

Chapter 7

Sacred Drama: Self, Earth and Indigeneity

[O]ne constant experience threads through and occasionally surfaces from all modes of celebration, solemn or festive: a transcendent ecstasy rooted in deep physiological passions and charged up autonomic awareness but burgeoning and ramifying beyond them into transient imaginative apprehensions of the meanings inherent in self and society. (Turner 1982d:23)

Introduction

ConFest is a vast extra-ordinary moment contextualising the meta-performative communication of *authentica*. Attending to the liminal modality of drama, this chapter articulates the variegated on-site evocation of the personal, political and cultural *sacra* of ConFesters. A focus upon a range of performances and narratives is intended to demonstrate how the discourse and practice alternates hold ‘sacred’ are (re)produced. In the first part, I field the view that ConFest is a *multi-cultural drama* - that is, a many-genred topos facilitating hyper-reflexive inquiry into the profligate ‘ultimate concerns’ (MacAloon 1984 in Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:201) of participants. The remainder of the chapter maps the composition of these *sacra*. In the second part, the *sacra* of self-healing and Earth consciousness are discussed. Self and globe are regarded as integral, a symbiosis manifest in contemporary expressions of Neo-Pagan *eco-spirituality*. In the third part, I shift attention to the significance of indigeneity for alternates. Several extra-ordinary moments are partially reconstructed to convey something of the way Australia’s indigenous people and landscape are evoked, appealed to and solicited for the purpose of *authentication*, and in the name of *reconciliation*.

Part I. Multi-Cultural Drama

In drama resides the blurred juncture of narrative and performance. For Turner, ‘cultural dramas’ (e.g. rites, festivals, exhibitions, literature, film, theatre, sport), are meta-communicative devices informing participants (actors and audience alike) of

society's most cherished symbols, beliefs and practices.¹ Cultural dramas are 'privileged moments' where we witness 'men and women of a given ... culture, wholly attending ... to their own existential situation' (Turner 1984:23). They afford individuals 'opportunity to stand apart from themselves, to objectify their own experiences and that of others, to be an audience to themselves and to others' (Kapferer 1984b:188). Indeed, they operate to facilitate collective inquiry into social dramas - inciting personal and public introspection upon issues of ubiquitous consequence - and it is via this process that meaning is (re)constructed. Thus, action never merely reflects or expresses culture, but is reflexive, or re-evaluative, of socio-cultural systems.

Turner argued that it is via the cultural drama (especially life/death cycle rites and seasonal festivals), that knowledge of two forms may be communicated. First, 'sacred and eternal law' may be presented to initiates or participants. Here, the *sacra* are transmitted: mysteries, origin myths and cosmic law are taught to the uninitiated, and cultural and religious values, axioms and principles are communicated. Drawing upon the observations of Harrison (1903), Turner takes the *sacra* to include: mythically significant objects ('what is shown'); actions, such as dramatic performances ('what is done'), and; instruction, such as oral histories and the teaching of theogony, cosmogony and mythical history ('what is said') (Turner 1967a:102; Turner and Turner 1982:204).

The second form of knowledge communicated is that which is potentially *sacrilegious*, that which may be subversive, threatening to transgress 'the most sacred texts, the mightiest rulers and their commandments'. Here, usually in cultural modalities contingent upon a ludic atmosphere, liminaries are granted freedom to scrutinise and question the conditions of their existence (Turner 1985d:236). Such a context parallels the 'gay freedom of thought and imagination' conditional of carnivalesque consciousness (Bakhtin 1968:49), a 'carnival spirit' which 'offers the chance to ... enter a completely new order of things' (ibid:34).

We can observe both forms within ConFest's hyper-reflexive environment. ConFest is a circumstance where the transmission of 'truths', of sacred 'objects', 'rituals' and 'texts', coincides with variegated dissension from hegemonic, and/or more popular alternative, discourse and practice. Indeed, that which is revered and that which is heretical are likely *the same* - 'truths' transmitted are those which agitate or rupture 'truths' the majority culture holds dear. There is thus no clear distinction between 'law' and 'freedom', the *sacra* and the *sacrilegious*. The *sacrilegious* is the *sacra*. This trait is not uncommon to

¹ See Appendix B.1(v).

liminoid events, appearing in an era when the ‘antinomian egg containing both law and freedom, which is ritual’s tribal form ... [has] cracked open’ (Turner 1985d:236-7). It is, nevertheless, a striking characteristic of ConFest - a *counter-spatial* event designed to posit challenges to entrenched ideas and practices - to accommodate the discussion of, and experimentation with, alternatives. In this, it is an occasion where the ‘lived in world’ (Handelman 1990) of alternates is self-‘presented’ - it presents lifestyle options to growing numbers of converted, or at least similarly predisposed, participants. As Amulla exclaims, ‘ConFest is one of the ways I touch base with what is going on in the real world!’ By that which is ‘shown, ‘done’ and ‘said’, ConFest provides reflexive attention to dominant consumption patterns, social relations, economic platforms, sexual politics, environmental management, agricultural practices, health care. And the *sacra*, so presented, may eventually achieve broader appeal in what is a ‘space of alternate ordering’ (Hetherington 1997:52).

Available avenues of ‘redress’ and resistance are multiple - multifarious marginalia circulate under the greater marquee of ConFest. With around 300 workshops on offer at summer events, the options are dazzling. Browsing the latest *authentica*, ConFesters sample esoteric accessories, folk-theologies, funky fringe therapies, chic modes of enlightenment and fashionable words of wisdom. They champion the principles of a proposed new: ‘Age’, ‘Jerusalem’, ‘cosmos’, politic, ‘tribe’, ‘spirit’, ethic, ‘consciousness’, ‘millennium’. In such a diverse and dynamic context, that which is sacred for one individual (e.g. techno-trance), may be profane for another. And what today is ‘law’ or the ‘truth’ (e.g. zone therapy and Rajneeshism), may tomorrow be dated or unpopular.

This *multi-cultural drama* also possesses the refractive effect of ramified performances. It is host to events transpiring at multiple venues: passage rituals (e.g. fire walk, ‘wild women’), healing/curative rites (e.g. *Spirituality* - Tantra; *Pagan* - rebirthing; and *Massage*), community dance and percussion (e.g. *Spiral* and Fire Circle), games and parades (*Children’s*), interactive theatre (*Labyrinth*), raves (*Rainbow Dreaming/Tek Know*), entertaining spectacles and theatre (*Music, Spiral*), exhibitions (*Alternative Technology*), demonstrations and educational forums. Demanding a range of participatory involvement (from total engagement to passivity) and uncertain shifts between ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ play, between reflexive and unreflexive moments, this is the forum for communicating the contemporary *sacra* I attend to in the following sections.

Part II. ‘Heal thy Self - thy Planet’

In this section I describe two principal *sacra* apparent at ConFest: self-growth and Earth consciousness. I seek to demonstrate that their trajectories are intimately connected, that they are symbiotically related. The Walwa III theme (‘heal thy self - thy planet’) represents a clear evocation of this relationship - that which I call *the self-globe nexus*. First, however, I will describe the respective ‘components’ of this nexus.

