unique product of licensed *transgression* - the 'gay abandonment', reversal or 'negation' (Babcock 1978) of 'form' common to seasonal/calendar celebrations and to tourist behaviour. As Turner had it, such events carry 'the essence' of liminality: they are characterised by 'free or ludic recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird' (Turner 1982c:82). Categorical confusion reigns as liminaries may be androgynous, at once ghosts and babies, cultural and natural, or human and animal (Turner 1977:37). In a 'time out of time', with the world turned upside down, mere mortals may become deified (cf. Meyerhoff 1978:231). Bakhtin's (1968) rendering of the medieval carnival is analogous. According to Bakhtin, the carnival celebrated 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions ... it was hostile to all that was immortalised and completed' (1968:10). At such a juncture,

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<sup>1</sup> For Turner, play is basically transcendent and reflexive. It involves Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow state' (1974), yet also provides a 'metalanguage' (Bateson 1958) for commentaries on self and society (Turner 1985e:263-64). In Turner's view, the inherent sacred and 'instrumental potency' of playing, inspires the imagination. Play is then *elusiv*e (a term derived from the Latin *ex* for 'away' plus *ludere* meaning 'to play'). From the point of view of neurology, it cannot be pinned down by left brain 'thinking' nor is it fully of right brain 'arationality'. Taking another tack, play is described as a slippery 'Trickster', 'a Puck between the day world of Theseus and the night world of Oberon' (ibid:268). The 'supreme bricoleur of frail transient constructions', it is an incongruous potpourri of 'mimicry and mockery' (ibid:264) paralleling the indivisibly transcendent and dialogical cultural mode of Bakhtin's (1968) carnivalesque.

<sup>2</sup> As Bey remarked, 'real art is play and play is one of the most immediate of all experiences' (1994a:4). ConFest is an immediate micro-social topos where barriers between artists and 'users' of art are removed. It thus approximates the TAZ which, for Bey, is 'the only possible "time" and "place" for art to happen, for the sheer pleasure of creative play' - where art is not a commodity but 'a condition of life'. In this democratisation of artistry (music making, singing, healing arts etc.) the artist is not celebrated as a special sort of person, but every person is celebrated as a special sort of artist (Bey 1991a:70).

<sup>3</sup> Note that 'ludic' is not synonymous with carefree frivolity. For Huizinga, 'we might call [play] a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary life" as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly' (Huizinga 1950:13).

'[t]he order of things is dislocated and everything becomes full of emotion, allusive ... *representational*' (Da Matta 1984:238, my emphasis). Such 'representational' events (Handelman 1990) may sustain the status quo as 'the aspects of order that are inverted remain the mould for the inversion' (ibid:52). Nevertheless, an inversion may become disconnected from its origin, emerging as an 'authentic, transformative alternative, one that attacks in all seriousness the foundations on which it was erected' (ibid:49).

At ConFest, one passes across a threshold into unpredictable 'banana' space-time, a 'bohemian moment' (Moore 1998a:173) wherein 'the forces of uncertainty in play' (Handelman 1990:70) are valued and consequential. Outside (or in modernity), where play is tightly framed and uncertainty 'domesticated', it has become 'frivolous' and 'inconsequential' - dismissed as irrational, mere 'fantasy', 'pretence', consigned to the devalued territory of 'make-believe' (ibid). ConFest is a 'play-ground', a 'crazy' peripatetic zone where there may be little preoccupation with 'the act of arriving' (Da Matta 1984:223). As Huizinga remarked, play invariably takes place within 'forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain' (1950:10). Once inside the 'forbidden' zone, participants discover or expect that the subjunctive mind, body and spirit is permitted and valued, that one may wander without need for direction, that routine dictates of (re)productivity are placed in abeyance, that normative gender configurations are openly ruptured, that the boundary between play and work is blurred, that risks may be taken.

In this way, ConFest approximates the open-theatricality of Neo-Pagan gatherings, where participants:

delve into aspects of other cultures and mythologies that they find captivating [and] become ensconced in the excitement of *becoming* amid a highly charged atmosphere. Reality is momentarily suspended or abrogated ... one steps out of one time into another and enters an enclave within which it seems anything may happen. (Hume 1997:6-7)

And such enclaves may be ruled by chaos, hosting unbridled destructiveness. One commentator, 'on several hits of liquid 2CB, DMT, and hash oil', narrates his experience of the apotheosis of the Burning Man Festival:

It was as if the pits of Hell opened up and fire shot out into the sky ... [T]he air was filled with smoke and incense and sweat and screams and laughter, there were people wandering around in all stages of insanity from slight drug-induced hazes to downright schizophrenic babbling, burning everything in sight, revelling in the total annihilation of all structure. (Tussin)

Yet, such threshold crossings and cataclysmic moments wherein the death of structure is engineered are highly consequential. They potentiate renewal in highly idiosyncratic forms. This is precisely the sentiment Orryelle received in feedback to his *Labyrinth*:

Some people freaked out a bit, went through some kind of cathartic death, but ultimately emerged stronger and stranger. Many tales of joy and fascination, of having discovered 'another world'. Those who got really lost mostly eventually found ... themselves. Some have even expressed 'life-transforming' experiences, while others just had fun!

Of course, the total experience promises analogous effects. Gum drives the point home:

[ConFest] is a transformation point. Where people are transformed 'cause they're loosened from the constraints of society, and they're then allowed to become something else. And they then go back and they're different. I mean they get back in society and ... they're never the same again. I don't think anyone that comes here is ever the same again.

In a general sense, ConFest effects a break down of routine rules and practices, followed by reformation or readjustment, a process echoing the 'programmed deconstruction' (Handelman 1990:65) and reconstruction of identities in passage rites. Novices are especially known to experience 'disequilibrium' (Schechner 1993:40). They approximate *paidia* (Greek for 'child') which, according to Caillois, stands for 'an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, carefree gaiety ... [and] uncontrolled fantasy' (in Turner 1983a:106). Deconstructive turbulence is evident in the alterations of the habitual, balanced body. The body is 'opened, made provisional, uncreated ... so that it can be re-created according to plan' (Schechner 1993:40). Yet, like Burning Man, there is no telos, no institutionalised sequence of aesthetic/performance modes orchestrating 'resocialisation' within a single cosmic order, as in Sinhalese exorcisms (Kapferer 1983). There are certainly 'transformative consequences for contexts and identities beyond the setting of ... performance' (Kapferer 1979:13). However, given the plenitude of performance venues, genres and workshops/playshops (many of which operate via deconstruction-reconstruction principles), there are many possible sources of de/reformation, effecting uncertain consequences.

