Chapter 1

Alternative Cultural Events: Heterotopia Now

Introduction

This chapter introduces alternative culture and its events, and surveys previous ethnographic research conducted on alternative events. It consists of two parts. Following an introduction to the alternative culture movement (ACM), part one investigates alternative cultural events (ACEs). Here, I identify the key criteria of ACEs before devising a non-exhaustive historical inventory. Six separate event-clusters, including the three variant forms of alternative lifestyle event (ALE), are delineated. The latter, characteristically polydimensional, are what I call *alternative cultural heterotopia* (ACH), a discussion and definition of which concludes part one. In part two, I discuss previous ethnographic research projects conducted on separate ALEs. It will be clear that critical and comparative analysis of theoretical and methodological approaches employed in each of the projects has assisted my own approach to, and rendering of, ConFest.

Part I: Alternative Culture

What is alternative culture? For Altman, it consists of 'all those aspects of apparent non-mainstream social activity and consciousness [including 'counter-culture'] that seem to prefigure a radically different type of social system' (1980:116-117). Cognate with Altman, yet seeking greater comprehensiveness, I define alternative culture as*: a diverse network of discourse and practice oppositional to perceived deficiencies in the parent culture*, which is the system of values, beliefs and practices hegemonic under modernity. Not to be confused with reactionary grassroots organisations of the radical right, the alternative cultural milieu (or alternates) are adherents to alternative lifestyles.[1] Disaffected by the parent or dominant culture, adherents seek manifold solutions to its complex and restrictive grasp. As such, they may be involved in intentional communities, LETS (Local Exchange Trading Schemes), co-operative societies and self-help groups,

[1] Writing in 1985, Metcalf and Vanclay estimated that 95,000 Australians (1% of the population) planned to develop an 'alternative lifestyle', urban or rural (1985:2).

grassroots activist organisations, Queer collectives, therapeutic communities, and committed to conservation, alternative technology, NVDA (Non Violent Direct Action) campaigns and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Western cultural history abounds with anti-hegemonic, resistance or utopian currents.[2] Today's alternative culture is expressed in various social movements (e.g. communitarian, bohemian, agitation art, healing-arts, green, feminist, queer, peace, civil and land rights movements), new spiritualities (e.g. Neo-Paganism or the New Age), and youth subcultures (e.g. new traveller, raver-dance, feral). It is the combination of such currents, their accumulation and their fusion, that I refer to as the ACM - a heterogeneous movement, a matrix, even palimpsest, of voluntary and unstable de-centrist 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli 1996), affinity groups and 'disorganisations' holding to alternative values and vocabularies. This is a network consisting of diffuse, sometimes openly antagonistic, sometimes 'submerged', groups variously committed to sustainability, reconciliation, civil rights, freedom of expression, personal wellbeing and co-operative living. Their lifestyle may be articulated via symbolic identity repertoires (Melucci 1989), constructions no longer regarded as anomalies in the study of social movements traditionally focused on resource mobilisation (Johnston and Lio 1998).

The ACM has been credited as 'DiY'. For McKay (1998:2), 'DiY Culture' is 'a kind of 1990s counterculture': 'a youth-centred and -directed cluster of interests and practices around green radicalism, direct action politics, new musical sounds and experiences' (see also Purdue et al. 1997). While the 'DiY community' is a diverse expression of resistance, with varying manifestations from street parties, to squats, protest camps and alternative press, most combine 'party and protest' under the ethic of NVDA. Here, social criticism is combined with cultural creativity in what is 'both a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance' (McKay 1998:27). The party/protest, pleasure/politics fusion customary to DiY Culture presents a contemporary manifestation of what Musgrove called 'the dialectics of utopia' (1974:16), a dynamic tension of *political* activism (resistance) and *personal* growth (aesthetics and play) which characterised the 'counterculture'.

Despite such neat and comfortable terms like 'counterculture'[3] or 'DiY Culture', a recurrent problem for researchers of alternative culture is that its constituents are not united under a single ideology or cause. To speak of a united front of opposition or a

---

[2] For example, see Armytage 1961, Cohn 1970, Kanter 1972, Abrams and McColloch 1976, Manuel and Manuel 1979, and Metcalf 1986:Ch.3.

[3] Which, as McGregor (1975) pointed out, really means 'countercultures'.

comfortably amalgamated de-centrism is erroneous as it falsely presumes consensus between de-centralising elements around that which constitutes 'the centre'. Different rejections of 'the centre' activate an abundance of alternative 'truths', other ways of being - conflicting *authentica*. Although networks enhance connections, alternative culture is not a homogeneous culture. 'Culture', here, consists of a *plurality* of contradictory and/or complementary discourses and practices. It also consists of the *process* by which their various proponents attempt to reconcile or embrace differences, or take advantage of semblance.

Some components of this culture desire to remain underground, on the edge, or in the gaps. They seek to avoid *defusion*. Others desire the dissemination of their values, ideas and practices. They seek to enact cultural *diffusion*. A detectable ambivalence, therefore, exists within the ACM, a tension between the desire to remain undiscovered and immediate, and the pro-active desire for exposure and reform; between actively avoiding recuperation via commodification and the disclosure of alternative discourse and practice; between the desire to maintain boundaries and breaking them down; between de-centring and re-centring.

Of course, adherents of either attitude may experience difficulty in preserving 'unadulterated' desires. This has been the subject of much critical investigation on 'resistance' as a cultural tactic, whether stated or implicit. Various commentators have suggested that social dissidence is defused as radical alternatives, gestures of refusal, and modes of authenticity are co-opted, domesticated (cf. Munro-Clarke 1986:225; Metcalf and Vanclay 1985:94-95) or recuperated (Hebdige 1979) by the dominant culture. Under market forces rebellion becomes a consumable fashion accessory for 'target' groups whose social and political motivations remain spurious. The counterculture's stress on freedom and individuality proved to be an especially marketable trait. In Australia, radical rhetoric, rebellion and romanticism were speedily absorbed into consumer culture. According to Alomes (1983:45), the themes of experience, harmony, friendship and the consolation of nature characteristic of 1960s 'alternative lifestyles' were rapidly 'translated into the wider romantic social mythology of consumer capitalism'. Later, in the birthplace of the 'counterculture', the music festival to mark the 25th anniversary of 'Woodstock Nation', had a US$135.00 cover charge!

Others speak of dissidence as a *temporary*, youthful, affectation, or a rite of passage - especially for the more privileged. In this vein, Kanter (1972:196), regards communes as 'temporary way stations', transitional sanctuaries appearing in an increasingly mobile

society.[4] Moreover, Brake (1980:87) suggests that the 'dropping out' performed by sixties youth 'presupposes a location in the class structure from which to drop (and to return)'. Moore (1998a:176) argues that bohemia is 'the acting out by the young bourgeoisie of marginal lifestyles to dramatise ambivalence toward their own identities, to refuse - if only temporarily - a stable and limited identity'. Here, there is an 'urge to disrupt and subvert ... but not to abolish' (ibid:176-7). Similarly, Bey's 'temporary autonomous zone' or TAZ (1991a) (see Chapter 2) has been denounced as 'episodic rebellion', even an 'anarchist club-med' - a 'socially innocuous' 'lifestyle anarchism' (cf. Bookchin 1995), or possibly 'repressive desublimation', which Marcuse thought allowed 'just enough freedom to disrupt and integrate discontent - but not enough to endanger the discipline necessary for a stable industrial order' (in Roszak 1995:xxii). Other modes of 'resistance' have been relegated to the field of 'leisure' and construed, therein, as ineffectual. Such was the fate of British working class youth subcultures, the pursuits of whom, under the Marxist gaze of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies researchers, were said to be merely *symbolic*, 'rituals of resistance' (Clarke et al. 1976).