Heal thy Self - Alternative Healing

ConFesters are exposed to a diversity of alternative healing modalities.² As Professor Ceteris Paribus (1996, unpaginated) explains, ‘all spectra of modalities find commodious nestling space in [the] capacious, multi-dimensional, loving bosom’ of ConFest. While many of these modalities reflect an insurgent personalism approximating the monistic religion of the self, or ‘Self-spirituality’ of which Heelas (1996) speaks, and invariably promote an approach wherein the mind, body and spirit are held as integral aspects of the person or self, the self is often not considered to be separate from the wider socio-cultural, familial context. In an orgy of complementarity, a host of healers - practitioners of Chinese medicine, herbalists, sannyasans, urban shamans, spiritual alchemists, dream interpreters, itinerant psychonauts, self styled gurus and past life therapists (as well as biomedical practitioners)³ - converge with a synergy of holistic preventatives, panaceas and DiY remedies for the afflicted self. Offering ‘psychotechnologies’ (Ross 1992:539), they seek to empower or ‘enable’ individuals ‘to mobilize internal resources’ (McGuire 1988:16) to heal themselves. Traditionally, a kaleidoscope of preventative healing and growth workshops have been offered: religious and metaphysical practice, spiritual ‘work’, tactile therapies, dietary regimes, botanic medicines, psychedelics. At Berri, the *Healing* village accommodated:

² While these are often referred to as ‘alternative healing’ systems (McGuire 1988), ‘fringe medicine’, ‘folk therapy’, ‘unorthodox medicine’ (e.g. Gevitz 1988), ‘vernacular health belief systems’ (O’Connor 1995), ‘non-cosmopolitan medicine’ (Ross 1992:539) and ‘natural medicine’ are terms variously employed .

³ Of whom, those like Marc (see *Healing* village, Chapter 4) possess complementary skills.

colour therapy, chiropracting, massage, esalen massage, Reichian therapy, hypnotherapy, healing circles, sufatshana yoga, naturopathy, acupuncture, Bach remedies, homeopathy, herbal remedies, palmistry, shiatsu, zone therapy. (*Down to Earth Berri Handbook* 1979:10)

At Walwa III, the menu included ‘earth meditation, golden light, crystals, hypnosis, cranial sacral therapy, the use of herbs, Celtic Chakras, Belly Dancing as a healing ritual’ (*ConFest 90/91 Gate Handout*). And, the following are some of the holistic practices transmitted during the period of research: ‘flower essences and gem elixirs’, ‘didge healing’, ‘somatic integration’, holistic massage, Reiki, Zen Shiatsu, ‘kundalini energising’, ‘pyramid meditation’, chanting techniques and Shamanic journeying.⁴

There is an evident increase in the popularity of techniques, myths and rituals attributed to indigenous, Asian or other ethnicities (e.g. Tai Ch’i, yoga, chakra balancing, chanting, Tantra, Reiki, Shamanism, medicine wheel, Celticism, didjeridu). Workshopping neophytes build up a repertoire of self-diagnostic techniques, remedies, dietary patterns, therapeutic relationships and esoterica, and they may be initiated into or upgrade their awareness of ‘the life force’, ‘hidden wisdom’, balances and ‘energies’.⁵ Akin to a spiritual ‘supermarket’, consumption is not dissimilar to that occurring at New Age festivals and centres like Glastonbury (cf. Bowman 1993:55).

As subtle and provocative gestures of refusal, the practices pursued and discourse digested in this ‘vast school of consciousness’ disclose a dissatisfaction with the curative and interventionist characteristics of professional allopathic medicine *and* with the doctrinal, hierarchic and paternal character of conventional religion. As such, biomedicine and the Church are both implicitly and explicitly contested. There is a tendency towards holism and voluntarism in the healing arts and new spiritualities. In alternative health care the emphasis is upon ‘healing’ rather than ‘curing’. The latter generally refers to the removal or correction of organic pathology, and may not necessarily involve ‘healing’

⁴ Many items may disappear from the menu, or become less popular, as they move into ‘the mainstream’ (practice and education). This has been the case for chiropracting, acupuncture and naturopathy. Unfortunately, it goes beyond the scope of my thesis to explore these trends further.

⁵ O’Connor’s (1995:29) spectrum of ‘energies’ identified within ‘vernacular’ systems is resonant:

Interpretations of pertinent energies may include a vital force that animates the body and provides the essential condition for health, energies that link individuals to the cosmos or to Nature; energies that flow through the channels within the body and whose blockage sets up conditions for disease and dysfunction; negative energies that are sources of disharmony and disease; and healing energies that can be tapped, channeled or manipulated by healers or by sick individuals themselves.

(O'Connor 1995:28) which encompasses a holistic approach to human wellbeing.⁶ In alternative spiritualities, 'detraditionalising practices' (Heelas 1996:23) signify a turning away from the dogma of religious institutions, towards a privileging of the self (the 'inner' or 'higher Self', and 'intuition') as the ultimate source of authority and nucleus of responsibility.

Neophytes are constantly reminded of the sacrality of the self and primacy of 'growth'. And they are provided with many paths. As workshops like those located at Toc III in *Self Development and Therapy* or *Spirituality* demonstrate, individuals are responsible for self (re)growth via the performance of 'inner work'. Spiritual work is considered to be important for individuation. According to one initiate, time spent at *Spirituality* with Param,

changed the direction of my life from one of ... isolation ... to one of reaching for the meeting between all ... [Tantra] brings a coupling of energies, the balance of femininity and masculinity, sustains sensuality and heightens awareness of one's own consciousness and that of others. Through group practice of chanting mantras over the preceding days, an ecstatic reverence on new years eve was experienced, a beautiful lightening of reality which I continue to feel. (N. McKinnon 1995:13)

Processes by which individuals are enabled to (re)create their identities, to achieve spiritual maturity, to *become*, are critical. Many workshops are a powerful expression of the sanctity of the person and the valued 'sovereign right to self-discovery' (Roszak 1979:3) apparent in complex societies - where individuals can enhance personal autonomy as they 'have the resources to invest in their own self-realisation' (Melucci 1989:137). This accounts for the significance of the journey theme in performance (*Spiral's* Wakan Tanka), interactive theatre (the *Labyrinth*), rites (firewalking), workshops (e.g. shamanic journey or astral travelling, 'conscious tripping', rebirthing, regression) and, moreover, for the distinct authority of Jungian psychology.⁷ Indeed, the

⁶ Alternative healing is more orientated to address wellbeing issues (including the way a person experiences illness) than the 'disease', and is thus inclined to take into account the socio-cultural meanings and conditions in the world of the afflicted.

⁷ In contemporary times, Jungian analysis is a popular form of rite of passage via which 'contact with a transcendent realm (the collective unconscious) and its powers (the archetypes) leads to an energizing renewal, rebirth or redemption (individuation)' (Noll 1994:292). Contact with the collective unconscious (or the Self), also known as the inner deity or the God or Goddess within, is often said to be achieved by meditation.

journey is critical for the growth and/or healing of the self (to 'move beyond ego').⁸ Though the self (and the process of self-objectification) may be deified, the sacred self is not ego-centric, closed, inflexible, alone. Such is made clear in the barrage of therapies promoting the necessity for the dissolution of boundaries (e.g. between mind/body, self/other, *anima/animus*, local/global).

Heal thy Planet - Earth Consciousness

As was discussed in Chapter 5, an 'ecological consciousness' (Eder 1990:37), or *radical ecologism*, is a rejoinder to an advancing awareness of environmental despoliation and the emergence of a new global sensibility. Dobson (1995:45) articulates this position: '[T]he Earth is a living being of immense complexity that ought to be the object of our wondrous contemplation, rather than the source of satisfaction for our rapacious material greed'. It has been argued that attention to the Earth's 'limits to growth'⁹ and concomitant conscientious lifestyle adaptations were stimulated by the photographic image of the planet from space:

'Spaceship earth', photographed from outside the atmosphere and repeated endlessly on record covers and advertisements, has become a new outer membrane which circumscribes our consciousness, a new icon of finitude. (Vitebsky 1995:193)¹⁰

This was perhaps a key moment in the development of an Earth consciousness - a biocentric sensibility characterised by reconciliation. Lovelock gave expression to this in his 'Gaia hypothesis' (1979). Humans, he perceived, are part of a living self-regulative being. Once aware of our role in its 'indigestion', he speculated that we can be 'guided to live within Gaia in a way that is seemly and healthy' (1991:20).

