

Going Feral: Eco-Radicalism and Authenticity¹

Introduction

Though ConFest accommodates diverse alternative orientations, I suggest that if there is an archetypal condition of authenticity on site, it is *ferality*. This chapter is organised into three parts. Part one introduces the radical ecological confrontationalism characteristic of an emergent Australian self-marginal youth milieu. Part two sketches the feral emergence detailing its subcultural assemblage. Following speculation about origins, I attend to respective traits: the feral *spectacle*, semi-*nomadic* subsistence, postcolonialist valuations of *nature* and *eco-tribalism*. ‘Going feral’, is a process which simultaneously indicates detachment from a state of domesticity, ‘the parent *culture*’, and identification with the *natural* environment. This biographical transition undertaken by thousands of young Australians, is a contemporary rite of passage pre-figuring reconciliation with indigenous ecology and peoples. Part three discusses the context ConFest furnishes for accessing and performing this desirable condition of human being.

Part I. Australian Radical Ecologism

The global environment of Reaganomics and Thatcherism provided the background for the emergence of post-seventies eco-millenarian movements. In 1980, with their doctrine of ‘no-compromise in defense of planet Earth’, Earth First! emerged in the US.² By the early nineties, Britain was experiencing the presence of self-marginal *eco-tribes* like the Dongas, the Flower Pot Tribe and Dragon Environmental Group.³ In the local context a

¹ A condensed version of this chapter is published elsewhere (St John 2000).

² Believing that we are ‘in the midst of an unprecedented, anthropogenic extinction crisis’ (Taylor 1995a:16), Earth First! is an environmental apocalyptic movement consisting of a network of quasi-militant autonomous affinity groups practising ‘primal spirituality’ (Taylor 1995b:151; 1997:191). Earth First!ers are influenced by deep ecology and bioregionalism, and were originally inspired by the writing of Edward Abbey (1975).

³ The Dongas Tribe, ‘the nomadic indigenous peoples of Britain’, emerged to oppose the extension of the M3 Motorway at Twyford Down in Hampshire in 1992 (Donga Alex, in McKay 1996:137; cf. Lowe and Shaw 1993:112-24). The Flower Pot Tribe are a ‘collection of nomadic Earth defenders’ who emerged in 1993 to defend the habitat of Newcastle’s Jesmende

contemporary face of defiance percolated throughout the eighties. By the end of the decade, these antipodean 'edgemen' (Turner 1969:128) had a name - 'feral'.⁴ To my knowledge, this metaphorical application, now acknowledged in the nation's dictionary,⁵ is exclusive to Australia, referring to a subcultural assemblage the adherents to which (often, yet not exclusively middle class youth) express an eco-radical inspired dissonance from the 'parent culture'.

It seems probable that this exclusivity derives from the unique historical response to and cultural interaction with introduced/domestic species running wild and turning pestilent across the breadth of the continent (Smith 1999). Yet, as I indicate elsewhere (St John 1999), human ferals are an enigmatic lot. They have experienced diverse reception: vilified as 'pests', green devils and 'terrorists' by rural and regional Australia, or adopted as 'wild' exotica in metropolitan centres. The diversity indicates that *ferality* is cloaked in ambivalence. Source of fear or subject of desire, ferals may be loathsome or lovable, a polarity fully recognised by *The Macquarie* where, colloquially, 'feral' may be either 'disgusting; gross' or 'excellent; admirable'!

Foremost, a critical discourse and praxis characterises *ferality*. Though feminist, peace, native title and New Age movements have contributed to the feral concourse, the radical ecology movement has been particularly formative. 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'. Awareness of environmental degradation has precipitated the advent of what Beck calls 'long-distance moralities' (1992:137), and has raised an ecological consciousness wherein *nature* has become the principal 'field of collective action with which new social groups are engaged' (Eder 1990:37). A key manifestation of this growing cultural anxiety over environmental 'risks' is 'ecologism' which Dobson (1995) regards as an ideological commitment to ecological balance and diversity, sustainable levels of production and consumption, and non-exploitative practices.

Dene from the destructive Cradlewell bypass (*Earth First!* 1993:13). Dragon Environmental Group are a more recent Pagan inspired collective combining environmental work with eco-magic' (Harris 1996:154).

⁴ Other labels have included 'new age hippie', 'bush punk', 'eco-warrior' and 'crusty'. According to 'Meri' (actually Neri - Nerida Blanpain - from the band-collective *Earth Reggae*), the label 'rat people' preceded that of 'feral' (Murray 1994:54).

⁵ 'Feral - a person who espouses environmentalism to the point of living close to nature in more or less primitive conditions and who deliberately shuns the normal code of society with regard to dress, habitat, hygiene, etc' (*The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edn 1997).

On the fringes of this ‘culture of the environment’ (Jagtenberg and McKie 1997:91), lies *radical ecologism*, a multi-faceted critical standpoint delineated by Merchant (1992). I take this system of discourse and practice to possess several elements. First, an acute awareness of rampant ecological devastation under the colonialist imperatives of industrial modernity - devastation constituting the apocalypse. An understanding of the abuses of ecological rights is closely linked with a growing knowledge of human rights abuses, suffered especially by indigenes. Second, an intimacy with, and attachment to, native biotic communities. The subscription to the *eco-spiritual* principles of deep ecology, and a Pagan-inspired kinship with maternal nature (Gaia) is common. Third, a personal and prescriptive ‘anticonsumerism’. As Purkis (1996:210) suggests, rather than ‘just buying green or ethically produced goods, different ways of living, trading and working are advocated in order to “live more lightly” on the Earth and to be less dependent on buying things to feel good about ourselves’. Low impact living (captured in the phrase ‘refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle’) involves ethical limitation⁶ of the consumption of mass-produced commodities and fossil fuels, and conscientious waste management practices. Fourth, a culture of eco-celebration and defence. In their methods of defending ‘the rights of nature’,⁷ this ‘earth volunteer army’ (Hoare 1998:19) are the radical offspring of the conservation movement, and the product of grassroots resistance actions mounted over nearly two decades. Finally, gravitation towards decentralised, non-hierarchical co-operatives. The coupling of global consciousness with decentrist habitudes is enshrined in the maxim of Nimbin Star Earth Tribe’s Tipi Village Sanctuary: ‘think globally - go tribally’ - perhaps *the* feral catchcry.

