Alternative Cultural Heterotopia and the Liminoid Body: Beyond Turner at ConFest

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This article takes issue with Victor Turner's influential, yet essentialist, category of the *limen*. While acknowledging Turner's continuing significance in the analysis of public events, I draw upon detailed ethnography of one of Australia's contemporary pilgrimage centres, the alternative lifestyle event ConFest, to reconfigure his project. Although ConFest may prove to be an exemplary field of liminality, as a decidedly contested and sensuous landscape, it demands re-evaluation of the implicitly consensual and non-carnal *limen*. I offer the concepts of *alternative cultural heterotopia* and *liminoid embodiment*, with the purpose of fashioning new directions in the study of alternative lifestyle, and other public events. Attending to contemporary pilgrimage research, spatial analysis and applying the ideas of Michel Maffesoli and Hakim Bey, this is a post-structuralist contribution to the anthropology of public events.

Introduction

The processual project of Victor Turner has been germane to the interpretation of alternative lifestyle events (cf. Newton 1988; Hetherington 1993; Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993), mirroring its pivotal role in the wider anthropology of public events (Handelman 1990). Although not seeking a complete break with Turner, the present article takes issue with his identifiably essentialist *limen*, strict adherence to which has likely restricted research of public event-space, including alternative lifestyle events. The *limen*, an implicitly consensual and non-carnal trope long holding influence over performance and ritual theorists, has apparently rarely inspired inquiry of contexts of *contestation* and *embodiment* (both currently popular fields of cultural analysis) within events. Through an investigation of ConFest, a significant pilgrimage centre for the vast number of constituents

of Australia's alternative lifestyle movement,[1] this article undertakes a twofold revision of the Turnerian project. ConFest is regarded as: (a) an *alternative cultural heterotopia*, a matrix of performance zones occupied by variously complementary and competing neo-tribes and identity clusters, and; (b) a realm of *liminoid embodiment*—a pleasurescape of transgressive sensuousness and carnal sociality. I explore such dimensions through attention to pilgrimage/tourism research, Foucault's inquiry into space and the ideas of Michel Maffesoli and Hakim Bey. Through a detailed investigation of a contested and sensuous counter-community, drawing upon contemporary social and cultural theory, I reconfigure the *limen* to propose a post-structuralist heuristic of public events.

The Turnerian project

The later work of Victor Turner constitutes an extensive and notable attempt to grasp the processes through which socio-cultural systems are (re)produced. In his 'incursive nomadism' Turner (1974:17) sought to gaze upon interstices which 'provide homes for anti-structural visions, thoughts and ultimately behaviors' (1974:293), and which are regarded as necessary sources of resolution. Meta-explorations beyond, beneath and between the fixed, the finished and the predictable ('structure'), his work consists of an extensive journey into such times and spaces, pregnant margins, the cracks of society, necessary thresholds of dissolution and indeterminacy through which socio-cultural order is said to be (re)constituted. This project was founded upon a sense that society is in-composition, forever *becoming,* and that its (re)production is dependent upon the periodic appearance of organised moments of categorical disarray and intense reflexive potential. This is most powerfully articulated as 'liminality', a concept which has been applied to a phalanx of public events and spaces demarcated from routine life, yet harbouring unquantifiable social possibilities. From 'ritual to theatre' (Turner 1982a), participants experience the subjunctive, reflexive and communal 'realm of pure possibility' (Turner 1967b:97). Through the interconnected performance modalities, or *limina*, of play, drama and community (St John 1997; 1999a), human actors may experience ludic abandonment, sacred truths and/or ineffable affinity with co-liminars.

   Though the significance of such a project cannot be denied, a problematical essentialism underlies Turner's vision. As Flanigan (1990:52) points out, the *limen*, the *leitmotif* in Turner's theoretical firmament, 'acquired transcendent value and became depicted as that which was quintessentially real, a kind of primal unity'. Turner's 'liminal ritual' was a pure, ideal category. Inflexible application tends to disregard 'complicated' performative spaces and intra-event strife. Furthermore, liminality's sacred, utopic dimensions are not particularly inclusive of embodiment. The *limen* has been more or less silent on the politics and carnality of public events.

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1. Emerging in 1976, the now biannual ConFest (Conference/Festival) is an alternative lifestyle event hosted by the Melbourne co-operative Down to Earth (DTE). This article derives from multi-modal PhD research conducted on ConFest and DTE between 1994 to 1999 (cf. St John 1999a). During that period, I attended twelve New Year and Easter events in succession, held at various sites on the Murray River near the NSW towns of Moama and Tocumwal. Here, I draw upon participant observation and interviews conducted during this research.

Communitas or heterotopia?

That Turner furthered the understanding of political process as 'social drama' is well known. Yet, within event-space itself, performative homogeneity is delineated at the expense of open-ended political manoeuvring and contestation. Symptomatic of an 'essentially utopian' approach, as Weber (1995:531) suggests, there is an 'implicit consensual dimension' in Turner's vision of cultural change—one which renders the consciousness of the ritual liminar implicitly apolitical.[2] This is especially apparent in 'communitas', regarded as 'a relatively undifferentiated *comitatus,* community, or even communion of equal individuals', and a 'direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities' (Turner 1969:96,132). Turner contended that 'the communitas spirit', where individuals interact free from socio-culturally constructed divisions, 'presses always to universality and ever-greater unity' (Turner 1973:202). Evincing a sacred anti-structurality, its boundaries are thus 'ideally coterminous with those of the human species' (Turner 1969:131). Said to approximate the religious experience it received its most effusive application in the study of pilgrimage.