⁸ This can be variously expressed - as in the following allegorical rendering of ConFest as 'social LSD': ConFest and LSD both are 'methods of consciousness expansion, both are instruments of the Possibility Archetype ... Now ConFest as social LSD costs \$30 a go, it takes about a day to come on, it peaks for 4-5 days, comes down for a week and it takes weeks, if not months to recover!' (Lord Kelvin & G 1995:4).

⁹ Acknowledgment of which runs concurrent with the continued desire for unlimited self, human or social 'growth'. Ross (1992:548), for instance, discusses the 'New Age's' 'fiercely moral attachment to the idea of setting external limits', while being simultaneously 'devoted to limitless "internal" development'.

¹⁰ However, it has been reasonably argued that such global imagery reinforces 'ontological detachment' and is fundamentally colonial (Ingold 1993:38).

In recommending *DTE* festivals, the international directory for New Agers, the *Pilgrims Guide to Planet Earth*, promotes such events as exercises in ‘raising our consciousness toward Planet Earth’ (Khalsa 1981:5). At ConFest, a global orientated ecological consciousness, or what one permaculturalist referred to as an ‘Earth friendly culture’, forged out of disquiet over dominant consumption patterns, is expressed through a profusion of narratives and performances, ranging from the political/instrumental to the personal/aesthetic. Participants are encouraged to ‘wholly attend’ to sacred and sentient Mother Nature, Gaia. The DTE logo is indicative.



DTE logo.

ConFesters enact the ‘ultimate concern’ of ‘getting back to the Earth, the planet, nature’ (Wogoit), of experiencing ‘a closer tie with nature’ (Corella), through performances which have their goal in connecting with the natural environment. It is no mere coincidence that ConFest is held in the bush, at distant locations to which urban-dwelling participants must travel hundreds, even thousands of kilometres. Not merely a spectacle to be observed and appreciated, ConFest encourages people to actively engage with the landscape, with ‘nature’: mysterious, indeterminate and primordial, not completely knowable or controllable (cf. Grove-White 1993:24).

Workshops endorse eco-consciousness, as numerous activist organisations and ideologues use the outdoor conference environment to seek support for ‘green’ philosophical, political and/or spiritual agendas: deep ecology, eco-feminism, intentional community, alternative technology, permaculture, animal liberation, vegetarianism. Various villages (*Forest, Earth Sharing, Great Walk, Nuclear Free, Green Connections*) have been sites for the dissemination of ecological awareness and activist issues. The agendas of activist neo-tribes like FOE and JAG (uranium mining), GECO and OREN (old growth logging), HEMP, the Great Walk Network (whose motto is ‘less consumption - more joy’), and individuals like human-sculpture activist Benny Zable (whose ‘Greedozer and Company’ sign reads ‘work consume, be silent, die - I rely on your apathy’) and Nelumbo (a workshop holder who claims ‘we’re all barracking for nature’), all provide evidence of a robust eco-radicalism. There is general consensus that dichotomies like individual/environment, human/nature, personal/political must be overcome, and that, by ‘acting locally’, individuals can make a difference.

Self-Globe Nexus

Many of the themes described above seem to be, at best, rather reluctant partners or, at worst, totally incompatible. However, an apparent inconsistency may be the result of cursory perception, for it is my contention that there is strong contiguity between elements of such diverse strands of contemporary alternative discourse and practice, contiguity powerfully evoked by Walwa III’s ‘heal thy self, thy planet’. This popular aphorism, elevated to the status of a festival theme, communicates the strong relationship between self-growth and global consciousness in the pursuits of alternative lifestylers. It suggests that *self* (person) and *globe* (planet), as is intonated by Roszak’s adage ‘the needs of the planet are the needs of the person’ (Roszak 1979:xxx), are embroiled in a complex ‘web of significance’, that each effects the other in such intimate patterns that they cannot exclude or oppose one another. Person and planet are related ecologically. Thus, what I call the *self-globe nexus* is characterised by *interconnection* (a sense of profound interdependence) and *responsibility* (an ethical self-commitment).

The contemporary desire to ‘heal the planet’ is taken to begin locally, and the locales are the self (mind/body/spirit) *and* the immediate environment. Commitments include: the

(re)turn to spiritual path(s) (e.g. New Age¹¹ or Neo-Pagan¹²); the adoption of ‘anti-consumption’ behaviour (e.g. wise energy use, diet, a disciplined commitment to ‘refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle’); and membership in autonomous eco-communities and environmental activist organisations. At the same time, eco-consciousness, expressed through various social, political and spiritual commitments, is a formula for individuation - for the self’s wellbeing. Therefore, ‘heal thy planet - thyself’ is equally applicable. As Griffiths (1981:11) announced at Glenlyon I, ‘[w]e must join together and heal the Earth, which is also the only way we can heal ourselves’.¹³

The positive ramifications of *working* locally have been championed from the inception of the DTE movement. Cairns’ Reichian inspired psycho-political liberationism (more accurately rendered there as ‘heal thy self - thy society’) is an early manifestation. At Glenlyon I, facilitators predicted that on-site ‘work’ (spiritual, social, community, political) may usher in a ‘New Age’. In both of these examples, macro transformations (new social/global consciousness) depend upon micro labours (self/local behaviour). They conform to ‘critical mass’ theory, which holds that if enough individuals work towards a similar spiritual or social goal, a critical threshold will be crossed.¹⁴ And ‘heal thy self - thy planet’ clearly elicits the thrust of this theory. Though this may be translated in rather transparent fashion as ‘the planet will heal itself when we attend to healing ourselves’ (Cheryl), it also evokes responsive environmental ethics (signified by the now familiar axiom ‘think globally/act locally’).¹⁵

¹¹ In ‘New Age religion’, spiritual development - often amounting to a transcendence of self (or achievement of ‘higher self’) - is thought to engender ‘harmony’ between humans and nature. Accordingly, ‘healing the mind leads to the healing of Mother Earth’ (Hanegraaff 1998:22).

¹² According to Harris (1996), ‘the ecological crisis ... is at root a spiritual crisis’ (155). He believes that in the example of reconnection with our body, our physical self, provided by Paganism, ‘we may come to heal our relationship with our planet’ (155, 149).

¹³ There are, however, a great many workshop themes (especially therapy) that are not immediately relevant to what I call the *self-globe nexus*, or at least don’t appear to be. I am not suggesting that this nexus unites all discourse and practice. With such a diversity present (and disputation between advocates of varying strategies) this is obviously impossible. Nevertheless, in my reading of the evidence this is a significant underlying theme.

¹⁴ Possamai (1998) suggests two types of ‘critical mass’: (1) Critical Mass by Meditation (CMM) where a shift (specifically towards the ‘Age of Aquarius’) is brought about through meditation, the channeling of universal energies (e.g. Transcendental Meditation), and; (2) Critical Mass by Social Action (CMSA) where revolutionary social changes are accomplished via the everyday attachment and commitment of individuals to a network of activist and community groups (Possamai 1998:191-92) (e.g. Critical Mass - the anti-car and world fuel crisis activists).

¹⁵ It also evokes the ‘energy’ concentration, channeling and/or magic acts found in such diverse practices as meditation, Reiki and Wicca.

