

Chapter 8

'What Tribe Do You Belong To?'¹ Immediate and Contested Community

Introduction

This chapter attends to the unique tension of unity and discord characterising ConFest. As I argued in the previous chapter, though valorised and even deified, the self is not alone. In an autonomous festive zone, there exists a will to achieve *immediate* community - a self/other dissolution. However, as I contend here, it would be illusory to regard this alternate community as one homogeneous mass. The chapter has three parts.

Part one draws attention to limitations in Turner's 'communitas' (the third liminal modality), while simultaneously advancing a fitting interpretation of the ConFest community. I attempt this by offering: (1) an understanding of ConFest as an alternative cultural *heterotopic community*, that is, an alternate social gathering invested with multiple meanings, and; (2) a heuristic approach to the unique *intercorporeality* occasioned by the event.

Part two draws upon research data to substantiate the view that ConFest is a tense exchange between positions of inclusivity and exclusivity. Circumscribing the prevalent alternative affectation of 'the tribe', I disclose this concept's duplicitous attributions transparent in the homogeneity/heterogeneity dynamic specific to the festival. With the assistance of Maffesoli's 'sociality', I argue that ConFest is a unique juncture of 'mass' and 'tribe' - an organic *network of nomadic* 'neo-tribes'. It is also my contention that this network actualises the *being together* popularly articulated as 'the ConFest Spirit'. Yet ConFest, like other communities, operates via differentiation and distinction. For one thing, internal unification implies boundary maintenance - the identification and exclusion of 'foreign' elements. For another thing, achieving consensus on boundary composition is highly unusual. I use the example of on-site disputation between proponents of competing music cultures to affirm ConFest's status as a *contested community*.

In the third and final part, I contend that, despite adversity and disharmony, ConFest's grassroots social *organicism* assures the ultimate 'triumph of community'.

¹ From *DTE News* Special Edn (Nov/Dec) 1995:2.

Part I: *Communitas* or Heterotopia?

'*Communitas*' is a Latin term meaning 'a relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals', which Turner distinguished from 'community' or 'an area of common living' (1969:96). That which he deemed 'spontaneous' or 'existential *communitas*' is a 'direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities' (ibid:131), a social modality within which individuals interact free from socio-culturally constructed divisions.² Turner contended that 'the *communitas* spirit', manifesting in the interstices, on the margins and beneath visible structure, 'presses always to universality and ever-greater unity' (1973:202). Effusing a sacred anti-structurality and evincing *homogeneity*, its boundaries are thus 'ideally coterminous with those of the human species' (Turner 1969:131). *Communitas* involves the sharing of special knowledge and understanding - 'a flash of mutual understanding on the existential level' (Turner 1982b:48). As a timeless condition or 'a place that is not a place', and as a 'magical' and 'numinous' moment, it is said to approximate 'the religious experience' (1969:128).

That the rebellious sixties laid the foundations for the concept of '*communitas*' makes for a compelling argument. However, though it was associated with the 'energy' seeding the establishment of communes, Turner saw that this pan-human modality, a kind of 'shared flow' (1977:51), was experienced by pilgrims, tourists, wilderness explorers and patrons of major sports events alike. It is even perceived to be manifest in Zen Buddhism's 'prajna' ('intuition') and Confucianism's 'jen' ('love, goodness, benevolence, humaneness and man-to-man-ness') (Turner 1974:46,283).³

For Turner, *communitas* is a 'natural', albeit temporary, form of human relationship. 'Normal structural activity', he suggested, becomes 'arid' and is a source of conflict if

² According to Turner, there are three types: spontaneous, ideological and normative *communitas*. An ideological *communitas* is a group's ideal and utopian *model* designed to replicate the concrete experience of spontaneous *communitas*. Normative *communitas* is an attempt to establish permanent *communitas*, with systematic rules and legal structures. Via further *communitas* experiences, groups often split and factions arise, starting the cycle over (Turner 1982b:49-50).

³ Said to be closely associated with the lowering of status, Turner eventually extended the metaphor to cover: the relationship between those undergoing ritual transition; 'religions of humility' (e.g. Franciscan, Vaisnavism); institutionalised poverty (such as that taught by Buddha, Gandhi) and other monastic and mendicant states (these states are described as 'permanent liminality' and are an attempt to bring about sustained 'normative *communitas*'); the middle class countercultural movements of the 1960s and '70s; the status of autochthonous people and 'submerged' kinship links (1969; 1974).

those in it are not ‘periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of *communitas*’ (1969:139). If structure is exaggerated, there occurs ‘pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside or against the law’ (e.g. rebellion) and if *communitas* is exaggerated, for instance in religious or political movements, there may ensue ‘despotism, overbureaucratisation or other modes of structural rigidification’ (as in totalitarianism) (ibid:129).

Many Meanings, Many ‘ConFests’

The homogeneity implied by an unqualified application of *communitas* has provoked a critical reassessment of the concept. As was pointed out in Chapter 2, pilgrimage destinations are not necessarily sites of all-inclusive sociality. While Turner saw that the anti-structural dimensions of pilgrimages were not characterised by total unity - as in the Hindu Pandharpur pilgrimage where a highly stratified caste system is reinforced⁴ - pilgrimage, counterculture, transition rites and so on are ultimately ‘means of binding diversities together and overcoming cleavages’ (Turner 1973:220). In this sacred sphere, unity and homogeneity prevail over the disunity and heterogeneity of ethnicities, cultures, classes and professions in the mundane sphere (Turner and Turner 1978:39).

While it is tempting to depict the contemporary ConFest as a vast *communitas*, the presence of ‘multiple constituencies’ holding sometimes conflicting and sometimes complementary readings of the event, renders such an interpretation problematical. I deem it more appropriate to view ConFest as an alternative ‘realm of competing discourse’ and practice, an ACH which rushes toward consensus and harmony, but which also yields discord and division. My approach is therefore consistent with that of Abner Cohen (1982; 1993) and Baumann (1992) who argue that public events are contested cultural arenas. For Cohen, carnival is essentially ambivalent - characterised by both *conflict* and *alliance*. Likewise, I find congruity with Henry (1994), who, with a particular local example in mind, regards the marketplace as a space of identity contestation. Events like carnivals, ceremonies and markets are, according to these commentators, characterised by ongoing apprehensiveness between converging constituents who stake claim to variant and often conflicting interpretations of the events, and event-spaces.

⁴ The Pandharpur pilgrimage, like the Muslim hajj, ‘remains within an established religious system. It does not lower defenses between castes, just as Islam does not allow those beyond the Umma (the nation of Islam) to visit the holy places of Mecca and Medina’ (Turner 1973:220-21).

Other ALEs provide furtive parallels. With no ‘official voice’, ‘high priests’ or ‘dogmatic presence’, the Burning Man Festival is a case in point. There, the:

sheer hybrid strangeness and polyglot weirdness of the participants and performances contradict and challenge one another, and, for a weekend, the desert becomes a contest of meanings. No one interpretation of the event can ever carry the day. If there is a definitive meaning of the Man, it is that there is no definitive meaning. (Wray 1995)

That such internal variation generates conflict, sometimes highly volatile circumstances, is a reality made clear by the example of Rainbow Gatherings, which, as Niman (1997) contends, express a ‘fundamental schism’ in the Family (between politics and religion): while ‘[p]olitical/environmental activists appreciate the networking and organizing potential of the Family and the Gatherings [many] spiritually centered Rainbows ... would rather keep politics out of “the church”’ (Niman 1997:111). Indeed, Gatherings are revealed to be constituted by zones of almost irreconcilable ideologies and life-strategies (not unlike any other large community) - at ‘A’ camp, ‘no one is baking cookies or singing songs. Young Rainbows in Patagonias or tie-dyes steer a wide berth around the foul-breathed drunks. It’s dangerous. It’s nasty. It’s all about enslavement to addiction’ (ibid:128).

ConFest is the kind of ‘polymorphic’ context Eade and Sallnow hold for pilgrimage and religious cults (1991), often characterised as much by ‘mutual *mis*understanding’ reinforcing differences between constituents as by forms of consensus (ibid:5). There is no consensus over the idea and space of ConFest. A pilgrimage destination in its own right, participants possess varying motives and expectations, and assign different meanings to the event, such that they experience different ‘ConFests’. We might therefore identify several types, or *clusters* of ConFesters,⁵ an identification enhanced by Erik Cohen’s tourist modalities (1992).

First, there are those who approximate ‘recreational’ or ‘experiential’ tourists. Many participants are ‘on holiday’, seeking ‘a break’ from the occupations and roles to which they shall return mentally and physically recreated. Their experience is generally vicarious. These ConFesters are like *flâneur* of exotica, tasting the authenticity of other lifestyles but not seeking to live it themselves. Otherwise, there are hedonists and bohemians, who revel in the joyful transgressivism the festival licences. These ConFesters travel the ‘Bohemian

⁵ Each of which, in the *lingua franca* of Bourdieu (1984), earn respect and ‘distinction’ for the achievements, style and ‘cultural capital’ that are the common aspirations of their milieu.

path' (Moore 1995). As 'trippers', bikies, ravers, and all-round party people (as in Dando's *Snail* [1996]), they approximate the 'diversionary mode', which, as Cohen argues, is attractive to the younger tourist travelling the path of enjoyment, living 'in the here and now' and whose purpose or direction in life seems unclear (1992:54).

Others arrive with the ambition of 'putting on' or, moreover, 'doing' workshops - that is, getting involved in the conferencing dimension. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, the alternatives expected and pursued on-site are multitudinous. Some are committed to hawking their ideals, political agendas and cosmic panaceas. Radical environmentalists, for instance, work to recruit or convert participants to various political agendas and campaigns. Others are principally committed to conducting 'inner work'. These 'esoteric tourists', like 'the full-time drifter' (Cohen 1973:100), engage in the 'experimental mode' of self-discovery via elective alterity. Obtaining a deeper awareness of self, it is their goal to become 'experienced', and their enhanced capability to mobilise internal resources increases their *spiritual capital*.

Finally there are the volunteers, those who, through their labour and service to the community, approximate the 'existential mode' and thus resemble the tourist who becomes a local - the 'ideal pilgrim'. A peak category of ConFest volunteer is *the worker*. Though, ideally, all participants are encouraged to volunteer their services, *the workers*, most often DTE site 'crew' or 'core group' members, but also market vendors, are the post-tourist *par excellence* - *the locals*. Practical and resourceful, for much of the time occupied accomplishing site duties, *the workers* are more likely to assist in preparing and dismantling the event and to regard their input into the event's operation as 'their workshop'. These ConFest locals, some of whom adopt a 'synthetic martyrdom' (Svendsen 1999) for their personal sacrifices, are proud and sometimes condescending towards the tourist-participants.

Of course, there are variations within, and movement between, clusters. For instance, *the workers* are far from an homogeneous non-factional unit. The point is that, as suggested by the presence of multiple participatory 'modes', there are divergent expectations and interpretations of the event. This convergence of alternate lifestyles generates *discord* as tension develops between those subscribing to variant interpretations of the event, variant 'truths'. Conflict surfaces as attempts are made to exorcise 'foreign' elements, especially when agreement over that which constitutes 'foreign' is absent. This is, therefore, not the homogeneous or apolitical landscape of Turnerian *communitas*.

Yet, despite such discord, shared experience within an autonomous, sensuous and bounded community does strengthen the possibilities of co-operation and *harmonious* relations between diverse constituents and clusters of constituents. ConFest is then a *community* or, more accurately, a heterotopic counter-community, which, by its own organic logic, is motivated by the desire for self-reproduction.