## Part II. Desiring the Other: Carnality and Alterity

People are given permission to do virtually anything, and as a result, they start to become more themselves. And a lot of them explore being like this and they explore that, and you know, they want to know what colour they are, and what ... their origins are: who they are. So they explore and they paint themselves, and they dress differently, and they even act differently and loosen right up, because there doesn't seem to be any judgment on anyone doing anything. They can see people doing much more bizarre things than they'd ever dreamt of. And clearly no one's gonna look twice at you no matter what you try ... You have to be real good to gain attention around here. So you find people are allowed to be something else. (Gum)

ConFest occasions the satisfying of otherwise unfulfilled, or even the discovery of hidden, desires. There are a number of ways in which otherness is implicated in the desires of participants. They desire *carnality* (getting 'in touch' with other participants) and *alterity* ('othering' their selves).<sup>4</sup> These are considered to be 'natural' states, complex interwoven processes of self-becoming, of individuation via authentication. In each, the body is paramount: a site of experimentation, medium of expression, fulcrum of mutuality. By carnality, I mean the manifest desire for physical contact with co-participants: ranging from non-sexual tactility to erotic sensuality. Alterity involves an express identification with difference (an 'othered' self) which itself takes a number of complex forms. Carnality and alterity are discussed in turn.

### Carnality

ConFest is an experimental 'festal culture' where 'carnal knowing' is permitted. 'Carnal knowing' is, according to Mellor and Shilling (1997:56), 'a form of gaining information about the world which is thoroughly embodied and connected to people's senses and sensualities'. It is a form of public knowledge suppressed in Protestant modernity and to which nostalgic contemporaries desire to return. ConFest is a unique site for such a return as its culture is carnal, is promiscuity. Not 'abstract, fleshless, mediated by machine or by authority or by simulation', festal culture is corporeal. It is 'face-to-face, body-to-body, breath-to-breath (literally a conspiracy)' (Bey 1994a:30). It is then Bakhtin's material realm of the infinitely permeable body. It is also pure carnivalesque, a licensed

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, participants also desire the immediate sociality of *communitas* - *being with* others. I give special attention to this in Chapter 8.

Batailleian world of taboo breaking ‘a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled’ (Stallybrass and White 1986:8). That permitted behaviour is taboo or discouraged elsewhere, confers a sense of demarcated clandestinity to which participants are privileged. And there is a spectrum of activities pursued.

Massage is popular - the *Massage* village being the principle locus for such sensuousness. There, various techniques - from Reiki to Tantric, and more idiosyncratic - are practised and reciprocated. ConFest has conventionally ‘showcased’ a plethora of tactile therapies and healing-arts.<sup>5</sup> Sensuous communions may however, take highly erotic forms. The *Queer*, *Pagan* and *Sexuality* villages have been repositories for playshops providing the opportunity to explore ‘flirting’, ‘gay flirting - with Shaun and Bazza’, ‘radical intimacy’, ‘polyfidelity’, ‘queer collaboration’, bisexuality, Tantra, ‘macrame and bondage - BYO rope’. *Queer* was host to numerous workshops and educational sessions on queer sexuality, cross-dressing and transsexuality - including those facilitated by self-designated ‘queer-hippie’ Nori May Welby. At *Pagan*, it was not unusual to witness a ‘guy dressed in little leather pants whip himself over a woman lying on the ground in a pentagram in front of a small crowd of onlookers’ (Baekia).

This festal ‘banana time’ is the realm of carnal possibility, a bacchanal ‘coming out’. Cedar explains this well:

I remember walking from [a workshop on bisexuality] past the *Massage* village and there was this guy sucking off another guy just off the side of the path ... I couldn’t believe it. I was stunned and amazed. I thought ‘wow, this is fantastic’ you know. Like people feel free to do that ... I’ve never seen it again at ConFest, but what got me was that there was room to be radically different.

Such intemperate disinhibition may be even more ‘public’. The celebrations at the Fire Circle adjacent the Market at Moama II over New Year present a pertinent example of Rabelaisian abandonment. The celebrations lasted well into the new year. Thousands of people, many nude, adorned with mud and paint participated in a percussion driven tumult well past midnight. We encircled a huge bonfire with an orchestra of the weird congregating at one end producing an incessant and often chaotic hand drum rhythm. There was an inner ring for wilder celebrants, primal voguers and temporary exhibitionists to circumambulate. It was an atmosphere where one was both exhibitionist *and* voyeur,

actor *and* audience. Some performed stylised dance gestures (like belly dancing, Butoh, Capoeira). Others were just ‘going off’ - no longer an audience to themselves, some participants were in or near states of entrancement. Entertaining bravado, some younger males took to leaping the fire. Later, after hundreds remained to see in the dawn, a few 44 gallon drums became the main source of percussion (noise). Two women fell in passionate embrace in front of the 44s. They seemed oblivious to onlookers, one of whom was a disconsolate male who was previously mauling one of the now erotically engaged.

In conjunction with such proprietorial dissolution and queer coalitions, there is much evidence of gender identity disruption. Male performance of femininity is encouraged and pronounced. According to Fulmar, at ConFest ‘you can live out your fantasies ... I wore a dress for a while (why not?)’. Crossdressing is one<sup>6</sup> overt indicator of the body’s potential as ‘a site of resistance’. For Grosz (1990:64), the body ‘exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways’. As Butler (1990:141) suggests, at sites ‘outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality’ such alternate gender configurations are enabled. At ConFest, ‘disruptive’ gender performances are made possible, in a space where divergence from rules governing sex, gender and desire is encouraged.<sup>7</sup>

Here is a promiscuous and disruptive topos, where ‘the unclosed body of convexities and orifices intrud[es] onto and into other’s personal space’ (Shields 1990:57), where ‘rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder’ are made possible (Butler 1990:17). Evocative of the insurrectionary TAZ (Bey 1991a), it surely is a most visible instance of society’s ‘orgiastic’ substratum which licenses the profligation of sensual alterity in the ‘transgression of imposed morality’ (Maffesoli 1993:92).