Yet, despite intra-cultural disputation, the risk of co-optation, ever present charges of temporality and insinuations of class privilege, as long as 'the centre' remains, there will always be an *edge* - that is, marginal cultural ideas and sites. Contemporaneous, multitudinous and often subterranean, *the edge* is the result of the perennial insistence to range beyond the boundaries of the familiar and conventional, to seek alternatives. At the edge (which may also be interstitial) there are limitless possibilities.

Alternative Cultural Events

The principal concern here is the (re)production and/or suffusion of alternative identities and culture via public events. Anthropologists have long been interested in public events variously described as 'ritual', 'ceremony', 'rites of passage', 'celebrations', 'feasts', 'carnivals', 'festivals', 'parades', 'pilgrimage rites', 'spectacles', etc. In perhaps the most comprehensive heuristic treatment of public events, Handelman (1990:16,3) suggests that all such events are 'closed phenomenal worlds' wherein 'people undertake in concert to make more, less, or other of themselves, than they usually do'. Public events are

[4] When it is understood that utopian experiments are attractive to both those committed to their ideals and to those merely taking a short-term survival option - as the 'least undesirable of options available' (Metcalf 1986:116-17, 365) - their transitory character becomes all the more apparent.

'little worlds' which 'point beyond' themselves, are 'symbolic of something outside of themselves, standing for, evoking or bringing into being something else, something absent' (ibid:13). They 'operate on and through' participants, who are said to be 'captured by, and caught up within, the logic of their design' (ibid:16). As such, they are, for both natives and ethnographers alike, 'privileged points of penetration' into socio-cultural universes (ibid:9).

This thesis goes some way toward correcting the absence of 'an anthropology of alternative cultural public events'. It seems clear that the communion (*coming together*) of dissenters, the profoundly disenchanted and part-time expatriates who inhabit certain spaces at certain times, to resist and celebrate - to quite literally seek *otherness* - is indispensable for the (re)production of alternative identities. Alternative cultural public events are sanctioned and patronised by the ACM.[5] Though they interrupt and agitate normative conceptual and value frameworks, such event-spaces are, however, truly varied in substance and effect - variation conveyed via theoretical models deployed to apprehend events and event-spaces. Lefebvre (1991), for instance, refers to 'spaces of representation' (or 'representational spaces'), everyday event-spaces resistant to commodification, which seek to make visible the contradictions in the capitalist production of space. Alternatively, Handelman (1990) speaks of 'events of representation', specialised, usually legitimate, moments of suspension and transgression in the seasonal round such as the carnival.

A discussion of alternative event-spaces should not be inattentive to tourism and the tourist-event. Seeking respite from, or disillusioned with, modern, urban life, westerners have developed an insatiable longing for the authenticity that is perceived inherent in the cultures and lifestyles of 'others' - especially indigenes. Like pilgrims, 'traveller-tourists' have discovered alternative, or 'elective centres' (Cohen et al. 1987) 'in the recesses of the Other' (Cohen 1992:51). Introducing the phenomenon of expatriate youth 'seeking spontaneous experiences in the excitement of complete strangeness', Cohen (1973:89) discusses a global itinerant traveller culture converging upon 'drifter communities', 'semi-

[5] It should be borne out that discussion of the collective behaviour and 'events' - uprisings, revolts, riots - of the oppositional movements of 'the South' (people's revolutionary or liberation armies etc) would be incompatible with the purpose of this thesis. The ACM is principally of the First World and is associated with lifestyles arising within the metropolitan centres of the democratised, post-industrial 'North'. Similarly, a discussion of the collective behaviour and events of the socialist left and its championed 'proletariat' - union formation, strikes and worker revolts - would also render this a different project. Though important cross-pollinations have occurred, this thesis does not address the labour movement or its events. I discuss oppositional cultural patterns and behaviours not necessarily directly related to subsistence.

autonomous islands of transplants' developing at exotic locations like the Spanish island of Ibiza and Goa, India, since the sixties.

The last three decades have seen the appearance of 'cultural productions' (MacCannell 1976) catering for 'traveller-tourists' who are 'searching for *experience* and for their *origin* through the rural, the primitive, the childlike, the unpolluted, the pure, and the original' (Bruner 1993:324). Descrying the existence of one such nostalgia-laden 'production', Manning (1983:26) cites the example of the Rio Carnival to which North American tourists flock *en masse*, 'not to revel in fantasia, but to encounter a pristine and genuine spirit of festivity that they believe has been "lost" in their own society'.

Authentic representation, however, is a process identifiable in cultural productions transpiring within the geographic boundaries of advanced capitalist societies. Such productions may appropriate, re-create or re-enact a constellation of themes from other cultures, rurality or the past. The nostalgia industry has, for instance, given birth to the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in San Francisco, which, since the sixties, has been held in a meticulously reconstructed Elizabethan Shire where participants, normally comfortably well off, imagine their immersion in a Shakespearian epoch (Cohen 1993:138-47). In this, and other examples of 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1976:101), traveller-pilgrims are often immersed in social imagery 'redolent with simplicity, truth, naturalness, and purity' (Manning 1983:26). I have especially in mind numerous *counter-spaces*, 'elective centres' largely outside the reach of corporate capital and state surveillance which have appeared at 'places on the margin' (Shields 1991) within the borders of 'home nations' since the sixties.[6] Perhaps performative alternatives to 'alternative tourism', or 'anathema parks', these are temporary local 'drifter communities' accommodating contemporaneous antinomians and expatriate pilgrims seeking affirmation, wholeness and a better world (Reader 1993:9-10).

It could be argued that *festival* (or *carnival*) is itself a universally alternate moment in the life of a people. Since the Roman Saturnalia and the Feast of Fools, the festival has been a time of inversion, intensification, transgression and abstinence.[7] Falassi (1987:3) makes this clear:

---

6 In more recent times, communities of dissent have convened in cyber space. While cyber space might be described as one immense 'virtual event', I have in mind singular sites of convergence such as the AllChemical Virtual Powwow hosted by psychonaut Terence McKenna on 4/3/99.

7 Such moments have an intimate relationship with faires and markets. The medieval marketplace was, for Bakhtin (1968), an early seedbed of 'the carnivalesque'.

> At festival times, people do something they normally do not; they abstain from something they normally do; they carry to the extreme behaviors that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life.

Carnival, a season of festive events culminating in two or three days of massive street processions, is rooted in Roman Catholic pre-Lenten festivities occasioning 'release from the constraints and pressures of the social order, generat[ing] relationships of amity even among strangers and allow[ing] forbidden excesses' (Cohen 1993:3). Duvignaud (1976:18) argues that the 'destructive or subversive spirit inherent in [such festivities] ... involve[s] a real awakening of individual consciousness'. Indeed, Duvignaud remembers Rousseau's romantic understanding of the non-imaginary 'other-world' of the festival where 'individual minds would fuse together under the pressure of intense participation' (ibid:16). In regard to the Rio Carnival, Da Matta (1984) understood this as the usually impersonal street's domestication. Bakhtin (1968) knew it as the cosmic world-body correspondence of the medieval carnival and market place. Turner (1969) deemed it 'spontaneous communitas'.

But what is the character of the subversion, rebellion or resistance inherent to the festival, carnival or market place? Are they moments of real conflict: instruments of political opposition, sites of subversion occasioning open criticism of the state and religious authorities? Or, are they 'rituals of rebellion' (Gluckman 1954), fake revolutions like Fasnacht at Basle, 'a savage form of class struggle' which 'enables the underprivileged class to make revolution without really performing it' (Weidkuhn 1976:44). Do they, therefore, function as 'safety valves', permitting people to 'revolt' before returning to their consented place in the social hierarchy, their allegiance to the system reaffirmed? Furthermore, are not carnivals means by which the powerful maintain their privilege - through which class, gender and ethnic strata are reproduced? The truth is carnival is essentially ambivalent. According to Cohen, it is poised between genuine opposition *and* means of domination. Like a 'grand joking relationship', carnival/festival is characterised by 'both conflict and alliance' (1993:128).