Sensual Solidarity: Return to ‘the People’s Second Life’

Questioning the valency of a concept which has diverted scrutiny from political mechanisms internal to events and practices to which it has been applied is one thing. There is also the matter of Turner’s inattention to the body, which, transfused into *communitas*, distends the concept’s limitations. In Chapter 6, I touched upon Mellor and Shilling’s (1997) account of the nostalgia for ‘carnal knowing’. In the modern world, where mind is separated and superior to body, where surface and image dominates, people experience personal incompleteness, feel ‘closed off’ from ‘embodied grounds of knowledge’ (ibid:29). There is a desire for:

the spontaneity and emotional passions often associated with medieval bodies. A desire for unmediated experiences and feelings, for a body which provides a sense of home, is understandable in a culture whose internal referentiality has made it banal. (Mellor and Shilling 1997:26)

And what they call ‘sensual solidarities’ are (re)appearing. ‘Disciplined bodies’, they argue, ‘are giving way to a ... re-formation, centred on an involvement in sensuous forms of sociality which echo the sacred corporeality of the baroque period, and which prioritise ... *tribal fealties* over individual contracts’ (ibid:162). These ‘solidarities’ ‘mark the resurgence of the “shadow kingdom” of effervescence, and of the sacred as a sensually experienced phenomenon’ (ibid:17). They are thought to ‘emerge from the immanence of the fleshy body within situations of co-presence and interdependence’. And, further, it is possible that, here, people ‘lose their individuality and cognitive control insofar as they choose to “open” certain aspects of their sensuality to flux, interaction and absorption’ (ibid:174).

As ConFest hosts such ‘solidarities’, it approximates the carnival of medieval Europe described by Bakhtin (1968). By contrast to the ‘romantic grotesque’ which is ‘marked by

a vivid sense of the private and isolation' and to the 'individual carnival' of literature, where laughter is 'cut down to cold humour, irony, sarcasm' (1968:37), the carnival is never distant from 'the laughing chorus of the market place' (ibid:439), it is 'the people's second life':

While carnival lasts there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. (Bakhtin 1968:7)

In ConFest, we can see 'carnival' is never merely 'a mode of understanding', as in Rabelaisian carnivalesque, but a *mode of being*. Most significantly for Bakhtin, in this 'body of the people', a world-body correspondence transpires such that the carnival body outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits, becomes mutable. In what Bakhtin calls the 'archaic grotesque':

the stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other. (Bakhtin 1968:25)

The grotesque body is 'a mobile, split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange ... never closed off from either its social or ecosystemic context' (Stallybrass and White 1986:22).

Turner's general neglect of the liminal body has already been conveyed (Chapters 2 and 6). With *communitas*, Turner arguably had the greatest opportunity to chart the terrain of the collective corporeal. After all, he proclaimed that we may be 'beginning to learn the ambiguous, ludic language of what Bakhtin calls "the people's second world", which is ultimately *always charged with communitas, the likely possibility of immediate human communion*' (Turner 1983b:190, my emphasis). However, the communions Turner had in

mind seemed to be clinically social, apparently not sensual. They were collectivities of minds and souls, but not bodies.

Orgiasm and Conviviality: Communitas Corporealised

In their attention to the corporeality of ephemeral and intense social moments, Michel Maffesoli and Hakim Bey have developed ideas complementary to, yet advancing upon, those of Turner. It is to these authors that I now turn.

According to Maffesoli, 'Prometheus has been put in doubt'. Positioned in the French tradition of theorising the everyday, Maffesoli promulgates a sociology of 'postmodern sociality'. Cannibalising numerous thinkers, especially Durkheim,⁶ and borrowing from Bataille,⁷ he expounds the re-enchantment of contemporary social life. Maffesoli claims that, today, 'Dionysian' forces of emotional renewal - signified by the 'relativisation of the work ethic, the accentuation of the body, polymorphous perversity, ideological disengagement, periodic groupings of consumption, networks of amorous camaraderie, the importance of dress and cosmetics' (1994:156 in Evans 1997:226) - are pervasive.

In Maffesoli's opinion, the relativistic emotional/aesthetic age of postmodernity is characterised by the appearance of nebulous 'neo-tribes' and 'neo-communities' resisting the universal codes of morality constructed and imposed by the Promethean rationality of the modern era. These protean aggregations are cultures of sentiment and aestheticisation, which he, rather controversially, argues are 'trans-political', distinctly disengaged from the political and returning to 'local ethics', or an 'empathetic sociality' (Maffesoli 1996:11). This sociality, or 'underground centrality', 'bestows, like the Freudian unconscious, strength, vitality, and "effervescence" to social life' (Evans 1997:227). In 'underground centrality', one discovers '*puissance*' the 'inherent energy and vital force of the people', which Maffesoli distinguishes from institutional power or '*pouvoir*' (Maffesoli 1996:1).⁸

⁶ A Durkheim, who, as Evans (1997:222) notes, is 'interpreted through the lenses of a surrealism, which was obsessed with exoticism, representation of otherness, Shamanic rituals, masks, and sacred sites'.

⁷ According to Evans (1997:222), Maffesoli's interest is in all those things Bataille represented as that which was "heterogeneous" to the order of rationalistic, instrumental and capitalistic "homogeneity".

⁸ The cosmic sensuality which Bakhtin assumed characterised the 'people's *second* life' is somewhat manifest in 'underground centrality' or 'black market sociality' which, for Maffesoli, is sociality of the *first*, and ephemeral, order.

The Shadow of Dionysus: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Orgy (1993) is of special interest, since it is here that Maffesoli sails remarkably close to the Turnerian project.⁹ At the beginning of the work, we are warned that a:

city, a people, or a more or less limited group of individuals who cannot succeed in expressing collectively their wildness, their madness, and their imaginary, rapidly destructure themselves and, as Spinoza noted, these people merit more than any 'the name of solitude'. (1993:8)

The book details the necessary manifestation of 'passional logic', which it is claimed, 'has always animated and once again animates the social body'. Like 'a subterranean switchboard', 'passional logic ... defracts into a multiplicity of effects that inform daily life' (1993:1). Maffesoli ranges across a plethora of perverse human activities recounted in various texts (historical, sociological), connecting them via 'passional logic', a theme most manifest in the social 'orgiasm'. The 'orgiasm' is a universal form of sociality which, 'contrary to a morality of "ought to be" .., refers to an *ethical immoralism* which consolidates the symbolic link of all society' (1993:2). The 'logic' of such a condition is that, while 'anomic in many aspects', it 'allows for the structuring or regeneration of community'.

As Maffesoli has it, in 'the face of historic time dominated by production and parousia, there is a poetic and heroic time, a time of the amorous body, a second and hidden time around which are organised endurance and sociality' (1993:31). In this secret, ephemeral and 'unproductive life' of 'Dionysian ludism', there is a desire for loss, for spending. Therefore, it is the orgiastic which is the source of society's renewal. Though Maffesoli reveals little evidence of its presence in everyday life, the 'orgiasm' clearly reaches a licentious, contagious and unrestrainable climax in the festal - those moments occasioning transgressions of imposed morality (ibid:92).

Although attention to Eros and the sexualised body represents an advance on Turner, strong parallels are apparent. Echoing Turner's discourse on the prophylactic role of ritual/festive inversion and *communitas*, Maffesoli asserts that periodic resistance to power and the transgression of norms precludes revolt: to refuse festival 'is to expose oneself to the return of the repressed, to encourage a brutal and bloody explosion' (1993:95). In another way, Maffesoli produces a trademark Turnerian (Nietzschean) denotation of social reality, stating: 'confronted with the laborious Prometheus, one must show that the noisy Dionysus is also a necessary figure of sociality' (ibid:21). The opposing social phenomena

⁹ Though apparently totally unaware of Turner.

carry a strong hint of Turner's 'structure' and 'anti-structure'. The orgasm is regenerative - it reinstalls the status quo:

In the same way that revolt or revolution permit an energetic new elite to supplant a sleeping, exhausting dictatorship, and through this allows for a startling of the political and social, thus the disturbance or festive orgasm is a sacrificial expiation which allows the proper virtue of the sociality to be restored. (1993:97)

'Proper virtue' is only a slight variation of the 'society' Durkheim saw recreated and given meaning via the sacred cult.

Maffesoli's attention to a transgressively sensualised sociality resonates with Bey's approach. Both the 'orgiasm' and 'the TAZ' are 'unproductive' - either depict an immediate demesne of joy and desire. For Bey, however, the 'festal culture' of 'the TAZ' is overtly pregnant with creative possibilities arising from 'radical conviviality' (1994b). The TAZ/Immediatist project is a struggle for presence. In Bey's view, the physically divided are also the conquered and controlled. He contends that

true desires - erotic, gustatory, olfactory, musical, aesthetic, psychic, & spiritual - are best attained in a context of freedom of self & other in physical proximity & mutual aid. Everything else is at best a sort of representation. (1991b)

The awareness of such has meant that 'all over the world people are leaving or "disappearing" themselves from the Grid of Alienation and seeking ways to restore human contact' (Bey 1993b). And the most 'appropriate architectural form' for radical conviviality - what might approximate Fourier's Harmonial Association and the Planansterian orgy - is that which has already been identified by Bakhtin as the 'infinitely penetrable body' of grotesque realism. It is in the festal space, the temporary autonomous zone, that a desired social mutability transpires. Immediatism, which can be likened to Bataille's 'eroticism',¹⁰ the Beyan solution to 'the addiction to bitter loneliness which characterizes consciousness in the 20th century', is 'the most natural path for free humans imaginable' (1994a:19,23). And, as Bey confirms, the fulfilment of the desire for immediate sociality, 'the group jouissance, the group coming ... [associated with] the joy of overcoming the law of the herd' (1993a), where people are fully engaged and not separated, replaced by, or turned into, commodities, is *liberating*: festival 'as resistance

¹⁰ 'Eroticism', which can be physical, emotional or religious, refers to 'a heightened experience which transgresses the self, wipes away the discontinuities that separate individuals, and

and as uprising, perhaps in a single form, in a single hour of pleasure [is] the very meaning or deep inner structure of our autonomy' (1994b).¹¹

As an immediate domain, ConFest is a *return* to 'archaic grotesque', to the natural 'body of the people'. There, otherwise hidden, closed off and commodified, 'the feral body' is uncovered and celebrated. '*Puissance*', or perhaps more astutely, 'radical conviviality', transpires in the heat of spontaneous fire circles, conferences, 'funshops' and conspiratorial conclaves. In this contemporary hub of clandestinity, there is a collective sense of 'going back', exuviating layers of cognition, 'getting out of the head and into the heart'. As participants drop their defences and become mutable, shed finite personas and go grotesque, lose their selves and gain the world, this is a centre of 'sensual solidarity' - indeed, a most corporeal *communitas*.

Part II: Two 'Tribes'?

'Tribalism' has some history in the ACM. The 'tribe' was presupposed in the thought and practice of 1960s and '70s counter-culture, as communards, like Gary Snyder, romanticised indigenous cultures as socially, morally and ecologically sound.¹² This was observable at Aquarius where it was also figured that similar 'histories of oppression' experienced by hippies and Aborigines warranted their 'kinship' (cf. Newton 1988:59),¹³ and where assumed mutuality resulted in alternates formulating 'tribal rituals' or 'corroborees' of their own.¹⁴ As Newton notes, such 'kinship' exposes basic naivety in

accomplishes a temporary fusion of selves' (Mellor and Shilling 1997:182).