What I have called the *self-globe nexus* implies an intentional responsiveness which relies in large part upon a sense of interconnectivity. Various ecosophies emerging between the 1960s and 1990s (and promoted at ConFest), clearly articulate and promote interdependence and responsibility. These are deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism. According to Fox (1984 in Pepper 1996:23) ‘the central intuition of deep ecology is that there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence’. Eco-feminisms provide an analysis of social domination which reveal ‘the interconnected roots of misogyny and a hatred of nature’ (King 1993:75). In both systems, all life possesses *intrinsic value* and has rights equal to those of human beings. Both philosophies provide foundations for the appreciation of the sacred in nature, the interdependence of all life, a ‘biospheric egalitarianism’ (Dobson 1995:63), with adherents couching their environmentalism in ‘woman-identified’ terms (Seager 1993:223). In social ecology, or eco-anarchism, social injustice and environmental degradation are believed to be the result of hierarchical power relations, particularly those of capitalism. Here, moves towards bypassing the state via the creation of autonomous communities and informal economies, as well as civil disobedience, are advocated (Pepper 1996:31-3). Bioregionalism literally means ‘life territory’. Its advocates promote the practice of ‘dwelling in the land’ (Sale 1985). It also necessitates decentralised, self-determined modes of social organisation. It is ‘a culture predicated upon biological integrities and acting in respectful accord; and a society which honours and abets the spiritual development of its members’ (Dodge 1993:114).

Communicated in workshops and redolent in the discourse of participants, these complementary and often conflicting strategies possess the unifying pretenses: (1) that self and globe are related ecologically, and, as a consequence; (2) that individuals can resolve current or prevent potential environmental degradation (‘heal thy planet’) by ‘acting locally’.

Neo-Paganism as *Eco-Spirituality*

Manifestations of contemporary ‘Nature Religion’ (Albanese 1990) exemplify what I am calling *the self-globe nexus*. A nature oriented religiosity, or *eco-spirituality*, Neo-Paganism provides a case in point. A growing discontent with what are revealed to be the strong anthropocentric and patriarchal foundations of western science and Judeo-Christianity has fashioned the appeal of Neo-Paganism. The latter is a loose-knit

polytheistic movement purportedly without hierarchy or doctrine, possessing diverse manifestations (cf. Hume 1997:54-7). Celebrating the seasonal, lunar and life/death cycles, its practitioners advocate an ontology of engagement with the world. For Luhrmann (1993:220,232), in Neo-Paganism:

there is no god, masculine, separate and transcendently aloof, but rather an ancient divinity immanent in the world ... the natural landscape becomes a map for human feeling and aspiration, an environment for spiritual odyssey.

This view is endorsed by Cedar who declared that contemporary Pagans 'define themselves as different from New Age with its emphasis on transcendence ... For the Pagans that I've known it has been much more going into and inhabiting the world'. Not necessarily proponents of eschatology, Neo-Pagans consent to Bey's immediatist cause for 'presence' as they celebrate 'being at home in [their] bodies and in nature' (Harvey 1997:141). As a celebration of one's physical presence in nature, Neo-Paganism is an expression of 'sacred ecology' (Harris 1997), or that which Harvey calls 'somatic ecology' (1997:131).

Neo-Paganism might then be interpreted as a celebration of ecology, an eco-centric resacralisation of the world - an 'ecological spirituality' (Taylor 1995c). Thus according to Adler:

If ecology studied the interrelatedness of all living things and their environment, Neo-Paganism seemed to be a religion that would celebrate those interrelations, that would heal into synthesis all oppositions: primitive and civilized, science and magic, male and female; spirit and matter. (in Hume 1997:1)

It is apparent that Neo-Pagans subscribe to a system of correspondences within which all is believed to be profoundly related. They are deeply aware of the need for re-enchantment, for humans to acknowledge through symbol and action their connection to nature. It is, then, also apparent that adherents are determined to 'return to', 'live in balance with', 'defend' and 'heal' the Earth (Gaia). Take the philosophy of Australia's Pagan Festival Group:

The common bond that links all pagans is their vision of Earth as a sacred living being, the sanctity of all life, and the Oneness of both ... [And] we hold the responsibility for creating and nurturing the wellbeing of our society. (*DTEQLD* May 1986:15)

It is characteristic of practitioners and sympathisers that they accept responsibility for their own actions, which for many means taking particular precautions to avoid dishonouring the natural world. Indeed, as it promotes a respect and reverence for the Earth, pantheism is uniquely qualified to lend support to environmental ethics (Levine in Crowley 1998:178). Harvey (1997:126-42) argues Neo-Paganism evidences a nascent 'Green Spirituality'. Practitioners express this attitude: Paganism is the 'spirituality of the ecological movement' according to one witch interviewed by Adler (in Roszak 1979:41). For one of Hume's (1997:44) informants, ecological awareness is 'a religious duty'. Sensing the emergence of 'eco-Wicca', which she ties to the kind of *terra-ist* activism I discussed in Chapter 5, Crowley (1998:177) conveys the common perception amongst young Wiccans that 'to be at one with nature in one's innerself is no longer enough'. There is no denying the nascent popularity of *eco-spirituality* given the insurgence of environmentalism. Indeed, this nature oriented movement, argues Spretnak (1986:65):

is completely in keeping with Green principles of private ownership and cooperative economics, decentralisation, grassroots democracy, non-violence, social responsibility, global awareness and the spiritual truth of oneness.

It should be pointed out, however, that, though Paganism may be the 'spiritual arm' of the ecology movement, contemporary Paganism may also involve anything from eclectic shamanism to outright hedonism (Hume 1997:56).

Over the past two decades, Paganism has experienced growing popularity in Australia as the appearance of events designed to celebrate nature oriented spirituality indicate (cf. Hume 1995:7; 1997:36-9; Rodgers 1995:34).¹⁶ Attracting a large contingent of Pagans (individuals and groups), ConFest 'trades' in the kind of *eco-spirituality* intrinsic to Paganism.¹⁷ At Baringa II (1984/85), the shamanic group Dolphin Tribe and members of Dark Circle banded together under the sign 'Pagans - Wicca, Shamanism, Magick' (Tim 1985:18). Afterwards, Ennelle, in *Kindred Spirits Quarterly* (a zine collective which had set up in the Market's 'alternative media sector'), reflected upon the potentials for using:

¹⁶ Billed as 'Australia's first National Occult and Alternatives ConFest', *Unicorn Star Enterprises'* Sky to Earth ConFest, a non-DTE event held at Glenlyon in 1984, was an early expression of this.

¹⁷ ConFest also inspired the All One Family Gathering, which, celebrated on the equinoxes and solstices since 1986, has been variously described as a 'purification of the Earth and its peoples' (*DTEQLD* Feb. 1986:7), and a 'celebration of the summer solstice and the wonder and joy of living and growing into total health in harmony with mother nature' (*DTE NEA* Nov. 1995:4).

the euphoric burst of energy we all received ... to recharge the batteries of our own little Earth Aware communities and organisations, who need all the love and encouragement they can get in their efforts to help Mother Earth. (Ennelle 1985, unpaginated)

The *Pagan* village has (at least since Baringa) accommodated ad hoc occultism. Here, and elsewhere around the site, full moon, seasonal and Earth rites, and rituals like 'wild women' (see below) have been performed. Workshops on 'Celtic mythology', 'meditation for pagans', 'survival as a modern witch' and 'men's and women's mysteries'¹⁸ have also transpired.

Though *Pagan* has not appeared after Toc III, Paganism is pervasive. Many participants approximate what Luhrmann (1989:76-85) has called 'non-initiated paganism'. As Orryelle remarked:

Probably almost everyone at the festival is 'pagan' in some manner or other. Definitely nature religions are a major focus at Confest. People there seem generally more connected with their roots and ancestry than in mainstream society.