Critical discourse propagates a distinctive confrontational attitude. They are ‘hippies with attitude’. In a Hot Wired website, Doyle (1995), claims that to be feral thou shalt ‘espouse peace and love ... but don’t take any shit, and never turn the other cheek’. Rather than seeking total isolation (as is characteristic of many communitarian experiments of the 1960s and ‘70s) or ‘disappearance’ (as has been described of ravers of the 1980s and ‘90s [Melechi 1993]), *ferality* is about creating a ‘public new sense’: obstructing, boycotting,

⁶ While there are variations in personal codes of conduct, a ‘green’ ethos is conveyed via certain forms of avoidance - or anticonsumption - practices. These include avoiding: products derived from the slaughter of, or cruelty to, animals (e.g. meat, leather, cosmetics); products made from rainforest species; inorganic produce (dependent on chemical fertilisers and pesticides); disposable non-biodegradable packaging; non-separated garbage disposal; and the overconsumption of and dependence on non-renewable energy sources. Avoidance also takes the form of ‘boycotting’ the products of corporate eco-vandals.

⁷ Including the rights of indigenous land claimants, especially when regions under claim are the

desiring and actively promoting change. Pursuing a transgressive lifestyle, theirs is an acute 'risk identity'. Yet, it differs from that which is, according to Hetherington, cultivated by new travellers. The latter are said to actively embrace chaos by 'putting themselves in danger from the things others fear so much: transientness, eviction, ostracism, placeless identities, poverty, harassment and uncertainty in one's life' (1992:91-2). Not a directionless and 'placeless' pursuit of hedonistic excess, the feral project is an activist life-strategy of (re)connection and defence.

This culture of activism seems to have generated two types of role: protester and educator. The former are perhaps spurred on by something like the directive 'turn on, tune in and lock on' (from the English DiY zine *POD* - in McKay 1996:131), which, inciting *direct action*, or non violent direct action (NVDA), is a declaration of disassociation from hippy forbears who are rather unfairly typified and dismissed as passive. According to Mardo, unlike the Rainbow tribe, who are 'more into spiritualism and inner growth', ferals, who are 'out there doing things on the Earth plain, here and now', derive from the 'more hard core end of the seventies hippies'. This provocative 'new warrior spirit' is sometimes extended to incorporate diplomacy, mediation and commitment to the latter, educational, role.

Banyalla is a notable example of the *protest activist*. Inspired by the Yippy movement,⁸ Earth First!, and a veteran of the Franklin conflict, he once canvassed for Greenpeace but became disgruntled with 'leaders and bureaucracy'. Since Greenpeace did not train him for anything other than 'knocking on doors raising money', he led a 'sort of industrial revolt' for which he was sacked. Banyalla is now a staunch defender of East Gippsland's remaining old growth forests and a key member of GECCO. He believes in the feral movement, but he says it must 'challenge the status quo'.

Quenda exemplifies the *educator activist*. Quenda suspects she was conceived at the Aquarius festival in 1973. Raised in a rock house on a Queensland permaculture community, she completed a degree in environmental science at Lismore, specialising in conservation technology. About her current life she says 'I've lived in my car for a long time [and] I know how to shit in the bush'. Though possessing the qualifications, she has so far resisted taking up a professional position as 'nothing really fits in with my ideals'. Quenda stresses that:

sites of current or potential ecological crises (e.g. Jabiluka).

⁸ The Youth International Party of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman ushered in the youth protest movement of the late 1960s.

[if] you're not interacting with lots of people and you're living in a little plot of rainforest and you're just sprouting your own sprouts - you've got your own simple herb garden and you're completely isolated from other people and temptation - then you're not the ideal feral.

Close to the ideal, she commits to raising ecological issues with 'red neck farmers', who, now she's shaved off her dreadlocks, aren't threatened by her approach: 'Hey! Ya'know if you plant x ya'know at x time of year you'll have heaps more nutrients and you can even have cow fodder. And then you can keep the cows off the creek at the same time!'

Many demonstrate a convergence of both roles. Take Mardo, a communicator and 'hard core' activist, for example. Brought up in housing commission flats, Mardo took to the streets and then the bush at an early age. His 'love of the land' and the knowledge of ecology and life on the planet developed working on cattle stations in outback Queensland and the Northern Territory. Once having objected to the cattle industry, he later became involved in several campaigns including Goolengook forest blockade in East Gippsland. By April 1997, he had been 15 months with GECO teaching people climbing techniques, bush survival skills, designing lock-on devices and building platforms for 'tree-sits'. He also liaises with police and loggers at blockades. In 1997, Mardo conceived the inclusive grassroots group CIDA (Concerned Individuals for Direct Action),⁹ to provide equipment and training to communities protecting natural heritage from development. He cited the support given to members of the community at Bannockburn defending the remaining 400 hectares of old-growth yellow gum in the region, as an exemplar:

They didn't want it chopped down, and they fought and they fought, and it came down to confrontational tactics - being on the ground out in front of dozers. And they didn't really have any idea of how to approach that sort of situation. I guess they had a few ideas, but not the expertise ... And I went down and, under the banner of CIDA, we went through and we helped them get what they needed, like lock-on boxes and told them how they worked, and tactics - how to play with the police or to use against the police - and what their legal rights were.

⁹ Which was funded \$1,000 for hardware by DTE for a village at Gum Lodge II.

Part II. The Feral Emergence

Roots

That ferals first appeared in the Northern Rivers area of northeast NSW is probable, as that area has been Australia's primary geographical repository for alternative enclaves and cultural lifeways since the 1960s. According to Merrin, co-founder of Nimbin's Star Earth Tribe, a multiple occupancy community near Tenterfield in northeast NSW, Om Shalom, was 'the parent of all the feral movement'.¹⁰ As for the label, Neri refers to a story in Cape Tribulation 'a few years ago' when 'some kids ... were not allowed to get on a plane because of how they looked' (Murray 1994:57) and where the term 'feral' was apparently first used by the media. There are two key historical factors to keep in mind when attempting to comprehend the feral emergence: a hippy/punk/pagan exchange throughout the 1970s and '80s, and the appearance of travelling anarchist/activists in the late 1980s/early '90s.