¹¹ The founder of Burning Man, Larry Harvey, is a notable TAZ/Immediatist engineer. For Harvey:

modern society discourages active participation and encourages us to be passive consumers ... [W]e don't participate in culture, we consume it. We live together in isolated stalls. The context of community, the vital interplay of human beings, has been forgotten. What we consume has no inherent meaning or transcendent value to us. It is no surprise we thirst for thrills. Consumption doesn't lead to satisfaction, only more consumption. If we're to break this cycle, we must somehow reclaim community and create culture out of that experience. (cited in Wray 1995)

¹² It is, likewise, a designation employed by new travellers (Hetherington 1993:152) and dance collectives.

¹³ The organisers of Aquarius actively promoted the concept of 'the tribe'. Not only had they urged participants to organise themselves into 'tribes' to construct their own shelters, share food and be collectively responsible for the environment, 'inter-tribal' communication was stressed (James 1973:951).

¹⁴ The original Mullumbimbi community, from which the support base for Aquarius was provided, was described as 'a white corroboree, the first meeting of the Mullumbimbi tribe' (Jiggins 1983:3, in Newton 1988:61). The Homeland Festival, held annually at The Sanctuary

alternate networks as, for instance, 'tribalism' at Aquarius was associated with the liberation of the kinds of social restrictions that are basic to 'tribal societies'. 'Traditional' tribes possess status hierarchies, structural inequity exists between gender and age groups, and there are 'taboos and fears surrounding the natural functions of the body'. The ascribed status of individuals in such societies contrasts to that which has been sought and achieved within counter cultures (and indeed within ConFest), where personal freedoms are fundamental (ibid:61).

Nevertheless, such idealised veneration of 'tribal life' is infused in the ConFest imagination. According to Cockatoo, ConFest is a 'celebration of tribal archetypes, with multiple options for expressing it'. As for Les:

ConFest is tribal in the sense of a closeness - a return, as the name says, down to earth. Some of the best aspects of the indigenous way of life are present at ConFest. It is tribal also in the sense of a respect for the Earth and the whole notion of nurturing everything.

Explicit here is the aspect of *return* - imaginative restoration to a desirable form of social organisation. As Lorikeet claims, 'we've lost the structure of a tribe in our society - what we're doing here in essence is trying to reform a tribal structure over a week'. For David Cruise, to become 'tribal' conveys a sense of belonging:

I've never experienced tribal life other than ConFest ... If we take tribalness to mean belonging ... entitlement ... then this is part of the personal journey of ConFest ... of getting to the point where you can lock into the tribal process of being a human ... ConFest is just a big tribal gathering.

Yet, it is discernible that the concept of 'tribe' is duplicitous as it conveys *two principal senses of belonging*. While some use 'tribe' to refer to a sense of all inclusive sociation (homogeneity), others use 'tribe' to denote multiple groupings (heterogeneity). I turn now to treat these respectively.

Coming Home: the ConFest Family

Some use 'tribe' inclusively to confer the idea of an emerging sense of extended kinship, such that all participants are members of 'the ConFest family', that the site is a place where one can merge with 'kindred spirits' or 'fellow travellers' (Schmidt 1983:9),

in the Thora Valley NSW, has also been described as 'a New Corroboree' (from Oct 1989 festival poster).

or further, that - according to Katunga - 'we are all members of one Earth Tribe'. The sentiment is conveyed in the adage printed on the cover of *DTE* 90 (Nov 1996): 'In Freedom We Are One Tribe'. The extension of affinal ties therefore becomes almost limitless - a notion of expanding familihood that is inscribed in DTENEA's 'All One Family' gatherings. Such an extension demonstrates an implicit challenge to the nuclear family, which, if we recall the 'counterculture', had become an obstacle, 'restricting opportunities for the development of more personal and richer relationships with a variety of others' (Newton 1988:59). ConFest is then a gathering for anyone 'who is into connecting with the real family'. Cheryl points out that this is not necessarily your biological family, 'it's a family of the people who support you to be yourself, support you to challenge your beliefs and fears'. And, the breaking down of barriers implied here is known to generate 'a feeling of belonging which was so unforced, so imperceptible, that I didn't notice it till it (or I) was gone' (Justine).

It is thus a most *familiar* environment. Michael intimates this in reference to his first ConFest: 'it was just like coming home ... It was all my friends in one place'. Indeed, as Cedar imparts, 'a lot of people feel like it's their home, that they are coming home when they come to ConFest, and that they are leaving home when they leave'. Paralleling the experience of the *Carnaval* participant, for the ConFester, it is likely that 'the whole world around him is turned into his house' (Da Matta 1984:238). And the domestication of public space, this licensed extension of the private sphere, sanctions, amongst other intimate behaviours, 'clothing optional' pursuits.

It is worth drawing attention to one of Turner's comparative insights at this point. In both counterculture and in tribal ritual, Turner thought sexual rules and the laws and vows of marriage may be 'liquidated' in two ways: they may be replaced by a kind of 'primitive promiscuity' or 'group marriage', or routine sexual behaviour may be prohibited, suppressed or altered by an extension of the sibling bond giving over to temporary abstinence or celibacy (1974:246). Newton (1988) argues that the Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration approximated the latter route. Contemporary sensitive attitudes and awareness of AIDS and other STDs increases the likelihood of abstinence or monogamy at such events. Though, I am uncertain as to whether ConFest 'sets asexual rules ... and greatly increases the number of people deemed to be within an incest taboo relationship' (Newton 1988:63),¹⁵ it at least seems probable that increased public nudity and tactility - the

¹⁵ For one thing, incidences of sexual harassment have not been unknown at ConFest. According to Anthony, the lingering 'free sex' perspectives of the sixties are partially responsible for

familiarity associated with the extension of the private sphere - correspond with a reduction in the occurrence of sexual harassment and abuse. Permitted carnality and sexual harassment seem to be inversely related.

Going Neo-Tribal: the Village People

Others stress heterogeneity. According to Saiga, if 'tribe' connotes singularity, sameness, then ConFest is the 'opposite of tribal [as] it's a coming together of many cultures'. It is thus a convergence of diverse solidary and orgiastic orientations, a circumstance Condoroo refers to when he suggests 'the village system promotes a sense of group identification'. *Food Not Bombs, Forest, Pt'chang, Spiral, Tek Know, The Grove* and *Ananda Marga*, for example, attract those connected to networks external to ConFest. The topography then accommodates cohabiting groups, each with a nucleus of identifiable, sometimes conflictual, attitudes, beliefs and rites - a unique neighbourhood of alternate 'neo-tribes', a spontaneous counter-world of TAZs, or even 'minor jihad'.

These groups can then be conceived as band-like or 'tribal' in the Maffesolian sense of dispersed micro-groups, possessing a distinct system of values and ethics. By contrast to the relative fixity and longevity of pre-modern or 'traditional' tribes, postmodern or 'neo-tribes' are temporary, internally diverse, unstable, and organised to fulfil the desire to *be together*. For Maffesoli, neo-tribes reflect a populist movement tending toward rediscovering 'mutual aid, conviviality, commensality [and] professional support' (1996:69). They are 'less disposed to master the world, nature and society than collectively to achieve societies founded above all on quality of life' (ibid:62).

It is clearly the case that ConFest is attractive to the disaffected who search for security and meaning in 'elective centres' (Cohen et al. 1987), becoming affiliates of precarious but affectual tribal or *Bund*-like forms of sociation (Hetherington 1994). To maintain their self-identity and internal cohesion, these neo-tribes often engage in subterfuge, are tactically duplicitous, or remain aloof (Maffesoli 1996:96). However, neo-tribes gravitating to and forming at ConFest are characteristically alternate (perhaps *counter-tribes*). While some are characteristically hedonist, others (including eco-tribes like GECO) display the kind of political strategies ostensibly foundering in 'the time of the

abuses, including the (alleged) rape of a fifteen year old girl on New Year's Eve at Birdlands (an incident achieving notoriety at a candle light vigil on the evening of January 1st). And, he adds, 'it's not just local yobbos that come in and create the problems, it's [also] New Age hippies [who] exploit each other'.

tribes'. This environ, then, incubates a heteroglossia of alternate lifestyle tribes: feral, pagan, anarchist, queer, New Ager, Margy, raver, bikie, itinerant trader etc. Such tribes, ephemeral and tragic, practise the 'forbidden', and the secret aesthetic and ideals that their members share is felt to be non-replicable, resisting imposition. Such is the internal resolve of 'underground centrality', one example of which I now discuss.

Tek Know Trance Dance

A proximate festive node, Trance Dance is a unique 'rave-derived' (Luckman 1998:45) assemblage - a convergence of varying collectives and 'posses' (Clark 1992:70). Trance Dance typically utilises the ambient, psychedelic (or 'psy-trance') edge of techno music, a style of digitally enhanced aural sculpture with an hypnotically persistent beat.

Attracting bohemians and activists alike, participants are united by their opposition to the parent culture.¹⁶ Located at the edge of 'the movement of the dancefloor' (Jordan 1995:125), ConFest Trance Dance is remote from the excessive commercialisation that characterises techno, and the style restrictions and exclusivity of 'club culture' or 'clubbing' (Thornton 1995; Malbon 1998). If there is a *haute couture*, it is detectably anticonsumerist. Yet, this is not to suggest that display is unconsidered, for participants ascribe to the most sartorially insane body-rigs and outlandish adornments (often using fluoro colours, wigs, face paint, layered leggings and trousers fashioned from the most ridiculously juxtaposed fabrics and colours), bad-taste artefacts and insurgent t-shirt slogans (like 'ungovernable entity'). Deploying a manifestly 'retro' style, these bricoleurs display a nostalgia for a panoply of past youth cultures (e.g. hippy and punk) with the homological conveyance of a neo-sixties ethos foremost.

Despite this conspicuous display, the Trance Dance floor is a space where participants can dissolve into the body - one's own, and that of others. One can be induced into an ecstasy of selflessness *and* feel profoundly connected to those who are on the same 'track', who share the experience. Surrendering to the music (and other effects such as the lights, smoke, installations) occasions the dissolution of ego, or the disassemblage of otherwise requisite egoic proclivities among dancers. In this 'democratic dance movement' (Richard and Kruger 1998:167), where 'the body moves beyond the spectacle of "the pose"'

¹⁶ Participants are often *habitués* of alternative dance venues - disused industrial spaces such as Global Village in Footscray, outdoor dance festivals such as earthcore, and protest events like Reclaim the Streets, Earth Dance (a global benefit dance for Tibet) and Goongerah Forest festivals.

(Melechi 1993:33), where the penchant for ‘whole body vibrations ... allow no hierarchising or privileging of any given body part’ (Gore 1997:64), and where females are infrequently constituted as dancing subjects by the male gaze, a quality of safe anonymity is experienced (although New Years Eve’s high ‘yob’ count jeopardises this). And, in sharing such an experience, an intimate fellowship is potentiated between dancers whereby standard markers of separation based on gender, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, become insignificant. Being ‘alone together’ (Moore 1995:207) is an appropriate expression for the experience. The phrase signifies the unique ‘passional logic’ of Trance Dance - where participants *share* the experience of ‘emigrating inwards’ (Goffman in Malbon 1998:275), each desiring the intercorporeal¹⁷ estate of the dance floor and the inviolable ‘space’ it offers them.