While not necessarily members of Wicca groups, there is evidence that 'pagan's' polysemy presents a winning formulae for a rather eclectic constituency. Under this polysemous rubric one finds 'heathen' or 'a person of no religion', and 'one who sets a high value on sensual pleasures', residing with 'polytheistic', 'magic' (the 'Craft') and 'non-Christian' associations. The latter denotation makes for an especially attractive affectation. Moreover, sympathies are aroused by the sense of responsibility commonly associated with the identity, one translated as an ecological 'duty'.¹⁹ Also, 'pagan's' etymological roots in the Latin *paganus* ('villager', 'rustic') and *pagana* ('of the land') (Moore 1986:6) illuminate the centripetal attraction Paganism holds for many (e.g. ferals).

¹⁸ The 'mystery of menstruation' is articulated as a rite of passage and revealed to be a source of wisdom and power. Women are encouraged to connect with their own cycles (and with the cycles of the moon, tides and weather), and are instructed on the value of washable cloth pads, which, whilst not only ethical in their reusability, satisfy the desire to get 'back in touch' as they can be used to transfer a woman's vitamin and mineral filled blood-soak 'back into the earth' (which is declared, on a pamphlet for 'Rad Pads' - 'the environmentally friendly modern woman's menstrual companion' - to instill 'a great feeling').

¹⁹ One instance of ecological 'duty' springs to mind. Anxieties awoken by contemplation of the environmental consequences of mindless consumption and waste is allayed through the serious undertaking, according to a sign at Toc IV, of 'returning the site to nature ... all welcome'. A responsibility upon which the success of ConFest is said to be dependent, such commitments are nothing short of *purification rites*. In this vein, at the signposted compost area of the same event's divisional recycling system we find: 'in celebration we give back to you Mother Earth that which is created from yourself and the energy from the sun'.

Celebrating the Goddess

An Earth-centred spiritual movement has been especially appealing to females. Challenging scientific and Judeo-Christian ideologies of separation and transcendence, Starhawk (1979) has been an erstwhile proponent of woman's connectedness to the world (to nature) and, as a consequence, her Earth-protecting and healing roles. The feminine is valorised in most Pagan manifestations. Indeed, an Earth-centred 'matriarchal Paganism' - 'the rule of the Goddess' (or the 'Chthonic imperative') - is even advocated (Roberts 1998).

Goddess rites were performed at Baringa II. There, members of Dark Circle and The Dolphin Tribe performed the Star Ruby ritual. That is, they 'cast the Circle' with the purpose of 'drawing down' the Goddess:

The Dolphin Tribe danced in the four quarters using the forms of the Eagle, Fire Lizard, Dolphin, Wombat & at the center a Spider Shaman. After, lead by the pagan women in the center, we drew down the Goddess into the collective unconscious of the circle as the men danced around. (Tim 1985:19)

In an engaging ritual conducted at the Toc III Fire Circle, over one hundred women danced in a circular formation, chanting a series of mantras to a steadily advancing djembe rhythm. Called 'wildwomen - a celebration of the Goddess', the ritual signaled several themes: each participant's physical attachment to the world (and each other); their responsibility as nurturers, and; the empowering consequence of internalising the Goddess. Initially the women pulsated toward the centre and out chanting:

We all come from the Goddess
and to her we shall return.
Like a drop of rain
falling to the ocean.

The chant affirmed the worldly presence of each participant (symbolised as a 'drop of rain'), who all come from and return to the same source, anthropomorphised as Mother, or she who gives life to and reabsorbs all: the Goddess.²⁰ That knowledge of such kinship engenders reciprocal obligations was transparent in another 'wildwomen' chant:

²⁰ Who, according to Greenwood (1998:101), is the 'ground of being': 'the ultimate reality connecting the universe in which all participate'.

The Earth is our Mother, we will take care of her.
The Earth is our Mother, she will take care of us.

This chant signified the women's view of 'themselves and the Earth as nurturers of humankind' (Hume 1997:235).

Participants were also reminded that a 'divine spark' of the perennial Goddess lay within, empowering them. Thus 'wildwomen' also involved a repetitive chant, sung as the women circled and then merged in a clamorous throng to complete the ritual:

We are the old women
We are the new women
We are the same women
Stronger than before.

Myall relates the affirmational effect of this:

It's empowering for me. It feels good to do that sort of thing. To say 'hey, I'm a woman and I appreciate being one'. It's really nice to be a female, to be feminine. I like being a woman.

As Hume clarifies, internalising images of female divinity within the context of a body-affirming theology 'gives women the strength to effect change in their personal lives and in the social and political climate' (Hume 1997:235). The Goddess is thus 'a symbol of self-transformation - she is seen to be constantly changing and a force for change for those who open themselves up to her' (Greenwood 1998:103). This includes males, as the 'drawing down' rite performed at Baringa II demonstrates. Yet, as Greenwood states, the Goddess 'represents an avenue to authority for women which has been denied in mainstream orthodox religions' (1998:101). 'Wildwomen' was thus an empowering expression of *eco-spirituality*.

Techno-Paganism

Rainbow Dreaming, the techno village at Toc IV, occasioned an all night 'tribal rave celebration' over New Year's Eve. Though contrasting with 'wildwomen' in that the context was decidedly masculine (e.g. the DJs were almost exclusively male) and high tech, in a logic that finds congruity with the former rite, according to its principal architect, Krusty, the purpose of *Rainbow Dreaming* was to 'create a sacred space for people to find their own sacred dance for healing themselves and the planet'. In

promotional literature prepared by Krusty, it became apparent that this 'sacred space' would be established via inventive reclamation - via reclaiming a putative past. Appealing to atavistic demands, the literature stated that:

the all night dance ritual is a memory that runs deep within us all, a memory that takes us back to a time when people had respect for our great Mother Earth and each other. A time when we came together as one tribe united in spirit. We understood the cycles of nature and the power of the elements. We danced around fires, we chanted and we drummed, invoking the great spirit to empower ourselves and our community.

It thus ignited nostalgia for connectivity with nature and fellow humans, connections which are thought to have been severed or forgotten. There is little doubt about the causes of such a circumstance:

Then one day a new force began to take control and these great rites of community empowerment were suppressed. Our sacred sites where we once danced all night into ecstatic trance had been taken over by a new order of worship.

Sympathy for the imagined ecstatic predilection of a beleaguered pre-Judeo-Christian religiosity is thus expressed. Yet, though a 'new order' had deflated 'the spirit of the people', history must run its course:

gradually the spirit of the people would return as they recognised the sacred power of trance, once again opening up the channels to the Great Spirit ... The temples may have changed but the sacred earth they dance upon is still the same.

Sacralisation and remembering via 'trance' are possible again. Trance Dance, regarded as 'an ancient Shamanic practice which invites Spirit to embody us; to heal us through spiritual ecstasy,' is authorised as a practice employed by indigenous people worldwide 'for over 40 000 years' (and as a means by which 'significant memories of this life, lives past, even those of prehuman form' can be retrieved).²¹ And, Krusty and other 'techno-shamanic' conductors would use a sound system, electronic rhythm sampling, conceptual and ambient lighting, and artistic installations to create a sacred space for a 'modern day ritual':

²¹ The universalistic property of Shamanism is thus evoked to legitimate the experience.

where we can join as one tribe to journey deep into trance states just as our ancestors did long ago ... This will be a shamanic healing journey in the traditional sense, with people tuning in on mass to the dance energy: working from the physical to access the emotional transcending to the spiritual.

Ultimately, the outdoor dance party is a grounding 'ritual' where participants are invited to 'revere ... natural habitat' (Shell 1998), and where the nature/culture boundary is effectively dissolved. According to Shell, the sunrise 'transition from footwear to barefeet' is a significant grounding indicator. Moreover:

[t]he separation between nature and culture becomes blurred especially once we're all covered in a light film of dust which has risen from the dance floor throughout the night. We are all able to feel that nature isn't something separate from us, we are a part of it. (ibid)

In the 'futurist pre-modernism' (Rietveld 1998:261) of Trance Dance, an imagined past is 'reclaimed' such that meaning is assigned to the present - an all night dance ritual. A desire to connect with primal 'roots', 'the Great Spirit', 'nature' and fellow dancers is facilitated via modern technology - which perhaps makes them high-tech primitivists (and a source of some consternation as I demonstrate in Chapter 8). Like 'wildwomen', the ritual is personally empowering. And, also like the former ritual, it evinces the *self-globe nexus*: healing 'the self' and 'the planet' are inseparable paths. 'Wildwomen' and Trance Dance are manifestations of new spiritual networks which hold ecology as an 'ultimate concern'.