For Turner, pilgrimage provided a ritual analogue between 'tribal' and 'historical' religious liminality. Following Durkheim, Turner was predisposed to account for the cultic practice of pilgrims as a form of social unification. In all the 'higher' religions, pilgrimage replicates the inclusiveness of earth and fertility cults earlier observed in tribal societies (Turner 1974:206). Parallel with these latter cults, pilgrims are members of a religious community in a state of 'flow', 'impregnated by unity ... purified from divisiveness and plurality' (Turner and Turner 1978:255). While it was seen 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 reinforced—they are ultimately 'means of binding diversities together and overcoming cleavages' (Turner 1973:220). Inside this essentially utopic sphere, homogeneity and unity prevails over the disunity of ethnicities, cultures, classes and professions beyond it (Turner and Turner 1978:39).

Turner's approach has now been widely challenged. To begin with, Werbner demonstrated that cults are fields of micro-politics which may herald 'new power divisions' (1989:295). Not straightforwardly inclusive, the Mwali cult of God Above, for example, is characterised by 'the dynamic tension between inclusiveness and exclusiveness' (1989:296). Moreover, Turner's insights have been debated as pilgrimage has been subject to thoroughgoing analysis. In a study of Bengali pilgrimage practices, Morinis (1984:273) argued that they are not those in which 'the structural bonds of the home community are sundered by a joyful, leveled communitas relationship among the participants'. Morinis pointed toward the various motivations held by pilgrims giving rise to a rather less consensual quality of experience than that promoted by Turner.

Furthermore, that such phenomena reinforce social, cultural and religious distinctions rather than occasion their dissolution, is a recurring theme in the pilgrimage literature.

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2. I do not suggest that Turner neglected an understanding of conflict in ritual contexts. His analysis of Ndembu female initiation rites, for example (1967a), highlights operational discord between men and women, patrilocality and matrilocality and competition between the principles of matriliny and virilocality. It should be further understood that these were 'structural' conflicts which did not necessarily undermine consensus concerning the meanings and consequences of the rites. I thank Michael Allen for pointing this out.

Sallnow, in a study of Andean pilgrimage in the Cuzco area of southern Peru, found that such regional devotions were occasioned by nepotism, factionalism, endemic competition and inter-community conflict (1981:176). Rather than become attenuated, the boundaries separating various sponsored community and ethnic groups were accentuated. Discussing the Sri Lankan pilgrimage site at Kataragama, Pfaffenberger (cited in Reader 1993:12) reveals how pilgrimage to the shrine serves to underline and reaffirm the differences between Hindus and Buddhists, and between Hindu castes. Bowman (1991) arrived at similar conclusions in a study of the super shrine of Jerusalem: 'There are as many Jerusalems as there are religious denominations visiting the city ... Here Judaism, Islam, and a variety of Christianities jostle with one another in an atmosphere of deep suspicion and sometimes outright hostility' (Eade and Sallnow 1991:10,13). Bowman demonstrates how Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Christian Zionist arrive with different understandings of the sacred. 'The sacred center par excellence of the Christian tradition paradoxically becomes the global focus for the display of its deep and pervasive doctrinal schisms' (1991:14).

Pilgrimage destinations are, therefore, contested sites where conflicting interpretations and reinforced divisions may frustrate the realisation of communitas. Researchers have thus regarded Turner's emphasis on unrestricted fellowship with caution. The problem, according to Weber, is that Turner lacks 'a conception and recognition of culture as political contestation: the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story, and from which position' (Weber 1995:532). Likewise, Abner Cohen (1993) regards cultural performances as 'politico-cultural' processes. Neither pilgrimages, nor other events like the Notting Hill Carnival, are neutral fields independent of the distribution and operations of power. Moreover, as Eade and Sallnow (1991:5) posit, the Turnerian paradigm imposes 'a spurious homogeneity' upon a phenomenon which is culturally and historically 'polymorphic'. Pilgrimage, they argue, is 'a realm of competing discourses'. Thus, they adopt a model which emphasises the multiple cultic constituency of such events. Pilgrimage is:

> ... above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and the non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups, for drives towards consensus and communitas, and for counter-movements towards separateness and division. (Eade and Sallnow 1991:2)

Most ConFesters travel hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres to achieve their goal. This alternative lifestyle event is a pilgrimage destination harbouring a complex constituency. As is recognised for public events in general, alternative lifestyle events are intersections of various 'pathways' (Moore 1995:212). Representing a kaleidoscopic field of subject positions, they occasion disputation between constituents over matters of philosophy and method as well as the interpretation of the event-space itself. I suggest that such are alternative cultural heterotopias, the key conceptual components of which require elucidation.

Alternative culture is a diverse network of discourse and practice in opposition to the parent culture—which is the system of values, beliefs and practices hegemonic under modernity. It is a 'DiY Culture' (McKay 1998) of voluntary and unstable 'energies' holding to values, vocabularies and sensibilities indicative of commitments to, for example, ecological sustainability, land-rights, self-expression, personal well-being and co-operative

living.[3] As alternative lifestylers are connected to a matrix consisting of diffuse, sometimes openly antagonistic, sometimes submerged vectors, and may be involved in intentional, activist, queer, new-music and/or therapeutic communities promoting a cornucopia of perspectives from anarchism to healing-arts, the 'culture' consists of a plurality of contradictory and/or complementary discourses and practices—often expressed through heterotopia.

'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. 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, Foucault (1973:xviii) 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 however, Foucault (1986) used the concept to refer to unsettling or ambiguous social spaces—'counter-sites'. He 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 'heterotopias', which Hetherington has clarified as real spaces and events 'whose existence sets up unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate "objects" which challenge the way we think, especially the way our thinking is ordered' (1997:42). As sites which likely possess an aura of mystery, danger or transgression, and which always possess multiple meanings for agents (1997:51), they are 'like laboratories ... in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out' (1997:12-13), from which 'alternative orderings' are derived.