This dissolution into a temporary trance-community is implicit in Krusty’s *Rainbow Dreaming* promotion. In a workshop envisioning revived Trance Dance, initiates would join together as one new tribe: ‘The Rainbow Tribe’: ‘all colours, all races, all as one’. This was an inclusive Dionysian ‘ritual of disappearance’ wherein, as Melechi (1993:37) narrates, one can ‘disaccumulate culture’ and ‘hide from the spectre of a former self’. In this ‘wild revolution’ of ‘escape’ from self identity, ‘nobody is, but everybody belongs’ (ibid). As participants merge into a collective body, they approximate Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Body without Organs’ (Jordan 1995:125). Yet this wider ‘body’ is not, as Pini (1997:124-5) suggests, just a collection of human bodies, but a ‘mind/body/technology assemblage’. With the use of smoke, strobe-lights, slides, Mutoid Waste Co. fire sculptures and industrial waste art installations, an instance of ‘an erosion of the limits between the corporeal and the technological’ is realised. Where ‘cyborgians’ enjoy ‘an ongoing inducement into a desubjectified state of something like rapture ... a communal state of euphoria’ (Jordan 1995:129), the Trance Dance TAZ can be envisioned as a ‘deterritorialising’ assemblage, and therefore testament to the unlimited and unblocked productivity of desire.

Trance Dance is a typically non-verbal experience - though ambient ‘chill spaces’ are usually provided for low level conversation. Consciousness altering drugs, ecstasy and acid, are often used to enhance the experience. An ‘entactogenic’, ecstasy heightens sensory awareness, yet the shared intensity of the dance floor already conditions empathy between co-trancers. Acid often produces auditory and visual hallucinations that amplify

¹⁷ Part of Merleau Ponty’s non-dualistic ontology, this is a term used to describe the embodied intersubjectivity characterising human being-in-the-world.

the sensory stimuli of the assemblage. Drug use, however, is not compulsory. Quenda, for instance, says she doesn't 'go tripping' to 'trance out' these days: 'usually there's heaps of people just out there and I can just vibe on and start tripping more than they are and I'm not doing it to my body ... I like to mingle around the crowd like a bit of a spideress and just bring everybody all into that motion'.

Quenda's remark also touches on the broad safety margins and permissive parameters of this 'rave-derived' experience, and the possibilities it holds for 'unfixing identity categories' (Pini 1997:126), for safely exploring alternate identities (such as androgyny, mythical characters or personal 'totems') or even non-identities. For this is a highly charged exploratory zone of sometimes grotesque embodiment. By comparison with the predatory sexuality associated with disco, Trance Dance can be said to leave participants 'suspended between ascension and climax, between childhood and adulthood' (Tomlinson 1998:201). The rave-associated component of regression is apparent - that is, with an abundance of fluffy toys, and even pacifier sucking, a temporary idyll approximating that of childhood is achieved. Though the experience may approximate what McRobbie calls the 'pre-sexual' and 'pre-oedipal' playground of raves (1993:419), since 'virtual' sex characterises these 'plateaux of intensity' (Gore 1997:62),¹⁸ it is perhaps more accurate to refer to the 'tacit sexuality' of the experience replacing sexual contact (Tomlinson 1998:201).¹⁹

The Organic Network and Nomadism

Tek Know is just one tribal node in the counterscape. But the question remains: is ConFest one tribe or a cluster of many? Its spontaneous vitality, or '*puissance*', nourishing the nuclei of relatively autonomous cells is evocative of both, since, in this organic 'protoplasmic' zone (an example of Maffesolian de-individualised society in miniature) the ConFest '*tribus*' of villages constitutes 'both an undifferentiated mass and highly diversified polarities' (Maffesoli 1996:88).²⁰ In describing something of this, it will be

¹⁸ According to Richard and Kruger (1998:168-9):

[T]his culture transforms eroticism into a dance style, sexuality is expressed in ritual form. The dance itself becomes a form of sexual intercourse where beats and rhythms imitate different stages of orgasm. The dancers experience virtual sex on the dance floor, releasing their sexual tension through ecstatic shouts.

¹⁹ Thus, stories of aggression, homophobia and sexual harassment are rare.

²⁰ Maffesoli refutes claims that contemporary society is experiencing rampant individualism and/or undergoing an homogenised massification. Neither is the case since society is 'built on

useful to outline ConFest's necessary interdependence of part (tribes) and whole (mass), and the distinctive inter-tribal membership.

Various spaces, organs and cultures of sentiment are interlaced forming the 'ambient' mass that is ConFest. The ConFest Committee and its several subcommittees, the key event zones and villages are inter-reliant. The successful operation of the festival, and the realisation of communality often deemed 'the ConFest Spirit' depend upon this delicate alignment.

Performing a subtle 'governing' role, the ConFest Committee facilitates the distribution of resources to multiple tribes and sites. Consisting of various impermanent subcommittees or satellite crews, the Committee enables basic infrastructural amenities, including the provision of food and cooking facilities to some village based kitchen communal-network centres (see Maps). These 'services' effectively reward and encourage volunteers to perform roles for the community. Via the ConFest Committee, DTE reproduces a local 'de-individualising' *puissance*. There is thus an implicit reciprocal relationship between part (tribe) and whole (community 'ambience'). Performing site work (e.g. separating garbage for recycling, Pt'chang peacekeeping, Front Gate duties, digging toilet pits) is a means by which individuals or groups - subcommittees, crews, villages ('diversified polarities') - become attached to the community (the 'undifferentiated mass'). Taking 'the co-operative path', individuals, often strangers to one another, share responsibilities (such as child minding, waste management, community safety and hygiene, healing and first aid) and provide free education (workshops). While some volunteers may strive for or seek to maintain 'true worker status' - the acme of DTE elitism and source of differentiation - most volunteers are satisfied with little more than their ownership of an equal share in the community: they 'work' for ConFest. A profound sense of satisfaction and belonging is derived from the collective effort required to 'pull off' a festival.

In addition to the essential tension of part and whole, the event encourages cross-membership, a promiscuous inter-village fluidity (or a poly-centredness), which is what Maffesoli has in mind with the 'network' (1996:145): a 'unicity' or matrix in which individuals have multiple sites of belonging. The contemporary topography promotes such networking by inviting people to wander, to be peripatetic. Village distribution permits

a fundamental paradox: the constant interplay between the growing massification and the development of micro-groups' (1996:6). 'All social life', he argues, is organised by a 'mass-tribe dialectic ... naturally inducing adherence and distance, attraction and repulsion' (ibid:127).

participants to 'go through a little gap to another zone which has its own ethic, or thoughts or process' (David Cruise). With this arrangement, they are constantly straying into unfamiliar territory. Furthermore, such *nomadism* may activate one's connection to numerous locales of intimacy and a multiplicity of overlapping identity clusters. One participant may become involved, for example, in the ConFest Committee, Pt'chang, the Front Gate, Spontaneous Choir, *Spiral* and *Tek Know*, and/or may oscillate between the lifestyle nodes of the 'diversionary' bohemian, 'experimentalist' workshopper and 'existential' volunteer; between 'tourist' and 'local'. Traversing the paths between such 'polycentric nebulae' (Maffesoli 1996:152), quite literally a network of networks, an individual may acquire numerous identifications and roles.

Being Together: the ConFest Spirit(uality)

Together, these elements (organic interdependence and nomadism) constitute the *being together* encountered at ConFest, a feeling captured by Corella. She writes:

I often say during a ConFest 'Oh God, *Never Again*'. It's all too much, too raw - too young, too juvenile. But I usually return. It's my one experience in the year when I can take off the mask of persona, let down my hair, get real dirty, rub shoulders with all age groups and all socio levels. A sort of melange of common denominator humanity.

The 'contact' - as opposed to 'contract' - community (Shields 1992:110) redolent in the sensate anonymity of the mud pit, uncovered body painting, Trance Dance and other communions, provides a patent rendering of Bakhtin's 'carnival spirit' wherein members of the crowd, archetypal liminaries - human *prima materia* - become 'an indissoluble part of the collectivity' (Bakhtin 1968:255). In this 'second world', 'free, familiar contacts [are] deeply felt and formed ... [as people are] reborn for new, purely human relations' (ibid:10).

Ostensibly opposed to closed, intolerant attitudes, DTE propagates the celebration of open sociality, an ethos of universal acceptance condensed in a bannered slogan 'strangers are friends you have not yet met'.²¹ This openness is also deemed to be indicative of 'the ConFest Spirit', 'the spirit of people leaving judgement behind, opening their arms and their hearts and embracing and welcoming connections with other people ... challenging

²¹ The slogan echoes 'Everyone's your mate in Albion Free State', an early free festival motto (McKay 1996:156), and one new traveller's incentive for a life on the road: 'It's the thought of

[their] fears, [and] belief systems' (Cheryl). The 'Spirit' had its genesis in 1976 at Cotter after which it was given expression in the original 'manifesto':

We have in a few, short days, broken through into a consciousness that is so powerful in its newness that it is, as yet, difficult to describe ... The Down to Earth Movement has found, here at the Cotter River, that we can live in wholeness, in harmony with ourselves, the Earth and all around us. This sharing has shown us to be so diverse, and from so many walks of life, that we are obviously not an alternative but the possessors of a new and greater consciousness of human potential ... We are the seeds of change that will ultimately transform mankind. (*DTE Community News* 1977, no 1:1)

Such a unifying, vision inducing experience, is an apposite example of 'spontaneous communitas'. According to Rawlins (1982:30), seven thousand people walked around naked at the height of the festival. He was enraptured by:

the creation of extended families as single-parents joined with others of the same or opposite gender, homosexual and heterosexual often joining together; and [by spontaneous] meetings, the wonderful life-enriching joy of knowing one could go up and embrace anyone regardless of gender. (Rawlins 1982:31)

At one point there were about 1,000 naked people in the water, and Jim Cairns recounted to me that even the police 'in one or two cases, went in with them [and] put their uniforms on afterwards'. The experience, which Rawlins favourably compared to 'Eden', amounted to something akin to the Roman Saturnalia: 'a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon the earth' (Bakhtin 1968:8).

After more than twenty years of events, 'the ConFest Spirit' continues to manifest in a zone which, according to Svendsen (1999:39) - who likens ConFest to India's Khumb-Mela (the world's largest gathering of Hindu ascetics) - has become 'the pre-eminent Spiritual Convergence in Australia, if not the Western World'; a zone where social divisions (based on role, status, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age) are variously suspended. The associated numinosity is perennial. Following Moama II, for example, one novice wrote:

[U]pon dropping my scepticism like an old skin I had outgrown, I entered a new space ... I was overcome with emotion ... I passed through the eye of a needle into a blossoming new reality, a lucid dreaming in bliss. With that came an increasing lightness of heart which allowed my eyes to witness a living miracle on a grand scale ... I was witnessing the grounding of earth of the heavenly fourth dimension, the descending of the era of the new paradigm,

the thousands of friends I haven't met yet' (Stone 1996:153).

city of the new Jerusalem ... I was witnessing miracles. (Andrew Elksin 1995:9)

Other pilgrim-novitiates may encounter a quality of experience which Cohen (1992:55) implies is desirable in 'elective centres': a 'sensation of timelessness-in-time, an eternal now, a dissolution of the structure of time [which is also] characteristic of the experience of liminality'. Therefore:

there was nothing to mark time but the passage of the sun and the ritual morning swim - after several days the thought of returning to the world I had left with the incessant regimes of time and timekeeping, appointments and schedules seemed appalling ... I felt like I had discovered the right way to live, timeless, among this calm, and welcoming community. (Simon K)

Yet another ecstatic novice considered Guilmartens I to be:

THE greatest experience of my life! ... I learnt that society is not solely consistent of superficial ... commodities and that there are genuine people in this world ... ConFest has taught me that the material world counts for very little (something that I always knew but had never truly believed until it was put into practise) and that emphasis on the internal spirit and beliefs are what fashions a good person ... [M]y faith in the 'Human Spirit' has been restored through the countless acts of genuine kindness and humanity I was witness to. (Katya)

Alluding to a sense of transformation underlying this 'being together', perhaps Laurie's first impressions come even closer:

People come into ConFest at the level of the groin, the animal sexual level, searching for a fuck, friendship, a companion. After two or three days, as the natural human comes out and they go up from the groin, they come out at the level of the eyes and you get a lot of people unafraid to look back at you and not fearing the consequences of simply saying 'hello'. And so after two or three days, to me, the magic comes out. And everywhere you look you see postures, you see ... little magic cameos, you see archetypal conversations ... [people] being in connection with something different from the normal regular mode that we operate in.

