

‘Heal thy Self - thy Planet’: ConFest, Eco-Spirituality and the Self/ Earth Nexus

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*Australia’s popular calendar event of alternatives, ConFest (Conference/Festival), is a principal location for the (re)affirmation of alternative lifestyle sacra. Attending to Victor Turner’s “cultural drama”, this article draws on fieldwork and archival research to circumscribe the complications of Self and Earth within this public event. After charting the manifestations of personal growth and environmental consciousness at ConFest, I demonstrate that, for the alternative lifestyler, the Self and the Earth are embroiled in a complex ‘web of significance’. What I call the **Self-Earth nexus** – signalled by the ConFest theme “Heal thy Self - thy Planet” – is characterised by interconnection (a sense of profound interdependence) and responsibility (an ethical self-commitment). I give detail to on-site expressions of Neo-Pagan **eco-spirituality** which ‘dramatise’ this nexus.*

Introduction

Australia’s popular calendar event of alternatives, ConFest (Conference/Festival), occasions the (re)affirmation of alternative lifestyle **sacra**. Attending to Victor Turner’s liminal modality of ‘drama’, this article draws on fieldwork and archival research¹ to circumscribe the complicated articulations of Self and Earth within this public event. After charting the manifestations of personal growth and environmental consciousness at ConFest, I demonstrate that Self and Earth are embroiled in a complex ‘web of significance’. What I call the **Self-Earth nexus** – signalled by the ConFest theme “Heal thy Self - thy Planet” – is characterised by interconnection (a sense of profound interdependence) and responsibility (an ethical self-commitment). Furthermore, I demonstrate how ConFest ‘dramatises’ this nexus - manifesting in expressions of Neo-Pagan **eco-spirituality**.

It is worthwhile backgrounding these ‘arms’. The “Age of Affluence”, which Roszak (1995) also called “the sixties” (delineated as the period between 1942–72), saw tertiary educated adolescents of the new middle classes suffer from “affluent alienation” - transfixed by the romantic notion of “personal freedom” (Gerster and Bassett, 1991:38). In the 1960s and ‘70s, this ‘youth movement’ sought ‘rebellion’, ‘experience’ and ‘spontaneity’ through consciousness alterants, sexuality, therapeutic

techniques, new religious movements and consumer capitalism. While some argued that Wolfe's "me decade" (the '70s) was a result of growing discontentment with alienating, self-fragmenting modern technocracies (Berger et al., 1974), others, like Inglehart, following Maslow, have suggested that economic prosperity triggered advanced needs - especially "self-actualisation" - and their fulfilment (in Heelas, 1992:149). In Australia, it is clear that a preoccupation with individuation, with an authentic self, gathered momentum from the early seventies. As the psychologies of Wilhelm Reich and Carl Jung gained popularity among alternative lifestylers, the children of 'the silent revolution' concerned themselves with the growth of the mind, body and spirit. As Cock (1979:215) argued, the "back to the land" or communitarian push of the 1970s and '80s was seen to signify a shift away from a direct challenge to the "Corporate State" towards changing oneself. Communes and intentional communities provided the social environment for "self-actualisation" and the expression of one's "authentic self" (Munro-Clarke, 1986:219). The trend continued in an explosion of retreats, weekend intensives and short duration workshops designed for psycho-spiritual (re)growth in the 1980s and '90s. This has provided fertile ground for the burgeoning Self religion of the New Age.

At the same time, since the 1960s local urban middle class populations of advanced capitalist nations have been the chief proponents of a globalist sensibility decrying 'the death of nature'. Ecosophical subsidiaries of that which Dobson (1995) dubbed "ecologism" - principally deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism - emerged between the 1960s and 1990s to counter perceived environmental catastrophe. In Australia, these philosophies have taken root within the broader ambit of a new environmental sensibility which is also shaped by an appreciation of indigenous Australian land management practices. They have informed the communitarianism referred to above, along with campaigns opposing resource development mounted from the late '70s. The new sensibility nurturing these eco-philosophies and practices has inspired - especially among radical ecologists (cf. Merchant, 1992; St John, 2000) - an emergent 'green ethics' and/or 'spirituality' in which an appreciation of the sacred in nature is paramount.

Just as personhood and politics are difficult, if not impossible, to regard in isolation, as is clear in a range of contemporary cultural formations, self-growth is contiguous with commitments to sustainable ecology. As my discussion of ConFest will highlight, these trends fuse *in situ* to (re)create protean spiritual (sub)cultures. This (re)creation transpires at an alternative cultural pilgrimage destination which, according to ConFest disciple Kurt Svendsen (1999:39) - likening the event to India's Khumb-Mela - is "the pre-eminent Spiritual Convergence in Australia, if not the Western World".