Often temporary event-spaces, what I call alternative cultural heterotopias, are liminal realms. They are thresholds fomenting the (re)creation of alternative identities, effecting 'alternative orderings'. Alternative cultural heterotopias involve three interdependent spatial characteristics:

1. They are primarily spaces of 'otherness', those which Foucault has called 'counter-sites'. They are destinations for expatriates of, and exiles from, the parent culture. Marginal centres, axes of 'DiY culture', they are communities of resistance wherein 'displaced and rejected knowledge' is celebrated (cf. Hetherington 1993:92), and where hedonistic consumption practices are licensed. This constitutes their difference in relation to adjacent sites—from which they are demarcated.

2. They are 'heterogeneous' spaces. Indicating 'a complex juxtaposition and cosmopolitan simultaneity of difference' (Soja 1995:15), heterotopias accommodate

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3. McKay (1998:2) regards 'DiY Culture' as a 'kind of 1990s counterculture': an independent, diverse, youth-centred and youth-directed expression of resistance combining 'party and protest' under the ethic of Non-violent Direct Action. In street parties, squats, protest camps and alternative press, for example, social criticism is combined with cultural creativity in what is 'both a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance' (1998:27). The party protest, pleasure/politics fusion customary at DiY Cultural events 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'.

variant alternatives, multiple 'utopics'[4]—incongruous marginalia. Their *habitués* may subscribe to a vast range of alternative, or authentic, discourses and practices. They are thus heterogeneous zones and thresholds, with variant expectations held by pilgrims/inhabitants. As such, there is rarely any certainty of outcome. Alternative cultural heterotopias are indeterminate, 'proto-cultural' (Handelman 1990:20) public event-spaces—what I have elsewhere called 'hyper-liminal' performance zones (St John 1997; 1999a:Ch.2).

3. 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 reproduce long-standing divisions or even beget fission.

Many meanings—many 'ConFests'

There is a familiar banner at ConFest: 'strangers are friends you have not yet met'. While it is tempting to conceptualise a vast communitas, the presence of multiple publics maintaining sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary interpretations of the event-space, renders this problematical. Let me prove the point through several vignettes of different, often geographically juxtaposed, zones and the various expectations and motivations held by their *habitués*. It should be understood that ConFest consists of multiple sub-sites known as 'villages'[5]—a diverse conurbation of temporary autonomous zones (Bey 1991a) facilitated by a variety of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli 1996).

The *Spiral* village first appeared at Moama ConFest, Easter 1995, becoming a drug and alcohol-free community performance space. Many participants are members of Spiral Dance, a collective holding 'tribal' drumming and dance nights in Melbourne. According to Prion,[6] village co-ordinator in his mid-forties, *Spiral*, which has attracted many people in recovery from consciousness-alterant addictions and broken relationships, is about recreating 'sacred space in our community as a whole'. The village has usually featured a 'medicine wheel', a wide ring of rocks placed around a centrally positioned post. Such a 'sacred space'—where ConFest's 'clothing optional' status is openly exploited, and where ersatz native American 'Indians' are conspicuous—is designed to effect healing through dance and 'primal drumming'.

The *Forest* village is the principal node for environmental activists on site. This zone has functioned as a recruitment centre for logging blockades mounted in East Gippsland and anti-nuclear industry activism at Roxby Downs and Jabiluka. *Forest* features the GECO (Goongerah Environment Centre) organic/vegan kitchen which raises funds for the defence of the Goolengook and Otway Forests. Information about the current state of forest management, boycotts and blockades are disseminated by eco-radical tacticians. One experienced *Forest* activist, Banyalla, voices his frustration with Down to Earth's (DTE) ecologically quiescent constituency: '[T]he more activists get involved [in DTE/ConFest]

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

5. At Moama ConFest 1996/97, for example, there were about 21 villages.

6. I use pseudonyms for all interviewees except those who have requested or permitted use of their proper names.

the more ... you're gonna get people actually doing something [ie. promoting forest awareness], rather than just believing having seven days walking around in the nude is fuckin' alternative'.

In the *Tek Know* enclave, 'techno-shamans' manifest a digitally engineered aural sculpture, summoning the ambient, psy-trance or ethnodelic edges of techno music to foment a temporary 'Trance Dance' community—a 'fluoro Rainbow Tribe': 'all colours, all races, all as one' (from promotion). At Moama 1996/97, *Tek Know* attracted near 2000 electronic music enthusiasts over New Year's eve. The village had a main 'doof' (dance floor) and two 'chill' (rest) spaces. Many participants were aglow on the entactogen ecstasy or 'tripping' on acid. Adorned with folk-jewellery, hyper-fluoro wigs, layered leggings, or displaying insurgent t-shirt slogans and fluffy-toy totems, their senses were assaulted with an hypnotic throb, strobe-lights, fractal slides, disco balls, fire sculptures and industrial-art installations. Enthusiasts were said to experience a 'shamanic healing journey ... tuning in on mass [*sic*] to the dance energy: working from the physical, to access the emotional, transcending to the spiritual'. As techno-pagan co-ordinator, D.J. Krusty, maintains: the 'Trance Dance' ground is 'a sacred floor, a place to connect with our power'.

The *Spirituality* village is a tranquil meditative area located in an isolated pocket of the drug and alcohol free zone. It has normally accommodated a large marquee-shrine, complete with pastiche of portraits and photographs of the world's spiritual leaders, and at Moama 1996/97 was the site of a large earth-mandala image which had taken many ConFesters several days to complete. In his fifties, co-ordinator Sri Param Eswaran claims that the village's purpose is 'to let people understand the environment within themselves—the stars, meditation, chakras within the body'. Possessing diverse influences, Param holds fire meditation purification rites and Tantra workshops. According to one village neophyte, Tantra engenders 'a coupling of energies, the balance of femininity and masculinity, sustains sensuality and heightens awareness of one's own consciousness and that of others'. Through group mantras over several days, the same commentator stated that 'an ecstatic reverence' was experienced on New Year's eve—'a beautiful lightening of reality which I continue to feel' (McKinnon 1995:13).