As ferals possess multi-subcultural roots, genealogical research is necessarily complicated. Here it will suffice to say that the seventies and eighties occasioned 'commerce' between, and eventual mergers of, disparate youth cultural dispositions - namely, the idealism of 'hippy' counterculturalists, the confrontationalism of punk, and the eco-spiritualism of local Pagans. As the feral milieu lies downstream from their confluence, we will likely discover a range of formative radical indices: the struggle for individual liberty and freedom of expression, a largely imported culture of dissent fermenting in the sixties which included genuine opposition *and* outright disengagement (militant and bohemian elements); the culture of *refusal* and often directionless confrontation apparent in the late seventies and eighties 'blank generation' and urban squatting scene, and; the dutiful commitment toward, and identification with, the natural environment inherent in Neo-Paganism - the 'spiritual arm' of the ecology movement (cf. Hume 1997:56). Early evidence of convergent streams, the first and third in particular, is discernible in that which Lindblad (1976) described as 'a new bush para-culture ... of geodesic domes, A-frames and Kombi vans' (32). In the mid seventies, he observed an:

¹⁰ Om Shalom, inspired by the Baringa period of ConFests, was the location for the first Australian Rainbow Gathering in November 1996, where I noted there were probably more ferals gathered, and tipis erected (about 50), than had ever been seen in one place in Australia.

eclectic religiosity which blends Zen Buddhism with the primitive tribal belief that man is essentially a part of nature. Just as nature was the basis of beliefs of the Aborigines, so you can still find mountain and mushroom worshippers among these new people of the bush, and their beliefs correspond directly with their geographical location. Children are given such names as Possum, Sunshine and Rainforest. (Lindblad 1976:34)

Shifting attention to the eighties, another factor in the feral emergence - mobile activism - became apparent as occupants of urban squats were set even further adrift. Cedar clearly remembers:

a particular type of people who were like squatters but they travelled. And they would go from action to action ... Whilst the squatting movement in Melbourne were very activist, and they were into things like resisting evictions, it was all still local and it was much more city based ... Suddenly the squatters would go feral and that was it, they'd start travelling.

Harbouring a strong cold-war survivalist mentality and transience akin to Britain's new travellers or 'rainbow punks' (Stone 1996:193), and an eco-defensive apocalypticism akin to Earth First!,¹¹ activists mobilised throughout the eighties to form counter-development (clear-fell logging and uranium mining) protests. Many began occupying and defending those biotic contexts of identity formation - the Australian forests.

Conservation issues have had an especially radicalising influence in Australia. Threats to valued areas of natural heritage sparked an effective series of 'greenie' civil disobedience campaigns/occupations: the anti-logging campaign at Terania Creek in NSW 1979 followed by the Nightcap National Park struggle in 1982; the Wilderness Society's celebrated Gordon-below-Franklin Hydroelectric Scheme protest in Tasmania's remote southwest in 1982-3, and; the blockade of Errinundra forest in 1984 (Cohen 1996; Kendall and Buivids 1987). The latter protest, Victoria's first, was mounted by 'a multi-coloured crew of "hippies" fresh from the [Baringa I] Confest. Sarongs, headbands, and dreadlocks were their marks of distinction' (Redwood 1996:7). According to Redwood, their 'tenacity and conviction' resulted in the creation of the Errinundra National Park. The suspected danger that an aggressive growth orientated political mainstream poses to natural heritage

¹¹ While Earth First! have inspired local wilderness activist groups like RAG (Rainforest Action Group) and GECO, the Australian movement's successes provided early inspiration for demonstrations in the US (Zakin 1993:249-50). In 1982, John Seed allied the local movement (including groups such as NAG: Nightcap Action Group) with Earth First! In 1983 Earth First! supported the Australian Rainforest Campaign (Lee 1995:70,80-1).

sites, and the successes of local direct action, has had a formative impact on Australia's recent self-marginals.

Protests followed one after another. By July 1991, there was a successful blockade mounted at the Chaelundi Forest conflict in northeast New South Wales dubbed 'Feral Camp' (Cohen 1996:189). According to Cohen, it was Chaelundi which spawned 'a new generation of young, alternative environmental activists'. Amongst these he includes the 'punks for the forests':

[A] wonderfully rare breed of wild young men and women, outrageous to the extreme, who shocked everyone, from police to protesters. Wild and often drunk, they surprised all with their outlandish humour and bravery. Under the rough exterior of rags and skull earrings, nose rings, boots and beer were some of the finest people I had encountered (when they were sober). (182-3)

Terra-ists of the nineties, many came to inhabit, if only temporarily, threatened regions where strong attachments to both native landscape and co-defender/celebrants were formed.¹²

The Feral Spectacle

Emerging as a unique subcultural phenomenon by the mid-nineties, ferals were eventually *media*-ted. Concentrated coverage occurred between 1994-96, the spectacular style of this mobile theatre of the weird providing the stimulus. Although there have been informative accounts,¹³ popular mediations have maximised the visual impact provided by the milieu's strangeness, its *otherness* (Murray 1994; Gibbs 1995), sometimes chronicling the exploits of intrepid reporters returning from our outer-terrestrial regions with tales (and images) of Euro-Australian primitives (Whittaker 1996), other times consigning them to a notorious leisure status. For instance, in 1995, the Nine network's *Sixty Minutes* sent a crew to Nimbin to probe tipi dwellers about dole bludging.¹⁴

¹² I wish to avoid a fixed image of ferals as incontrovertibly heroic. Hitting the road, many youths have taken their drug addictions (including heroin) with them. And since 'its harder to get drugs on the road' (Cedar), some were headed for dereliction. Addicts at the fringes of festivals and blockades have been a persistent problem. Om Shalom is itself renowned for its population of heroin users.

¹³ For informative accounts, see Woodford (1994), Hill (1996), Sheil (1999), and the incisive documentary *Going Tribal* (produced by M.Murray) first broadcast on SBS TV in May 1995.

¹⁴ Varnished productions, which have arraigned ferals as fleeting and infantile and have aligned them with the now pejorative (commoditised and quiescent) 'New Age', have resulted in a

So what constitutes the feral spectacle? They are often talented musicians, didj players, artists, dressed in recycled garb, dreadlocked, adorned with multiple piercings and folk-jewellery: feathers, birds feet, skulls and umbilical-cord necklaces (feralia). A wild rustic appearance is desirable. For many, this transpires as fabrics fade and hair tangles in unkempt locks. Others will go to great lengths to achieve a turbulent look - a 'cultivated crustiness' (Hetherington 1996a:43). The feral rig is an ensemble of materials discovered dada-esque in garage sales, op' shops, or fashioned from the hide of road-kill or dead animals found in the bush. Outfits range from the sartorial splendour of brightly imbued and offbeat garments, to dirty green and brown hued favourites. Army great coats with personalised patches sewn on the rear are not uncommon, nor are silken night dresses and fairy wings. They revel in an iconography of otherness and authenticity. The identification with various indigenous peoples and historical cultures - their cosmologies, rituals and artefacts - is apparent in multiple appropriations.

Performing wherever they go - especially hand drumming and fire dancing - these are youth for whom life is akin to theatre. They are spectacular. Hebdige's discussion (1983:86-7) of the intrinsic ambiguity in subcultural gesturing casts light on the spectacular sheen of *ferality*. Youth subcultures are 'insubordinate' - they 'drive against classification and control'. Yet, pleasure is derived from 'being watched', from being spectacular. There is pleasure in being watched and power is, as Hebdige (ibid:96) avers - in reference to a comment attributed to Foucault - 'in fashion'.