Finally, Krusty informed me that 'energy' located in and channeled from the Australian landscape is responsible for the ecstatic states associated with outdoor Trance Dance. To explain this he drew parallels with Aboriginal Australia:

I think there's a sense of the spirit of the land. This land we now call Australia has a real spirit to being stomped. And if you've ever watched Aboriginal dance, its very much about stomping the earth and they do the shake a leg or what ever you want to call it ... And if you watch techno ... It's very much about stomping the earth [It] brings energy into the body, Earth energy into the body.

Thus, a dancer's body can 'become a conduit for energy'. Krusty stressed that with or without the use of psychedelics, ecstatic states are achieved as bodies and crowds become 'energised'. Therefore, a sense of presence is important. The 'voyage' of Trance Dance,

he continued, depends upon moving into ‘an Earth presence ... it’s a special ritual being able to stomp the Earth’.

Part III. Indigeneity: Authentication and Reconciliation

On-site events and their interpretation disclose the significance (ultimacy) of indigeneity for alternates. In this section I will discuss numerous performances and narratives (other than *Rainbow Dreaming*) which invoke, appeal to or solicit indigeneity/Aboriginality. Two broad themes are covered in separate sections: 1) indigeneity as a source of *authentication*; and 2) the commitment to *reconciliation* with Aborigines. Within this broad sweep, instances of romanticism and the commitment to solidarity are uncovered. The panorama of examples I use conveys an awareness of a humanised (indigenised) landscape, and a desire among non-Aborigines to inhabit that place, a desire for *em-place-ment*.²²

Sanctified Land, Authenticated Experience

Acknowledging the indigenous inhabitants (to degrees real or imagined) of a place is a desired means of sanctifying space and authenticating experience. For instance, the collective invocation of the Yorta-Yorta on the night of the Toc III fire walk sacralised the collective performances there. This kind of sacralisation is frequently encountered in ConFest mythos. In 1981, Glenlyon was, for one commentator, an apt location for an event as it had been used as ‘a tribal gathering place’ for millennia: ‘Once an Aboriginal meeting place and spa, more recently a village race track and now a ConFest site’ (Robinson 1981:12). Later, ConFesters at Mt Oak 1987/88 were informed that on the Murrumbucca Creek leading up to the Snowy Mountains there was a path once used by Aboriginal people who gathered to feast on bogong moths, and that ‘if we remember that

²² It should be pointed out here that the proliferation of indigeneity at ConFest stands in contrast to the relative absence of Aborigines. The record with Aboriginal groups is not comforting to DTE. According to Cockatoo, a large group of Pitjantjajara used to come down to Daylesford, building *mimis* (bush huts). However, after a request for travel funding was refused, they stopped coming. Koories also travelled from Melbourne to Walwa to perform dances, but did not return after DTE failed to deliver on its promise to allocate ‘a certain percentage of profits’ to them. As rental for and recognition of prior occupation, and in agreement with the ‘Pay the Rent’ scheme formulated by Koories as an alternative to Government funding, DTE paid the Yorta Yorta 1% gross income of Toc I and Toc II (*DTE News* 70 July 1992:1). This gesture has not been repeated.

every step we take is on sacred ground, we will be part of rekindling the dreaming' (DTENEA Dec 1987:4).²³

I will discuss two on-site occasions where indigeneity has been marshaled to perform a validating function

The Water Corroboree

At the first ConFest on the Cotter River (1976), a sense of spontaneous community and a palpable sensation of inevitable social transformation was enervated through a series of gatherings culminating in what became known as 'the water corroboree'. According to first hand reports, the event occasioned a sense of communion (between humans and with nature). I want to draw attention to the most detailed recollection of the moment I have found, according to which the presence of 'spirit' seems to have been validated by two authorities. One was an Aborigine, the other an esotericist, both of whom held communication with otherwise unseen forces:

On the second last day of the festival, Dec 13th, some Aborigines, probably from the Berri area, had been brought to the site. Early the next morning, I saw one of them, a middle aged man hugging a half drunk flagon of wine. For some reason he looked at me penetratingly - not like one who is drunk. And said fiercely: 'Don't you mess with the Spirit of Cotter!' I said nothing, almost forgot the incident. (Rawlins 1982:31)

Rawlins then describes 'the water corroboree', nearly 2000 people in thigh-high water forming circles within circles, OMing then chanting 'all we are saying is give peace a chance', followed by a 'celibate orgasm' of water thrashing. He continues:

²³ These gestures are common place within alternative culture. The Aquarius Festival was said to have occurred on a Bunjalung initiation ground and organisers invited 'one of the old Aborigines from the area ... to open the festival' (*Byron Express*, 5th ed, May 1973:4). That Mornington Islanders performed corroborees, dancing around fires in proximity to a host of white bands such as The Magik Karavan (Shelmerdine 1973:4), was also heralded as significant. The 1983 Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration closed with the performance of a 'Rainbow Serpent' ritual (Newton 1988:67). And, local Murris, notably the Gabbi-Gabbi, have 'hosted' the annual Woodford/Maleny Festival, opening the event via a 'permission ceremony' (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:203-4). In North America, the Rainbow Family often send a delegation to meet with local Indians - sometimes the wrong ones - seeking their approval before holding a Gathering (Niman 1997:142-4). These examples indicate that Aborigines (and other indigenes), approving, opening and consummating events, have become sanctifying signifiers, performing the role of an authenticating 'presence' (physical or spiritual). They also take an important role as the 'absent referent'. Disappointed with the unacknowledgment of Aborigines at recent events, anarchists from *Food Not Bombs* at

[T]he two hours or so we were all sharing in the water had been and remains today one of the most whole, fully-alive, totally transcendental experiences of my life. And, of course, the half-drunk Aborigine had somehow known that that benign Nature Spirit was giving us the extra energy we all felt during the festival. Far from ‘messing with’ Him, we all received His Benediction’. (Rawlins 1982:38)

If this wasn’t enough validation, the authentic spiritual experience was confirmed by the Rev John King, once President of the Theosophical Society, and a clairvoyant, numerologist and healer who founded the Healing Church of St. Raphael. The Reverend, who ‘stayed in a nearby motel and wore ecclesiastical garb in the midst of his naked “parishioners”’, informed Rawlins that, in reference to ‘the Spirit of the Cotter’, ‘He was manifesting very strongly while you were all thrashing about in the water’ (ibid.:39).

The remark of a ‘half drunk’ Aboriginal man, endorsed in turn by a past President of the Theosophical Society,²⁴ indigenised the site and thereby authenticated the experience. It thus provided the validational scaffold Rawlins required to construct a meaningful interpretation of a transcendent experience.