Also known as the *Anarchist* village, *Food Not Bombs* has consisted of a kitchen/communal eating area and workshop/bookstore space. At Tocumwal Easter 1996, the kitchen provided organic vegan meals to ConFest participants and volunteers. There were several workshops per day conducted on themes including animal liberation, women and violence, ecosabotage, the legalisation of hemp, squatting, alternative media, transnational corporations and boycotting, and the abolition of work. *Food Not Bombs* co-ordinator, Acacia, is critical of those for whom ConFest is a 'kind of a theme park ... the Disney World of alternative lifestyles'. Anarchists object to the fleeting entertainment of the market and workshop culture. In their own workshop, 'why your alternative lifestyle won't change anything', held at Moama New Year 1996/97, the apolitical frivolity of on-site consumerism was contested.

ConFest is a 'realm of competing discourses' and practices, an alternative cultural heterotopia rushing toward consensus and harmony, but also yielding discord and division. My approach is, thus, 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. For Baumann, polyethnic ceremonies are significant moments over which there are competing interpretative claims. Likewise, I find congruity with Henry (1994), who, with a particular

local example in mind, regards the marketplace as a heterotopic 'hot-spot', a site of identity contestation. Carnivals, ceremonies and markets are, according to these commentators, characterised by ongoing apprehensiveness between converging constituents who stake claim to variant and often conflicting versions of the event-space.

Alternative lifestyle events provide furtive instances of such contested domains. Hetherington, for example, argues that Stonehenge, the site of a summer solstice festival in the 1970s and 1980s, is 'heterotopic': 'a space with many actors who all wish to project their ideas about society, their utopics, through it' (1996a:162). Glastonbury, the site of an annual alternative cultural mega-event, provides another case of contested meaning. A host of interests congregate around a site which is invested with a diversity of corresponding, though surely often incompatible, significations. Variously, an 'English Jerusalem', a centre of 'Celtic renaissance' or 'a stronghold of hippy counterculture' (Bowman 1993:36,42), the town of Glastonbury has played host to a range of Christian denominations, and to Sufis, Buddhists, Bahais, Hari Krsnas, New Age Travellers, self-proclaimed Pagans and Druids (1993:39).

With no 'official voice', 'high priests' or 'dogmatic presence', the Burning Man Festival presents a further example. In a populous annual techno-pagan gathering in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, 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, and sometimes highly volatile circumstances, is a reality made clear by the now international Rainbow Gatherings, which, as Niman (1997) contends, demonstrate a 'fundamental schism' in the 'Rainbow Family'—that between politics and religion. According to Niman, 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"' (1997:111). Indeed, Gatherings—ideally enabled through consensus-seeking and decision-making bodies ('councils' or 'circles')—are revealed to be constituted by enclaves of those harbouring irreconcilable ideologies and life-strategies. For instance, at 'A' camp (a ghetto for alcohol (ab)users), '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' (1997:128).

Australia's principal alternative lifestyle event presents intriguing parallels. Indeed, characterised as much by 'mutual misunderstanding' reinforcing differences between constituents as by forms of consensus, ConFest is the kind of 'polymorphic' context Eade and Sallnow (1991:5) hold for pilgrimage and religious cults. There is no consensus over the idea and place of ConFest. As the above vignettes demonstrate, participants possess varying motives and expectations, and assign different meanings to the event, such that they experience different, often contentious, 'ConFests'. They demonstrate that ConFest is differentially sacralised—that which is authentic or sacred to one group or individual may be profane or inauthentic to another. Those subscribing to similar authentica, and, therefore, similar 'ConFests', tend to gravitate toward and cluster around specific villages. We might,

then, identify several clusters of ConFesters,[7] an identification circumscribed through Erik Cohen's tourist modalities (1992).

First, there are the volunteers—those who, through their co-operation and service to the community, approximate Cohen's '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, are the post-tourist par excellence—the locals. They are 'the host community'. 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-space and to regard their contribution to it as 'their workshop'. These ConFest locals, some of whom adopt unco-operative 'ownership issues' as a result of their personal sacrifices, are somewhat insular and sometimes condescending towards tourist-participants.[8]

Committed to traditions of 'enlightenment' or 'struggle' rooted in DTE's mid-1970s efforts to seed 'a New Society', there are those who arrive with the ambition of 'putting on' or, moreover, 'doing' workshops—participating in the conferencing dimension of the event. As the selection of villages described above demonstrates, the alternatives expected and pursued on-site are multitudinous. It is a countersite wherein a crowd of 'vendors' and their potential clientele engage in the transaction of ideals, cosmic panaceas and political agendas. Some are principally committed to conducting 'inner work'. These 'esoteric tourists' (Goodman 1990:51), like Cohen's 'full-time drifter' (1973:100), engage in his 'experimental mode' of personal discovery through elective alterity. Obtaining a deeper awareness of self, it is their goal to become 'experienced' through exposure to a diversity of healing-arts modalities and therapeutic passage rites. Amongst such participants could be included the several couples 'married' by the Tantra Yoga spiritual community, *Ananda Marga*, near the earth-mandala at *Spirituality* on one evening at Moama 1996/97. A great majority of the 800 people who actually participated in this ritual-feast, sought to build upon a repertoire of self-growth techniques, their enhanced capacity to mobilise internal resources increasing their spiritual maturity.