It could be suggested that the feral ensemble illustrates 'symbolic' resistance, their marginal corporeality, their 'fashion statements' resembling the apparently inconsequential 'rituals of resistance' which Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies researchers located in the leisure time of working class youth. This is qualified by Banyalla who makes the distinction between a 'fashion feral' (which he says he's not) and an 'alternative lifestyle feral'. Banyalla does agree outward appearance is critical, since this signals a conscious challenge to society. He says of ferals:

you can be totally fashion conscious and still not have to spend three or four hundred dollars on a fucking dress or a fucking flash pair of pants or something ... they stand out in a crowd ya'know. They're fucking stunners! ... And just by the fact of doing that ... you have to be activists in some way.

Like other subcultural ensembles, feral is an intentional sign system. *Ferality* ‘stands apart’. It is ‘a visible construction, a loaded choice. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read’ (Hebdige 1979:101). However, at the risk of inciting a shallow rebellion, an ‘alternative lifestyle feral’ must be politically active, must celebrate *and* defend. Ultimately, the feral spectacle must be in service of the cause. ‘Weekend ferals’ do not pose a threat. According to Banyalla, the ‘rebellion’ of the narcissistic ‘fashion feral’ remains substantively empty: ‘they’re just rebels, ya’know ... like Dean. James Dean was a rebel, but what was he fucking rebelling against? No idea, ya’know - politically fucking inept’.

Like other middle class subcultural milieux (e.g. hippies), feral resistance is not confined to the field of leisure (Cohen 1972). Nor is it merely ‘symbolic’ or ‘ritual’ (Clarke et al. 1975) and, therefore, containable. Furthermore, though edged into the media spectacle, in the large, feral remains in the subterranean marginalia of ‘immediatism’ (Bey 1994a). As such, its anarchic confrontational potential has been spared the degree of ‘recuperation’ via commodification that is the experience of other subcultures (e.g. mod, hippy, punk and raver). This is the case as: there is no distinctively commodifiable feral literature or music; there is little evidence of an entrepreneurial ethos; clothing is DiY, inexpensive and recycled; hair is not usually styled professionally; and there have been few feral ‘pop stars’. Feral signs are not converted into mass produced objects on any scale comparable to punk. They have not, at least yet, been ‘rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise’ (Hebdige 1979:96).¹⁵

As the feral assemblage is *significant*, it is abundantly clear that style cannot be easily dismissed. It ‘speaks’ of the values shared by adherents, radiating a transient, eco-conscious, non-material atavism. However, while *ferality’s* spectacular aesthetic predominates in popular media representations, pivotal social, political and cultural traits have gone largely unnoticed.

¹⁵ ‘Feral Cheryl’, complete with oregano stash, pierced naval, pubic hair, tattoos, string bag, nose ring, joint, dog and dreadlocks with feather (McCullagh 1995:13), and ‘Feral Faeries’, original designs described as ‘a new generation of ancient peoples’ available in greeting cards, stickers and T-shirts (from promotion in *DTENEA* Sep 1996:17), may represent exceptions, though marketing strategies are moderate to say the least.

Semi-Nomadic Subsistence

A key characteristic of *ferality* is transience. The rejection of 'the parent culture' - especially 'the great Australian dream' of home-ownership - has sent these 'nomads of the '90s' (Woodford 1994:17) spiralling out from their domestic origins. *Ferality*, which approaches the transhumant resistance to a settled life so strongly endorsed by Chatwin (1987), is cognate with the earlier 'rucksack revolution' declared by Kerouac in *Dharma Bums* (1956). Indeed, their immediate solution to dissatisfaction with a settled urban life - mobility - corresponds with that of their Beat antecedents (Creswell 1993). Yet, also like Beats and, not to mention 'drifter tourists' (Cohen 1973) and new travellers (Earle et al. 1994), ferals seek stability and belonging with 'like-minded' others.

On the road, they reside in their station wagons, kombis, converted buses, trucks and tipis. Australia's sparsely populated interior deserts and coastal rainforest provide geomorphic contexts. Destinations (festivals, protests, communities, seasonal work) are often remote from cities, and travel duration protracted. Many have their 'home bases' in or near forests where they get 'grounded' (e.g. Northern Rivers NSW, East Gippsland Vic, Cairns hinterland Qld). Others are 'located' in the city, or oscillate between bush and city. There, they reside in low rent share housing and urban squats. Many are tertiary students (largely arts/humanities). The inner city feral is accustomed to a 'rootless cosmopolitanism' - often verging upon the destitute. They support independent artists, attend benefit concerts and Reclaim the Streets celebration/protests, are members of food co-ops, and are not out of place in Smith St (dividing Melbourne's Collingwood and Fitzroy).

Movement and residence are also patterned by subsistence strategies. The fact that most are Centrelink 'clients', and therefore State dependent, challenges a purist definition of 'feral' as uncontrolled. Though welfare dependency tends to curtail mobility - with the requirement to submit 'dole diaries' and the pre-1998 threat of Case Management - the dole is an accepted part of the lifestyle. Welfare payments are often supplemented or superseded by other informal, often temporary, sources of income. These include itinerant trading at small alternative markets or events like ConFest, seasonal fruit picking, small-scale illicit substance trade and busking.

The receipt of welfare, especially over the long term, is a circumstance around which conservative elements launch offensives: 'greenies' are 'bludgers', 'taxpayers liabilities'. However, insiders rally around the conviction that the work involved justifies taking 'the

government scholarship'. This is the case for Quenda. People in receipt, she argues 'are working real hard ... I couldn't explain to the typical person what I do'. There are actually two means by which Quenda personally 'works for the greater'. First, she performs 'healing work' with Bohemia, a group of healers who, after forming at an All One Family gathering, combined their talents and travelled to festivals to heal people via massage (including didjeridu massage), drumming and chanting techniques. She revealed to me one source of her healing powers - Mt Warning in northeast NSW. There, 'at night time, I talk to the Kooris in my dreams and they teach me special songs. And because I heal with the song vibration, that's really sacred to me'.

However, doing her bit for the planet, 'environmental work', is Quenda's chief preoccupation. In 1996, this involved 'scouting' and laying 'traps' around the Timbarra Plateau, the site of a proposed gold mine.¹⁶ The 'traps', or hair tubes, are designed to seize hairs from endangered species like tiger quoll, which are then taken to a laboratory in Coffs Harbour for identification. She is resolute - 'I'm hoping to deter [Ross Mining] any way I can'. Since industries whose activities threaten already endangered species must possess expensive licenses to do so, the higher the number and frequency of endangered species known to exist in the region, the heavier is the burden placed on companies like Ross Mining. Though she has spent many weeks trapping to defend species diversity and Aboriginal heritage, it is not a livelihood: 'I'm working for Australia ... So I feel fine taking the dole'.