Cultural Drama

For Victor Turner, “cultural dramas” such as rites, festivals, exhibitions, literature, film, theatre and sport, are meta-communicative devices informing participants of society’s most cherished symbols, beliefs and practices (Turner, 1984). In such “privileged moments”, participants are reflexively apprised of or reacquainted with their “ultimate concerns” (Tillich in MacAloon, 1984:250). Stimulating collective inquiry, they incite personal and public introspection upon issues of weight and moment. Cultural dramas are thus realms of potential, charged repositories for the (re)construction of meaning, the (re)constitution of identity, the (re)production of culture. Public events represent particularly potent cultural dramas, not least since the collective attention to transcendent concerns within their precincts potentiates “spontaneous *communitas* (Turner, 1969:131).³ According to Turner, two types of knowledge are communicated in cultural dramas. First, “sacred and eternal law” may be presented to neophytes. Here, the **sacra** are transmitted: mysteries, origin myths and cosmic law are taught to the uninitiated, and cultural and religious values, axioms and principles are communicated. The second is potentially **sacrilegious** knowledge, that which may be subversive, threatening to transgress “the most sacred texts, the mightiest rulers and their commandments”. While the first ‘type’ of knowledge is usually communicated in initiation rites, the second is common to events possessing a ludic atmosphere, festivals, wherein liminaries are granted freedom to scrutinise and question the conditions of their existence (Turner, 1985:236).

As a unique festival, ConFest has harnessed and fused both ‘types’ of knowledge. Here is a circumstance where the transmission of sacred ‘truths’ coincides with variegated dissension from hegemonic discourse and practice. Indeed, that which is revered and that which is heretical are likely **the same** - sacra transmitted are those which agitate or rupture ‘truths’ the parent culture holds dear. There is thus no clear distinction between ‘law’ and ‘freedom’, the sacra and the sacrilegious. The sacrilegious is the sacra. While a striking characteristic of ConFest – which permits the collective experimentation with alternatives - this fusion is not uncommon to events appearing in the (post)modern era where the ‘antinomian egg containing both law and freedom, which is ritual’s tribal form ... [has] cracked open’ (Turner, 1985:236-7).

Multifarious marginalia circulate under the greater marquee of ConFest. Hundreds of workshops present a dazzling array of options and engender meta-reflexivity. Participants champion the principles of a proposed new: “Age”, “Jerusalem”, “cosmos”, “tribe”, “spirit”, “consciousness”, “millennium”. Furthermore, with “ultimate concerns” dramatised via ramified performance genres transpiring at multiple venues – quite literally a multi-cultural drama - the effect is “hyper-liminal” (St John, 1997:173-4). Nevertheless, I isolate two foundational tropes for a majority of participants - Self growth and Earth consciousness⁴ – and, furthermore, demonstrate their intimate connection. With the evocative theme of the Walwa 1990/91 ConFest

("Heal thy Self - thy Planet") in mind, I will first describe the respective components of this nexus.

"Heal thy Self" - Alternative Healing

ConFesters are exposed to a diversity of alternative healing modalities.⁵ As Professor *Ceteris Paribus* (1996) explains, "all spectra of modalities find commodious nestling space in [the] capacious, multi-dimensional, loving bosom" of ConFest. While many of these modalities reflect an insurgent personalism approximating the monistic religion of the self, or "Self-spirituality" of which Heelas (1996) speaks, and invariably promote an approach wherein the mind, body and spirit are held as integral aspects of the person or self, the self is often not considered to be separate from the wider socio-cultural, familial context. In an orgy of complementarity, a host of healers - practitioners of Chinese medicine, herbalists, sannyasans, dream interpreters, technoshamans, itinerant psychonauts, self styled gurus and past life therapists - converge with a synergy of holistic preventatives, panaceas and DiY remedies for the afflicted self. Offering "psychotechnologies" (Ross, 1992:539), they seek to empower or enable individuals "to mobilize internal resources" (McGuire, 1988:16) to heal themselves. Traditionally, a kaleidoscope of preventative healing and growth workshops have been offered: religious and metaphysical practice, spiritual 'work', tactile therapies, dietary regimes, botanic medicines, psychedelics. At Berri in South Australia, the "Healing" village accommodated:

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

The following are some of the holistic practices transmitted during the period of research: "flower essences and gem elixirs", "didge healing", "somatic integration", holistic massage, Reiki, "kundalini energising", "pyramid meditation", "psychedelic spirituality", chanting techniques and Shamanic journeying. As workshopping neophytes build up a repertoire of self-diagnostic techniques, remedies, dietary patterns, therapeutic relationships (often attributed to and borrowed from indigenous, Oriental and Celtic sources), they may be initiated into or upgrade their awareness of 'the life force', 'hidden wisdom', balances and 'energies'. Akin to a spiritual 'supermarket', consumption is not dissimilar to that occurring at New Age festivals and centres like Glastonbury (cf. Bowman, 1993:55).

As subtle and provocative gestures of refusal, practices pursued and discourse digested disclose a dissatisfaction with the curative and interventionist characteristics of professional allopathic medicine **and** with the doctrinal, hierarchic and paternal character of conventional religion. As such, biomedicine and the Church are both implicitly and explicitly contested. There is a tendency towards holism and voluntarism

in the healing arts and new spiritualities. In alternative health care the emphasis is upon 'healing' rather than 'curing'. The latter generally refers to the removal or correction of organic pathology, and may not necessarily involve 'healing' (O'Connor, 1995:28) which encompasses a holistic approach to human wellbeing. In alternative spiritualities, "detraditionalising practices" (Heelas, 1996:23) signify a turning away from the dogma of religious institutions, towards a privileging of the self (the 'inner' or 'higher Self', and 'intuition') as the ultimate source of authority and nucleus of responsibility.

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

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

Processes by which individuals are enabled to (re)create their identities, to achieve spiritual maturity, to **become**, are critical. Many workshops are a powerful expression of the sanctity of the person and the valued "sovereign right to self-discovery" (Roszak, 1979:3) apparent in modern societies - where individuals can enhance personal autonomy as they "have the resources to invest in their own self-realisation" (Melucci, 1989:137). This accounts for the significance of the journey theme in performance, interactive theatre, rites, workshops and, moreover, for the distinct authority of Jungian psychology.⁶ Indeed, the journey is critical for the growth and/or healing of the self (to 'move beyond ego'). Though the self (and the process of self-objectification) may be deified, the sacred self is not ego-centric, closed, inflexible, alone. Such is made clear in the barrage of therapies promoting the necessity for the dissolution of boundaries (e.g. between mind/body, self/other, anima/animus, local/global).

"Heal thy Planet" - Earth Consciousness

Advancing awareness of environmental despoliation has seen the emergence of a new Earth (or global) sensibility - an 'ecological consciousness' (Eder, 1990:37). According to Dobson (1995:45), 'the Earth is a living being of immense complexity that ought to be the object of our wondrous contemplation, rather than the source of

satisfaction for our rapacious material greed'. It has been argued that attention to the Earth's 'limits to growth' and concomitant conscientious lifestyle adaptations were stimulated by the photographic image of the planet from space:

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

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

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

DTE logo.



Workshops endorse eco-consciousness, as numerous activist organisations and ideologues use the outdoor conferencing atmosphere to seek support for green

philosophical, political and/or spiritual agendas: deep ecology, eco-feminism, intentional community, alternative technology, permaculture, animal liberation, blockade techniques. Various villages (“Forest”, “Earth Sharing”, “Nuclear Free”, “Green Connections”), facilitated by eco-tribes like Jabiluka Action Group, Goongerah Environment Centre and Otway Ranges Environment Network, have been sites for the dissemination of ecological awareness and recruitment centres for anti uranium mining and old growth logging campaigns. As one workshop holder claimed, “we’re all barracking for nature”. Here, there is general consensus that dichotomies like individual/environment, human/nature, personal/political must be overcome, and that, by ‘acting locally’, individuals can make a difference.

