

THE RANGE – AND PURPOSES – OF AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC FESTIVALS THAT ARE FUNCTIONING AT PRESENT

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Abstract: The ‘festival’, this customary and very Australian institution, has always embraced a multiplicity of rituals, forms and activities; for it is public in its presentation, participatory in its nature, an embodiment of the community, and also a carrier of its traditional/long accepted values and beliefs, notably those of defiance and of the scurrilous and mocking.

Recent classification would seem to indicate that social and class bases enable the (larger) festivals to be put in several categories. Alex Barlow opted to categorize these festivals into eight, seemingly progressively developing, clusters: seasonal, harvest, food, sport, historical, cultural, religious, ethnic/folk.

Australia today enjoys a vast variety of festive celebrations, civic, playful, religious, popular, and traditional. The catalysts/determinants to the regular performances and their attractiveness are: (present) power; (residual) class; the distinctive/seeming enclave; or the perceived/energetically claimed/promoted ‘regional’ style. The author also outlines some theoretical perspectives on the late modern/post-modern public celebration of festivals on the basis of two major scholars in the U.S. – William M. Johnston and Jack Kugelmas.

The Australian/post-modern festival complex/area of associations – and one somehow close to the area of meaningful and accessible ‘heritage’ – is one evolving in its deeper significance, and acting as a bowl mirror to tell us much about the actual local/national past and its possible future. Yet it continues to defiantly celebrate life, and so it remains, as it always has been, the most important/uncertain/enigmatic presentation of a culture’s/any culture’s values, meaning, more spontaneous behaviour and place on history’s spectrum.

Key words: festival, Australian public festivals, theoretical perspectives of festivals

Today an Australian rural or urban community’s particular festival/carnival/procession-parade/fiesta/celebration has certain obvious revivalist (performative) dimensions or characteristics that are, in all seeming, and superficially at least, similar to those of many other countries in the first or second worlds’ cultures. For the styles and dimensions of all of these – or their general typology and morphology – are to be placed somewhere along a continuum, even as they constitute a planned format – or is it one cobbled from bricolage? – but offering,

and marking, an enjoyable, celebratory and periodic social occasion. This national, and ubiquitously experienced, public and communal event functions through various ethnographic and largely traditional Australian observances, performances, rituals, superstitions and, often, with some very satisfying and accompanying and appropriate amusements.

Vital to the well-being of (a large, if temporarily gathered section from the whole of) a region's society, the same event endeavours to bring people together in active fashion, very much as the village square gathering so long ago did and the present internet café may occasionally attempt to achieve. Certainly all such public functions in this country are specific contextual responses – often both naïve and arcane – to a given place and era, overwhelmingly one significant in either the general Australian or to a discrete region's (imagined) ethnography or social history. Thus settlement/convictism, pastoralism, war and its anniversaries, the Indigenous presence, sport and bush/popular music, and any more local and distinctive ethnic groupings, are almost certain ingredients. And, to state the obvious, the Australian climate at most times of the year offers a climate conducive to the exploration of (facets of) the country's history, identity and the human emotions in the out of doors.

Further, all such twenty-first-century festivals, whether completely Australian or other, are now to be seen and understood as customary, complex, and deeply symbolic public events, operating in a restorative fashion in the public space. Perhaps the strongest statement of their like, and commonly nostalgic and postmodern, significance is to be found neatly phrased in this 1995 American summation:

[Public c]elebrations have always been vital to the well-being of society. Not only do they punctuate its life with rituals, ceremonies and festive events, they also bring an essential and rich spirit to its everyday existence as well as to its special moments. They are touchstones for its strength and cohesion for its tensions and conflicts... [and so] necessary to the pulse of society. G. Fabre, p.1, in her 'Feasts and Celebrations' in *Feasts and Celebrations in North American Ethnic Communities*, ed. Ramon Gutierrez and Genevieve Fabre.

To this contextual definition we might well add the recent shrewd and perhaps necessarily qualifying remarks from Michael Brocken on the content and reception of one ostensibly traditional event, albeit a typical folk (music) festival in Britain:

... the relationship ... between [such] folk music and its presentation remains a significant and persistent problem... [for] the inherited categories of high culture, folk culture and popular culture... are being subverted by the heterogeneous mass-mediated cultures of our own age. (M. Brocken, *The British Folk Revival, 1944–2002* (2003), pp. 130–131.)