Postcolonial Primitivists: Heritage Defence

Growing numbers of youth are disenchanted with the parent culture's predaciousness. They challenge neo-classical scientific interpretations of nature which seek to snuff out its mystery and indeterminacy, which generate 'a global ontology of detachment' (Ingold 1993:41). They object to monotheistic religions deferring responsibility to transcendent creators. They dispute neo-colonialist infringements upon sites of cultural significance. In response to what has been regarded as 'a spiritual crisis' implicit in the way 'Western religious assumptions have divided humans from other creatures and ... the natural world

¹⁶ In 1996/97 Ross Mining Co began developing a gold mine on northeast NSW's Timbarra Plateau, an area of 'outstanding and unique conservation value'. According to the Timbarra Protection Coalition, the mining project threatens clean water systems, endangers wildlife and flora species, and imposes rigid restrictions on local Bunjalung from accessing sacred sites (*Tribe* 1997:12).

from the divine realm' (Taylor 1993:226), a milieu of localised identification and action has arisen, a culture variously committed to the defence of the rights of native ecology and peoples, of natural and cultural *heritage*. The defence of indigeneity draws upon the Earth conscious confrontationalism of radical ecology, the eco-spiritual proclivities of Neo-Paganism, and displays solidarity with the native title movement.

This movement expresses a desire for re-enchantment, a (re)attachment to the 'natural' (including 'natural' healing and immediate, 'natural' sociality). The 'real business' of feral eco-radicalism is not simply *being*, but *going*, wild. It involves a voluntary traversing of the borders of Culture (cultivated, predictable, bound) and thereby, becoming 'closer to Nature' (uncontrollable, animal-like, wild). Though a threat to both propriety and property (St John 2000), this process is highly desirable - ultimately rewarding. Principally, the Culture/Nature transgression is one of reconciliation. Human improvement is the result of a *re-place-ment*, an implied 'return'. This point is taken up briefly by Bey (1991a:137) proposing that the TAZ 'involves a kind of *ferality*, a growth from tameness to wild(er)ness, a "return" which is also a step forward'. Approximating 'nature' provides the foundations for a (re)turn to authenticity. Though this quest may reveal signs of neo-primitivism,¹⁷ the temptation to categorical reduction and excoriation should be avoided.

The process of *return* evidences transition from ontological detachment to an eco-conscious lifestyle and identity. Take Bandicoot, who has mounted tree-sits in the threatened Goolengook Forest north of Orbost since 1997. Raised in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, Bandicoot eventually worked nine-to-five as a building hardware salesman. His recollections are that of inherent detachment:

My life took me away from the earth. It put me into a four bedroom house, it fed me. You know, meat and three vegetables every night. Showed me a TV. Taught me how to live and how to protect myself ... to put a roof over my head, and a doona around me. And I wasn't exposed to the outside. And when we did it was in a car, you know, and in a cabin.

Yet, with a 'desire to understand more about the earth', Bandicoot shed his suit, grew dreadlocks and gravitated towards the rainforests of East Gippsland. 'Out there', he

¹⁷ There is a certain extropian edge to these postcolonial primitivists. As Doyle (1995) says, 'ferals may run from modern Australia, but they aren't running from the modern era: life is a paradoxical blend of savage-meets-silicon'. The passion for electronic music, especially at forest raves, provides clear evidence of this curious alliance. One group, Electric Tipi - who travel to various alternative communities holding dance parties and sound and light shows - are depicted as 'a tribe sustained by a mix of [techno] music and Mother Nature' (Leser 1994:60). Although mixed feelings prevail, 'trancing out' to a persistent electronic beat in the bush does

reveals somewhat skittishly, he found ‘something magical’, a ‘specialness’. And, with a realisation that we are ‘of the earth’, he has become ensconced in the forest’s defence. Bandicoot’s nascent eco-activism sees him travelling between forest and city on a regular basis to gather support.

Rationales for the identification with, and defence of, landscape prove rather sophisticated, sometimes contradictory. This is the case as ‘wild’ landscape and ‘Aboriginaland’ are variously imagined and invoked. On the one hand, many eco-rads express their desire to be ‘at one with the wilderness’ - meaning ‘pristine’, ‘untouched’ nature. Here, ‘wild’ landscape is valorised - local ‘wilderness’ is perceived to be a place of worship, a temple, its disciples privileged to an Australian ‘wilderness experience’. ‘Wilderness’, associated with being lost, unruly, disordered and confused, is thus a powerful source of psychic re-creation. Others, however, recognise the limitations of this ill-fated concept, a recognition matching the growing acknowledgment of prior occupation by Aborigines and, therefore, of a ‘humanised realm saturated with significations’ (Stanner 1979 in Rose 1996:18). As Pearson (1995) and others (Salleh 1996; Rose 1996) have begun articulating, ‘wilderness’, or ‘untouched’ nature, simply ‘reiterates the logic of *terra nullius*’, ultimately serving the interests of bioprospectors. As Rose earlier remarked (1988:384), since ‘Aboriginal people were everywhere’, there is no true ‘untouched’ or ‘pristine’ country in Australia (cf. Morton and Smith 1997 for a relevant discussion). Today, knowledge of prior occupation and dispossession - our ‘black history’ - is superseding the blind invocation of ‘wilderness’. This awareness confers emotive value upon a beleaguered landscape, elevating the commitment to its defence.

Yet attachment is very personal. *Terra-ists* of the nineties, many ferals dwell in forested regions where, for prolonged periods, they may form affinities with native biota. Strong attachment to place arises as a result of such ‘dwelling in the land’, such ecological ‘re-centring’. An eco-spiritualism can be traced back to at least the early eighties with John Martin’s comments in the first edition of *The Deep Ecologist* (Martin 1982). A champion of the ideas of ecological anarchist and Buddhist-Animist Gary Snyder, Martin stated, ‘[w]e need to be *For Nature!* Let the inner voice out and let it speak in terms of committed action based on a deep awareness of the awesome plunder of the earth and the hurts we have to heal’ (ibid:3). Extended periods in the bush often convince people of the interdependence and sacrality of all life, and personal ecosophies - akin to deep ecology or

eco-feminism for instance - are thus founded and/or confirmed by experience. Australian radical ecologists assume a position not dissimilar to that of Earth First!ers who believe 'animals, including humans, are only authentic, only sacred, when undomesticated, living life wildly and spontaneously in harmony with, and when in defence of the natural world' (Taylor 1995b:102). Earth First!'s position is best conveyed by co-founder Dave Foreman, an advocate of bioregionalism: by 'reinhabiting a place, by dwelling in it, we become that place. We are *of* it. Our most fundamental duty is self-defense. We are the wilderness defending itself' (Foreman in Taylor 1994:204).