Self-Earth Nexus

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

The contemporary desire to heal “thy Planet” is taken to begin locally, and the locales are the Self (mind/body/spirit) **and** immediate social, cultural and physical environments. Commitments include: the (re)turn to spiritual path(s) (e.g. New Age⁷ or Neo-Pagan⁸); the adoption of anti-consumption ethics (e.g. wise energy use, diet, a disciplined commitment to “refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle”); and membership in autonomous eco-communities and activist environmental organisations. At the same time, eco-consciousness, expressed through various social, political and spiritual commitments, is a formula for individuation - for the self’s wellbeing. Therefore, “Heal thy Planet – thy Self” is equally applicable. As Barry Griffiths (1981:11) announced at Glenlyon in 1981, “[w]e must join together and heal the Earth, which is also the only way we can heal ourselves”.⁹

The positive ramifications of **working** locally were championed from the inception of the DTE movement. Jim Cairns’ Reichian inspired psycho-political liberationism is an early manifestation. At Glenlyon, facilitators predicted that on-site ‘work’ (spiritual, social, community, political) may usher in a “New Age”. In

these examples, macro transformations (new social/global consciousness) depend upon micro labours (self/local behaviour). They conform to “critical mass” theory, which holds that if enough individuals work towards a similar spiritual or social goal, a critical threshold will be crossed.¹⁰ “Heal thy Self - thy Planet” clearly elicits the thrust of this theory. Though this may be translated in the rather transparent popular sentiment that “the planet will heal itself when we attend to healing ourselves”, it also evokes responsive environmental ethics (signified by the now familiar axiom ‘think globally/act locally’).¹¹

What I have called the **Self-Earth nexus** implies an intentional responsiveness which relies in large part upon a sense of interconnectivity (which is also articulated in the various earlier mentioned ecosophies). Communicated in workshops and redolent in the discourse of participants, these complementary and often conflicting strategies possess the unifying pretences: (1) that Self and Earth are related ecologically, and, as a consequence; (2) that individuals can resolve current or prevent potential environmental abuse (“Heal ... thy Planet”) by ‘acting locally’.

Neo-Paganism as Eco-Spirituality

Manifestations of contemporary “Nature Religion” (Albanese, 1990) exemplify what I am calling the **Self-Earth nexus**. A nature oriented religiosity, or **eco-spirituality**, Neo-Paganism provides a case in point. A growing discontent with what are revealed to be the strong anthropocentric and patriarchal foundations of western science and Judeo-Christianity has fashioned the appeal of Neo-Paganism. The latter is a loose-knit polytheistic movement purportedly without hierarchy or doctrine, possessing diverse manifestations (cf. Hume, 1997:54-7). Celebrating the seasonal, lunar and life/death cycles, its practitioners advocate an ontology of engagement with the world. For Luhrmann (1993:220,232), in Neo-Paganism:

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

Not necessarily proponents of eschatology, Neo-Pagans celebrate “being at home in [their] bodies and in nature” (Harvey, 1997:141). As a celebration of one’s physical presence in nature, Neo-Paganism is an expression of “sacred ecology” (Harris, 1997), or that which Harvey calls “somatic ecology” (1997:131). Neo-Paganism might then be interpreted as a celebration of ecology, an eco-centric resacralisation of the world - an “ecological spirituality” (Taylor, 1995). It is apparent that Neo-Pagans subscribe to a system of correspondences within which all is believed to be profoundly related. They are deeply aware of the need for re-enchantment, for humans to acknowledge through symbol and action their connection to nature. It is, then, also apparent that adherents are determined to ‘return to’, ‘live in balance with’,

'defend' and 'heal' the Earth (Gaia). Take the philosophy of Australia's Pagan Festival Group:

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

It is characteristic of practitioners and sympathisers that they accept responsibility for their own actions, which for many means taking particular precautions to avoid dishonouring the natural world. Indeed, as it promotes a respect and reverence for the Earth, pantheism is uniquely qualified to lend support to environmental ethics (Levine in Crowley, 1998:178). Harvey (1997:126-42) argues Neo-Paganism evidences a nascent "Green Spirituality". Practitioners express this attitude: Paganism is the "spirituality of the ecological movement" according to one witch interviewed by Adler (in Roszak, 1979:41). For one of Hume's (1997:44) informants, ecological awareness is 'a religious duty'. Sensing the emergence of "eco-Wicca", which she ties to the kind of "terra-ist" pro-activism I have explored elsewhere (St John, 1999b; 2000), Crowley (1998:177) conveys the common perception amongst young Wiccans that "to be at one with nature in one's innerself is no longer enough".¹²

Over the past two decades, Paganism has experienced growing popularity in Australia as the appearance of events designed to celebrate nature oriented spirituality indicate (cf. Hume, 1995:7; 1997:36-9; Rodgers, 1995:34).¹³ Attracting a large contingent of Pagans (individuals and groups), ConFest 'trades' in the kind of eco-spirituality which is intrinsic to Paganism.¹⁴ At Baringa near Wangaratta in Victoria (1984/85), the shamanic group Dolphin Tribe and members of Dark Circle banded together under the sign "Pagans - Wicca, Shamanism, Magick" (Tim, 1985:18). Afterwards, Ennelle reflected upon the potentials for using:

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

In the contemporary event, paganism is pervasive. Many participants approximate what Luhrmann (1989:76-85) has called 'non-initiated paganism'. As Orryelle, the architect of an interactive ritual initiation cycle weaving "a tapestry of ancient mythologies and modern technologies" called "The Labyrinth" (at Moama Easter 1997), remarked:

probably almost everyone at the festival is 'pagan' in some manner or other. Definitely nature religions are a major focus at ConFest. People there seem generally more connected with their roots and ancestry than in mainstream society.¹⁵

In the “Pagan” village and elsewhere around the site, workshops on “Celtic mythology”, “meditation for pagans”, “survival as a modern witch”, “men’s and women’s mysteries” and other manifestations of ad hoc occultism have transpired. Furthermore, full moon, seasonal and Earth rites have been enacted along with other eco-spiritual sub-cultural dramas such as “Wild Women” and “Trance Dance”.

Wild Women and Trance Dance

At the centre of one observable event-pedigree is Goddess spirituality – expressive of an Earth-centred spiritual movement especially appealing to females. Challenging scientific and Judeo-Christian ideologies of separation and transcendence, Starhawk (1979) is a popular proponent of woman’s connectedness to the world (to nature) and, as a consequence, her Earth-protecting and healing roles. Furthermore, the feminine is valorised in most Pagan manifestations. Indeed, an Earth-centred “matriarchal Paganism” – “the rule of the Goddess” (or the “Chthonic imperative”) – is even advocated (Roberts, 1998). ConFest has been heir to this tradition as is evidenced by the Goddess rites performed at Baringa New Year 1983/84. There, members of Dark Circle and The Dolphin Tribe performed the Star Ruby ritual. That is, they “cast the Circle” with the purpose of “drawing down” the Goddess:

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

Over ten years later, in a ritual conducted at Tocumwal Easter 1994 called “Wild Women - a celebration of the Goddess”, over one hundred females danced in a circular formation, chanting a series of mantras to a steadily advancing djembe rhythm. Initially the women pulsed toward the centre and out chanting:

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

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

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

This chant signified the women’s view of “themselves and the Earth as nurturers of humankind” (Hume, 1997:235). Participants were also reminded that a ‘divine

spark' of the perennial Goddess lay within, empowering them. Thus "Wild Women" also involved a repetitive chant, sung as the women circled and then merged in a clamorous throng to complete the ritual:

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

As Hume (1997:235) clarifies, internalising images of female divinity within the context of a body-affirming theology "gives women the strength to effect change in their personal lives and in the social and political climate". The Goddess is thus "a symbol of self-transformation - she is seen to be constantly changing and a force for change for those who open themselves up to her" (Greenwood, 1998:103). While this includes males - as the "drawing down" rite performed at Baringa demonstrates - the Goddess "represents an avenue to authority for women which has been denied in mainstream orthodox religions" (Greenwood, 1998:101). "Wild Women" thus signalled each participant's physical attachment to the world (and each other), their responsibility as nurturers, and the empowering consequence of internalising the Goddess.

An all night "tribal rave celebration" transpiring at "Rainbow Dreaming" - an electronic dance music village at Tocumwal Easter 1996 - "Trance Dance" was a further on-site manifestation of eco-spirituality. Though contrasting with "Wild Women" in that the context was decidedly masculine and high tech, in a logic that finds congruity with the former rite, the purpose of the "Rainbow Dreaming" event was, according to its principal architect DJ Krusty, to "create a sacred space for people to find their own sacred dance for healing themselves and the planet". In promotional literature it became apparent that this "sacred space" would be established via the reclamation of a putative Pagan past and through the valorisation of indigenous trance practices. Echoing the functional outcomes cited by participants in Hutson (1999:63) - "open mindedness", "self-empowerment", "enhanced consciousness", "inner peace" and "spiritual transformation" - participants were informed that "Trance Dance" is "an ancient Shamanic practice which invites Spirit to embody us; to heal us through spiritual ecstasy".