Yet, what is distinctive about the events I outline here, is that they are diverse products of an oppositional culture. After all, there are substantial differences between most commercial festivals, or state sponsored arts festivals, and independent, underground or alternative orientated events. In chronicling events, I have kept several principal criteria in mind, taking into account the organisational and economic framework of events themselves as much as their self-designated or apparent purpose. That is, to qualify as

counter-spatial, they are, firstly, grassroots and, therefore, communally derived. As such, the administrative structure of events inclines towards a non-hierarchical, co-operative style of (self)management. Collective ownership of the event-space is encouraged. Second, the organisers (also 'facilitators', 'focalizers' or 'enablers') should not be motivated by self-profit. In some cases, this means that an event may be 'commercial' (that is, possessing an entrance fee), but only such that this necessitates its reproduction.[8] Third, events lie largely outside the spectacularising tendency, and recuperating implications, of the corporate media industry. Thus, they are not normally 'media-events'. Immediatist as such, commodification is largely avoided. Fourth, they are not singularly, nor in large part, dependent upon the state through the administration of 'Arts' funding. Fifth, on the performative level, they are participatory. As such the boundary between performer and audience is fluid or non-existent. Sixth, practical demonstrations of non-violent philosophies, such events are usually safe environments. Finally, they are 'real-time' encounters. Rather than 'virtual events' - though these may be employed in the hatching of such encounters - they are intercorporeal occasions.

As I will indicate, several clusters of ACEs have emerged, the most significant for my purposes being the alternative lifestyle event (ALE), of which there are several varieties. Before disclosing these, I will attend to other ACEs conforming to the above criteria: co-operative, not-for-profit, non-spectacularised, independent, participatory, non-violent and intercorporeal. It will be clear that boundaries between event-clusters are fuzzy. This discussion not only seeks to detail the contours of several event-clusters, but is intended to provide a cursory history of the international ACM, and Australia's contribution to this field.

Folk Festival

Proliferating with 'folk' music, folk festivals became popular heterodox events in the US in the 1950s. In Australia, in the same decade, folk music was established by radical left-wing nationalists, espousing collectivism, egalitarianism and a general suspicion of authority (Smith and Brett 1998:4). Folk attempts to keep alive 'non-official', independent musical styles. It is distinguished from commercial genres and professionalism by the

[8] I have needed to make this point as the organisers of some 'alternative' events hold pecuniary interests. Therefore, some events (e.g. Australia's Earth Haven) may be, organisationally, only a short remove from 'mainstream' events.

ideology of the folk 'community' and 'process'. The music is the product of a communal process. That is, it is firstly an expression of community interactions, and secondly, there is a porous boundary between performer and audience. Folk is 'committedly inclusivist, a celebration of culture from below ... ground[ing] cultural production in community and the face-to-face' (ibid:7).

As minimal-commercial orientated music events, folk festivals should not be confused with most country, pop or rock festivals. Folk festivals are intentionally heterodox to mainstream music trends especially in their focus on 'authenticity'. That is, apart from the 'ideology of total participation', there is a proclivity towards: 'traditional' (especially acoustic) music instead of electronic instruments; widespread amateurism instead of 'stars', and; embracing a multiplicity of ethnic and regional styles instead of a monocultural, profitable style (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:201-2). Also, often maintaining an explicitly political agenda, the genre celebrates and promotes the interests of disadvantaged populations (cf. Eder et al. 1995). Australian folk festivals appeared in the 1970s. Such festivals, like Port Fairy and the Australian Annual Folk Festival (held annually at different locations), along with Queensland's folk-derived Woodford/Maleny Festival, occasion songs, lectures and yarns expressing deep concern 'with past and present oppressions, injustices and barbarities perpetrated by the state upon ordinary people and upon the land itself' (J. Kapferer 1996:173).

Dance Party

Underground 'raves', or free techno dance parties, appeared in Britain from 1988 (the so called 'second summer of love').[9] The dance party involves a distinct celebration of the corporeal, of altered embodiment and states of consciousness via a multi-media cyber-chemical assemblage. Its complex origins can be traced to a range of bohemian events and licentious enclaves 'pushing at the edges of acceptability' (Moore 1998a:172). Its immediate origins include Detroit 'techno', the Chicago 'house' black gay scene and Britain's underground 'acid house' phenomenon of the late eighties (Reynolds 1998:Ch.1 and 3).[10] More distant, yet formative, are those 'psychedelic symphonies' of the American sixties, the Acid Tests (especially the 1966 Trips Festival) conducted by Ken Kesey's

[9] Techno music possesses different styles (from exteme fast 'hardcore' or 'gabber' to the ambience of 'psy-trance' - often incorporating Goa Trance or Tribal music).

[10] Melechi (1993:30) argues that British Acid House was born out of the attempt to 'relive the jouissance' experienced by tourist-ravers on the Spanish Balearic island of Ibiza.

Merry Prangsters (Wolfe 1971; Buenfil 1991:51). Yet, the lineage can be traced further back to other all-night bohemian parties, especially those of the 1920s Jazz era, which, in Australia, included the Artist's Balls at the Sydney Town Hall (Moore 1998b:57).

Free, or by donation, outdoor dance parties were originally operated in Britain by various sound system collectives such as Spiral Tribe, the DiY Collective and Exodus (Reynolds 1998:Ch.8). Possessing an anti-market orientation and featuring largely anonymous DJs, these all-night parties constituted deliberate attempts to withdraw from the spectacle of rock concerts and machismo of disco culture. They are distinguishable from the extravagances of clubculture where dance culture became commodified and 'rave style' super-marketed. In Britain, illegal outdoor dance parties proliferated in the early nineties, seemingly reaching a crescendo with the Castlemorton 'mega-rave' of 1992, where the traveller/raver connection was forged.[11] Though the Criminal Justice Act (CJA)[12] has effectively criminalised free dance parties in Britain, smaller 'microraves' continue to appear, and from the mid-nineties sound systems and travellers have sought to escape home-nation restrictions by joining other Europeans at events like the Czech Teknival (Garner 1998). Exiled 'tech-nomad' sound systems like Spiral Tribe have thrown *techno fiestas* in Bologna (Reynolds 1998:173), while Desert Storm and Dubious Sound System have travelled Europe, holding free dance parties in places like Bulgaria and Bosnia (Dubious Dan 1998; Bean 1998).

Protest

Operating via the principles of NVDA, 'sit-ins', 'die-ins', 'protest villages', vigils, reclamations, encampments and festivals organised to raise consciousness of, and funds for, political, identity and lifestyle (e.g. environmental, gender, land rights, human rights, sexuality) issues are also, or can become, significant ACEs. As the public event phase of collective action, protests can be temporary communities and theatres of creative resistance, spaces where politics and pleasure converge, and where concrete disturbances

[11] In Australia, the independent techno-bohemia, earthcore, is one of the principal outdoor dance party/festivals of the southern hemisphere.