Yet, as postcolonial re-evaluations of nature transpire, it is increasingly an indigenised landscape that is valorised and defended. In eco-radical reconciliation with nature, we are perhaps witnessing a subterranean manifestation of the kind of redemptive strategies located in nationalist discourses (Lattas 1990; Morton 1996; Morton and Smith 1999). For instance, the didgeridu, an Aboriginal icon now widely embraced by alternates, is often perceived as 'a bridge to facilitate the journey of white Australians back to the land' and is thus an 'instrument of expiation' (Sherwood 1997:150). Their mutual ambivalence effecting an attractive partnership, common preference for dingo companionship amongst self-marginals also enhances an experience of reconciliation and (re)connectivity. Such an alliance signifies 'true' continental inhabitation. Yet, it must be remembered that ferals are also conscientious citizens of the planet. Indigenous to Gaia, and not especially sympathetic to nation building, it is to Earth that their loyalties ultimately lie.

Many venerate 'the old ways' of pre-Christian Europe, especially Celticism - to which most adherents may reasonably claim descent. Yet, an identification with various other indigenous peoples - their cosmologies, rituals and artefacts - has intensified. Amid feral argot, body-art and material culture, a customised ensemble of beliefs, architecture, musical instruments, dietary habits, cooking methods, medical knowledge, clothing and hair styling deriving from various indigenous peoples, is discernible. Apart from Native American Indians and Aborigines, other oppressed, 'heroic' peoples/religions like Jamaican Rastafari are valorised, and eastern traditions (e.g. Hindu, Buddhism, Tao), following beat and hippy pathfinders, continue to be mined for their personal spiritual value.

With respect to Australia's indigenes, according to the creator of the 'Rainbow Temple' near Lismore, ferals are 'strongly connected to the Dreamtime - Aboriginal dreaming' (Murray 1994:58). Indigenised landscapes are indeed sources of enchantment. For instance, Nimbin Rocks and Mt Warning - reputed Bunjalung male ritual initiation sites -

have become sacralised ‘energy’ sources or ‘power spots’ for many of the region’s post-sixties settlers. According to Quenda, Mt Warning (or *Wollumbin* - Bunjalung for ‘cloud catcher’ or ‘rain gatherer’) is:

a really sacred mountain ... the first place of ritual, where ritual came to this planet ... It really crosses on a ley line there and it’s very significant in terms of the whole planet ... I think Aye’s Rock is like a crown chakra and Mt Warning is like a third eye.

Such discourse has drawn criticism in recent cultural commentary which endeavours to target and condemn instances of cultural appropriation (e.g. Cuthbert and Grossman 1996). While it is true that ‘fashion ferals’ are no strangers to essentialising and homogenising indigenes, even becoming ersatz Aborigines,¹⁸ as discussed in the following chapter commentary has tended to be selective and misleading. Though ferals may be our new chthonic others, this should not be interpreted as ‘new *autochthones*’, thereby effectively supplanting Aborigines in the ‘search for *lebensraum*’. The Northern Rivers band *Earth Reggae* are enlisted to clarify my point. Their song ‘Always Was Always Will Be’ features the lines:

Ain’t no mystery
 What we’re standing on
 Always was, always will be
 Aboriginaland. (written by A. Evans, from ‘Indigina - Planet Magic’ 1992)

The same CD features the track, ‘Indigina’, the chorus of which runs:

State what you are
 And then stand tall and strong
 For it’s not to skin colour but to land
 That we belong. (D. Mackenzie-Cochran)

¹⁸ Often the indigenes worthy of ‘kinship’ and support are conceptualised as noble-environmentalists, who, essentialised as such, are potential sources of ‘ecological salvation’ (cf. Sackett 1991; Jacobs 1994:313). Practically legitimating the occupation of an essentialised other, late ‘black hippy’ Burnam Burnam, once held the view that some white environmentalists, like those protesting uranium mining in Kakadu, ‘are more Aboriginal than most urban Aborigines in their treatment of, and respect for, mother earth - and in their personal relationship with her’ (Burnam Burnam 1987:96-7). Voicing a similarly perilous sentiment, though seemingly with greater awareness of the inevitable paradox, at the Australian Rainbow Gathering held at Om Shalom in November 1996 human-sculpture activist Benny Zable had it that many feral activists were ‘non-Aboriginal Aborigines’!

Juxtaposed, the lyrics suggest that while acknowledgment of prior and continuing Aboriginal occupancy is never in doubt, conscientious Earth-orientated descendants of recent migrants too claim their human right to inhabit place. The message of *Earth Reggae* seems to be: ‘while we respect the rights of First Peoples, this land is *our place* too’.

Eco-tribes

There is a predilection among ferals to become affiliated with alternate collectives and ‘disorganisations’.¹⁹ Typically they are anarchic, non-hierarchical associations within which resource pooling is favoured and ecological issues foremost. They are marginal ‘neo-tribes’ (Maffesoli 1996), ‘*Bünde*’ (Hetherington 1994) or ‘DiY communities’ (McKay 1998), wherein membership is non-ascribed. They are highly unstable, yet strongly affectual resource hubs and, through long periods of voluntary work, valuable skill sources. Some collectives are performance orientated (like Bohemia, Wolfgang’s Palace, Earth Reggae and various dance collectives like Vibe Tribe and Oms not Bombs). Others are intentional communities, including the Star Earth Tribe near Nimbin and Feral Wymyn, an Anarcho-Feminist Collective who, in 1996, intended to establish Victoria’s first all female community (Feral Wymyn 1996). Yet, more genuine ‘eco-tribes’ are radical green outfits like OREN, NEFA and GECO, or more established Co-operatives like FOE. These are DiY communities of resistance interconnected in a growing network. They are typically engaged in natural heritage conservation and anti-development campaigns: including anti-logging, mining and road protests.

Harbouring a legacy of swift occupation and peaceful obstruction, one node in this network is the East Gippsland based GECO, which represents the last line of defence of Victoria’s remaining high conservation-value forest. Like Earth First!, GECO have become a vehicle for translating broad ecocentric and bioregional principles into an ‘operational environmentalism’ (Seager 1993:224). With their familiar screen-printed folk-dicta ‘old growth - fucken oath’ and ‘tragic happens’, GECO emerged out of blockades mounted in 1993/94. One activist, Belalie, conveys a common perception:

[There is] a really hostile local community [in East Gippsland] ... I mean they’re living on massacre sites. It’s just an area of such dark history. It’s an area where, like, colonisation continues. They continue to destroy the sacred

¹⁹ An ‘unstructured protest group of the mid-Nineties without the leadership of a conventional organization’: from the *Guardian*’s ‘Glossary of the Nineties’ (McKay 1996:176).

things. They continue to wipe out the native species. It's the same attitude which [early settlers] approached this country with ya'know, and it's just ongoing.