Further participant commentary confirms ConFest's status as a periodical *communitas*/autonomous zone. According to Wendy, the:

greatest healing done at the Confest was the opportunity to drop all those mainstream facades and communicate with each other from the heart. Walking around naked to the world without having to justify or classify - sharing and

communing openly and environmentally, finding strength in the networks created. (Wendy 1984)

Many enjoy the event's immediate sensuousity, its momentary potential to purify, redefine and revitalise. It thus acts as 'a recharge ... before re-entering the struggle forward' (Possum), and as a 'beautiful networking space, [it] recharge[s] the battery to withstand the next onslaught of society/reality!' (Emu). Reporting on Glenlyon III, an earlier commentator claimed the 'atmosphere anointed me with its healing balm, and I came away three days later feeling mellowed and refreshed. I wish we could bottle it and sip it all year round' (Jaye 1986). For Ariel, as one great workshop, ConFest enhances your 'spiritual insight': 'When you leave ConFest, you have something in your soul that wasn't there when you arrived. You take it with you back to reality. And *that* makes a difference'. While the tenor of these comments resonates the conservative 'release valve' interpretation of carnival, others envision a utopic modelling. ConFest, therefore, 'renews the spirit for people who feel oppressed by the conventions and values of the "straight" world, and perhaps can act as a mould for what a community can be like' (Boobiialla). Les is even more affirmational in regard to the potential of 'the ConFest Spirit', for it is:

one of the most powerful, useful forces on earth ... part of a global model for building wellbeing that is not utopian but is based on practical action. Unique in the world, it is a context for possibilities.

At each ConFest there develops a strong affinity between those participating in a host of 'grotesque symposiums', between those sharing the experiences of feasting (including beach potlatches and workers kitchens), mud bathing, firewalking, dancing (Trance or otherwise), sweat lodging, workshopping, market place rendezvous, volunteering - *ConFesting*. Playful, sometimes erotic, coalitions engender feelings of profound continuity. There is a sense of wild, collective anonymity associated with mud bathing, dancing and other nocturnal orgiasms. In the ConFest crowd 'the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself ... [as] the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community' (Bakhtin 1968:255). They quite literally come 'down to earth' (ibid:20).²²

²² Such experiences occasion permanent bonding. Despite the absence of strict controls, the process is not unlike that observable in such diverse phenomena as Ndembu circumcision rites and the army (Turner 1972:215-16). Referring to both boys undergoing lengthy initiation rites and army recruits, Turner points out that 'no longer were they grandsons, sons, nephews, but simply anonymous novices ... [who] looked upon each other as equals, each an integral person rather than a social persona segmentalized into a series and a set of structural roles and

Boundary Contests

Though this ‘contact community’ may accommodate diversity and even unify disparate elements, ConFest is not free from division and discord. Despite the co-dependent ambience, external differences and internal distinctions are transparent. The perception that ‘strangers are friends you have not yet met’ may be somewhat consistent with the ideology of the ‘authentically social’ promoted to maintain successful tourist destinations (Selwyn 1996:21). The reality is that ConFest is a contested community. In this section, I seek to demonstrate that: (1) ConFest exercises ‘boundary maintenance’ and thereby activates localised exclusion strategies, and; (2) its boundaries are subject to dispute. While the first point will be addressed through a discussion of the community’s reaction to several perceived threats, the second will be advanced via the circumscription of one specific theatre of intra-community conflict.

Counter-Community Under Threat

Communities are known to rely upon an ‘other’, the ongoing definition of which ensures self-identity. It has long been observed that a community’s distinct identity is reproduced via forms of ‘boundary maintenance’ (Cohen 1985), and by excluding that which is believed to threaten its identity. According to Bauman, this demonstrates the dangerous dimensions of communities:

Because of inbuilt uncertainty ... a community lives under the condition of constant anxiety and thus shows a sinister but thinly masked tendency to aggression and intolerance ... [It is] therefore, bound to remain endemically precarious and hence bellicose and intolerant, neurotic about matters of security and paranoid about hostility and ill intentions of environment. (Bauman in Evans 1997:238)

Strategies, such as isolating and excluding ‘foreign’ elements, and concentrated enmity, generate and maintain a community consciousness - an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983).

Within DTE’s ConFest Committee, there is a preoccupation with identifying, containing and/or expelling potential dangers (symbolic and physical) believed to violate the ‘Spirit’ of ConFest, or otherwise threaten its virtue or sacrality. Those reacting to

status’. Among the Ndembu, ‘[f]riendships made in these circumstances of liminal seclusion

perceived threats often warn of the denudation of 'traditions' that such incursions may occasion. The community must be protected from the threat of the 'mainstream'. Many threats are seen to be associated with the festival atmosphere of the summer event. Thus, for Sparrow, ConFest is at a 'turning point'. It risks being 'swallowed up by the mainstream and essentially lose its essence' unless 'a drastic change and step away from this party that its turning into at New Year's Eve is made'. Otherwise, the people who are 'the heart of ConFest ... the gypsies, the ferals ... the people who actually live an alternative lifestyle 24 hours a day, every day of the year, will be less inclined to come'.

For Ranji, ConFest used to be like an 'ashram', a 'refuge'.

I used to go to the ConFest and it was like ... a sort of a spiritual holiday. Then I would have to go back into town where all the shit was happening, and it was very hard to adjust, and I could get depressed, 'cause the difference was so pronounced. [But today] the difference isn't so pronounced. Some people really lament that.

Others, such as Lorikeet, bemoan the presence of vast numbers of recreational and diversionary 'tourists' who come 'for a holiday', to consume, rather than commit to a 'tribe'. He observes the incessant movement of people on the paths, 'always moving as if they're looking for something that is really gonna [reward] them ... [They're] like speed freaks, always going somewhere and never getting there'. Ranji regards today's ConFest as an ailing microcosm of society: it has become 'a little bit like Torquay or Lorne on a New Year's Eve ... People come away from the cities ... and find that they've still got to deal with the problems that they have with society'. Indeed, according to Wirilda, 'pollutions of the dominant culture/mind set infiltrate [and] ... sexism and addictions riddle ConFest polluting it like the piles of VB cans at the bases of trees'. Therefore ConFest's distinct status as a *counter*-community is perceived to be under threat.

There are four basic threats.

1. *Space invaders*.

There is a general concern with the presence and proximity of spectating 'strangers', 'outlaws' or 'parasites'.²³ As George had it, these days 'we just don't know who's coming'. At Birdlands, according to a *TAZ-Cyber* emailer, 'the ratio of yobbos to friendly

sometimes lasted throughout life'.

²³ Lewis and Dowsey-Magog (1993:205-6) use 'outlaw' to describe the disruptive groups of drunken youths, 'with their baseball caps, baggy shorts, and American sneakers', who rampage about Maleny on New Year's Eve.

people [was] too high'. Such commentary reveals that the totalised rendering of the event's capacity to deliquesce 'us'/'them' or 'self'/'other' distinctions, is perhaps rather romantic, even illusory. At the Moama events, which transpired on public riverways, 'yobs' ('rednecks', 'petrol heads', and 'river hoons') stormed the Murray beach-head in flotillas of canoes, dinghies and high powered boats (with monikers like 'hooters', 'hard on', 'krak-a-fat' and 'mongrel').²⁴ Often young local males, these voyeurs and loiterers (a kind of yobbo *flâneur*) intoxicated on alcohol *and* the licentious atmosphere, are attracted by the prospect of observing a wild menagerie of abject ferals, or perhaps even a lewd exhibition of 'tits and bums'.²⁵ Buoyed by expectations of prelapsarian sexuality, of polymorphous perversity, many of these 'foreign bodies' experience ConFest as a terrestrial paradise, a 'fantasy island'. The fantasy of being a castaway, remote from 'civilisation' and its inhibitions, is exaggerated by the sounds of distant drumming and the sight of 'primitive' mud people. And, much like 'fantasy islands', the event is often regarded by such castaways with a mixture of fascination and revulsion (Woods 1995).

This circumstance has occasioned a series of bizarre and sometimes unsettling incidents between ConFesters and interlopers. There have been many reports of groups of 'other' males 'fishing' close to shore, late night spotlights and gate runners. At Moama III, in a rather dangerous manifestation of 'pelting',²⁶ dozens of frozen oranges were launched from a home made 'canon' set up on the Victorian bank of the Murray. In regular incidences of *offense*-ive disrobement, buttocks and genitals are exposed from the river's opposite bank and from passing speed boats. In a counter-offensive, Kokako recalls how participants at Moama I decommissioned a paddle steamer, that, full of passengers, had navigated up to view 'the nudist camp' every day:

One fella ... he got about fifty or sixty people in a row and as the paddle steamer went passed they all dropped their drawers and turned 'round and brown-eyed them. [We] didn't see the paddle steamer again.

²⁴ Fatalities are associated with invasions. In recent years, two local males, both drunk, have died in separate incidents as they attempted to enter ConFest. One drowned in the Murray (at Moama II), and the other died from head injuries at Gum Lodge (Easter 1998) in a motor vehicle accident near The Gate.

²⁵ Some, however, argue that, since 'yobs' have the most to gain from such an experience, and that there are obvious signs of behaviour modification, they are more than welcome.

²⁶ Traditionally a permitted transgression for youth on such occasions, 'pelting' refers to the hurling of excrement, ashes and dirt in European Carnivals of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, or of flour, dirt and confetti in nineteenth century Mardi Gras (Shrum and Kilburn 1996:427).

Another species of ‘space invader’ are the ‘bludgers’ who stay on-site after the final day of the event. These are participants who have not achieved ‘worker’ status. As one perceptive ConFester wrote, a successful way ‘of generating surface camaraderie and familial communion is for a group of people to have a scapegoating “other”, which they can all loath & resent’ (Svendsen 1999:62). A manufactured ‘other’ himself, Kurt Svendsen points out that the active devalorisation of post-ConFest participants as ‘bums’, ‘bludgers’ and ‘parasites’, serves the purpose of galvanising internal solidarity.

2. *Substance Abuse*

A growing incidence of the abuse of mind altering substances, particularly alcohol (but also acid and ecstasy),²⁷ is a source of anxiety. Indicating that the consummate ConFester is located at a distant remove from Australia’s risk-taking ‘real man’ celebrated in events such as the Darwin Beercan Regatta (Mewett 1988), DTE is alarmed by the growing presence of the alcohol abusing male. According to Prion, ‘for many people, “the ConFest Spirit” is ... vodka and scotch’. On this matter he maintains:

women are really outspoken, because alcohol just doesn’t support the women at all. It’s just abuse and we don’t need it, like people can go and get pissed anywhere. It’s very rare these days where people can come to a place ... and celebrate, dance and do all sorts of amazing things without the presence of alcohol or drugs ... I see ConFest heading in that direction.