## **Alterity**

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in a workshop at Cotter, The Farm’s James Prescott endorsed the view that ‘the more physical touching shared by people for the purpose of pleasure and understanding, the less the tendency toward violence in their society’ (*DTE Canberra* 3, Dec. 1979:14-15).

<sup>6</sup> Other strategies include piercing and innovative body painting.

<sup>7</sup> For Butler, gender is not an ‘expression’ of an inner ‘essence’ or ‘substance’ - it is performed, it is produced. Therefore, to follow her argument, gender discontinuities such as those ‘performed’ at ConFest expose the fiction of an interior gender ‘essence’, dramatising the performative construction of an original or true ‘sex’: ‘In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency’ (Butler 1990:36).

MacCannell holds that (1976:5) ‘a basic theme in our civilisation ... [is] self discovery through a complex and sometimes arduous search for an Absolute Other’. Accordingly, an essential category of *difference*, typifying authenticity, is considered to be a source of self discovery (or even ‘rediscovery’) for contemporaries. This leads especially to tourism which, as Bauman argues, is a ‘mode of life’ in postmodernity:

The tourist is a conscious and systematic seeker of experience, of a new and different experience, of the experience of difference and novelty - as the joys of the familiar wear off and cease to allure. The tourists want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element ... on condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish. (Bauman 1996:29)

I take this further by suggesting that states of social, psychological and cultural alterity are required for the (re)creation of identity. Othering is a requirement of selfhood. As ConFest demonstrates, one need not make pilgrimage to distant, international cultural productions to experience such othering. Of course, following Bauman’s logic, one need not even travel so far as ConFest, yet the point I wish to make is that several *pathways* of alterity intersect at ConFest. I shall discuss regression (to childhood), alterant use, dressing down (nudity) and dressing up (indigeneity).

### *Childhood*

There are occasions when the entropic birth-death trajectory is momentarily reversed. These are moments when ‘one dies to become a little child’ (Turner 1974:273). Childhood and play are normally considered to be profoundly related. Turner acknowledged the serious transitional implications of childlike abandon: ‘this is why Jesus said “Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven”, the un-kingdom beyond social structure’ (1983a:111-12). In the ‘un-kingdom’ of ConFest, participants are granted permission to relinquish the affectations of adulthood such that, according to Karrabul, ConFest is ‘a whole body experience ... [it’s] kindergarten again’. Along these lines, Les reveals that ‘in many respects the whole ConFest experience is an age regression ... It’s an opportunity to play again, for adults to play, to do bizarre and crazy things, to let your hair down’.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it amounts to a vast playground - a magnified *Children’s* village.

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, one might regress as far as the womb (e.g. *The Labyrinth*) or even past lives (Dr Fu’s popular ‘past life regression’ workshops).

As such, the following description of the *Children's* village at Walwa III (90/91) is a curiously befitting description of the entire event:

Story telling, singing and sharing circle, adventure playground, mysterious tunnel, parasol totem puppets, fabric printing, cubby shelters, face painting, procession, festival dragon, costumes, masks, music, follow the pied piper, join the frog circus, puppet theatre, arts and crafts tent, treasure trail - collect natural material. (from *Walwa 90/91 handbook*)

### *Re-creational Alterant Use*

There is also a pervasive Dionysian propensity for altered states of consciousness effected via conspicuous re-creational substance use (especially cannabis but also psilocybin ['magic mushrooms'] acid and ecstasy). It can be quite reasonably stated that ConFesters are the descendants of 'the psychic disaffiliates' who, in the 1960s, 'took off in search of altered states of consciousness that might generate altered states of society' (Roszak 1995:xxvi). Svendsen (1999:38) argues that what he calls 'Psychedelic Spirituality' has 'always been at ConFest & will always be at ConFest ... the only thing that varies is to what extent the 10% of the ice-berg is above the visible water line'.

It would be erroneous to assume that all alterant usage is enacted with similar intent. For instance, LSD may be ingested for purely hedonic escapades, or as a sacramental tool for intentional spiritual transportation - to *re-create* or create anew consciousness. A common thread is that psychedelics can expand the boundary lines on the fields of possibility, potentiating self-transformation within a 'rave-safe' environment. Yet, there is an uncertain and random quality to the experience. In the only literary depiction of ConFest to date, Dando (1996) describes ConFest as a wild acid trip: the author and his friend were 'two feral goblins on acid ... we paint[ed] our faces tribal colours, became other people ... it's just like lord of the flies. It's chaos, anything could happen' (149). Isha recalls a young woman she knew who came to ConFest and, 'dropped a tab of acid and ... we didn't see her for days. Then I heard stories ... someone had seen her coming out of the bushes growling and snarling like a tiger. And she was a tiger for days'.

Well conceived and facilitated workshops can provide a safe environment to explore the consciousness enhancing, spiritual dimensions of psychedelic alterants. Kurt Svendsen, has, for instance, offered workshops which provide:

a gateway so that people so motivated to swim against the currents of mere sensory pleasure & entertainment could find a dignified clear-spot & exploratory oasis, a Meta-ConFest within the greater ConFest, a pure, albeit obscure Conferencing-Festival (Svendsen 1999:41).

A report on one such workshop ('Conscious Tripping' at Moama III) provides an account of the 'half-life awakening of one individual into transpersonal or god-consciousness' (Professor Ceteris Paribus 1996). Another Psychedelics graduate relates that a subsequent workshop, an 'intense six-hour voyage of self-discovery' at Moama IV, 'opened the doors of perception into the world of the unknown within'. As an opportunity to discover 'some truths about good and evil', it stimulated 'a profound understanding of balance ... open[ing] a door to a higher level of compassion and feeling for other people' (Nagy c.1996). The 'bad trip' notwithstanding, alterants have been known to amplify ConFest's catalytic capacity. Holding the firm belief that the event is nothing less than 'a catalyst for change', Mundarda, for instance, conceived his youngest child at ConFest during a 'psychedelic journey'.