Dedicated to NVDA, GECO also engage in political lobbying, police and forestry worker liaison, conduct surveys for endangered species ('scouting') and public education. They founded an organic food co-op and have established a permaculture garden. They recognise the prior occupancy of the forests by the Bidawal (from flyer). In 1997, they united with other groups to form a community of resistance at Goolengook. With the signing of the Regional Forest Agreement, and against the recommendations of DNRE (Department of Natural Resources and Environment) botanists and prominent scientists, Goolengook forest has been exposed to clearfell logging and slash burning. A large percentage of trees are destined for the government subsidised export woodchipping mill at Eden in southeast NSW owned by the Japanese Harris-Daishowa.

The Goolengook base camp blockade was established when all other political processes failed to protect this forest. The camp experienced constant flux, with numbers swelling as 'Goolengeeks' assembled for immanent blockades²⁰ and 'event-actions'. The latter has involved occupying the DNRE office in Orbost, and, more importantly, 'hitting the chippers' (actions on woodchipping mills at Orbost and Eden). These passionately executed actions involved conveyor belt lock-ons, banner dropping and eco-political theatrics. Instances of the feral spectacle serving the cause, they are designed to attract media attention and engineered to increase the operating costs of an environmentally destructive industry. They are often collaborations of groups representing people from diverse backgrounds - GECO and more conventional conservationists such as members of The Wilderness Society - yet it is often the ferals who commit to the lock-on. With cruel irony, on June 5th 1997 - World Environment Day - police 'broke the blockade'. Since then, there have been over 170 arrests.

Encampments are a strong source of identity formation and belonging. Like road protests in Britain, GECO's direct action can be seen to possess a ritual function:

[T]he inherent risk, excitement and danger of the action creates a magically focused moment, a peak experience where real time suddenly stands still and a certain shift in consciousness can occur ... Direct action is praxis, catharsis and image rolled into one. (Jordan 1998:133)

²⁰ Strategies included tripods, mono-poles, cantilevers, treesits and 'lock-ons' (invariably attachment to bulldozers using chains, kryptonite bike locks and home made devices).

Indeed, eco-defensive actions, with all their trials and tribulations, have a purpose reminiscent of a rite of passage. Taylor communicates this idea drawing upon a passage from *Earth First!*:

Rites of passage were essential for the health of primal cultures ... so why not reinstate initiation rites and other rituals in the form of ecodefense actions? Adolescents could earn their adulthood by successful completion of ritual hunts, as in days of yore, but for a new kind of quarry - bulldozers and their ilk. (Davis in Taylor 1994:193)

A form of civil disobedience, a successful 'hunt' constitutes the delaying of logging activity via the 'lock-on'. Risks taken at 'actions' are a strong source of kudos and acceptance in these communities of resistance. Great respect is reserved for those who perform the most valorous feats 'in the field' - who, 'by deploying their bodies in precarious settings ... convert themselves into flesh and blood bargaining chips' (Williams 1998:9).²¹ Yet domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and washing-up, earn members equivalent respect. For instance, Bandicoot suggests washing dishes, cooking, fetching water and chopping wood are his foremost responsibilities at a blockade. Mardo lives by the Zen Buddhist philosophy: 'Before enlightenment - chop wood, fetch water. After enlightenment - chop wood, fetch water'. Along with obstructions accomplished, harassment's experienced, arrests and fines accumulated, kitchen duties and camp maintenance are important sources of kudos within the protest milieu.

Such communities of resistance are autonomous zones of warmth and solidarity. This was reported to be the case at a recent anti-logging campaign at Giblett WA in 1997, where, at any one time, in a stand off with the WA Department of Conservation and Management, there were said to be 150 people scattered throughout the old growth, many on tree platforms. One platform dweller, Zac (aged 20), revealed that 'for the first time, I feel like I actually belong somewhere ... There is such a sense of belonging and such a sense of family in this place that I haven't found anywhere' (Pennells 1997:5). While the loss of forest compartments or coups to which deep attachments have been formed occasions a 'crushing sense of grief and despair' amongst forest defenders, the desecration often binds together those who have 'borne witness' (Hoare 1998:23).

Together with blockades and other protests, forest raves, festivals and gatherings are important hubs of eco-radical sociality. Ferals will likely celebrate the season's cycle - the

²¹ For example, during the Daintree Skyrail protests of 1991, one dedicated activist was said to have 'superglued his testes to a bulldozer blade' (Doyle 1995). Perhaps a prime candidate for

pagan year, the path of the sun and phases of the moon - at small gatherings, doofs (like Earth Dream events), communities (e.g. Wolfgang's Palace) or at larger ACHs (like ConFest). Immediate centres on the margins, such events provide the context for meeting new friends and/or partners, for forging alliances. Further to this, they provide opportunities for the disenchanted and directionless to form and maintain vast 'extended milieux' (Purdue et al. 1997) and to (re)turn to spiritual and activist paths. They are, therefore, recruitment thresholds. Consistent with the party/protest amalgamation of 'DiY culture', such thresholds typically combine festive celebration with political consciousness raising. With the rallying promo 'Celebrate and Defend', the Goongerah Gathering of January 1998 typified such an alliance as it hosted live music, a doof and was the kick off for a renewed forest campaign. ConFest is a magnified model of this kind of alliance.

Part III. Authentication at ConFest: the Feral Return

Australians have sought authentication at various locations. These are invariably temporary and geographically marginal spaces they make pilgrimage to as tourists/holiday makers. They make journeys both out/inside the nation's borders seeking cultural, historical, ecological and psychological authenticity. Internal destinations range from the centre (especially Uluru), to the hinterlands (mountains/rainforests), to the edge (the beach/coast), to the past ('heritage' sites). In the quest for a purer, more 'natural' existence, those sympathetic to alternative lifestyles have a range of destinations at hand, most of which are socially and physically marginal. Many have attempted permanent authentication by emigrating to communes and multiple occupancy communities. Munro-Clarke argues such places provide residents suffering from fragmentation and the personal estrangement of modern-industrial society with the potential to develop 'an inner quality of strength and coherence', a 'fully realised personal identity', an 'authentic self' (1986:36,219,34). In more recent times, 'self-actualisation' may be the intentional outcome of much briefer sojourns: from weekend workshopping and rural retreats offering spiritual guidance (e.g. Vipassana courses), to practical education camps furnishing an 'ecological self' (e.g. Nimbin's 'permaculture youth camp'). Recent times have also seen

alternates travel to temporary festive centres where multiple qualities of self-authentication are accessed and performed. ConFest is such a transitory, marginal centre.