For other publics, the outdoor conference environment is strategic to the ongoing fulfilment of political agendas. For instance, for semi-nomadic ferals and other celebrants and defenders of natural and cultural heritage (cf. St John 1999b; 2000), ConFest is a strategic platform for a radical ecological cause—a recruitment centre for a volunteer 'earth army'. Activists at *Forest* and anarchists at *Food Not Bombs*, work to mobilise support for various agendas and campaigns. These anarcho-pilgrims demonstrate an activist commitment to the serious business of resisting the parent culture, of mounting opposition to dominant socio-cultural patterns.

By contrast, the event attracts alienated hedonists who revel in the joyful and momentary 'transgressions' the festival licences. These ConFesters travel the 'Bohemian path' (Moore 1995). Often techno-music enthusiasts, 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). For such participants, many of whom will use consciousness alterants (usually marijuana,

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7. 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.

8. Another local species is the market vendor—the local service provider.

ecstasy and acid), ConFest is principally a Festival—a permissive topos engendering a Dionysian sense of vertigo, abandonment and excess. In the only literary depiction of ConFest to date, Dando (1996:149) describes the experience as a wild escapade: the author and his friend were 'like two feral goblins on acid ... we paint[ed] our faces tribal colours, became other people ... it's just like *Lord of the Flies*. It's chaos, anything could happen'.

And, finally, there are those who approximate the 'recreational' and 'experiential' tourist modes. 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. For participants from local and surrounding districts, ConFest is pure spectacle, an event 'put on' for their amusement. At New Year events, 'yobs' invade ConFest, often accessing the site through the Murray River on board high-powered boats with monikers like 'hard on', 'krak-a-fat' and 'mongrel'. Many are attracted by the prospect of observing a menagerie of erotic freaks and abject ferals. Perhaps buoyed by expectations of prelapsarian sexuality, of polymorphous perversity, many of these voyeurs, especially males 'tanked on grog', experience ConFest as a terrestrial paradise—a 'fantasy island' (Woods 1995). 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 with a mixture of fascination and revulsion.

Of course, there are variations within, and movement between, clusters. For instance, 'the workers' are far from an harmonious, non-factional unit. And, mirroring that which Maffesoli has conveyed for contemporary social life, an event 'network' (1996:145) encourages cross-membership such that participants occupy multiple sites (villages) of belonging and fluctuate between tourist mode/lifestyle clusters. The point is that, as suggested by the presence of multiple publics, there are divergent expectations and interpretations of the event-space. This convergence of alternative lifestyles and communities generates discord as tension develops between those subscribing to variant definitions of ConFest, variant agendas, 'truths', sacralities. Despite ideologies of inclusiveness, there are internal efforts to identify, contain and/or exclude 'foreigners'—a process long acknowledged as vital to community reproduction (cf. Cohen 1985). Indeed, the banner 'strangers are friends you have not yet met', resonates with the ideology of the 'authentically social' which is promoted to maintain successful tourist destinations (Selwyn 1996:21). That there is actually internal anxiety about the presence of 'strangers' reveals the totalised rendering of the event's capacity to deliquesce 'us'/'them' or 'self'/'other' distinctions, to be rather romantic and illusory. Moreover, like other communities, conflict surfaces as there is no consensus over that which constitutes 'foreign' or 'strange'.

It is clear that participants possess differential commitment to either of the event's Conferencing or Festival dimensions. For many 'hosts' and workshop facilitators, those attracted to the festive atmosphere of the contemporary summer event are 'alien'. This is the case, as their pursuits and behaviours pose a threat to ConFest—or, more pointedly, to the significance that 'locals' have personally invested in the event. As 'yobbo' castaways and 'doofers' on 'eccy' (ecstasy) trespass across the tranquil idyll of 'locals' and spiritualists like Param, they effectively 'endanger the sacred' (Sibley 1997), defile paradise, imperil their 'ConFest'. According to Prion, that which is for him 'the ConFest Spirit' is, for others, just 'vodka and scotch'. At Birdlands' ConFest 1995/96, one besieged commentator stated: 'I've never known so much booze at a ConFest ... A drunk yobbo

woman collapsed and spewed up near us on New Year's [eve] and we didn't even feel like helping her'. Workshop holders like Lorikeet, co-founder of *Wolfgang's Palace*,[9] find the presence of a horde of 'tourists' who arrive to consume rather than commit to a 'tribe', deplorable. For Ranji, an astrologer and veteran of the first ConFest at Cotter in 1976, ConFest used to be like a 'refuge ... an ashram ... a sort of a spiritual holiday'. But, akin to 'Torquay or Lorne on a New Year's Eve', today it approximates an amusement park.

Yet, those considered 'alien' arrive with their own expectations and may infuse ConFest with alternative meaning, such that the experience takes on a subterranean sacred significance independent from that of 'the locals'. Take *Tek Know* habitués for instance. Many 'existential' volunteers and pundits championing an 'official' account of ConFest , argue that techno music is an inauthentic violation of 'the ConFest spirit'. By contrast to that which transpires at *Spiral* (where putatively 'real' trance and community is augmented by African drums and didjeridu), as an amplified, pre-recorded and machine-made assemblage, *Tek Know* does not engender 'authentic' trance, nor is it deemed a genuine communal experience. Yet, adherents defend the authenticity of 'Trance Dance'. For them it is sacred, communal and real. Variant music-authenticity claimants mobilise their intellectual and material resources to promote and defend different 'ConFests'. And, as an authenticity war erupts, along with the possibility of local compromises, we witness the development of exclusionary tactics, rhizomatic hybridisation and, ultimately, an event diaspora (St John 2001).