### *Nudity*

If you and your friends have got nothing on over the new year holidays you're more than welcome at ConFest. (Trev Hemer, DTE email-group 16/10/97)

ConFest is conventionally a 'clothes optional' event. The open relaxation of dress codes and prevalence of full nudity inverts the sanctioned norm of covering up (especially genitalia) outside the private sphere. The theme is reflected in workshops - such as 'nude years day', 'nude drum and dance party' and 'naked sensuality'. While many participants feel comfortable with the idea of the 'free' festival - there being many practising nudists ('naturists') present - for novices the experience may approximate the kind of 'ordeal' associated with passage rites. Apprehensiveness is common as novices entertain false expectations of obligatory nudity and confront fears of first-time public *exposure*. Here, public nudity (which it should be stressed is not at all obligatory) involves the temporary disclosure of the 'self' - the vulnerable, unfortified self stripped of social disguises and

pretence. Thus, for Oribi, it ‘gave me a chance to step out of my bra and drop all the bullshit pretences’. According to Wogoit:

People drop pretence and falsity because there’s no need for it at ConFest. We are who we are here. Allowing us to be like that makes us stronger inside and reasserts our purpose to us. Because it doesn’t matter who you are, you can really relax and grow.

Following possible embarrassment, resolutions are often achieved as dress behaviour is modified, and as participants may adopt various styles of undress.<sup>9</sup> As Trev explains:

There is nothing morally, religiously, or socially wrong with nudity. No one should grow up without knowing and respecting what a human body looks like ... naked is natural - we have to be taught to wear clothes. Overcoming this conditioning is often threatening but it changes lives and outlook on body image, self esteem, acceptance, respect and worth of ourselves and others. (Trev, DTE email-group 16/10/97) <sup>10</sup>

Female participants are more likely to hold reservations. Initially Saffron:

was a bit worried ... I expected everyone to be naked and thought that would be expected of me, but I found the nudity wonderful as everyone was so unselfconscious; I wish society wasn’t so moralistic about such things.

Similarly, for Peregrin, ‘it broke down my body image - no one is “hung up” on bodies. It also made me more adventurous with my clothes’. Ambrosia had strong reservations about the whole thing at first: ‘I was apprehensive because of the nudity thing. I thought I might have felt pressure to be nude all the time, because everyone else was’. Eventually she gave up a cruise she won on ‘The Wheel of Fortune’ to come to ConFest:

[A]nd now that I’ve got here I’ve realised, well there’s a lot of people clothed and ya’know, you don’t necessarily have to do that ... I also think it’s an attitude. [Since people are] really comfortable with it, you start to feel really comfortable with it.

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<sup>9</sup> In my own experience, such taboo-breaking ‘modifications’ were ultimately satisfying - even liberating. I discovered at my first ConFest (Moama I) that, following anxieties about going around, as a friend deemed it, ‘tackle out’, being naked in the presence of strangers was not as difficult as I had been conditioned to believe.

<sup>10</sup> According to Trev, Australia is ‘a country that’s been nudist for 99.9% of its inhabited history - 40,000 to 100,000 years ... The Americas, South Pacific, Australia, S.E. Asia, and Africa were all inhabited by naked people, living in respect for their land and people’. Acacia provides a rather different insight however, stating that Aboriginal people are often ‘shocked and are really angry about the nudity’, which she says is ‘kind of interesting in terms of the fact that that’s really been appropriated from indigenous cultures’.

Yallara inquires 'where else can people be nude without being conscious of it? Where else can someone like me, just from straight suburbia, really do that?' Recalling his first ConFest, Cedar admits a common male apprehension and revelation:

Walking around naked, I was terrified that I was going to have an erection all the time. But I didn't, which, mind you, was a bit of a struggle at first. And then I since found that underwear and bathers are much more sexually attractive cause they actually focus your attention. Well, for me they do anyway. And I actually changed my outlook.

For experienced site workers, nudity is a celebration of the body. Trev says 'I don't believe there's anything imperfect, indecent, or obscene with the human body. I can't believe we are the only species that have to wear clothes and cosmetics and jewellery to increase our sex appeal. So [in reference to his gate duties] I even go on buses now. No worries'. Graham refers to his body as his 'uniform':

When I'm working I'm in uniform. Yeah, I love nudity ... I'm not an exhibitionist, I just love being naked. It's free. You can feel the breeze on your body, and the sun, and the dirt, and the dust, and what else. And I work a lot better ... when I'm naked. I don't like being naked when people object to it. That's fair enough. But this is an accepting atmosphere ... nudity is a freedom.

Nudity is not as prevalent today as it has been in the past, however. Cedar notes that over the last ten years it has become more unusual to see people walking around the site naked. In the past, one third of the people were naked all the time at summer ConFests, whereas now most people only go naked when they're swimming. This is a shame as 'everybody is forced ... to confront their fears. And so the standard is set high in terms of confronting yourself through nakedness. And that standard has lowered a lot' (Cedar). People are, nevertheless, less inhibited in their choice of body covering a fact which becomes apparent over successive days of the event. Cockatoo suggests a good reason for this:

The majority of the people now are a lot younger, and they go through a cultural process of shedding their clothes, and that could take the whole festival ... For lots of young people, it's a cultural barrier to break through - very important though.

Though less universal, nudity retains popular acceptance. The *Art* village and adjacent beach area is the principal site of concentrated nudity. In *Art*, bodily exposure is

accompanied by group mud plastering and skin murals. Back in 1979, Claudia revealed her prime remedy for inhibitions:

[T]ake one huge mud puddle, 20 to 30 naked people, have them jump about a lot, singing to the tune of 'Mud, Mud, Glorious Mud', ensure that only the eyeballs remain uncovered, lots of spectators, bemused expressions, hearty laughter. (Claudia 1979:19)

To be covered with wet earth (which one nine year old girl called 'special mud') subverts instilled rules of cleanliness and sterilisation to which novices have learned to strictly adhere. One is reminded of Turner's description of liminaries who are melted down to a generalised, anonymous 'prima materia', who become lumps of human clay, ready to be moulded anew (1977:37). By negating conventional standards, including that of the 'classical body' (Stallybrass and White 1986), participants engage in a kind of 'resistance through dirt', a celebration of the 'marginal [dirty] body' which for Hetherington (1996:43-44), is almost a requirement for 'marginal identities'. And, reminiscent of a trait common to 'fantasy island' narratives:

mud seems to signify the indulgence of an atavistic impulse - *nostalgie de la boue*. White people who roll on mud not only revert to an infantile relationship with excremental soil - they literally soil themselves - but also, if only temporarily, become 'primitive', which is to say black. Mud reminds them, not only of their roots in their own polymorphous perverse infancy, but also of their Darwinian origins among primitive peoples and, looking even further back into pre-history, among the primates. (Woods 1995:141)

ConFesters thus possess a family resemblance to Nimbin revellers who 'coated their whole bodies with ... dark brown mud and transformed themselves into anonymous "natives"' (Newton 1988:63).