‘The Sacred Mound’

The imagined Aboriginality of a raised area (known as ‘the sacred site’, ‘the sacred mound’ or just ‘the mound’) which became the Fire Circle at Birdlands not only legitimated the events transpiring there, but, as a consequence, seemed to accord participants with a chthonic status of their own. Awareness grew a few weeks prior to New Year on a pre-festival trip. Cockatoo, a retired geologist, and the researcher walked over to investigate a raised area with a barren, hardened surface and riddled with rabbit boroughs. Quietly excited about the area, Cockatoo was unsure whether the ‘NSW authorities’ knew about it. They probably didn’t, he mused, since it was private land and the area in question was not fenced-off. Such mounds, he speculated, were used as cooking, ceremonial and/or burial sites, and may have been retreated to in times of flood as ‘an island of survival’ which could be occupied for six months of the year. He suggested that, ‘according to the work we’ve done in Victoria, mounds [otherwise known

Moama IV fashioned a large banner hung near the Market: ‘You are on Aboriginal land. Where are the Aborigines? Have we asked their permission?’

as ‘middens’] started to appear 3000 years ago’. Though there was no tell-tale sign of ash - which, he suggested, you would need to locate with a magnifying glass - ‘there is’, he told me later:

sign of nodules of fired clay ... which is the only evidence I found to say it was occupied by human action. And there’s some tiny little white flakes that could be bone. But you’d have to look under a microscope to identify that. There is sand under this clay layer, so the Aborigines have built up this 4 or 5 feet of sand over an area of 200 feet by 50 feet probably - an oval shape, 5 feet high. So there’s a lot of sand there, and it’s taken them a long long time to build it up. So it’s quite a significant area, in terms of ceremony. If they were having corroborees they wouldn’t have them on the mound they’d have them back in the trees a bit. So it’s quite significant. So I referred to it as a sacred site ... It’s [now] fenced off and we’re going to respect it. And treat it properly.

Cockatoo was of little doubt that the place was ‘significant’ - despite the lack of scientific evidence or corroboration from Aborigines themselves. As a consequence, he announced ‘we are going to erect a large flag over it declaring that it’s a sacred site’. Whose ‘sacred site?’ I inquired. He responded:

It could be a white man’s sacred site, as well as an Aboriginal one. So we can behave as if it’s our sacred site also, and have gatherings, workshops on it, sit on it, talk, conference, you can dance on it ... [But, he cautions] I wouldn’t disturb the surface. No camping on it.

Rumours about the area abounded, and an embellished folk mythology arose intimating the raised area’s primordially. According to one commentator (attributing the find to someone else), Cypress ‘found some bone sort of implements that he knows to be Aboriginal, of a certain thing, and that if you find these ... on an area you should only use it for pleasure, you should never use it for [commerce] ... It’s only to be used for pleasure, like for dancing’.

The place rapidly acquired the characteristics of a sacred site, areas normally ‘hedged about with interdictions’ (Maddock 1991:215). Indeed, restrictions were applied. A line of blue tape ‘fenced’ the area off from campers,²⁵ and a large ‘flag’ with the words ‘Sacred

²⁴ It is not clear whether these ‘authorities’ were referring to the spirit of the festival or the river. Rawlins did not seek further information from either.

²⁵ There is some confusion over this, since the purpose of restricting access was believed by some to be a matter of safety on account of the rabbit boroughs.

Site' painted across it flew from trees nearby.²⁶ At the beginning of the festival, campers adjacent the site were instructed of the site's sacrality, a fact relayed by them to new arrivals. For instance, when I arrived at Birdlands I passed such a campsite and was informed by an awe struck young man that we had the privilege of being close to a 'sacred site'.

The mound eventually became a safe fire zone (in a fire danger period) for the Fire Circle. Indeed, the mound's elevation coupled with its perceived primordiality (perhaps '3000 years old') made it the ideal gathering place. The recognition/invention of the place's significance set up a context whereby those who came into 'contact' with it, who passed across its perimeter (and who were made aware of its apparent status) would themselves likely become 'significant'. Its sacrality, its putative 'energy', was literally transmitted to those who would gather there. And many sought to become attuned to the place's 'power', its memories, to tap into its chthonic energy,²⁷ to be immersed in its sacrality.

It was thus invested with meanings that are the contemporary currency of alternative lifestyles. Such interpretations and effects are likely to arise in the context of:

a colourful amalgam of spiritual ecologists, modern-day Luddites, anti-rationalists, geomancers, nature-lovers and New Age mystics [who have] re-discovered humanity's spiritual roots through recognition of the sacral aspects of places of nature and a ritualistic approach to them. (Kolig 1996:374)

Of course, the sacrality of the landscape is magnified as it is perceived to have been occupied. The Birdlands folk theory is a demonstrable reflection of sentiments circulating in the alternative sector, where there is a strong desire to both acknowledge prior occupation and to enjoy the spiritual replenishment that may derive from contact with such places (cf. Tacey 1996). It is consistent with the 'Spirit of Cotter' hermeneutic and corresponds somewhat with what Robinson, in a report on Glenlyon I, called 'the spirit of Australia':

[T]he spirit of Australia moves within us ... We are coming together and realising our common spiritual heritage: this land with its millennia of continuous habitation by spiritually enlightened people. We cannot help but

²⁶ The mound became a 'sacred site' even though midden sites - traditionally gathering places - were not 'sacred' or religious places. Places may now be 'sacred' due to imputed religious, cultural, historical, even personal significance (cf. Maddock 1991).

²⁷ Though he does not refer to middens, for a discussion of ancient and indigenous sacred sites serving as 'energy transmitters' for both Aborigines and Euro-Pagans/New Agers, see Kolig (1996:371).

hear the voice of our land when it calls for help, screams for mercy from the devastation wreaked upon it by a vengeful and spiritually bankrupt society. We hear its voice and we awaken to its call. We recognise ourselves as spiritual beings and we realise that our destiny is tied to the spirit of this land, Australia. (Robinson 1981:12)

This parallels the attitude candidly stated in the *DTEQLD* newsletter (1988:27): ‘what is most urgently needed in this country is that non-Aboriginal people should also have the opportunity of having a spiritual relationship to the land’.

In these examples, I have documented two events which occasioned the sacralising effect of putative indigeneity. In the first, we saw how, in one commentator’s account, even fleeting, ‘half-drunk’ Aboriginality is enough to substantiate an authentic experience. The second demonstrates the inspiring effect of such sacralisation on a wider scale.

Didjeridus, Rites and Reconciliation

As I have noted (in Chapter 6), the didjeridu (or ‘didj’, as it is colloquially known) has proliferated in the alternative sector. It functions as a sacralising conduit in firewalks, is held to possess unique therapeutic qualities for the recipient (‘didge healing’), and may, as Sherwood (1997) conveys, provide the player with a ‘feeling of wholeness’ or groundedness - a ‘tuning in’ to the land. The didj’s Aboriginality provides the basis for the amplification of these qualities and effects. Yet, the didj’s potential as a ‘healing’ catalyst may extend even further. That is, according to manufacturers and players, taking up the didj amounts to taking up the cause for reconciliation. This is a message often promoted by ConFest workshop instructors. For example, according to Heartland Didgeridoo:

Aboriginal spirit is rising again through a greater respect for our indigenous people and an acceptance for their rights, their autonomy, their spirituality. More Koori folk are feeling a greater sense of pride. With it they are taking their lives back into their hands ... Until all or the majority of Australians reconcile with Aboriginal people then every white person carries some degree of guilt or shame and every Aboriginal person carries some degree of animosity and this land is not united ... I challenge every one that takes up the didge that they take up a responsibility to be part of the reconciliation - the healing.

As Sherwood comments (1997:150), the didj is ‘an instrument of expiation’ holding the potential for users to be absolved of ‘guilt’ or ‘shame’. Considering the majority of young non-Aboriginal didjeriduists are aware of Australia’s ‘dark past’, the didj’s adoption is a likely demonstration of empathy.²⁸ At the same time, from a position of detachment, the didj represents a ‘bridge to facilitate the journey back to the land’ (ibid). It is almost as if mastery of the didj generates a more ‘geosophical’ outlook - whereupon ‘all knowledge and wisdom’ and ‘moral teaching’ is considered to reside *within* the earth’ (Swain 1989:348-9). The didj is thus an instrument via which one may achieve simultaneous reconciliation with indigenous peoples and the Earth.