The liminoid body

While inattention to the inclusive *and* exclusive configurations of 'rituoid' (F. Turner 1990:152) phenomena exposes shortcomings in the Turners' analyses, an inclination toward the reflexive and transcendent aspects of the *limen* signals a further deficiency in the paradigm. 'Embodiment' has rapidly become an integral concern of cultural theorists and ethnographers (cf. Csordas 1994). Performance researchers have understood that physical 'incorporation' is central to such processes as gendering—both in and outside ritual contexts (cf. Butler 1990; Mitchell 1998). Yet the ethnographic and analytical circumscription of corporeal circumstances particular to (post)modern liminality is in its infancy. Perhaps this is because liminal embodiment, like elective physical mutations, gender disruptions, erotic contacts and carnal communions transpiring in moments 'betwixt and between' were only ever provided cursory treatment by Turner.

Though he later urged that we bring anthropology 'back into touch with the bodily as well as the mental life of humankind' (foreword to Schechner 1985: xii), Turner was not an 'anthropologist of the body'. Although acknowledging Bakhtin (1968), whose 'grotesque realism' provides a useful approach to the study of public events, Turner was never a strong materialist.[10] He stated:

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9. *Wolfgang's Palace* is an interactive ritual theatre troupe and community near Colac, Victoria, where the key points of the pagan calendar are observed with demonstrations of original interpretations of Ancient Greek mythological themes. At Birdlands, members of *Wolfgang's Palace* created a space where they performed a play on one night. They also hosted theatre sports and the 'Freak Olympics', which involved four teams (membership being determined by each participants' Zodiacal element) competing in a series of games.

10. Despite an interest in the development of 'neurosociology' (cf. Turner 1985a; 1985b) and an understanding of the neurophysiological causes of transcendent, or 'Orphic', experiences (cf. Turner 1992:154-5).

> Perhaps we are only now beginning to learn the ambiguous, ludic language of what Bakhtin calls 'the people's second world', a language as much of verbal as of non-verbal signs and symbols, always pregnant with good sense, always rich in metaphors and other figurative expressions, often scatological to counterbalance the chilling refinement of spiritual and political repression, but always charged with communitas, the likely possibility of immediate human communion. (Turner 1983:190)

Here, an interest in the cognitive dimensions of 'the people's second world', in the 'ludic language' of 'figurative expressions', is transparent. Turner's liminars are more preoccupied with reflexive semiotica than gratifying erotica. The pursuit of libidinous desire does not figure in the achievement of an anti-structural transcendence. Quite simply, ludic embodiment, carnality and sensuous 'communions' are unrecognised. How can the available heuristic toolbox be refitted such that certain somatic realities are not overlooked or undervalued in the analysis of public events?

The subjunctive pleasurescape

ConFest is a paroxysmic exemplar of society's 'subjunctive mood', by which Turner meant a playful mood of 'wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis', a world of 'maybe', 'could be' and 'as if—the mood of were, in 'if I were you' (Turner 1982b:83; 1984:20-21; 1992:149). As opposed to the quotidian 'indicative mood', Turner's subjunctivity is a heightened 'mood' of reflexivity and transcendence.[11] While this seems incontrovertible, I seek to cast the role of the body in subjunctive performance, in art, in play. More specifically, I seek to figure liminoid embodiment, such as optional body modifications, sensual pleasures and transgendering enactments, within the permissive and transgressive parameters of festal cultures, events and spaces. Shields (1990) has begun exploring liminoid pleasure in his analysis of Brighton beach. ConFest provides an especially significant arena for an exploration of embodied subjunctivity since, there, one's art—one's body—is public, on display, on parade. There, the body, as 'the least mediated of all media' (Bey 1994a:2), is the principal medium through which one engages in experiments of the self.

ConFest is a 'banana time' (Schechner 1993:42) of licensed transgression. In common with other seasonal celebrations and tourist behaviour, such alternative lifestyle events are characterised by 'free or ludic recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird' (Turner 1982b:82). They are also Batailleian worlds of taboo breaking, 'of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled' (Stallybrass and White 1986:8). A sensuous 'representational' realm wherein 'the forces of uncertainty in play' (Handelman 1990:70) are valued and consequential, ConFest is an unpredictable and experimental space wherein 'carnal knowing' is (re)lived. According to Mellor and Shilling (1997:56), 'carnal knowing' is 'a form of gaining information about the world which is thoroughly embodied and connected to people's senses and sensualities'. It is a form of public knowledge suppressed in Protestant modernity, which nostalgic contemporaries desire to (re)experience. ConFest is a unique site for such a return as its culture is not 'abstract, fleshless, mediated by

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11. For Turner, play is basically transcendent and reflexive, possessing both sacred and instrumental potency. It involves Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow state' (Turner 1974), yet also provides a 'metalanguage' (Bateson 1958) for commentaries on self and society (Turner 1985a:263-4).

machine or by authority or by simulation ... [but is] face-to-face, body-to-body, breath-to-breath (literally a conspiracy)' (Bey 1994a:30).

As ConFest is a 'clothing optional' space, various states of disrobement are permitted within the event's precincts. Though nudity is less prevalent today—given the increased intensity of the 'tourist gaze' of 'recreational' ConFesters—participants generally become less inhibited over the course of an event, temporarily breaching body taboos and achieving embodied states of liberating alterity. Long-term volunteers express the virtues of nudity outside the private sphere. According to front gate co-ordinator, Trev:

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

For one-time DTE director and secretary Graham, exposure to the elements is a liberating experience. 'I love nudity... I'm not an exhibitionist, I just love being naked. It's free. You can feel the breeze on your body, and the sun, and the dirt, and the dust'. Such 'freedom' is extended to bodily functions. As toilets and showers are non-gender specific and non-hermetic, performing everyday functions can be a confronting experience for participants accustomed to segregated and sealed cubicles with automatic waste and water disposal. Excreting into pits under the open sky, defecation represents an especially confronting visual, olfactory, auditory and 'organic' experience for novices. According to Chris, 'having a crap beside a stranger' was the most disarming experience he had at ConFest, an experience inspiring this past director to design what he called the 'Shit Together' facility consisting of non-enclosed 'shitters' (toilets) at ConFest New Year 1997/98.