To be decorated with water based or fluorescent paints - in a combination of styles and colours on any anatomical location - engenders an almost infinite array of possibilities in refiguring and recomposing one's experience of the primitive body. The curious attraction of such integument is that participants are provided with the convenient option of being simultaneously unclothed (exposed) *and* totally covered (protected). *Art* is located on the beach, itself a liminal zone (between land and water) often constructed as a topos of pleasurable activities (cf. Shields 1990), a most 'visible site of hedonist culture ... [and] cheerful eroticism' (Booth 1997:172). Here, the undisciplined body is celebrated in a grotesque degradation to the material level of earth and flesh. The clay clad masses mingle

and dance, spilling out into the festival, wandering around all day in such temporary body modifications.

### *Indigeneity and Appropriation*

A white male Toc III participant posed a curious sight. With his body covered in mud, didjeridu painted in a black, yellow and red pattern, and penis decorated in matching hues, he emblematised the sensuous simulation of, and experimentation with, primitivity discovered on site. Here, participants manipulate a repertoire of symbolism (paint, musical instruments, clothing, dance styles, architecture) assuming aspects of the valorised primitive, seeking indigeneity.<sup>11</sup> While workshops like 'Koori astronomy' and 'intercultural sharing' - involving the construction of multi-totemic murals - appeared at Toc III (in *Koori Culture*), body decorations using ochre (hence the experience of getting 'ochred') and dot painting technique have become ephemeral recently. And, like primitive antennae seen on backpackers commuting to and from ConFest, the popularity of the didjeridu has escalated. Non-indigenous Australians (usually males but increasingly females also) desire to create the vibrating drone to which Aborigines have always attributed sacred significance, a trend that is underscored by the popularity of workshops on 'how to play didjeridu' and 'didge healing',<sup>12</sup> and stalls like 'Heartland Didgeridoo' which, at Toc III, was signposted:

It's time for Aboriginal spirit to rise in us all ...The didge is the sound of Mother Earth and is bringing forth the heart spirit, from the depths of our land. The Didge Spirit will guide us if we put aside our ego and be humble ... The vibrating sound of the didge is stirring for it reflects the wonderful sound of creation. Even the earth rotating as taped from outer space sounds like a didgeridoo ... By using it in creative ritual in day to day life and going into meditative, reflective and feeling spaces it becomes our soul companion helping open and clear the doorway to our spirit.

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<sup>11</sup> That which is variously perceived to be: timeless (a source of spirit, wisdom and moral teaching - keepers of 'the dreaming'); primordial (possessing animal instinct); autochthonous (from the land); conservationist (the 'ecologically noble savage': Redford 1990; cf. Sackett 1991:242); and nomadic.

<sup>12</sup> In 'didge healing', or 'didjeridu resonance therapy', the subject's body, or afflicted region, is offered up to the didjeriduist who provides a methodical 'sonic massage'. See Sherwood (1997:148-9) and Neuenfeldt (1998a:35-40) for discussions of alternative lifestylers' use of the didjeridu in therapeutic contexts.

In sympathy with such logic, the didjeridu, a chief ritual tool used in a fire walk at Toc IV, was played over the bare feet of prospective coal walkers with the purpose of guiding their journey. Such discourse and practice is consistent with essentialising patterns like those located in contemporary world music where the instrument is often perceived to resonate Mother Earth (Neuenfeldt 1994), and whose originators are imagined to be so 'in-touch' with their natural environment that they themselves are Nature. However, as a conduit between the sacred and profane (1994:93), the didjeridu's specified use in nascent performances ('didge healing' and the Toc IV fire walk) delivers us upon fresher ground.

For the disenchanting of Euro-origin, the world's aboriginal peoples have become the embodiment of the sacred. Indigenes are mobilised to serve varying purposes in different orbits. They are 'fetishised' at the global level (Beckett 1994); discursive mediators for the national imaginary (Lattas 1990; Hamilton 1990); and models for developing 'indigenous selves' (Mulcock 1997a).

As reflected in the popular imagination and consumption habits of contemporary Australia, non-indigenes have taken increased interest in Australian indigenous culture (religion, history, art, politics etc.). Aborigines are a highly desired source of inspiration. Andrew Lattas seems to have dominated much of the discussion here. Analysing the discursive products of contemporary 'bearers of nationalism' in Australian culture, Lattas commentates on the way Aborigines ('the primitive') have become a site for competing discourses about 'who we are' (the primitive ranges from the feared 'killer ape inside us' motif to a desired 'original' and 'sacred' essence). It is the latter to which Lattas devotes most attention, especially the ideas of those 'merchants of authenticity', leftist intellectuals and artists. In a discursive on what might be called the politics of truth and nothingness, Lattas is concerned with the forging, by these elites, of that which has become 'one of our most powerful myths' - the superficiality and spiritual corruption of the modern self. Pursuing a Foucauldian approach to power, those discourses rely on the positing of this sense of 'lack' - on a continuing belief that westerners are alienated from their selves and require the spiritual truths of the 'other' - to sustain their power and influence (Lattas 1990; 1991).

Aboriginality is thus mobilised to fill the void. 'Entrenched apocalyptic images of self-annihilation authorise selective appropriation of Aboriginal culture' (Lattas 1992:58). Settler Australians find, in Aboriginal culture, the perceived psychic healing qualities of timeless archetypal symbols (ibid:57), indigenes becoming a 'space of pilgrimage' wherein lost otherness is recaptured and the lacking, alienated settler self made whole (Lattas 1990;

1991:313; cf. Hamilton 1990:22-3; Marcus 1988). Lattas further argues that a 'redemptive function is being assigned to Aborigines' (1990:59). '[C]loaked in the shroud of Christ', the Aborigine, once 'crucified' (read slaughtered) is now 'resurrected' as the source of white redemption from the 'fall' of imperialism and 'the ravages inflicted by modernity' (1991:312-13). And, this 'interiorisation of Aboriginality', which is said to imprison Aborigines in a reductive healing role, 'is the means by which the West cannibalises this imaginary Other in the process of trying to constitute its own being' (Lattas 1990:61; 1992:57). Yet, what happens when we attempt to apply this interpretation to real circumstances of cultural borrowing?