[12] In 1994, the Tory government legislated the notorious Criminal Justice Bill. The 'final solution' engineered by the New Right, the CJA constitutes a draconian system of police and legal powers which have 'almost decommissioned a lifestyle' (Dearling 1998:1). The Act includes clauses which criminalise squatting and trespassory assembly (including raves and free festivals not officially sanctioned, and, potentially, peaceful protests). It also repealed the 1968 Gypsy site legislation which obliged local authorities to provide sites for travellers.

of, and symbolic challenges to, state and corporate interests transpire. With roots in surrealism as much as leftist-politics, projects may embody prescriptive agendas which seek to generate 'situations', non-violent moments of resistance to the spectacle and banality of capitalism (cf. Debord 1983).[13]

There are varying manifestations. The Paris Commune of 1968 is probably one of the most significant episodes of situationist revolutionary carnival. A dramatic ritual re-enactment of past revolts - 1789, 1848, and the Paris Commune of 1871 - the festival 'finally gave true vacations to those who had never known anything but workdays and days off work' (Turkle 1975:85). During the eighties, an indication of the strengthening of the peace and women's movements, women's anti-nuclear Peace Camps appeared in Britain (Harford and Hopkins 1984; Young 1990; Roseneil 1995), the US (Krasniewicz 1994) and Australia (the Pine Gap peace encampment of 1982). During the nineties, anti-road protests such as the 'Free States' (McKay 1996; Routledge 1997) and Reclaim the Streets rallies (Jordan 1998) have become significant sites of cultural resistance. With anti-logging encampments and forest festivals appearing through the eighties and nineties - such as the US Earth First! 'rendezvous' (Taylor 1993:227-8; 1995) and their Australian equivalents (see Chapter 5) - the history of eco-radical direct action illustrates the merger of civil disobedience, poetic gesture and gathering.[14]

Some events have begun as small protests, evolving into huge annual street carnivals. Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras follows this pattern. Beginning in 1978 as a commemoration of New York's Stonewall riots, the Mardi Gras has since shifted to the summer blossoming into one of the world's premier gay and lesbian celebrations (Altman 1999; Carbery 1995). Despite experiencing the conversion from protest to street carnival and dance party, the Mardi Gras remains a crucial annual moment in queer identity politics (Hawkins 1993:131). Though experiencing a different quality of mutation, London's Notting Hill Carnival, known as 'the biggest street festival in Europe' (at least up until the early nineties), represents an equally significant field of expression and intervention, in this case for a subaltern immigrant community (Cohen 1993). Beginning in 1966 as a

[13] Yet, by contrast to other ACEs, protests are more likely to attempt to secure the power of the corporate media to convey their protest message.

[14] As 'powerful poetic gestures and effective political strategies' (Jordan 1998:151), various 'rave-derived' (Luckman 1998) events also possess political-activist significance (Rietveld 1998). This is especially apparent in Britain, given the criminalising effects of, and widespread responses to, the CJA. In Berlin, the annual LOVEPARADE is a massive occupation of the city's major thoroughfares. According to organisers, it is officially a 'political demonstration' -

'revived traditional English fair', from the seventies West Indian's embraced the Notting Hill Carnival as an 'all-West Indian institution' and 'liberated territory', which came to symbolise and enhance the 'corporateness and cohesion' of that disadvantaged minority.

Alternative Lifestyle Events

What I call alternative lifestyle events (ALEs) possess varying manifestations: the free festival, gathering and mega-event. Most ALEs are seasonal events, annual moments in the (re)creation of an alternative lifestyle. They accommodate a diversity of alternative discourse and practice within their locales, often combining that associated with either of the above clusters. I will now provide details on each of these clusters.

Free Festival

The 1970s and '80s occasioned the emergence and growth of free festivals in Britain and the US. The free festival represented a critique of the commercial exploitation and profiteering of rock festivals, a nostalgic effort to revive folk festivals and the medieval fair. The 'free' element constituted the absence of an entrance fee or payments to entertainers and musicians.[15] In January 1967, 100,000 people attended the first 'Gathering of the Tribes' or 'Human Be-in' in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, and huge free concerts also transpired in London's Hyde Park in the late sixties. Other free festivals appeared on the periphery of large commercial festivals (Hetherington 1993:147-8). In the seventies, a circuit of free festivals and fairs (or 'fayres') evolved in Britain (Earle et al. 1994:Ch.2; McKay 1996:Ch.1). As Clarke (1982:82) conveys, in these events, commerce was often replaced by voluntary efforts, with food and drink either given away or distributed at cost price, or large informal markets evolved.[16] Free festivals were 'a test of counter-cultural independence ... a genuinely collective achievement' (Clarke 1982:83).

---

with participants (500,000 people in 1995) gathering to protest for peace (Richard and Kruger 1998:171).

15 Since they were free, there was no need for fencing or hired security.

16 Markets are themselves, as Henry (1994:299) points out, 'alternative events' since they are sites of informal sector work. What makes free festival markets, along with markets at sites like Kuranda, St Andrews near Melbourne and ConFest even more significant is that the majority of vendors reject formal sector work, consciously seeking economic alternatives. 'Marketing [Henry continues] is particularly attractive to "seekers of alternatives" because it offers the opportunity for self-employment and an associated autonomy of action which formal sector work does not provide' (ibid).

Their success demonstrated that music festivals were not 'dependent upon the expertise and finance of commercial promoters in laying on an elaborate set of facilities'. Yet, they were more than just music festivals, as 'arts and crafts of various sorts, music and forms of theatre, folk dancing, fireworks and various manifestations of commitment to ecological awareness and ... the occult' were apparent (ibid).

Stonehenge was the most renowned of these events. As 'anarchy incarnate, a riot of self expression and celebratory culture' (Stone 1996:192-3), this summer solstice event, formative in the development of Britain's semi-nomadic new traveller[17] culture, began in 1974 (also, see below). The Thatcher government oversaw the demise of summer solstice festivals at Stonehenge with the violent demolition of the 'Peace Convoy' at the 'Battle of the Beanfield' in 1985 (cf. Earle et al. 1994:Ch.1; McKay 1996:Ch.1; Hetherington 1992; 1993). Despite the repressive strategy employed here and elsewhere, many smaller free festivals continued to appear - 'utopian models of an alternative society, offering an ethos of freedom from constraints, an economy based on reciprocity and gift and on the principles of mutual aid rather than money' (Hetherington 1993:148) – some in the mould of the free dance parties discussed earlier.

In Australia, the National Union of Students Aquarius Festival of May 1973 was the formative free festival out of which the nation's 'alternative capital', Nimbin, was born.[18] Located in the 'Rainbow Region' of northeast NSW, Nimbin has become a desirable topos for young Australians and international travellers seeking alternative culture and independent living. Nimbin is a demesne of independence and resistance, a significant port-of-call (or destination) on the Australian youth migratory route popularly regarded as 'the hippie trail'. It has become a popular hedonic centre at the margins for 'experimental' and 'existential' tourists (Cohen 1979) chasing the authentic life. At least 5,000 people participated in the watershed moment that was Aquarius. An intentional 'tribal' process and 'a work of art immeasurably greater than anything yet attempted' (Jiggens 1983:11), Aquarius was a direct precursor of the Cotter ConFest in 1976.[19] Coming to 'symbolise the

---

[17] Often labelled 'New Age Travellers', they possess diverse commitments and practices. Some pursue spiritual and occultist practices, others have been outright hedonists, while others still are eco-radicals and anti-road activists (e.g. the Dongas Tribe). Following the CJA, Britain has experienced something of a traveller exodus - the new nomads declaring themselves 'world citizens ... [a] stateless tribe roaming through the European Union and beyond' (Dearling 1998:177).

[18] As a 'community celebration', Aquarius received Federal Government funding via the Australia Council's newly established Community Arts Program (Hawkins 1993:42-3).