Various on-site locations are unique loci of festal carnality. At the *Massage* village, various techniques—from Reiki to Tantric—are practised and reciprocated. A plethora of tactile therapies and healing-arts has been available in zones like *Healing, Spiral* and *Spirituality*. Yet, somatic communions may take highly erotic forms. The *Pagan, Queer* and *Sexuality* villages have been repositories for play shops providing the opportunity to explore, for example, polyfidelity, 'queer collaboration', Tantra, even 'macrame and bondage—BYO rope'. One participant recalls a *Pagan* village denizen 'dressed in little leather pants whip himself over a woman lying on the ground in a pentagram in front of a small crowd of onlookers'. *Queer* has been host to numerous workshops and educational sessions on same-sex orientation, cross-dressing and transsexuality.[12]

This realm of carnal possibility is a bacchanal 'coming out'. As Cedar, a facilitator of 'flirting' and 'radical intimacy' workshops, explains:

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

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12. Including those facilitated by self-designated 'queer-hippie' Nori-May Welby, whose web site can be found at http://www.cat.org.au/ultra/noz.html

Such intemperate disinhibition may be more 'public'. The celebrations at ConFest's central fire circle at Moama over New Year 1994/95 present a pertinent example of Rabelaisian abandonment. Thousands of temporary primitives, many naked, adorned with mud, ochre and body-paint, participated in a percussion driven tumult well into the new year. They encircled a huge bonfire and an impromptu orchestra congregated to produce an incessant, often chaotic, hand drum rhythm. There was an inner ring for wilder celebrants, primal voguers and temporary exhibitionists—many of whom, no longer an audience to themselves, were in or near states of entrancement. As hundreds remained to see in the dawn, two women fell in passionate embrace in front of the drums. They seemed oblivious to onlookers, one of whom was a disconsolate male who had been previously mauling one of the now erotically engaged.

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

Carnal sociality

According to Mellor and Shilling, the modern desire for 'embodied grounds of knowledge' (1997:29), has stimulated the (re)appearance of 'sensual solidarities'. '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' (1997:162).

These 'solidarities', recalling the world-body correspondence of 'archaic grotesque' (Bakhtin 1968) where the body outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits and becomes mutable, mark 'the resurgence of the "shadow kingdom" of effervescence, and of the sacred as a sensually experienced phenomenon' (Mellor and Shilling 1997:17). While Turner arguably had the greatest opportunity to chart the terrain of something like 'sacred corporeality', the communions he had in mind tended to be clinically social, not somatic. Spontaneous communitas was a temporary horizontal epoch of minds and souls, but not bodies. In their attention to the sensuousness of ephemeral and intense social moments, Maffesoli and Bey have developed ideas which are both complementary to, and advancements upon, this paradigm. Although both authors tend to replicate a utopianism located in Turner, their attention to carnal sociality holds a fresh approach.

Expounding the apparent re-enchantment of contemporary social life, for Maffesoli, postmodernity is characterised by the appearance of nebulous 'neo-tribes' resisting the universal codes of morality imposed by the Prometheanism of the modern era. These protean aggregations are internally diverse, unstable micro-cultures of sentiment and aestheticisation, which, it is argued, are distinctly disengaged from the political and returning to 'local ethics'—an 'empathetic sociality' (Maffesoli 1996:11). A Dionysian 'mass' of neo-tribes are said to constitute an 'underground centrality', which, we are

informed, is the source of *puissance*, which is—by contrast with institutional power or *pouvoir*—the 'inherent energy and vital force of the people' (1996:1).[13]

Apparently unaware of Turner, in earlier work (1993) Maffesoli began to articulate the social and historical exigency of *puissance*, of collective non-rationality. 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)

And it transpires that such wildness exhibits a sacred sensuality, an eroticised anti-structure revealed as 'passional logic', which, it is claimed, 'has always animated and once again animates the social body ... defract[ing] into a multiplicity of effects that inform daily life' (1993:1). 'Passional logic' is a theme most manifest in the 'orgiasm', a universal 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 Durkheimian 'logic' of such a condition is that 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 aloof, ephemeral and 'unproductive life', there is a Batalleian desire for loss, for spending. The orgiastic reaches a licentious, contagious and unrestrainable climax in the festal—those moments occasioning transgressions of imposed morality (1993:92).

Though attention to a sacred, sensualised sociality resonates with the approach of Bey,[14] the 'TAZ/Immediatist project' connotes liberatory struggle. A post-structuralist strategist and provocateur of the imagination, Bey advocates the 'total liberation of desire', which cannot be achieved through the attainment of phantom needs manufactured under capitalism, but through free associations of individuals—non-mediated, non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical. As an 'Immediatist' solution to 'the addiction to bitter loneliness which characterizes consciousness in the 20th century' (Bey 1994a:19), an antidote to the 'immiserating consequences of the Media', that which Bey calls the 'temporary autonomous zone' or 'the TAZ'—a ' ... guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen before the State can crush it' (1991a:101)—has been adopted by multitudes as an evocation of immanent transgression.[15]

Although his call for 'Utopia Now' (Bey 1993) evokes the almost apocalyptic agency of communitas, like Maffesoli, Bey had not evidently encountered Turner. Furthermore, while the 'orgiasm' and the TAZ both conceptualise the liminal demesne of *jouissance*, the TAZ is overtly pregnant with the creative possibilities arising from 'radical conviviality' (Bey 1994b), amounting, therefore, to a liberatory rendering of the *limen*. Bey contends that

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13. According to Evans (1997:227), 'underground centrality' 'bestows, like the Freudian unconscious, strength, vitality, and "effervescence" to social life'.