At "Rainbow Dreaming", 'techno-shamans' and esoteric engineers employed advanced audio, lighting and visual technologies to generate an all night "shamanic" dance-odyssey featuring a celebrated peak at sunrise (St John, 2001b). And participants frequently used 'body-technologies', especially the psychedelic LSD, to enhance the experience. Furthermore, like other outdoor dance events (or 'doofs'), "Trance Dance" was a grounding ritual where participants were collectively invited to "revere ... natural habitat" and question their separation from the natural world - thus potentiating a dissolution of the nature/culture boundary (Shell, 1998), enabling what has been called a "geocentric spiritual identity" (Tramacchi, 2000:208). "Trance Dance" thus

facilitated desires to connect with Pagan ‘roots’, ‘nature’ and fellow dancers.

Conclusion

These rites are performative contexts for the (re)constitution of eco-spirituality. As sub-cultural dramas, they evidence Self and Earth as interrelated sacra of ConFest participants. Their depiction arose in the context of an investigation of “ultimate concerns” at Australia’s principal alternative festival. Following separate descriptive assessments of on-site evidence of self growth and environmental consciousness (personalist and globalist sensibilities possessing a countercultural legacy), I demonstrated contiguity in a diversity of discourse and practice. “Heal thy Self - thy Planet”, a ConFest theme signifying the ecological relatedness of person and planet, is a particularly apposite expression of what I have called the **Self-Earth nexus**. Healing the planet, according to most discursive accounts, starts ‘locally’ - that is, via ‘work’ undertaken on the self or one’s immediate environment. The nexus implies that individuals in possession of the understanding that they are **connected** (to nature), resolve to take **responsibility** for their actions. Eco-spiritual manifestations of Neo-Paganism were canvassed to demonstrate the performative expression of the **Self-Earth nexus**. Signalling new spiritual networks members of which hold personal empowerment and ecology as “ultimate concerns”, “Wild Women” and “Trance Dance” demonstrate that healing the Self and saving the Earth are often inseparable trajectories, (re)affirmed at ConFest.

Notes

1. Research on ConFest and its Melbourne based facilitating body, the Down to Earth Cooperative (DTE), carried out for a PhD in anthropology (St John 1999a - available at www.come.to/confest), was conducted between 1994 and 1999 during which 13 consecutive ConFests (at New Year and Easter) were attended by the researcher. This article partially draws upon the 68 interviews and 4 separate surveys conducted. Thanks to members of DTE and ConFesters for their support and assistance throughout this project.
2. For a discussion of one time Deputy PM Jim Cairns’ significant role in the emergence of ConFest, see St John (1999a:ch3).
3. One relevant example of which is the “Fire Event” at the Woodford/Maleny Folk Festival which, according to Lewis and Dowsey-Magog (1993:201), is “an experience of egalitarian solidarity and spiritual integration”, engaging participants by embodying their “ultimate concerns” (namely, Green politics and New Age spirituality).
4. Another sacred trope, Indigeneity, will be the subject of a forthcoming article.
5. While these are often referred to as “alternative healing” systems (McGuire, 1988), “fringe medicine”, “folk therapy”, “unorthodox medicine” (e.g. Gevitz, 1988), “vernacular health belief systems” (O’Connor, 1995), “non-cosmopolitan medicine” (Ross, 1992:539) and “natural medicine” are terms variously employed.
6. In contemporary times, Jungian analysis is a popular form of rite of passage via which

“contact with a transcendent realm (the collective unconscious) and its powers (the archetypes) leads to an energizing renewal, rebirth or redemption (individuation)” (Noll, 1994:292). Contact with the collective unconscious (or the Self), also known as the inner deity or the God or Goddess within, is often said to be achieved by meditation.

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

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

9. There are, however, a great many workshop themes that are not immediately relevant to what I call the **Self-Earth** nexus, or at least do not appear to be. I am not suggesting that this nexus unites all discourse and practice - clearly many workshops satisfy a consumerist individualism which articulates little concern for connectedness with nature. With such a diversity present (and disputation between advocates of varying strategies [cf. St John, 2001a]) this is impossible. Nevertheless, in my reading of the evidence this is a significant underlying theme.

10. Possamai (1999:119-20) suggests two types of “critical mass”: (1) Critical Mass by Meditation (CMM) where a shift (specifically towards the “Age of Aquarius”) is brought about through meditation, the channelling of universal energies, and; (2) Critical Mass by Social Action (CMSA) where revolutionary social changes are accomplished via the everyday attachment and commitment of individuals to a network of activist and community groups.

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

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

13. Billed as “Australia’s first National Occult and Alternatives ConFest”, Unicorn Star Enterprises’ “Sky to Earth ConFest”, a non-DTE event held at Glenlyon near Daylesford Victoria in 1984, was an early expression of this.

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

15. From an electronic questionnaire conducted on the 10/11/98.

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