Along with Aborigines, American Indian cultures, ever-popular repositories of essentialist meaning as a result of their fashionable co-option by North American and European countercultures,<sup>13</sup> also provide a desirable range of signifiers at ConFest: tipis,<sup>14</sup> cow hide garments, beads, hair styles, chants, percussion, and 'sweat lodges'<sup>15</sup> are typical mediators. However, the subscription to American Indians (like other indigenes) is characterised by a diversity of motivations - subscribers possessing different reasons for 'playing Indian'. A brochure dating from the late 1980s (when ConFests were held at Walwa) seems to have targeted 'wanna-bes' with specious promises and temporary fantasia: the reader being introduced to 'Good Medicine Tipis of Walwa' and ensured that the proprietors hire and sell 'authentically constructed' tipis and canoes designed for 'a real Indian adventure'. Yet, for the growing numbers of alternative Australians who have become committed to the more permanent 'adventure', tipis are practical - they're ideal homes. Accordingly, the founder of 'Trident Tipis' (a New Enterprise Incentive Scheme [NEIS] funded enterprise) proposes that not only do his shelters - 'scaled to the original Sioux design' (though with acrylic canvas rather than buffalo and animal skins) - offer 'a return to a way of life that honours the cycles of nature, that puts us in touch with the

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<sup>13</sup> American participation in 'the occult power' and 'mythic radiance' of the Indian, of 'Caliban the Wild Man', has, however, a long history - in fact traced back to the first English colony at Roanoke who had 'Gone to Croatan', who deserted civilisation and 'went native' (Bey 1991a:116-23; cf. Wilson 1993), and more recently clearly apparent in films like *Dances With Wolves* (Alexeyeff 1994).

<sup>14</sup> As evidenced in the *Tipi* village at Toc III, as well as a pervasion of old, new or mock tipis locally fashioned from logs, bark, scrub and corrugated iron.

<sup>15</sup> ConFest 'sweat lodges' are really just wood fired steam tents, though serious purificatory rituals of this type are becoming more popular amongst non-American Indians (Lindquist 1995).

Source of Energy that gives rise to all of creation' (from leaflet); they are also economical, durable and transportable.

Such processes are far from straightforward. There is indeed a tension characterising the process we know as appropriation, one recognised by Richards (1995:63) who finds that a 'fine line between reconciliation ... and plunder' underlies and problematises the endeavours of people like Daricha, 'New Age shaman' and director of the 'Centre for Human Transformation', who is said to borrow 'without shame, ready to wear anything that fits his evolving vision of the cosmos'.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, in the wake of Said (1978) cultural imperialism and its implications cannot be ignored. The recent history of pirating through which the 'other' has been removed, distorted and commodified as noble and wise, as profitably 'pure products' (Clifford 1988:ch.1),<sup>17</sup> and marketed to those seeking spiritual growth, restoration and status enhancement, deserves attention as an appendage to darker, more conspicuous, histories of dispossession.

On the other hand, a great deal of 'othering' is conditioned by deep sympathetic awareness, first-hand knowledge and a serious commitment to social alternatives such that the appropriation involves spiritual (e.g. personal belief in spirits, gods and divine cosmos), practical (e.g. diet, medicine, agricultural methods, architecture), social (e.g. public ritual and communal living) and political (actions in solidarity) lifestyle tactics.<sup>18</sup> And many alternative lifestylers (often widely 'travelled', and who may have themselves, to some degree, 'gone native' like Cohen's 'existential tourist' [Cohen 1979]) are as captivated by the religiosity and impressed by the simplistic practicality of the 'other' as they are sobered and horrified by the socio-historical contexts and consequences of colonialism. In a period recognised as one of mounting crisis for all of the planet's inhabitants, wherein a cornucopia of discourses, personal philosophies and nascent political, scientific and cultural agendas have drawn inspiration from the knowledge and

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<sup>16</sup> Daricha, who takes workshops at ConFest including 'the modern shaman's journey', was spurned by the Anangu Pitjantjatjara for attempting to harness local initiatory themes (the *Wanampi* Dreaming) in a ten day workshop in Central Australia in 1994.

<sup>17</sup> In cultural mining strategies, indigenes are consigned to the status of essential difference - they are reified as 'wholly other'. This denies a people's capacity for innovation and change, to absorb 'elements' from the outside in the continual development of their 'traditions'. It denies their agency. It also disadvantages those who deviate from the 'real' or 'authentic'.

<sup>18</sup> Tactics include what Hetherington (1998b:71) calls a 'politics of metonymy', whereby 'those not in a subaltern position identify with one or more such positions as a means of valorising their own identity as real and significant'. However, the approach is somewhat diminished as the cultural politics involved in the transference of marginality, where 'the idea of ethnicity and the idea of Otherness become important symbolic resources', is overlooked.

practice of others (including indigenes), such cultures have become valorised and defended for their real and/or imagined social/ecological record.

There is then a need to traverse the 'morally muddy landscape' (Taylor 1997) of appropriation, especially within the context of 'alternative Australia', with the purpose of revision. An investigation of the way anthropologists and cultural commentators have interpreted the appropriation of Aboriginality by alternative cultural adherents is required. Marcus (1988), in a discussion of the way 'Ayers Rock' (Uluru) is 'becoming the sacred centre of a rapidly developing settler cosmology' (1988:254), attends to the way 'New Age pilgrims' rework Aboriginal law and cosmology through the distorting prism of an 'international mystical tradition'. Just criticisms are launched. Focusing on 'a feeling of the timelessness and essential universal truths' that Aboriginal beliefs offer, 'Aquarians' ignore the unique social, political and religious context of people's such as the Pitjantjatjara. Furthermore, they seek a unity which 'transcends all local differences' and encompasses all religious traditions (ibid:265). The implications of such processes are not to be taken lightly:

The universalising and egalitarian sentiments of mystical doctrine are used to deny the specificity of Aboriginal belief, to disregard entirely the wishes of Aboriginal custodians, and to insert settler Australia into the very heart of the secret Aboriginal knowledge on which their only recognised claim to land rests. (Marcus 1988:268)

Yet, the approach is ultimately dissatisfying. First Marcus adjudges 'Aquarians' collectively guilty of the crime of 'cultural appropriation', by which is meant the undermining, via theft, of a people's belief system. Second, the people she accuses of such crimes are strangely absent from her article (except via newspaper reports). Third, without comparative evaluation, a vast range of other discourse and practice - from popular music and tourism to gender discourse (reflecting 'a conservative movement in Australian politics' [ibid:272]) - is also cast within a 'shame file' of 'cultural appropriation'. Therefore, not only does Marcus conflate 'appropriation' with expropriation and employ a somewhat empirically distanced approach, she adopts an homogenising strategy of her own. Unfortunately, a balanced discussion of such a complex issue is compromised by protective advocacy. We are left wondering what direction we should take, and what is the value of this kind of analysis. And what of 'the Rock'? Should non-custodians (including

non-custodian Aborigines) forgo the pilgrimage, forget it exists, intentionally purge it from our 'idiosyncratic geographies of significance' (Gelder and Jacobs 1998:123)?