[19] Both Aquarius and Cotter undoubtedly had some influence in New Zealand, where the Nambassa festivals occurred in 1978 and '79 (Broadley and Jones 1979).

alternative lifestyle movement' in Australia (Metcalf 1986:122), it was celebrated at a ten year anniversary festival, the 1983 Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration (Newton 1988, see below), and at a twenty year commemorative community arts festival (the Aquarius '93 Winter Festival).[20]

Gathering

Alternative gatherings are distinguished from festivals, in that, not being carnivals of excess, they exemplify conscious efforts to recreate radical utopian communal perspectives. They are decentralised, co-operative and non-hierarchical social experiments, with a distinct commitment to healing-arts and non-commercialism. The Rainbow Gathering of Living Light is the most popular and enduring example of such an event. Beginning as a 'festival of prayer for world peace' in Colorado in 1972, Rainbow Gatherings are annual North American congregations of the all-inclusive Rainbow 'Family' (Niman 1997; Beck 1991). The Gathering grew out of a diverse range of alternative communities and experiments beginning in the sixties, all of which possess 'the shared intent of working for the healing of the Earth' (Buenfil 1991:17). It operates via numerous Councils (e.g. Main Council, Banking, Kitchen, Supply and Vision), consensus orientated decision making bodies which 'strive toward being nonexclusionary and nonhierarchical' (Niman 1997:38). Using money to buy or sell anything at Gatherings is considered 'taboo' - all food and materials are purchased through donations made to 'the Magic Hat'. Gatherings eventually spread around the world. The first Australian Rainbow Gathering took place at the Om Shalom community, northeast NSW, in November 1996. An international phenomenon, Gatherings attract thousands of global travellers, or 'Rainbows', and engender a steadily growing Rainbow 'consciousness' (see below for further elaboration).

There are a host of new spiritual gatherings possessing comparable characteristics and attracting similar participants. The annual One Earth Gatherings, the first of which was held at the Findhorn community in Scotland in the mid seventies, and subsequently passed from host to host around the world (*DTEQLD* Sep 1983:9), is an exemplary New Age[21]

[20] Nimbin also hosts an annual celebration, the Nimbin Mardi Grass Fiesta.

[21] Though there are inevitable cross-overs, these events should usually be differentiated from the specialised and explicit commercial orientation of events that are hallmark showcases of the 'New Age industry', such as a great many weekend 'retreats', 'intensives', 'workshops', 'funshops' and 'conferences' designed for the development of one's 'internal resources'. Also,

gathering. Australia and New Zealand are host to numerous annual gatherings with specialised 'healing and wellbeing' constituencies.[22] Alternatively, Neo-Pagan gatherings, designed to celebrate the survival or revival of strains of ancient folk or nature oriented spirituality, have also proliferated. 'Sabbats', meetings of covens or families and other individuals on the solstices and equinoxes and 'quarter days' or fire festivals (seasonal ritual meetings), and 'esbats' (full moon meetings) (Lurhmann 1989:47), have grown in popularity in western nations. In Australia, Pagans have converged at such events since the early eighties (Hume 1995:7; 1997:37-9). Radical Faerie Gatherings, celebrations of 'gay spirituality' (Rodgers 1995:34), are also evident, as are ritual theatre gatherings like those held at Wolfgang's Palace in Victoria.

The Burning Man Festival, Black Rock Desert, Nevada, is perhaps the world's largest techno-Pagan or Zippie (Zen Inspired Pagan Professional) gathering. Thousands of people travel long distances onto the desert playa to become part of a sacred community and to eventually witness, and participate in, the burning of a 50 foot wooden statue packed with fireworks and rockets - 'the Man'. Emerging out of the bohemian scene in San Francisco in the mid-eighties, with its philosophy of 'no spectators', Burning Man is a temporary experimental art community accommodating 'restless, creative counter-rituals of community building and active participation' (Wray 1995). According to Sams (1999:6), the experience is 'off the beaten track, well off any beaten track in America'. Within this edge-community comprised of numerous 'villages' or theme camps, commodification of art is reproved, while a 'gift-economy' is promoted and nurtured. Aside from a 'black market' trade in illicit substances, commodification is kept to an absolute minimum (e.g. most barter for goods). However, as the event increases in size (15,000 people in 1998), it is subject to wider mediation and thus external commodification.

---

gatherings, and ALEs in general, should not be confused with New Age exhibitions, fairs and expos operating since the late seventies and usually held in exhibition halls or show grounds.

[22] These include the Homeland Festival of Peace and Healing (from 1985) at 'The Sanctuary' on the Bellinger River NSW, Ananda Marga's Ananda Mela (or Festival of Bliss) held near Stanthorp Qld (from the early eighties), the 'Renewing the Dreaming Camps' hosted by Yuin elder Guboo Ted Thomas, and the Healing Arts Festival held in Victoria in 1998. Gender-specific events like Lismore's Green Man or the Thora Men's Gathering, and The Wild and Wise Women's Festival in East Gippsland, along with pan-indigenous and inter-cultural events like The Global Village held near Townsville in 1996, and the Laura Aboriginal Dance and Culture Festival in Bellingen NSW, have also emerged. In New Zealand, in the early nineties, the Aotearoa Festival of Light at Tauhara, and The Gathering at Owhangu (1993) - originally a drug and alcohol free healing festival with a $250.00 cover charge, but evolving into that country's largest dance festival - became local manifestations.

Mega-event

Recent times have been witness to the appearance of large-scale alternative events the territories of which are occupied by an ever growing diversity of performance zones and genres. The mega-rave at Castlemorton in 1992 was a free-festival attracting about 40,000 people. The counter-spatial character of such events is jeopardised by encroaching and sometimes unscrupulous commercialism. Britain's Glastonbury, is perhaps the most famous event of this kind. Beginning in 1970, a free festival throughout the seventies, Glastonbury became larger and commercial in the following decade, with a 'fringe' festival developing outside its perimeter (Earle et al. 1994:30). In Australia, the Woodford/Maleny Festival possesses a family resemblance. Beginning in 1985 at Maleny, Qld, the event grew from a small folk festival into a huge alternative community New Year festival, now held at Woodford in Southern Qld. Accommodating indigenous, environmental, multicultural and New Age components, the event attracted around 80,000 people over New Year 1990/91. Woodford/Maleny hosts a large indigenous presence and culminates with a 'Fire Event' (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:203 [see below]). Today the event incorporates a 'Murri festival', the participants in which are accommodated at a separate 'Murri Camp' (Goodman 1998:39).

We might call these mega-events *alternative tourism events.* Demonstrating parallels with conventional 'mega', or 'hallmark' (Ritchie in Roche 1992:577) events'[23] - like world fairs, significant political or religious events, historical milestones, major sports events and international rock concerts - they often transpire in urban contexts of 'world cities' and attempt to stimulate local economies. While there are signs that alternative mega-events are changed by the input of the corporate dollar, by comparison with 'hallmark events', alternative mega-events possess markedly variant cultural, lifestyle and political 'content'.

Alternative Cultural Heterotopia

There is at least one theme common to most alternative events - they are polydimensional in form and content. First, they possess *overlapping* event formats, and perhaps, historically, or even during the course of an event, metamorphose from one event

[23] Also called 'global media events' - 'publicly performed for, highly mediated through, and popularly consumed by global audiences' (Palmer 1998:267).

cluster to another. Second, and this is especially the case for ALEs, they are likely to accommodate the *heterogeneity* of alternate discourse and practice evident within the ACM. As Moore (1995:212) recognises for public events in general, such events are intersections of various 'pathways'. Rarely 'single issue' events, they occasion *disputation* between constituents over matters of philosophy and method, as well as the interpretation of the event itself. They are what I call *alternative cultural heterotopia*. In order to describe this, I now turn to a discussion of the concept's principal term.

'Heterotopia' is a spatial concept in receipt of growing interest in recent times. Partially developed by Foucault, the concept has been applied to a range of spheres, installations, geographies and events, accumulating a heterogeneity of meanings in the history of its usage - a confusion which is, in part, a legacy of its brief and non-concise treatment by Foucault himself (1973; 1986). As Hetherington (1997:41) conveys, 'heterotopia' has been used to denote: sites constituted as incongruous or paradoxical, through socially transgressive practices; sites that are ambivalent and uncertain due the multiplicity of meanings attached to them; sites that have an aura of mystery, danger or transgression about them; sites defined by their absolute perfection; marginalised sites, and; incongruous forms of writing.