Birdlands exemplified the way mind alterants are perceived to injure the community. For one *TAZ* emailer: ‘I’ve never known so much booze at a ConFest ... A drunk yobbo woman collapsed and spewed up near us on New Year’s and we didn’t even feel like helping her’. According to Angela Palmer, alcohol ‘attracts negative energy to what was once a spiritual celebration’ (letter to DTE). For Ranji, concerned with more illicit substances, ‘drug pushing’ and use is a little ‘out of control’:

A lot of young people go to ConFest now. I mean young people are very impressionable ... There’s some pretty powerful people that get around and push drugs on to just about anybody. I’m really dead against that. I always was dead against that all my life, even when I was taking drugs myself.

²⁷ For most participants, marijuana or ‘dope’ is regarded as a benevolent narcotic. Favourable attitudes to cannabis are reinforced by lobby groups like HEMP (Help End Marijuana Prohibition) who promote cannabis as a valuable, flexible, renewable resource.

DTE has responded to these defilements by creating a drug and alcohol free zone from Moama IV, an area comprising about a third of the site: 'Get high on the spirit of ConFest' (*DTE News* 91, Dec 1996:3).

DTE has waged its own micro 'campaign against drugs', a process possessing all the characteristics of a witch hunt. A campaign conducted by ill-informed and puritanical elements within DTE saw a Psychedelic Spirituality (or 'conscious tripping') workshop facilitator subject to a host of egregious rumours and accusations (ranging from spiking the *Spiral* water supply with acid to child molesting). The mood was set at Toc III where a 'counter workshop', whose co-convenor had presided over a gnostic celebration of the Eucharist at a previous Easter, took place in response to the visibility of Psychedelic Spirituality. The facilitator of the practical 'conscious tripping' workshop was aligned with the likes of Timothy Leary and denounced for engaging in 'false spiritual teaching'. As one observer remarked: '[q]uite frankly, I felt like I was back in Sunday school, with the next person eager to outdo the last with a description of the devil' (Pipit). Over several years, the same facilitator became a target of the Society's enmity, a scapegoat for the community's fears. His workshops (on Shame Healing) were 'sabotaged' (rubbed off the blackboard) at Toc IV, even though they had nothing to do with psychedelics (Svendsen 1999:61, 85). Kurt Svendsen eventually suffered an irregular banishment from ConFest (*ibid*:73) and was apparently struck off the shareholder's register and mailing list.²⁸

It is obvious that the two threats above are related. Though many ConFesters put the sentiment of accepting all 'strangers' into practice, extolling tolerance as one of ConFest's principal legacies, and though 'yobbos' sometimes metamorphose into regular workshopppers and site crew,²⁹ as Cedar remarks, what is really at issue is 'the question of how much ConFest can carry, because people don't feel safe any more'. In a space where difference is celebrated, some differences remain intolerable. The following poem captures the mood ranging against the space invading drunk:

²⁸ According to the victim of this witch hunt, DTE should not forget that ConFest has some foundation in 'Psychedelic Consciousness'. After all, 'the Hippy movement & the endless Summers of Love entered western culture on a wave of psychedelia' (Svendsen 1999:46). Furthermore, 'tripping workshops', he maintains, are 'happening informally all over ConFest, all the time, as friends come together to chat, & share a joint or whatever'. And, these 'workshops' are just one of the 'many languages of sharing at ConFest, the hug, the massage, the joint, the rollie, depending & according to people's lights'. His 'Spiritual Psychedelics' workshops were designed as dignified, 'consciously experimental', safe spaces to explore psychedelics (*ibid*:45).

²⁹ Much like the way Rainbow Gatherings have seemingly converted 'A camp' drunks and locals

Here's a woman and man
carrying their gear with
a struggle.
Somebody comes up and takes
a load from each of them
& walks behind.

Heres an old man
walking with a stick
carrying a pack upon his
spine, bent over like a half
moon.
Somebody walks up, takes
his weight off
& and walks beside him.

Here's a young man
in shorts and short hair,
carrying two slabs of beer
in his hard arms.
He keeps resting and swearing.
Nobody helps him. (Lysenko 1996:4)

3. *Unvirtuous Commercialism.*

Some express their contempt for any manifestation of capitalism. However, since the Market is a marginal vending and consumption zone accommodating community and environmental co-operatives dispensing second hand/recycled materials, and trade is sometimes characterised by negotiable prices and price deflation, this is tolerated so far as trading remains 'virtuous'. 'Unvirtuous economics', in the form of rampant overcharging, using disposable containers, and trading 'exploitative goods' manufactured in third world 'sweatshops', is a cause for alarm. There are common complaints about the omnipresence of the 'alternative lifestyle industry' and the availability of ingenuine artefacts located in 'New Age emporiums'. Railing against inauthentic commoditisation and frivolous consumerism associated with the city, David Cruise commented that ConFest risked becoming 'Daimaru³⁰ without the steak and styrene'. At Moama III:

[t]he shopping mall came to ConFest ... under the Sun the Stars and the Trees, we had a full scale replica of a modern shopping town. Complete! Fast food. Trinkets, baubles, bangles and beads. Just the thing for browsing and impulse

(Niman 1997:183).

³⁰ A huge shopping plaza in Melbourne.

buying. And to complete the replication, a band playing in the centre to amuse the shoppers. (*DTE* 83 June 1995:5)

4. *Modern Technology.*

Conspicuous signs of mass-produced commodities and techno-industrial sources of pollution are avoided. There are two main sources of anxiety and suspicion. First, cars and other private vehicles are the most visible reminders of modern mass-production, unsustainable energy consumption and obvious sources of pollution. Their on-site presence is contaminatory, an unwelcome intrusion on a pristine environment. Spatial sacralisation is therefore attempted by separating the ‘profane’ car park from the remainder of the site.³¹ Second, as will be seen below, amplified music is a bane of contention, as it is often believed to be invasive, and, powered by diesel generators, a waste of non-renewable resources. We can see that that which is often regarded as ‘inappropriate technology’ is founded upon a critique of technologism which itself rests on popular and, as Ross (1992:513) points out, rather dubitable dichotomies: nature:technology, purity:artifice, holism:science.

As I have argued, identifying, containing and even excluding ‘foreign’ agents, inauthenticities and other sources of anxiety - constructing and patrolling boundaries - are strategies by which the identity of the festive community is maintained *vis-à-vis* the non-ConFest world. Yet, boundary maintenance is a highly contested process - revealing this counter-world to be populated by subject positions widely at odds with one another.

Music Wars: the Battle of the ‘Bands’

The debates raging over that which constitutes appropriate and authentic ConFest music provide a particularly pertinent case for the event’s status as a contested community. Reminiscent of ‘the clash of musics’ transpiring between Notting Hill Carnival ‘traditionalists’ (the ‘mas’ bands) and younger British-Caribbean sound system enthusiasts throughout the 1970s and ‘80s (Cohen 1993:53), from the late eighties ConFest has been a

³¹ There was a ‘kombi circle’ on site at Birdlands consisting of at least three multi-hued kombi vans and a *tipi* which encircled a fire/drumming space. The kombi provides the exception to the rule since, quite simply, it objectifies ‘the sixties’. A hippy icon, it triggers ‘peace’ and ‘love’.

centre of friction between converging constituents or ‘bands’ over genre, style and aesthetics of musical performance.

First, there is evidence that professional staged music is perceived to pose a threat to ConFest’s folk ethos. The *Music* village has been the principal locus for ‘stars’ to entertain relatively passive audiences.³² According to critics, this is little more than a transference of ‘the pub scene’ to the bush, and is seen to compete with genuinely spontaneous music and dance (incorporating a range of indigenous styles and instruments) at spaces like the Fire Circle and *Spiral*. The latter accommodate what Les Spencer calls ‘communal music’ (1995), where the emphasis, by contrast to ‘staged music’, is on total participation not the passive witnessing of an entertaining spectacle. A contributor to the former *WA DTE News* called this dissolution of the performer/audience distinction ‘the new tribal music’:

No one is ‘up there’. The musical leadership seems to rotate in an unpredictable way, unconnected with privilege, flattery or special status. To me it’s anarchy, primitive communism ... It has to do with mutual respect and affection for all. Its spirit is emotional and cannot be commanded or organised. It may be recorded but no recording can convey the feeling of participation. (Thorell 1980:12)³³

Second, Trance Dance or techno at *Tek Know* (and *Rainbow Dreaming*) has been an even greater locus of antagonism. Reckoned to be a legitimate spiritual path by many, techno-trance’s loud repetitive pulse, synthetic alterant and non-renewable energy use, and immediate impact on wildlife, are cited by others to justify exclusion or implement restrictions. While some directors, like Janet - who compares the reaction of older members to the hysterical response to the ‘evils’ of rock music by parents in the 1950s and ‘60s - have been supportive (‘we cannot discriminate against what the young see as their ritual’), others have been far from sympathetic, even hostile (‘I don’t like it. I think it’s a

³² Some criticisms, especially wholesale denunciations, are rather unfair, as the stage locations - formally the *Music* village, then the *Earth Sharing* stage, then the Solar Stage - have accommodated impromptu amateur ensembles of varying description.

³³ The scepticism expressed by members of the ConFest Committee toward the value of staged performance parallels, somewhat, the struggle waged by the Olympic movement (especially Coubertin) against the encroaching ‘spectacle’. MacAloon (1984) discusses how, at the Olympics, ‘the aggrandising ethos of the spectacle attacks the unities ordered by the festival frame, and the licensing of passive spectatorship contravenes the ritual command that all be *engaged*’ (ibid:263). The spectacle is cheap, banal, a mere display trespassing upon the sacred ‘transcendental ground’ of the ‘cult’ of Olympism. Yet spectacle, an unforeseen recruiting ground for the intensive generation of ‘ultimate concerns’, is a triumphant cultural performance deserving further research, particularly as a component of ‘neo-liminal’ (ibid:269) performances from the Olympic Games to ConFest.

waste. It's a guru thing ... It has an Apollonian inspiration. It's just fucking horrible. It kills everything around [Laurie]).

I will now provide specific attention to this theatre of conflict.

Deterritorialisation: Slipping Out of the Nets

Through the mid nineties, from its nascent clandestine appearance near the Market at Moama III and its association with the *Labyrinth* at Moama IV, to its more recent outlet at *CIDA* at Gum Lodge I, Trance Dance has been implicated in a running battle of attempted elimination and recalcitrance. It is necessary to outline the sequence of events between 1996-97.

In mid 1996, Krusty attempted to shift the dance party assemblage to the DTE Winter Solstice Gathering. At an RGM prior to the event, however, DTE cancelled that event, with David Cruise arguing that the proposed event's poster - which featured an image of, and reference to, psilocybin ('magic mushrooms') - contradicted DTE and ConFest's 'family' orientation. Laurie, supporting techno's shift to a separate event, laments this decision:

Cruise resisted right down the line, to in the end banning the poster ... But they just wanted an excuse ... completely overreacting. I mean, you'd think better of parents. You'd think better of older people, and particularly people who espouse to be wise and clever.

Thus, 'manning the moral barricades' protecting the community from a new form of space invader, DTE stifled an alternative outlet for techno-trance. This decision eventually backfired when it became apparent that techno-trance would not go away quietly, if at all.