In a prejudiced attack on new social formations, Cuthbert and Grossman's work (1996) suffers from similar shortcomings. The authors point out that the New Age 'occupation' of indigenous 'others' is a result of the inversion of imperial discourse whereby those who once were characterised by *lack* and envy (and therefore targets of derision and hate), are now perceived to be *rich* in purity and verity (and, as such, a source of strength and wisdom [ibid:20]). Despite the validity of this interpretation, the authors have produced a selective and misleading account of a complex cultural phenomenon.

Cuthbert and Grossman introduce the concept of 'new feralism' to describe contemporary Australian New Age primitivism, claiming that, through their pre-lapsarian return to the wild and 'metaphorical search for *Lebensraum*' (1996:23), ferals are the cardinal boogey-men of neo-imperialism. Though it is early declared that 'the new feralism' is 'a domain *partially* aligned with New Age' (ibid, my emphasis),<sup>19</sup> ferals ultimately become the wanton juggernauts of an incursive essentialism, leading the New Age occupation of indigenes.<sup>20</sup> As 'feral' becomes effectively synonymous with 'New Age', ferals are dismissed as politically quiescent. In fact, the 'new feralism' relies upon the portraiture of morally bankrupt self-seeking aesthetes. Enter Neri and Reggae AI, whose comments (featured in Gibbs 1995) represent the evidence upon which 'the new feralism' rests. For Cuthbert and Grossman, the 'new feralism' seems most transparent in a phrase attributed to Reggae AI: 'Going tribal is what it's all about. The forest is a giant playground'. Performing intellectual gymnastics, the authors not only infer that all ferals regard all tribal peoples as child-like, but that their interests do not extend to redressing the history of dispossession by supporting native title and self-determination.

It should be acknowledged that 'connections' or identifications with indigenes are diverse. Towards one end of the spectrum we see fabrication, distortion and dubious claims to indigeneity, (Kehoe 1990; Rose 1992), 'fakelore' (Niman 1997:131-48), the reductive trivialising of complex religious systems into shallow therapeutic devices (Jocks 1996; Ziguras 1996:70), imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989), the adoption of a 'salvage paradigm' (Root 1996:100) and the commodification of imported cultural property (cf.

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<sup>19</sup> Though the New Age too, does not receive adequate definition here.

<sup>20</sup> The authors seem to conspire in a strangely familiar invective, albeit dressed up in a legitimate academic tongue. A tiresome *feral as pest* discourse is adopted as ferals become invasive New Age pests.

Neuenfeldt 1998b). Identifications may be characterised by the kind of conflation of difference and denial of history found in indigenously inspired eco-nations expounded in New Age, environmental and eco-feminist tracts (Jacobs 1994). 'Post-settler' narratives of entitlement (Cuthbert and Grossman 1998) which resist and undermine the cultural authority and rights of indigenous peoples (Marcus 1988), lead to the erosion of cultural values and community cohesion as young indigenes are exposed to European (e.g. New Age) interpretations of their spirituality (Taylor 1997:200).

Towards the other end, one finds a sensitive cultural awareness and validation of indigenous authority in regard to knowledge and practice subscribed to. Recently, social commentators have begun to rethink 'appropriation' which, after all, as Morton reminds us, means to take something 'unto oneself and devote it to a special purpose' (1996:134). As he suggests, 'reconciliation necessarily entails a logic of redemption ... [which is] at the same time, personal and political, not simply subject to "discourse"' (ibid). Further, a 'mutually satisfying future' for Australians, he argues, depends upon appropriations. Mulcock (1997b:15,n8), pointing out New Ager's 'genuine attempts to honour indigenous people', laments:

[w]here are the balance of voices, the multiple perspectives that critical academic practice has the potential to portray? I feel the need to look for less judgmental and more complex models of cultural appropriation that embrace the diversity of voices and the lived experiences of people participating in this discourse.

Furthermore, there is much evidence of a postcolonial attitude where, in contradistinction to Said - and Cuthbert and Grossman - appropriated cultures are positively valued and even benefit from borrowings. Ziguras (1996) suggests there may be an 'important difference between those from privileged groups who romanticise and exoticise abstracted images of another culture, and those whose sympathy is with the actual people who live that culture'. He asks 'can cultural appropriation foster closer ties and political solidarity between oppressed and privileged groups?' (1996:73). Taylor (1997), elicits a positive response. Researching the partly Native American inspired 'primal spirituality' of Earth First!, he argues cultural borrowing promotes *respect*, furthers the establishment of concrete political alliances, and can even enhance the

survival prospects of indigenous cultures.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he argues, cultural borrowing should never be dismissed out of hand as pernicious. In Australia, alternative lifestylers, besides playing the didgeridu and appreciating Aboriginal art and Dreamtime stories, are often engaged in struggles for native title rights, improved health-care and self-determination - for reconciliation. Many alternates, including eco-radicals, acknowledge prior occupation, are cognisant of histories of dispossession, and are consequentially empathetic. Such awareness and empathy has inspired support for Aboriginal land claims, especially where 'bioprospectors' are involved (e.g. WMC at Roxby Downs, Ross Mining at Timbarra, and ERA at Jabiluka).

As I have argued, cultural appropriation is essentially an ambivalent process; indeed 'painfully complicated' (Mulcock 1997a:6).<sup>22</sup> Caution is therefore required. Blanket condemnation of 'New Age', 'Aquarian' or 'feral' appropriations of indigenes is not justifiable. Careful contextual research is required. Ethnography clarifies the status of cross-cultural borrowings as 'pernicious, beneficent, or something in between' (Taylor 1997:n9). While a critical awareness of the politics of othering should be retained in research, unbalanced assessments, 'witch hunts' and approaches relegating people to the status of self-redeeming cannibals should be avoided.