Many participants are attracted by the sense of *return* ConFest evokes - a return to a desired space, to *nature*, manifested as the 'natural' environment, 'natural' healing, diet or even immediate, 'natural', sociality. Liminalities celebrate their distance from the parent culture and their affinity with one another. As local authenticity *par excellence*, *ferality* is championed and performed at ConFest. At a space on the edge and time in-between, participants are permitted to be, or quite literally go, feral.

Therefore, there are several ways in which we can conceptualise ConFestian *ferality*. First, ConFest is a temporary juncture for ferals, a haven accommodating various semi-nomadic tribes. Rarely subjected to prejudice at this populous marginal centre, 'the ferals, the gypsies, the people on the fringes of society, seem to be quite comfortable' (Yallara). For itinerant activists it is a transhumant 'gathering of the tribes'. Yet, perhaps more than this, ConFest, says Spinifex, 'is a kind of a link for city based people to have that connection with the Earth and to rub shoulders with the very few that are actually living with the Earth'. In their open defiance of a mass-consumerist mentality and the apathetic disposition upon which economic rationalism relies, in resisting and ridiculing bureaucratic structures and 'power over' processes, ferals are like beacons. With their integration of living theatre, Earthen spirituality and anarchist social and political projects, they are, to use Banyalla's phrase, 'fucken stunners'. Adherents of an expressive and conscientious youth culture, they represent an attractive subcultural career for the disenchanting.

As a result of its conferencing dimension, ConFest is a significant point of accessibility. Dominant culture expatriates encounter eco-radical alternatives and may become enlisted in 'the volunteer earth army'. As a recruitment centre for contemporaneous campaigns (e.g. protests at the WMC uranium mine at Roxby Downs SA in 1983/84 and 1997, the Errinundra forest blockade in 1984, and the protest at ERA's Jabiluka uranium mine in 1998), ConFest has featured in Australia's feral emergence. From Moama IV, activists from GECO (in receipt of grants and donations from DTE for equipment for blockades and educational tours) and other ecotribes (FOE, OREN, and TWS), formed *Forest* (see Chapter 4). An 'outpost for the forests' (Bandicoot), the village has functioned as a fund raiser and rallying centre for native logging blockades mounted at Goolengook. With the precedent already set back in 1984, Banyalla makes no bones about the possibilities:

If we get down to East Gippsland we can lock off the whole of the logging industry, right. A thousand people the coppers can't deal with. It takes 20-30 coppers to do one blockade, so it's impossible for them to knock out six or seven.

At a further level, *ferality* is nearest to that which might approximate a 'dominant symbol' at ConFest. For participants, *ferality* is an archetypal mode of *otherness*, 'natural' corporeality, a most authentic condition of human being. *Ferality is freedom* - a freedom embodied in those who have 'cut loose from common or garden varieties of human' (Nelumbo). At ConFest, such freedom is given root and permitted to flower. In an organic autonomous zone, where other 'truths' are enacted and alternate forms of sociality are (re)discovered, one is free to take a risk - to stray from the paths.

The fragile, eruptive character of this permissive topos is laid bare when participants spill over its perimeter. Transitory occupancy of immediate locales is often threatening to locals. Outside opinion on ConFest and its inhabitants is mixed. Since ConFest is a financial boon for small towns like Tocumwal and Moama, and ConFesters are usually friendly, locals are most often favourable. However this is not always the case. As Spain earlier reported, from the first moment of the DTE movement alternative lifestyleers have encountered hostility:

The Establishment authorities treat us like a load of excrement. They are not even concerned to consider our usefulness for composting a garden ... the media show little interest in relating our positive attributes, preferring to exploit our sensationalist image of being dirty, useless, irresponsible, drug-addicted, ratbag, ragtag dropouts. (Spain 1976)

In 1985, DTE withdrew continued permit applications for the Baringa event near Wangaratta following objections from local property owners and residents. Apart from the alarm generated by the proximity of a 'nude camp', locals took exception to the abject feral body 'loitering and hitch-hiking in the area'. One couple even discovered someone 'asleep under their mailbox' (*Wangaratta Chronicle* 1985:1). In 1991, after Walwa III, a town resident wrote to DTE reporting cases of 'people sleeping in the streets and in various front gardens around town. In fact we were a bit concerned at the number of people who lingered on after ConFest had finished, in some cases for weeks' (*DTE News* 67, Aug 1991:5).

Outside the festive atmosphere, the freedoms sought and assimilated by participants presents a potential threat to privileged order, propriety and property. But inside, transhumant participants - distanced from routine social life, outside the confines of

suburban enclaves, centres of learning and business districts - are provided the opportunity to experience an immediate communion with 'the natural' and 'fellow travellers': they are safe to get and be 'dirty', to assume wildness, to cultivate 'crustiness'. *Ferality* is an authentic transitional/edge identity (re)constituted via ConFest's liminal/marginal coincidence. In Chapters 6-8, I investigate a triad of liminal modalities (outlined in Chapter 2) which respectively condition key aspects of *ferality*: embodied alterity, eco-spirituality and neo-tribal sociations.

Conclusion

Feral is a characteristically confrontational attitude intimately connected to the critical discourse and practice of radical ecogism in Australia. It has appeared at the crossroads of several historical trajectories: the local confluence of hippie, punk and pagan youth cultures, the emergence of a nomadic squatting/activist movement, and the valorisation of indigeneity. Via discussion of this relatively immediate and largely non-commodified spectacular/activist subculture, special note has been made of its efforts to celebrate and defend natural and cultural heritage.

We are witness to a contemporary transition which indicates detachment from the domestic 'parent culture' *and* identification with the natural environment. This Australian eco-radical project promises to bequeath similarly disenchanting individuals with an understanding of their kinship with the natural world, an attendant range of responsibilities, and a defensible *place* in the scheme of things. For those embarking upon co-operative eco-tribal trajectories, this subcultural career is rewarding, a risk worth taking, a source of belonging and purpose. Evidencing a subterranean process of reconciliation (with ecology and indigenes), ferals are antipodean *terra*-ists seeking (re)connection with place.

For many alternates, *ferality* has become an authentic category of human being - evoking disorder, unpredictability, wildness, otherness - freedom. Its desirability lies in the transitional/trespassory status achieved by the straddling and undermining of an established Nature/Culture boundary. Permissive and immediate, ConFest is a site wherein *ferality* can be accessed and performed. It contextualises the expression and realisation of principal elements of *ferality* - spectacular aestheticism and life theatre (art); eco-

spirituality and activism (religion/politics); and a quest for belonging in community (sociality) - discussed here and elaborated upon in the remaining chapters.