14. Hakim Bey is a pseudonym of Peter Lamborn Wilson. Although he has published work under his proper name, I remain faithful to the pseudonym here.

15. Bey's 'Immediatism' can be likened to Bataille's 'eroticism'. Physical, emotional or religious, 'eroticism' refers to 'a heightened experience which transgresses the self, wipes away the discontinuities that separate individuals, and accomplishes a temporary fusion of selves' (Mellor and Shilling 1997:182).

'true desires—erotic, gustatory, olfactory, musical, aesthetic, psychic, and spiritual—are in a context of freedom of self and other in physical proximity and 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 1993). As denizens of the TAZ are wholly engaged and not separated, replaced by, or turned into, commodities, it is ultimately liberating: festival 'as resistance 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' (Bey 1994b).

As an immediate domain, ConFest is a return to the 'archaic grotesque'. There, otherwise hidden, closed off and commodified, the body is uncovered, permeable and celebrated. *Puissance*, or perhaps more astutely, 'radical conviviality', transpires in the heat of spontaneous fire circles, conferences, 'funshops' and conspiratorial conclaves. Neo-tribes gravitate toward topographically unique sites which can mutate into TAZs. These liminoid communities themselves become on-site 'tribes', autonomous 'sensual solidarities' meshed in a labyrinthine counterscape (cf. St John 1997:182-4). The *Art* and *Tek Know* villages are two such nodes in this network. As festal-tribes, each expresses a 'passional logic'. In *Art*, unclothed masses bathe in mud and ochre pits, their chthonian exteriors perhaps later decorated with fluorescent murals. As ConFesters submit their bodies to wet earth, joining a grotesque symposium, or 'tribe', of 'mud people', standards of the 'classical body' are subverted. Enacting a kind of 'resistance through dirt' (Hetherington 1996b:43-4), a celebration of the grotesque body, ConFest 'mud people' become temporarily 'primitive' (Woods 1995:141).

Tek Know is a Dionysian insurrection mirroring broader 'rave-derived' (Luckman 1998:45) strategies through which youth are 'disappearing themselves' with the purpose of restoring 'contact' (cf. Melechi 1993). Despite conspicuous sartorial displays, *Tek Know* is a zone where dance enthusiasts dissolve into the body—their own, and that of others. Surrendering to the assemblage, 'Trance Dancers' can feel profoundly connected to those who are on the same (dance) 'track'—who share the experience. Their experience is akin to that which Jordan (1995:129) describes as 'an ongoing inducement into a desubjectified state of ... rapture ... a communal state of euphoria', a collective body, which may approximate Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body without Organs' (1995:125).[16] Being 'alone together' (Moore 1995:207), perhaps more accurately describes the 'passional logic' of 'Trance Dance'—where 'cyborgians' share the experience of 'emigrating inwards' (Goffman, in Malbon 1998:275), each desiring the intercorporeal estate of the dance floor and the inviolable 'space' it offers them.

In distinctive ways, both festal-tribes demonstrate carnal communitas. It should be pointed out, however, that while some villages are characteristically chthonian (e.g. *Art*, with its mud-tribes), or cyborgian (e.g. *Tek Know*, with its techno-tribes), others openly display the kind of political strategies ostensibly foundering in 'the time of the tribes' (e.g. *Forest*, with its eco-tribes). The fluid 'polycentric' dimension of this alternative cultural heterotopia stimulates a promiscuous nomadism conditioning the establishment of 'heteroclite' identities (Hetherington 1996b:43). Yet, as the counterscape is also characterised by implacability and subterfuge, a total inter-'tribal' *puissance* is

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16. Yet this wider 'body' is not, as Pini (1997:124-5) suggests, just a collection of human
    bodies, but a 'mind/body/technology assemblage'.

unattainable. In a possibility Maffesoli does not entertain, inter-tribal division and impasse foments conflict and (re)produces difference.

Conclusion

One effect of acknowledging the 'sacred corporeality' of public events is to strengthen the logic of a utopian paradigm. After all, in a contemporary alternative lifestyle festival, amidst the chaos of local sounds, styles and sentiments, a host of playful, sometimes erotic, coalitions engender feelings of profound continuity. Indeed, 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'—they quite literally come 'down to earth' (Bakhtin 1968:255, 20). Yet, while there is evidence of festal-wide solidarity which demonstrates a common desire to (re)live 'communion', to (re)produce 'the ConFest spirit', this can never be wholly realised since event-publics own competing versions of communion, the sacred. Therefore, the event-community does not enjoy consensus over that which is considered 'non' or 'un' ConFest practice. Although there is evidence of harmonious co-operation between diverse lifestyle clusters, there is also dissension between 'tribals' maintaining variant 'ConFests'. Oscillating between inclusive and exclusive tendencies, this pilgrimage destination is not 'impregnated by unity'.

There is, therefore, need to approach Victor Turner's *limen* with caution. In particular, I have taken issue with the unqualified application of communitas. I have argued that an essentially consensual and non-carnal legacy challenges researchers to take up new directions in the analysis of public events. Therefore, in my translation of ConFest, I introduced the concept of *alternative cultural heterotopia*, and adopted a body-oriented conceptualism to describe a liminoid zone of contestation and carnality. Alternative lifestyle events—distinctive cultural performances of which ConFest is a local variant—are demonstrably heterogeneous spaces inhabited by festal-tribes. While pilgrimage research provisions for the investigation of a contested counterscape, the co-application of the ideas of Michel Maffesoli and Hakim Bey has aided conceptualisation of what is also a permissive pleasurescape. Research has, thus, demanded the forging of an approach which apprehends the din of voices and morass of bodies in public events.

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