Heterotopia is Latin for 'place of otherness'. It originally came from the study of anatomy where it refers to 'parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien' (Hetherington 1997:42). In his early work (1973:xviii), Foucault was concerned with the heterotopic character of language - that is, 'the way that a textual discourse can be unsettled by writing that does not follow the expected rules and conventions' (Hetherington 1997:8). Later (1986), however, he used 'heterotopia' in reference to specifically unsettling or ambiguous social spaces. Foucault argued that, by contrast to 'utopias', 'sites with no real place' - which 'present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down' - there exist 'heterotopia'. These 'counter-sites' are:

> a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1986:24)

Foucault suggests that there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute real spaces that are 'absolutely different from all the sites they reflect and speak about' (ibid).

Hetherington has helped clarify our understanding of such spaces, 'whose existence sets up unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate "objects" which challenge the way we think, especially the way our thinking is ordered' (1997:42). Rather 'monstrous combinations' appear in these 'almost magical' spaces (ibid:43), since the internal organisation of 'texts' and 'objects' is thought to be derived from similitude rather than resemblance - that is, there is no unity of meaning via resemblance within heterotopia as their content signifies 'through a series of deferrals that are established between a signifier and a signified rather than with direct reference to a referent' (Hetherington 1996b:158-9).

Foucault saw that 'spaces of otherness' can be event-spaces (or 'heterochronia') of transgression (like the festival or the carnival), or spaces for the perfection of social control and order (e.g. the prison and asylum, new colonies or museums and libraries). An understanding of this spectrum has informed Hetherington's take on heterotopia. He defines them as:

> sites of alternate ordering ... established by their incongruous condition. That incongruity emerges through a relationship of difference with other sites, such that their presence either provides an unsettling of spatial relations or an alternative representation of spatial relations. (1997:51)

The 'Otherness' of such sites, therefore, does not exist in itself, nor does it derive from the site, but is established via its relationship of difference to other spaces. Such spaces are not fixed as heterotopic - they always have multiple meanings for agents (ibid:51).

Hetherington displays a shift in his position on heterotopia. In earlier work, including his PhD (1993), they are sites of resistance and transgression, marginal spaces where alternate identities are performed. In more recent work, they are 'spaces of alternate ordering', a 'mode of ordering based upon some idea of social improvement' (1997:52).[24] In offering 'a theory of the spatial dynamics of modernity' (ibid:ix), Hetherington introduces several spaces as key sites of 'alternate ordering' in the history of modernity. Manifestly ambivalent - accommodating a unique combination of rational debate and hedonistic pleasures - the Palais Royal in eighteenth century Paris was one such site: 'one of the first sites in which the utopics of modernity, the ambivalent interplay of freedom

[24] Yet, that which Hetherington claims for heterotopias, has long been known for public events, 'in' and 'through' which 'cultural order' is made (Handelman 1990).

and control, were expressed' (ibid:17). As a heterotopia, the Palais Royal, along with other spaces like the Masonic lodge and the factory, have:

> acted as obligatory points of passage, in producing a spatiality that expressed the utopic ideas of freedom and order through which we might begin to understand modernity ... Almost like laboratories, they can be taken as sites in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out. (ibid:12-13)

Hetherington is not so much concerned with the utopia or dystopia of modernity, but with heterotopia - actual spaces and spatialised processes of ordering. Heterotopia exist, but they only exist *in the relationship between spaces*, in particular, between *eu-topia* (good place) and *ou-topia* (no-place) - the two Greek words Thomas More (1985) merged to form the term *Utopia*, which meant 'a good place' which was 'nowhere', except in the imagination (Hetherington 1997:ix). Heterotopias are spaces where efforts are made to turn the nowhere of the imagination into the good place - but they are invariably 'in-between' such ideals.

The above clarifications have facilitated the development of the concept of *alternative cultural heterotopia* (ACH), which, I suggest, involves four interdependent characteristics:

First, they are primarily spaces of *otherness*, that which Foucault has called 'counter-sites'. That is, centres for alternative culture - expatriates and exiles, outsiderhood, marginality, authenticity - they are places where dispersed ambivalence and uncertainty, displaced and rejected knowledge (Hetherington 1993:92), are celebrated. This constitutes their difference in relation to adjacent sites, in contrast to those 'other spaces' established for the control of disorder like prisons or psychiatric hospitals.

Second, they are *heterogeneous* spaces. Indicating 'a complex juxtaposition and cosmopolitan simultaneity of difference' (Soja 1995:15), they accommodate variant alternatives, multiple 'utopics'[25] - marginalia. Their *habitués* may subscribe to a vast range of alternative discourse and practice - *authentica*. They are thus heterogeneous zones, with variant expectations held by inhabitants.

[25] A term used by Marin (1984), which Hetherington (1998b:138) describes as 'a spatial practice that seeks to make use of the marginality of certain sites to articulate ideas about alternative futures for society'.

Third, they are *contested* spaces. Uncertainty and variant expectations condition disputation between inhabitants over the meaning of the space. Conflict does not arise exclusively between inhabitants (organisers and patrons) and non-inhabitants (external bodies), but possibly *between inhabitants* themselves. This may produce fission.

Fourth, often event-spaces, they are *liminal* realms. That is, despite contestation, or perhaps because of it, they hold potential for (re)creating alternative identities and effecting 'alternate orderings'. I thus take my cues from Turner (see Chapter 2) and Foucault (via Hetherington) who claims that heterotopia 'do not exist in the order of things, but in the ordering of things' (1996a:38).

My thesis is that ACEs (especially ALEs) are ACH. And, ConFest will be offered as an unparalleled example of such a phenomenon. Not only had the original Aquarius Festival presaged the building of Australia's permanent ACH (Nimbin), but it provided the prototype for the DTE ConFest, which had, according to Altman (1980:116), 'come to replace Nimbin ... as the best known symbol in Australia of the "counter-culture"', or, as I prefer, alternative culture. Yet, it is an inimitable counter-site, and its special place in Australian alternative culture is affirmed and validated through its unique combination of the above ACEs - a synthesis of festival, gathering and mega-event (and accommodating features characteristic of the folk festival, dance party and protest). Such polydimensionality engenders a remarkable environment of contrast and complementarity. Yet, for now, I wish to examine the way researchers have investigated other ALEs.

Part II: Alternative Lifestyle Event Ethnography

I now turn to a review of the published results of four ethnographic projects conducted on ALEs. The first two projects derive from PhD thesis research carried out on non-Australian events by non-anthropologists. The latter two are articles on Australian ALEs researched by anthropologists. My intention is to offer: a description of the events themselves; an appraisal of conceptual issues raised; critical commentary on methodological and theoretical perspectives, and; a general comparison of the approaches.

Stonehenge Solstice Festival

In a sociology/cultural geography PhD thesis, Kevin Hetherington (1993:Ch.5) renders Britain's Stonehenge as a significant site in the historical (re)production of 'New Age Traveller' identity.[26] Between 1974 and 1984, travellers and other festival participants gathered at this ancient megalithic site on Salisbury Plain to celebrate the summer solstice and participate in a nearby rock festival (ibid:143-4). Hetherington maintains Stonehenge is heterotopic, arguing that there are 'few sites in the world that create such a heteroglossia of interpretation' (ibid:142; see also Hetherington 1996b). Among these, two general views hold sway: Stonehenge as 'order/heritage' (held by the National Trust and English Heritage) or 'mystery/festival' (held by new travellers). For new travellers, the site is 'a place of worship and renewal'. As 'a symbolic site of Otherness, associated with rejected knowledge in the form of Earth Mysteries' (Hetherington 1993:147), the rituals of festival performed there enhance the 'heteroclite' identities of travellers, that is marginal identities that are 'monstrous, anomalous and collage-like in composition' (Hetherington 1996a:43). Festival participants celebrated their identities via rites of inversion and 'enacted' their lifestyle through excessive consumption (Hetherington 1992:87). As grotesque harbingers of uncertainty and discontinuity, sources of pollution and anxiety, the traveller lifestyle was associated with sources of 'risk' to those (including locals) holding to the 'order/heritage' view. Their transgressive life-strategies are thought to have led to the ultimate suppression of their spectacularly utopic 'museum without walls' (Hetherington 1996b).