Events came to a head at Moama V when efforts to eliminate Trance Dance necessitated the collaboration of the latter with the MRTC in the *Labyrinth*.³⁴ The *Labyrinth*, however, was constructed on the site's highest region. Along with time and power excesses, this provided the context for the ensuing 'theatre'. As the doof penetrated the festi-scape from atop the *Labyrinth* hill into late morning of April 1st, Bilby claims he attempted to find the

³⁴ The collaboration took place as a result of music budget limitations enforced by a small band of DTE techno opponents. Richard drew attention to this process contending that a form of 'generationalism' such as that described in Mark Davis' *Ganglands* (1997), characterises the way 'a particular class of volunteers, who call themselves "the workers", operate to actively squeeze out the possibility of the Trance Dance workshops' by limiting the village component of the ConFest budget such that funding the Music Stage or Trance Dance becomes unfeasible (Richard, DTE email-group 13/8/98).

generator and ‘stab the beast in its belly’. Another vigilante claims he was convinced that the number of noise complaints justified his actions: driving his car into the *Labyrinth* honking the horn in an effort to drive off with the generator in tow. Commenting on the matter, Laurie suggests he ‘was more interested in getting an off knob. And, not just an off knob during the festival to turn them off when they’re running late, but an off knob to have them not in the festival at all’.

At Gum Lodge I, *CIDA* was home to the solar powered stage and a New Year Trance Dance event. During the night the battery was damaged by unknown assailants, incapacitating the sound system for an hour. This proved to be a significant affront to those who subscribe to the therapeutic and spiritual qualities of the music and dance, and who interpreted it as an act of aesthetic terrorism carried out by older non-understanding members of the ConFest community - by ‘the parent culture’ of DTE. For Mardo, claiming ‘dance is a very very spiritual thing all through history, and [that] this is just the modern version of a trance’, this sabotage justified a ‘workshop’ conducted by a band of direct activists the following afternoon.³⁵ This ‘ritual of resistance’ saw a sound system ‘fire up’ on the beach, a designated ‘quite area’.

As the t-shirt design, ‘ungovernable entity’, encapsulates, attempts to suppress Trance Dance and its clandestine techno-corporeality have been continually resisted by its young adherents. The persistent desire to experiment with Trance Dance has inspired mutations and innovative manifestations. Like reggae sound systems in the Notting Hill Carnival, and subterranean dance parties in the UK, ConFest Trance Dance could be:

compared to the mythical many-headed Hydra, a creature which captivated and entranced, only to make disappear, all those who beheld it, and which mutated inexorably, by growing new heads, when its protagonists attempted to destroy it. (Gore 1997:51)

Trance Dance, like raving, is a ‘deleuzoguattarian’ ‘desiring machine’ (Jordan 1995). The dance is ‘rhizomatic’, it ‘cannot be killed off [since] its stems will inevitably proliferate

³⁵ Curiously, as it is subject to external imposition, Trance Dance becomes a ‘ritual of resistance’. This parallels circumstances in Britain wherein state imposition politicised dance parties (Rietveld 1998:255) including the Blackburn warehouse parties of the early nineties which, under sustained police pressure, mutated from ‘entertainment’ to ‘movement’ (Hemment 1998:218). Historical precedents are easy to locate. As Stallybrass and White convey (1986:16), since the Renaissance:

carnivals, fairs, popular games and festivals were very swiftly ‘politicized’ by the very attempt made on the part of local authorities to eliminate them. The dialectic of antagonism frequently turned rituals into resistance at the moment of intervention by the higher powers, even when no overt oppositional element had been present before.

despite pruning' (Gore 1997:57). Yet, libratory 'deterritorialisation' may take different forms. Thus, adherents have sought to 'disappear' (evade restriction and control), engage in confrontation (e.g. the beach action), and achieve compromise (see 'Magic Happens', below).

The Trouble with Techno(logy)

There have been three combined objections ranged against techno-trance - that it represents a violation on physical, aesthetic and/or moral grounds. Many regard the musical assemblage as physically invasive. They cite the *Labyrinth* drama and beach action as forms of internal colonialism, denounce its organisers as a 'wave of predatory appropriators' (Laurie, DTE email-group 18/10/97), and dismiss them as selfish and deceitful. Thus, despite their 'smooth loving tongue', the 'techno people':

have shown callous disregard for everyone not at their do. It is totally invasive. It is totally at odds with the ConFest Spirit. Have them do their do miles away ... EVERYTHING at ConFest is SUBJECTED to it. I FOR ONE LOATH SUBJUGATION. You can not get away from it. (Les, DTE email-group 14/10/97)

According to David Cruise, while protagonists try to 'convince themselves and everybody else that it's a religious experience, and that it has some religious and spiritual merit', it is little more than an 'intrusion':

It's like smoking. If you smoke indoors, you breathe out and everybody else has to breathe it in. And techno is a very invasive process, 'cause it uses very high power levels of sound, which not everybody finds - if there's a word called discordant ... not many people find it very cordant. And you can't escape it. Particularly on these type of sites, because the low frequencies propagate over the flat areas and they go for miles. So you're stuck with 'voouur voouur voouur' whether you like it or not ... So I find that it's a very arrogant, aggressive, selfish process.

Yet, opponents often couch their objections in the idiom of aesthetics or style. The common view is that techno-trance poses a danger to ConFest's folk or 'earthy' communality. Various assumptions are held about the assemblage's (in)authenticity. In the following comment, techno is seen to be aesthetically misplaced:

The house-like disco at one end of the festival does not have the earth/beat energy that one goes to ConFest for. There are thousands of discos but only one ConFest ... [the 'disco'] greatly disrupts wildlife in a way drums and non-amplified sounds don't do and this seems contrary to a Down to Earth attitude. Also, any pre-recorded music saps the energy from the creativity and life that was so much a part of ConFest. (letter from A. Palmer to DTE)

Of the city, it is thus an urban profanity disrupting the spontaneity of ConFest's rural idyll. Pre-recorded tracks are presumed to compromise the authenticity of 'live' happenings.³⁶ Thus, another emailer laments the dearth of musicians who 'used to wander around various camp sites playing guitars, flutes, penny whistles, singing songs [and] ballads in the QUIET peaceful TRANQUILITY of the evening' (25/8/98). Bilby expresses a profound uncertainty about the technology driving the music:

I'm not entirely sure that I trust the machinery that the trance inducing stuff is coming out of. It seems to me that there is a lot of powerful machinery being used ... It's really alien, and it's really machine driven, and it's ... opposed to a lot of the values that I think we need to be preserving if we've got any chance of continuing existence on this planet. You know, this sounds a bit wild eyed and dramatic, but I don't trust techno. I don't trust it at all.

Indeed complaints about the technology upon which Trance Dance relies are not uncommon. A notable example of the charge of 'inappropriate technology' came in the form of a polemical document distributed prior to Moama IV, after techno-trance secured nearly one third of the village budget for that event. Denouncing techno as yet another form of parasitic, alienating Western technology, Les Spencer (1996) argues that the 'trance' to which the music's producers and consumers lay claim is specious. It is argued, contentiously, that this form of music is 'a-rhythmical' and disharmonic:

Our bodies are organically rhythmical. We respond to cord and withdraw from discord. We like harmony and withdraw from disharmony ... The techno-format is a-rhythmical (absence of rhythm) and discordant, either with or without simple down beat under-rhythm. From a distance this down beat sounds like industrial noise. In techno, up beats are virtually non existent. The up beat is the spiritual. The up beat is for lightness and celebrating. The down beat is grounding. It is also the beat of the war dance. (Spencer 1996:1)

Genuine trance contrasts with this Anglo-European style of electronic and computer generated music, which can only give rise to ersatz trance. While the:

³⁶ An objection paralleling that of rock patrons and aficionados who venerate 'live' musical

techno-trance process typically involves moving to trance via sensory overload - beyond threshold typically via the a-rhythmic and discordant ... [t]he indigenous trance dance tradition is typically complex rhythmic and poly-rhythmic (multiple variations on a base rhythm). [It is] rarely, perhaps never a-rhythmic and discordant. (Spencer 1996:1-2)

Above all, 'indigenous music' is esteemed because it is not 'amplified, prerecorded, technical and machine made' (ibid:2). Real 'trance', it is suggested, 'can be explored without any power at all. Indigenous and tribal people have been doing it for over 40,000 years' at no cost. And it is spaces like *Spiral* that are perceived to induce authentic trance. At *Spiral*, in a drug, alcohol and generator-free community performance zone featuring a 'medicine wheel' of Native American or Celtic origin, drumming impresarios and skilful rhythm collectives converge to generate hypnotic pulse 'African trance dance style' (Prion), launching dancers into states of ecstasy.³⁷

There, the didj (a form of 'appropriate technology' [Neuenfeldt 1998b:80]) and African drums (such as the *doumbek* - which is often used as an accompaniment to belly dancing) augment the authenticity of an experience, which is ostensibly closer to the 'heart energy' of 'tribal and indigenous' musics (Spencer 1996) than the implied artificiality of sounds produced by electricity and machines. Accordingly, to 'call trance induced by noise bombardment from electronic machines "ancient" is nonsense' (Les, DTE email-group 27/11/97).

Furthermore, while the authentic 'tribal' musicality at *Spiral* may be seen to enhance community, techno-trance is deemed to have 'little to do with communal bonding during the dance':

[T]he indigenous communal rejoicing trance dance has a preponderance of rhythmical up beats. People move into the dance connected to the community. The community, as community, pulses together in entering and sharing other realms of experiencing and understanding together ... My personal experience of techno trance is profound dissociation from self and from others. It is not for me a 'community building' experience. (Spencer 1996:2)

Due to invasive sound systems, acid and ecstasy traffic and use, and the apparent hedonism of the raver milieu, some commentators are even prone to rather 'tabloid' outbursts. For instance, frustrated by the way techno has denied him his 'basic human

'happenings', expressing their contempt for 'disc cultures' (Thornton 1995:8).

³⁷ *Laceweb* (from Gum Lodge I), with its 'celebration of play' workshop space, explicitly accommodates drumming, didj and dance along with 'community healing action' (promotion).

rights' (to sleep, to choose, to be consulted), for one passionate opponent, the techno crew are imagined to employ sinister 'methods' like those used in 'the interrogation of prisoners to destabilise and disorient ... [Indeed] the way Techno has been done would be illegal under the Geneva Convention if Confest were a prisoner of war camp!!!'. DTE must, therefore, 'prohibit techno Nazis' (DTE email-group 30/8/98). This and other commentary parallels the kind of media manufactured 'moral panic' surrounding Acid House raves in the UK.³⁸ Take the following predicted scenario:

Moama, ConFest, young people, techno, ecstasy, 40 degree heat, dehydration, death in the darkness and found in late afternoon, not sleeping it off, but already stiff. Headline 'Five young teenagers dead at "Go to Heaven in 1997 Spiritual Festival"'. (Spencer 1996:1)

Although less 'sensationalist' than 'Killer Cult', 'In the grip of E', 'Rave to the Grave' - all British tabloid headlines (Thornton 1994:183) - there is a family resemblance here, an attempt to 'sell' an idea by making appeals to morality. According to Artemis, who 'felt dizzy' just looking at 'the electronic set up' at Toc IV, 'techno ... can trigger epilepsy'. Indeed, participants are deemed to fall victim to this decadent and diabolical dance assemblage 'endangering the sacred' (cf. Sibley 1997): '[o]ur young people are being misguided ... [we must] get back Down To Earth' (Artemis 1996:5).

ConFest is not a neutral field. Like the variant pilgrimage devotees to the rock shrine of St Besse, 'the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story' (Weber 1995:532) arises as combatants, taking up various vantage points in the authenticity war, 'try to dictate how the event is to be interpreted' (McClancy 1994:34). As such, competitive promotions are launched wherein techno-trance is variably wished out of existence *or* highlighted as an integral component of the total experience.