I want to complete this section by drawing attention to two further extra-ordinary moments transpiring in the context of collective performances. Both are ‘intercultural’ experiences within which the didjeridu is deployed. In each, I rely upon on-site commentators’ recollections of events, readings which reveal the contingent and uncertain trajectory of ‘reconciliation’.

Defilement at Berri

The late Aboriginal activist Burnam Burnam attended the early ConFests. A cultural broker, in 1979 Burnam Burnam encouraged a group of performers from the Oombulgarri-Kununarra area of the Kimberley region of Western Australia, who were at that time participating in an Aboriginal Arts, Crafts and Music festival in Adelaide, to perform at the Berri ConFest. He was to receive a ‘devastating shock’:

By arrangement they were to perform around a campfire hosted by white ‘hippies’. The didgeridoo players, clap stick artists, singers and dancers were performing when, to my horror, a nude male crazily picked up the end of the didgeridoo while it was being played and placed his erect penis into it. The horror and shame of the single act made me hate whites. I was to miss the next five annual Down to Earth Festivals because of the sickness and irreverence of that one act. (Burnam Burnam 1987:97)

²⁸ According to Heartland Didgeridoo, ‘remembrance and grieving is the start of the journey’ to reconciliation.

The sanctity of what has been referred to as an ‘ancient ceremony’ or ‘mini corroboree’ was thus defiled. This penetrative act seemed to be a most disturbing reminder of the history of psychological, socio-cultural and political violations suffered by the same people. Burnam Burnam makes this much clear:

My feelings of revulsion were all the more intense as I knew that the performers came from an area which has seen the destruction of their burial sites and hunting grounds by white men, following the non-consultative decision to dam the Ord River in Western Australia. (Burnam Burnam 1987:97)

Designed to generate an intercultural alliance, the ‘mini-corroboree’ instead provided an occasion where history was seen to be repeated in a most audacious and shameless moment of ‘acting out’. Though there is no evidence to suggest that it was the intention of the perpetrator to do so, for estranged spectators such as Burnam Burnam the event occasioned a lascivious dramatisation of past violations carried out by white men.

Burning and Building Bridges

The *Tek Know* village at Moama IV occasioned another unexpected incident. On New Year’s Eve, a large twelve hour clock was suspended from the top centre of a high scaffold tower from which an enormous Aboriginal land rights flag was also draped. The flag featured a smiley face (symbolising rave culture) on its sun. Near midnight, the rhythm became wilder as throngs of jugglers and fire-stick twirlers raised the tempo of their manipulations at the base of the scaffold, and two men swirled ignited catherine wheels at opposite ends of the tower. At this point, Dama approached with flame-thrower in hand. He intended to set the clock alight to signify the termination of the old year, a feat he achieved at midnight. However, when a couple of propane balloons backfired an unanticipated conflagration illuminated the amazed faces of hundreds of revelers as the flag itself went up in flames.²⁹

Dama later informed me that at the time of the incident, ‘Quoll the Koori’, who operates a St Kilda Market didj stall, was at the base of the flag playing didjeridu with his son. Although nobody was burnt and ‘the show went on’, Dama sensed Quoll’s pride had

²⁹ Though presaging disaster for some, many participants were oblivious, interpreting the flag’s demise as part of the proceedings.

been 'naturally dented'. Nonetheless, something uncanny had transpired. As Dama recounts:

some of the women in the group came to me and sort of said 'Oh my god! Dama, what have you done now?' You know, 'not only have you burned the Koori flag, but you've done so with a Koori underneath it at the time'. Oh my god, woe is us, we are doomed, you know. And I tried to sort of shrug this off because it all sort of felt a bit too sort of pessimistic for the tone of the event. I mean it was New Year's Eve and something very strong had happened, and I wasn't quite sure what it was.

Despite initial uncertainty as to what to make of the incident, a resolution was ultimately achieved:

The week before I'd been through South Melbourne market and I'd passed a stall with a lot of belt buckles on it and one jumped off the table at me. It was a beautiful oval brass buckle with a lovely rendition in enamel of the land rights flag in the centre. And I had this in my pocket. As I later found Quoll at breakfast at FOE, I looked him in the eye and said 'well Quoll, sorry about ya flag mate', you know, and 'here ... here's another one'. And he said 'thanks mate'. And he took this belt buckle and he felt the weight of it and he said 'right, yeah I'll wear that'. And I should have been honoured and that should have been the end of the conversation. I should have said 'thank you Quoll', and this pesky little voice came up inside of me and I said 'Quoll, you don't need to wear that'. And he said 'yeah, right'. And I looked him in the eye again and I said 'that was total fucking anarchy last night wasn't it, just total fucking anarchy'. And he said 'yeah mate'. And I said 'and we don't need a flag do we'. And he said 'no mate ... we're all one peoples, and we don't need no flag'. And that I think is what happened there. To me that was the truth of those moments. And he honoured and I honoured it, and we actually destroyed between us the last vestige of separation that may exist between the whites and the Koories ... So that felt very very very powerful to me actually. And I've seen Quoll since, and we're good mates and give him a hug and we carry on. So it wasn't a great 'woe is us' at all ... The girls however have since made a new Aboriginal flag, and I'm not gonna go any where near it in case I burn it.

In Dama and Quoll's interpretation of this incident a positive resolution was achieved in the face of potential disaster. This stands in stark contrast to Burnam Burnam's reading of the former incident.

The series of privileged moments reconstructed in this section convey, in disparate but often cognate ways, the ultimacy of Australian indigeneity for alternates. At Cotter and Birdlands, putative indigeneity was valorised for its sacralising and authenticating legitimacy. There, ConFest folk-theories celebrated indigenous presence, and local

practices indicated a non-Aboriginal desire for *em-place-ment*. I argued that didjeridu use may be a means by which non-Aborigines reconcile with indigenous peoples and ecology. The events at Berri and Moama IV of which Burnam Burnam and Dama speak occasioned unexpected ‘disturbances’ which threatened the reconciliatory processes of which these events were, in part, an expression. The first incident was interpreted as a sign of the perduring injustices experienced by Aboriginal peoples, therein indicating a fissured relationship, the second ultimately signified an alliance.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the lifestyle *sacra* of participants are presented, contested and (re)confirmed in a hyper-reflexive liminal environment. Alternative cultural discourse and practice, I have argued, are (re)produced in the context of a marginal *multi-cultural drama* performed via multiple genres at multiple venues. The entire event is an extra-ordinary cultural frame, within which a range of localised ‘ultimate concerns’ are evoked. I have explored three principle *sacra* communicated: the self, the Earth, and indigeneity.

Following separate descriptive assessments of on-site manifestations of self healing/growth and Earth consciousness (insurgent personalist and globalist sensibilities), I articulated how such a diversity of discourse and practice may be perceived to be contiguous. ‘Heal thy self - thy planet’, a ConFest theme signifying the ecological relatedness of person and planet, is a particularly apposite expression of what I called the *self-globe nexus*. ‘Healing the planet’, according to most discursive accounts, starts ‘locally’ - that is, via *work* undertaken on the self or one’s immediate environment. The *nexus* also implies that individuals in possession of the understanding that they are *connected* (to nature), resolve to take *responsibility* for their actions. *Eco-spiritual* manifestations of Neo-Paganism were canvassed to demonstrate the performative expression of the *self-globe nexus*.

Finally, addressing indigeneity, common sentiments on the matter were conveyed via a series of revelatory vignettes highlighting several extra-ordinary moments. Events partially reconstructed via readings performed by participants and the researcher disclosed

the significance of indigeneity for alternates - as a valorised source of authentication and in the complicated quest for reconciliation.