In this disquisition on marginal space, performance and identity, Hetherington draws heavily upon Victor Turner, and establishes a strong link between heterotopia and what Turner called liminal, or more precisely liminoidal, space-times. Heterotopic spaces are, like liminoidal space-times, both marginal and interstitial. As such, Stonehenge festivals were interstitial occasions occurring at a marginal space, which possessed the effect of reproducing the marginal identities of travellers. For Hetherington, such events are realms of performance, 'offering a carnivalesque and liminoid ethos or theatre of cruelty in which the Otherness and deliberate marginality of the Traveller lifestyle can be performed'

[26] Reference to Stonehenge and new travellers in his thesis have been published in several places (Hetherington 1992; 1996a; 1996b; 1998a).

(1993:192). Furthermore, such spaces, regarded as 'centres' on the margins for pilgrim/participants, are said to exemplify Turner's 'spontaneous communitas' (ibid:179).[27]

Hetherington's 'deliberately eclectic' (1993:294) project employed minimal ethnography. Besides extensive documentary research, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted (including five with Travellers in 1991). In defence of this small sample, the author cites the frequent mobility and geographical dispersal of his informants, and his own 'limited financial resources' (ibid). Since festivals, gatherings and protests are not infrequent occurrences, I am not altogether certain why field research should be restricted in this way. As Hetherington's 'participant observation' consisted of 'two and a half days' at the Forest Fayre - 'a small commercial festival organised by some of the Travellers and not exactly a free festival' in 1991 (ibid:292-4) - interviewing a greater number of experienced Stonehenge participants would have added weight to his ethnography.

The Rainbow Gathering

In a comparatively in-depth ethnography, Michael Niman (1997)[28] portrays the Rainbow Family, Nation or Tribe as a 'revitalization movement' (of, now, global proportions) which attempts to realise a 'utopian libertarian-anarchist vision' at Rainbow Gatherings (or just 'Gatherings'). 'The Family' is described as an 'intentional group', indeed 'the largest utopian community in America' (Niman 1997:31). Yet, 'the Family' is also an 'occasional group' (ibid:112), or 'band society' which dissolves and regroups while maintaining 'a cohesive identity' (ibid:201). Since there are now many regional North American as well as global Gatherings, there is today, at any given time, 'at least one Rainbow Gathering taking place somewhere in the world' (ibid:33) - a circumstance which, according to Niman, renders 'the Family' a community with an element of permanence. The Rainbow Family possesses an open membership, Gathering attendees automatically qualifying as Rainbows. The invitation encourages people of diverse backgrounds (e.g. middle class kids, Dead Heads,[29] war veterans and hobos) and spiritual affiliations to live in peaceful co-existence - a 'multispiritual utopia' (ibid:146). Indeed,

[27] As Turner's conceptual framework is examined at length in Chapter 2, I reserve elaboration of and commentary upon his concepts until then.

[28] Work which began life as a PhD (1991).

with sixties peace activists and Vietnam War veterans forming the core of the first Gatherings, it is grounded in a tolerance for diversity. It is further argued that 'the Family' are a 'cooperative community of individualists' (ibid:70), their Gatherings expressing a 'commitment both to communalism and to individual liberty' (ibid:213). With 'no central organization to be subverted or destroyed', Niman describes how they have survived media misrepresentation and persistent harassment and persecution by the government (ibid:201-2).

Niman's account is grounded in a proximate, first-hand understanding of his subject matter. A long term member of the Rainbow Family with years of experience - and conducting 49 interviews between 1990-94 (Niman 1997:262-3) - he provides a thick description of the Gatherings. Such immersion justifies a departure from conventional ethnography, which is demonstrated by the opening chapter, 'Sunflower's Day' - described as 'a piece of ethnographic fiction'.[30]

However, while Rainbow Gatherings are *public events*, albeit of a peculiar kind, a discounting of the potency of socio-cultural theory[31] on such events reveals an analytical deficiency in Niman's approach. Not festivals or celebrations, Gatherings are regarded as 'communities', and comparative analysis is restricted to 'utopian communities'. While this may account for inattention to comparable events and marginal people's worldwide (such as Britain's free festival circuit and new travellers), and the avoidance of other temporary seasonal events, I find it curious that the salient concepts of 'community' or 'communitas', as these have been employed by anthropologists and sociologists (e.g. Anderson 1983; Cohen 1985; Turner 1974), have been overlooked. In addition to this, while Niman regards the Rainbow Family as a 'movement', indeed a 'revitalization movement', no attempt is made to explicate this via social movement theory. Yet, overlooking Turner proves especially noticeable for, of the four events discussed here, Gatherings most approximate the sacred redress and spontaneous communality of the *limen*. It is almost as if Rainbow Gatherings are of such divine character that they cannot be made heuristically renderable.

---

[29] Dead Heads were followers of The Grateful Dead, a band which went on a 'Tour' that, beginning in the sixties, spanned about three decades. 'Dead' concerts became spiritual gatherings for 'Dead Heads' (Sardiello 1994).

[30] The chapter pursues a day in the life of 'Sunflower', 'an amalgam character'. Sunflower's experiences are, according to the author, 'real, based on both my field notes and stories Rainbows have shared with me'. The topography of Sunflower's gathering is also 'real' - being a combination of two separate National Gatherings (xi). Though the suggestion that Sunflower's experiences are both 'real', yet, at the same time 'fictional', may provoke criticism, given the researcher's own history of involvement, such an approach is warranted. Though idealised, it does provide an insightful introduction.

The Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration

The Nimbin Lifestyle Celebration of 1983 (4,000 people) marked the tenth anniversary of the Aquarius festival. Concerned by anthropology's apparent neglect of the popular culture of Australian alternates, Janice Newton (1988) investigated this nostalgic attempt to recapture the essence of Aquarius - using 'impressionistic evidence' (ibid:64) gathered at the event itself, and extensive archival research (including documentation on the original Nimbin event). Each day of the Celebration possessed a theme: 'kid's day, yin day (women's activities), green day, peace day and land rights day'. According to Newton, the event was pervaded by naturalism. She observes two key manifestations of 'the natural' desired by participants - 'tribes' and 'Aborigines' - meditating upon what they reveal about Australian counterculture. The attempts to 'recreate tribal communalism' and 'tribal ritual structures' (ibid:64), and the celebration of, and identification with, Aboriginality (evident, for example, in a 'Koori space', land rights tent, workshops on Aboriginal dialogue and birthing practices, a '*bora* ring' and 'Rainbow Serpent' closing ceremony [ibid:62]), demonstrate a romantic 'idealisation of a tribal and Aboriginal way of life' rooted in the counterculture.

The Celebration also revealed significant shifts since Aquarius, as 'the radical New Left Politics of many of the 1973 participants were replaced by a more humanistic political interest: conservation, Aboriginal land rights, peace, and world hunger' (ibid). However, Newton reveals that what she regards as the political/personal (or religious) 'cleavage' of early counterculture, was retained, since social and political issues were evidently 'secondary' to the 'expansion of self' (ibid:64).