### **Part III. Mimesis, DiY Identity and Multi-Alterity**

I wish to point out two further themes associated with the subjunctive process of othering at ConFest - both of which render existing models of appropriation problematical.

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<sup>21</sup> Also see Taylor (1995b). For accounts of radical ecology movement alliances with other cultures deemed to possess a nature beneficent spirituality, see Taylor (1995a).

<sup>22</sup> And there are further complexities. Demystifying a process routinely associated with 'distortion, inequality, theft, repression and coercion', Morton refigures appropriation as an 'aspect of exchange', ideally involving mutual agency (1996:133). Appropriation is here assigned an unusually positive value given the conviction that an 'equivalence of agency' is impossible (Johnson 1995:164) or that 'appropriation goes hand in hand with colonialism' (Root 1996:102). The economy of appropriated signs - the system of imports and exports - is a subject worthy of further research. As agents, 'others' may be involved in 'selling' (e.g. Aborigines as producers of New Age artefacts), 'spending', (e.g. strategic disclosures of secret land/business [Jacobs 1994]); or 'giving away' (e.g. the Krishna movement founded by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada offered to the west as a form of 'consciousness expansion' [Ziguras 1996:74]) their 'cultural capital'. They may also be themselves consumers of the New Age (Mulcock 1997a:6). Conklin (1997) complicates matters further. Addressing the new face of Amazonian identity politics, she discusses the tactical deployment of an embodied 'eco-

First, assuming otherness is central to play and, therefore, indelibly human. At ConFest, there can be observed a variety of forms of mimicry (from the Greek *mimos*, meaning imitator or actor). By ‘dressing up’ as Aboriginal, American Indian, Celtic Pagan, female, child (or fairy, witch, animal), imitating the desired ‘other’ - via corporeal inscriptions (dress, adornments, piercings, body paint, known icon of the other) gestures and practices (rites) and elaborate symbol systems (mythology) - ConFesters enter, via the laws of sympathetic magic, into physical contact with that ‘other’, whose raiment, whose very image, enhances condition. Such othering demonstrates, in a phenomenological sense, the possibilities arising out of what Taussig (1993) calls the ‘mimetic faculty’ - the very human capacity and desire to other. In the ‘mimetic faculty’ lies the potential for ‘copying or imitation and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived’ (1993:21). Mimesis, the ‘art of becoming something else, of becoming other’ (ibid.:36), a condition wherein otherness is copied and contacted, makes possible the altering of the self and the manipulation of the world. The processes of imitation here are processes of (re)creation and (re)formation. And, as Taylor (1997:198) points out, cross-cultural borrowing and the blending of myth, symbol and rite is a ‘rarely escaped dimension of religious life’ (and more so at a time when few societies remain insular).

Second, identification is not unitary or fixed. The ‘postmodern personality’, argues Bauman (1996:32), is restless, fickle and irresolute. Displaying or performing one’s self, an individual participant may simultaneously interiorise or exteriorise more than one ‘other’ (e.g. via curious combinations of Celtic symbolism, didgeridu use, Hindu pantheon, Rastafarian hairstyle and tipi dwelling), or, illustrative of the indefiniteness of identities now ‘adopted and discarded like a change of costume’ (Lasch in Bauman 1996:23), they may manipulate different sets of symbols at different times. ConFesters are very much bricoleurs energetically committed to a DiY lifestyle. They display desired vestiges of otherness in an externalised pot-pourri of exotic tattoo, or change their skins like ludic chameleons. Drawing upon multiple sources of authenticity, like new travellers, their identities are ‘heteroclite’ (Hetherington 1996a:43). Participants’ identities, as they are performed on site, are an embroglio of signifiers/inscriptions. To be feral, is itself most evocative of such unruly syncretism.

This relates to my feeling that the origin of ‘artefacts’ adopted (e.g. clothing, jewellery, icons, instruments, cuisine, language) is too often unclear as the meanings of such have

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semiotics’ (723) by indigenes. Though effecting political and cultural benefits, this is a strategic claim to an authenticity which is defined by non-Indians.

been refashioned and reinvented in a diffuse, undocumented, and steadily exponential tangle of migrations and fashionable concatenations. In such a creative cultural dynamic, where the ethnicity/culture of the 'displayer' (the 'self') is becoming as diverse as the favoured 'other/s' acted out, a preoccupation with origins (much like the 19th century search for the origins of religion) verges on the pointless and futile. Though we can clearly perceive Taussig's 'magical power of replication' (1993:2) at work in the recreational space of ConFest, that which is represented/reproduced is constantly distorted, refashioned, reinvented by the representer/reproducer. It is thus a context for the mimesis and synthesis of elements of imagined otherness. As such, it engenders multi-alterity, the protean effect of costuming, mask and paint work not unlike that of Halloween mask work which endows American children 'with the powers of feral, criminal, autochthonous and supernatural beings' (Turner 1969:172).

## **Conclusion**

Processes observed in this chapter indicate the complex role of play in identity formation. I have explored ConFest as a salient context for the abandonment and recreation of the self via an investigation of the event's subjunctive cultural space-time. I have stressed that the subjunctive mood - of inversion, fantasy, imitation, mimesis - involves corporeal (as well as cognitive, transcendent) possibilities. At basis, ConFest is a culture of permission, with participants in possession of a license to 'play out', to be 'other'.

I have discussed ways in which otherness, or the 'other', is heavily implicated in participants' desires. In an uninhibited topos of tactility and promiscuity, liminary voluptuaries may experience unconventional reconfigurations of their bodies, enact erotic fantasies or disrupt gender conventions. A variety of valorised 'others' are subscribed to, assumed, mimicked. I focused specifically on indigeneity, concluding that appropriation and/or cultural borrowing - less straightforward and openly dismissible than has been assumed by some researchers - is a theme requiring substantial revision. Since performative appropriation (mimesis) is indelibly human and identification not one-dimensional (in a time when identities are increasingly irresolute and restless), this requirement is made all the more necessary. Integral to the self's journey of becoming, it is clear that carnality and alterity are complex interwoven components of the ConFest experience.