The 'Tribal' Beat Goes On ... and On

In response to 'some of the old ConFest farts [who] think we're just dicken' around doing fuck all' (Krusty), Trance *habitués* reply that the experience holds a communal authenticity, and therefore legitimacy, of its own. As Krusty contends, despite techno's

³⁸ Indeed, DTE's 'attention' to techno can be compared to the moral outrage which fuelled the Tory government's commitment to draconian legislation (the CJA) criminalising free raves (and new travellers) in rural Britain. The condensed topography (of Britain and ConFest), and the concomitant increase in the likelihood of spatial transgression, are similar factors in both cases.

dearth of the kind of sophisticated stories Aboriginal peoples exchanged when ‘there was corroboree all over the landscape’, what adherents are doing is principally ‘the same today ... Coming together and dancing ... communicating through dance’. Trance Dance is then perceived to trigger the unifying effervescence attributed to ‘corroborees’. Effecting an ‘emotional community’, according to Mardo, the techno beat ‘brings every other individual around you into that same beat, brings everyone to that same level, and brings them together like a tribe’. Indeed, outdoor parties like ConFest’s *Tek Know*, ‘allow us to reclaim ... carnival’ (Shell 1998). Such events:

succeed in bringing people together to experience the ancient ritual of dance ... During the party we become a community which can continue beyond a party. [The dance] connects us all together as we shed our urban skins ... [It is] the time and place where people who connect can dance under a canopy of trees, under a blanket of stars and feel a part of one tribe. (ibid)

And, so far as Krusty is concerned, Trance Dance potentiates trance. He describes how:

working from the body [you can] allow yourself to move into a state of bliss, or, if you like, ecstasy. And that’s what dance does. And ... the heart beat drumming, which is the bottom end of the techno, the ‘doof’, starts to sink and align the whole energy system of the body to a rhythm ... So you really can let go of a lot of your cognitive presence and just allow yourself to be open. And, in a ritual sense, if you’re coming into the space and people are energised either through the dance or the energy from working with psychedelics or shamanistic herbs ... you get a special energy that starts to lift ... There’s some therapy going on there in a way, because people can really release.

An empowering upliftment may thus be achieved, especially in an environment where ‘there’s no right or wrong way to dance’. It is not too difficult to perceive how the electronically advanced *percussion* in Trance music - engineered by ‘techno-shaman’ - induce the forms of effective impact associated with *transition* (cf. Needham 1967). Ultimately, however, Trance is collective. It potentiates a form of that which Kapferer (1984b:188) calls ‘self negation through adduction’, which is ‘most regularly a group phenomenon establishing a unity with others but above the level of the self’. As discussed earlier, Trance Dance is a node in ConFest’s own ‘underground centrality’, a manifestation of ‘sensual solidarity’. Posting a retro-Durkheimian perspective, Shell (1998) writes: ‘[o]nce you’ve experienced the collective trance state brought on by dancing to repetitive beats in the bush, you begin to understand the collective consciousness that develops between people around you’. Therefore, adds Krusty, ‘the total is far greater than the sum of the parts’.

As Laurie argues, 'toleration ... is the most intolerant of all virtues'. In other words, permission breeds chaos. As this example of competing music authenticities demonstrates, ConFest occasions a clash of 'communities'. And as tensions arise between music constituencies, pre-existing differences are amplified. Here, in a most transparent case, rival 'bands' mobilise their physical and intellectual resources to delineate the event's acceptable parameters, and thereby articulate contrary versions of the community. On the one hand, for one reason or another, techno-trance is regarded as a form of 'internal colonialism'. With physical, aesthetic and moral objections ranged against it, it is an intolerable form of difference, a violation. On the other hand, for *habitués*, Trance Dance is a highly valued experience with a 'passional logic' of its own. And the desire for its performance triggers a repertoire of tactics resistant to exclusionary strategies.

Part III: Magic Happens: 'the Triumph of Community'

ConFest's vast constituency is comprised of lifestyle clusters and cliques whose differences seem, in some cases, overwhelmingly irreconcilable. Like the Kuranda Market - this is a 'hot spot' of competing discourses (Henry 1994:295). Of course, much on-site squabbling is a direct reflection of differences and faction formation in DTE itself. Within the Co-operative there is a paucity of commitment to shared ideals - the kind of commitment observable, for instance, in many utopian communities (Kanter 1972; Metcalf 1986:Ch.8). While ConFest itself represents the 'common denominator' to which members are committed, as there is little consensus on its meaning - reflecting the panorama of values, backgrounds and motivations of members - it variously unifies disparate elements while at the same time reproducing Society-wide differences. The enduring expression of intra-ConFestian difference has generated fission. While some expatriates may go to Earth Haven at New Year, this example of centrifugence is not isolated. New Year events at Peacehaven and the Blue Mountains in recent times can be read as further fragments of a growing diaspora.

Yet the commitment to achieve a successful ConFest remains. In the face of perceived threats to community cohesion, and despite ongoing disputes between authenticity claimants, as the saying goes, 'magic happens' - 'the ConFest Spirit' endures. Given the adversities and conflicts encountered by DTE and festival attendees, ConFest's survival is,

as many have it, ‘a miracle’. ‘Miracles’ can be seen to be a product of grassroots organicism effecting proto-cultural solutions, including temporary mergers or alliances, to immediate problems. Here I will draw attention to two such ‘miracles’ - one averting a site-specific logistical nightmare, the other an example of localised adaptation.

‘The Bridge’

One adversity worth recalling arose in the form of a long and wide irrigation channel at Birdlands. This site-specific contingency possessed the potential to provoke community disharmony. Separating the Market, *Gypsy* village and car park from the rest of the festival, the channel was eventually spanned by two one-way foot bridges (see Appendix F, map 2). The main bridge, a long tragic structure fashioned from plywood crates and 44 gallon drums, was an 11th hour effort (the smaller ‘feral bridge’, consisting of fallen logs thrown across the water, was situated at the end of the site). ‘The bridge’ was heavily overburdened - an anxiety provoking circumstance not relieved when the intended hand-operated punts failed to materialise. As a consequence, ‘the bridge’ came apart several times during the event. Frustrating bottlenecks and long detours ensued.

However, though ‘the bridge’ was maligned by many, this ‘anti-structure’ became a focal point of solidarity. It was fabricated and repaired by participants taking responsibility and applying their skills *in situ*. A potential disaster was averted. ‘The ConFest Spirit’ rose to the challenge posed by ‘the bridge’ - and was strengthened. The banner - ‘strangers are friends you have not yet met’ - draped along its length provided an acute commentary on the way ‘the bridge’ was built and maintained, and on the way ConFesters complied to the difficult circumstance of standing in long winding queues in the burning sun waiting to cross - fifty one way then fifty the other. In fact, the queues were contexts for random meetings, immediate contact, *puissance*. As Sage commented ‘[m]any times I’ve said “it could only happen at ConFest”’.

The Compromise

In response to the ongoing disputation over the presence of techno-trance, and motivated by a desire to achieve an integral community, various ConFest Committee members have deemed it necessary to promote the benefits of compromise. Michael is an advocate of this approach. For him, ConFest is:

where people come to express themselves no matter what their background or tastes are. And I believe we should cater as much as possible to any new ideas ... and help young people to get out there and be creative ... I don't think we should fight it. But we should also encourage the techno people to come and have a look at the sort of thing you can do with drums and didj, and bits of wood banging together, and bits of metal banged together. Because I believe they can incorporate more live art into the techno performances, take it down a notch on electric power, and put some human power in there ... I think we can educate them - they can run on lower power, more efficiently. And be co-operative. Let us help them, 'cause this is what we're about. DTE is about helping people establish their village, or helping them get their message out. We're sort of a hub of a network.

Indeed, conflict generated by the presence of techno-trance has dissipated to some degree in recent times, as adversaries have moved to resolve issues, to 'settle their differences', to 'band together'. Amplified electronica remains a feature of the festive community, but in rhizomatic adaptations. On the one hand, it is widely perceived that techno-trance should be accommodated on site, a view supported by a DTE survey conducted in 1997 where 2/3 of the respondents supported the presence of techno - albeit with noise and time restrictions. DTE has acknowledged that sites where amplified music can be acoustically separated from 'quiet areas' are preferable. On the other hand, by applying for lower budgets, adopting 'appropriate technology', and through processes of fusion and amalgamation, dance music facilitators have evolved a more agreeable quality of tact and diplomacy.

The recent conversion to wise energy use through the employment of a solar powered, soft tech assemblage (*CIDA*, Gum Lodge I), the concomitant decrease in db output, as well as the provision of interactive 'hands on' workshops and the encouragement of amateur DJs and combined techno-acoustic performances incorporating drummers (*Hybrid*, Gum Lodge II) - a collaboration which, rather than just 'having automated rhythms ... [bears] a human feel' (from *Hybrid* 98/99 budget proposal)³⁹ - has actualised a music-dance experience that, not without its detractors, is widely held to be more 'appropriate', 'live', folky and thereby authentic.

The 'deterritorialised' acculturation in musical performativity and boundary ambiguity exemplified by *Hybrid*, evokes the 'triumph of community' of which Anthony Cohen

³⁹ *Hybrid* incorporates 'all technology without bias (from fire to wood to wire and electronics)' (from proposal).

(1985) speaks. It is apparent that, although advocates of disparate musics and 'communities' give expression to their differences, 'they also suppose themselves to be more like each other than like the members of other communities' (Cohen 1985:21). And despite the diaspora, the persisting desire to 'raise the Spirit' means that ConFest, like the cultic pilgrimage destination of the shrine, retains an unusual capacity to 'absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses ... offer[ing] a variety of [pilgrims] what each of them desires' (Eade and Sallnow 1991:15).

It is apparent, then, that ConFest is an 'elective centre' engineering 'miracles'. A vast social organic laboratory, its co-operative ethos effects a mystical experience, the kind of ineffability participants unite around and return to. And, in the interests of harnessing and replicating this experience, Les envisions a national circuit with, perhaps, fifty sites set up around the country. With each staged for a week, '250,000 people' could spend 'a year in the ConFest circuit before returning to mainstream life with extraordinary skills'.

Conclusion

This chapter has questioned the value of an unqualified application of Turner's *communitas*. Via a critical assessment of this concept and an investigation of the ConFest community, I have identified two basic shortcomings in Turner's work: (1) he discounted the heterogeneity of liminal arenas and their potential for contestations of many kinds, and; (2) was inattentive to the bodily or corporeal aspect of spontaneous community. An acknowledgment of such shortcomings has energised an approach which takes ConFest to be: a *heterotopic community* harbouring diverse, variously complementary or competing, alternative cultural constituencies, and; a desirable *intercorporeal*-estate likened to the 'orgiastic' 'underground centrality' of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli) or the immediate 'radical conviviality' of temporary autonomous zones (Bey).

As a contemporary manifestation of the desire to reclaim 'sensual solidarity', 'the ConFest Spirit' is an affective and tireless, but ultimately enigmatic, phenomenon. And it is so since it is concurrently inclusive and exclusive, *massive* and *tribal*. While the festive counter-community may surge towards ever greater unity, the diversity of 'bands', lifestyle clusters, autonomous zones and authenticities convergent guarantee that its integrity will

be jeopardised by proximate differences - indeed its identity necessitates the reproduction of difference. However, in the final analysis, the festival's organic logic nourishes networks and dialogue potentiating the resolution of internal conflict. Illustrating the enigmatic disposition of 'the ConFest Spirit, throughout the chapter I have attended to the constitution and fate of one theatre of corporeality, conflict and co-operation unique to ConFest. That is, I have circumscribed Trance Dance or techno-trance as: an autonomous 'tribal' node of 'underground centrality'; a contested form of musical (in)authenticity, and; a nucleus of rhizomatic hybridity. The 'Spirit' lives.