Like Hetherington, Newton grants Turner pride of place in her theoretical modelling. Indeed, Newton first recognised the value of plying the ideas of Victor Turner to the study of ALEs and their participants. After all, it was the countercultural milieu which Turner believed best characterised the intimate marriage of marginality and what he called 'communitas' in western culture. Newton argues that the original Aquarius Festival was an exemplary 'spontaneous communitas', a source of regeneration, and the '83 Celebration was a kind of 'ideological communitas', an attempt to 'recharge the permanent alternative communities, to revitalise a contra-ideology, to keep up the strength of the anti-rationalistic ideals of work, play and personal development' (1988:66) conceived ten years

[31] Apart from a brief reference to the ideas of Bey (Niman 1997:97).

before. Finally, interpreting the later event as a font of societal change, Newton also acknowledges the utility of the (post)modern 'liminoid', which is applied to render it a 'proto-structural' force. Quoting Turner, she says liminoid activities can:

> generate and store a plurality of alternative models of living, from utopias to programs which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles ... in the direction of radical change (in Newton 1988:65).

While this may be true for the former event, I wonder whether it has equal applicability to 1983 where, echoing the 'personal/political (religious) split' of the early counterculture, social and political issues were 'secondary' to self-growth. I think this inconsistency may be corrected once it is recognised that the 'cleavage' about which Newton speaks, may be quite simply overstressed (see Chapter 7). A related problem can be located in the author's implication that the Celebration's adopted tribal model resembles 'small scale liminality'. My concern is that we are left with little solution as to how this perceived valorisation of 'the tribal model' can be reconciled with the simultaneous predominance of individualism and self development in the observed 'counterculture'. My chief question is, where does the presence of apparently incompatible values - the collectivism of the 'tribal model' on the one hand (including the women who apparently 'acted within a separate social and political unit' [Newton 1988:62]), and the individualism inherent to self-growth practices on the other - leave 'small scale liminality'?

Finally, in accordance with the parameters she set for her article, Newton, in discussing the counterculture's valorisation of Aboriginality, does not go beyond reference to their 'false idealisation of a tribal and Aboriginal way of life' to take in a discussion of the politics and/or phenomenology of cultural appropriation. I have no doubt that further investigation would uncover a complexity of issues: from the neo-colonialist distortion, homogenisation and occupation of essentialised 'others', an approach gaining momentum in the wake of Said (1978), to the reconciliatory and alliance building potentials of cultural borrowing, and the syncretic creativity located in the appropriational process of 'othering' as a means of identity (re)creation. However, this is not a criticism as Newton's goal is to initiate discussion on the matter. As she says, the counterculture's 'reaching out' to Aboriginal culture 'provides a fruitful area for further research' (1988:67).

The Maleny Fire Event

Lowell Lewis and Paul Dowsey-Magog (1993) provide a detailed exegesis on the fate of the Fire Event taking place within the context of the Maleny Folk Festival between New Year 90/91 and 93/94. The Fire Event is perhaps Australia's most popular and renowned incidence of 'ritual theatre', with up to 20,000 people in attendence in the period researched. Special attention is accorded the 91/92 Event, considered to be an exemplary 'totalising integrative force'.[32] The authors argue that the Event's power as an engaging transformative performance was weakened in the later Events where 'art' had apparently triumphed over 'ritual'. This occurred in two ways: the dominance of linear time over cyclical time (the Event's transference from New Year's eve to the last night of the festival), and of individualism over communal processes (Western art, such as ritual theatre, is not so much a 'deeply communal process' as a domain of 'individual genius') (ibid:207). The Event's shift away from New Year's eve replaced collective engagement and resolution with passive spectatorship to an experience controlled by artists. At the same time, an indigenous people's night replaced the Fire Event on New Year's Eve. This event 'stole some fire' from the Fire Event as the largely non-Aboriginal crowd attracted were able to participate as spectators only. The authors claim that, here, indigenous people:

> have sometimes constructed themselves as groups with ritual, as opposed to (Euro) others who had lost it. The implicit effect was to disallow or delegitimate the possibility of the popular recreation of ritual and to put indigenous people in the position of 'standing for' the sacred. (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:216)

Ultimately, this encouraged people 'to watch the performance of the sacred at the Fire Event' too (ibid).

Relying upon detailed ethnographic data,[33] Lewis and Dowsey-Magog offer a tight analysis of the Fire Event and its participants. Like the Nimbin festivals, the Fire Event is said to have been an example of ritual's revitalisation in the (post)modern world - a liminal event. In an integrated approach, the authors use the ideas of Turner and

[32] That Event involved the 'victory of natural forces' (symbolised by a huge mobile Earth Mother figure) 'over the excesses of civilisation' (a twenty metre wooden skyscraper called the 'Tower of Babel'), which was eventually consumed in a conflagration of flames, fireworks and mortar rockets.

MacAloon (1984), to argue that, 'at best' (when they were held on New Year), the Fire Events 'constitute a neo-liminal framework within which participants can achieve a consensus of belief and action' (1993:198). Here, they use MacAloon's 'neo-liminal' (1984:269) in place of 'liminal' since, due to 'the degree of individual variation, no special performance framework in a large scale society can be as integral to general daily life as similar frameworks can be among small-scale groups' (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:217). They argue that, ideally, Fire Events elicit the kind of 'totalising integrative force ... central to many kinds of ritual practice' (ibid:198-9). Therefore, it is 'grounded in transcendental, fundamental, or "ultimate concerns"' - engaging people by embodying their most important concerns (green politics and New Age spirituality). Consonant with the earlier approaches to Stonehenge and the Nimbin Celebration, prior to the triumph of art over ritual, the Fire Event occasioned 'communitas' - 'an experience of egalitarian solidarity and spiritual integration' (ibid:201).

While the authors imply that Aboriginal spectacle took the place of non-indigenous communitas, and while they speculate that the separation of Aborigines (the Murri stage and camp) and non-indigenes on site may reflect the 'difficulty of social reconciliation in the outside society' (ibid:217), I am left wondering about possible, but undisclosed, disharmony between indigenous and non-indigenous organisers and participants.

It should be clear that I am indebted to all of the above research projects. Variably rich in ethnographic data on, and analyses of, a diversity of ALEs, they represent the key texts drawn upon for comparative purposes throughout the thesis. They have furnished appropriate conceptual tools and the identification of various theoretical and methodological shortcomings has helped clarify my project. Hetherington's elucidation of the Stonehenge solstice free festivals as heterotopic has been particularly useful in formulating my own interpretation of ALEs in general, and ConFest in particular. It is clear to me that all of the four events above are ACHs.

My reading of past approaches has given rise a certain degree of dissatisfaction. I have been especially concerned that, although three of the projects are inspired by the writing of Turner, a critical deconstruction of his project has not been undertaken. For instance, what does the concept of heterotopia and its implied heterogeneity and conflict, reveal about liminality and its ostensible consensuality? Or, if these events are elevated moments of

[33] Made all the more probable as this is an annual event observed over several years, and since one of the authors was involved in its production and planning.

excess and intercorporeality, a celebration of the body, will a non-revisionist Turnerian perspective be appropriate for their study? If the popular Turnerian paradigm restricts the inquiry of contemporary ACEs, then what directions should we take?

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced alternative culture, a movement consisting of a heterogeneity of de-centrist DiY neo-tribes connected by their commitment to, and expression of, discourse and practice responsive to perceived deficiencies in the parent culture. It has investigated alternative cultural events, the principal criteria of which have been ascertained. Several event-clusters meeting with this criteria, including alternative lifestyle events, were identified. The latter, following the ideas of Foucault, via Hetherington, were described as alternative cultural heterotopia. Finally, I examined four independent research projects conducted on ALEs (employing ethnographies of varying description). This critical and comparative investigation serves to assist the formulation of an appropriate approach to the inimitable, local ACH, ConFest, and to provide valuable comparative data and analysis to be drawn upon in the following chapters.