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This same type of multi-stranded and celebratory public occasion is, however, a very concrete activity, one of performance, entertainment, or commemoration, and, much as its etymology – from the Latin word *festum*, originally meaning ‘public joy, merriment, revelry’ (and used commonly in the plural) – would suggest. For, as was the case in ancient times, it is still characterized by a plurality of activities and of multiple (nostalgic) celebrations. Their enjoyment nature is neatly caught in the opening words to the recent national festivals-surveying volume, *See Australia All Year* (2002), from which we may excerpt:

The range of [a festival’s] social phenomena is broad. All [of them] are, at their core, a simple fun-loving expression of the desire to celebrate life or, to put it in another way, to have fun. (p.8)

If we may anticipate some of the conclusions to be reached later in this survey, we may note here that that work’s editors then continued –

[m]oreover, in these days of social atomisation and individualism, there is something reassuringly communal and giving about most festivals. Regardless of the particular motif or rubric they adopt, most are celebrations of the community itself: its survival, prosperity, productivity, skills and talents and its desire for self-expression, recognition and social contact. (*Ibid.*)

Continuing in this vein they distinguished very wisely between the smaller scale and more participatory regional festivals, commenting next, however, in a caveat on the processional/parade-like propensity of the larger/metropolitan observances, that

[t]he major urban festivals are more likely to involve a relationship between the expert artist/performer and the passive viewer/consumer. (*Ibid.*)

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Indeed this customary – and very Australian – institution, the ‘festival’, has always embraced a multiplicity of rituals, forms and activities; for it is public in its presentation, participatory in its nature, an embodiment of the community, and also a carrier of its traditional/long accepted values and beliefs, notably those of defiance and of the scurrilous and mocking. It also contains situations of gentler display or mockery, in short, of the ludic, or the playful. And here we do well to recall the timeless and highly significant views of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872–1945), who in his *Homo Ludens* (1938) had focused on the ubiquitousness of the element of play in human culture. For every spontaneous event and action, he would argue, there are elements of directness, sadness, and of playful ritual. For, indeed, he had long seen the instinct for such play and its core expression of human emotion as the central one in human culture and something to be cherished, especially after the dampening of the European spirit since the Reformation. For he had deemed all the arts – as well as such other elements of society as religious ritual, music, poetry, philosophy, poetry and war – to be best ‘rooted in the primeval soil of play’, and concerned to relive the affectionately recalled past rather than follow the emergent and ‘reformed’ seriousness. In short, he stressed for us play as a social impulse, one older than culture itself, and pervading all life like a ferment, for ‘poetry was born in play and nourished on play, while music and dancing were pure play’.

Similarly, the associations of the word ‘festival’ itself remind us of – and so reclaim something of – so many of our European/Catholic brethren’s world view from the past. [And one may recall that the Roman Catholic faith is now the most regularly observed form of Christianity in Australia.] Above all, this wholistic activity of play, once easily accessible to everyone then in any European community, is now often nurtured and further extended in its influence by its dynamic style and vitality’s appealing irresistibly to the television cameras and so to their soon mass audiences.

If we may further anticipate, in the somewhat banal jargon of today, the ‘festival’ also meets the (emotional) needs of ‘every stakeholder’, rather than merely and mechanistically endeavouring to make a cash profit. While it may well to seem to manifest organizing power and even a certain degree of business and industrial urgency, its core nature is one of total social legitimacy/relevance, in that it is related to the (community) experiences of the participants and, usually, to the easy understanding of the viewers. It is, in short, an enacted perspective on their own real or imagined cultural and societal identity, a return to the time before the post-modern and so an attempt to relive the past with its

multiple and cohesive communal bondings, and, seemingly, with its perhaps fanciful elements of worker cohesion in the face of employer oppression.

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Once often conducted in a distinctive public/religious building for a selected group – as was for centuries the case with higher classes/for much (religious) ceremonial in Europe –, these post-modern organized events, or ‘festivals’, still have something of the religious/deeply significant at their core and they are now genuinely democratic and, inevitably, normative social events which tend to occur in the most central and accessible public space, and at a time of holiday or ‘race day’, when the numbers involved can be large in terms of that immediate community. Earlier mainly rural and very much ‘customary’ (i.e. closely associated with the ancient calendar customs concerning the seasons), most of the very large Australian festivals nowadays are largely urban in their location and/or international in their (tourist) targeting, and they celebrate urban prosperity and the multi-stranded dynamism of the local/national lifestyle, often very self-consciously, as with Sydney’s Mardi Gras. Usually, for both larger metropolitan and smaller distant regional festivals alike, some portions of them are concerned with relevant (often recently fabricated) regional and colonial period history, or heritage, and with like social bruited issues. Further, if they should involve major institutions, they are almost certainly cautionary to the use of power – as with Conscription in World War I, or the logic of the barrel of marbles in the Call Up for the Vietnam hostility, and so give a somewhat uncritical warranty of the trustworthiness of the accepted social order of government and its policies.

In the light of all this, much recent classification would seem to indicate that social and class bases enable the (larger) festivals to be put in several categories, in all honesty:

- 1) those given by the people for themselves – these more usually to be seen as spontaneous/decentralized/regional; as with the potato festival at Guyra (N.S.W.);
- 2) those given by the people for the establishment – often an uneasy pairing; as with various military parades or observations of past public sacrifice; and,
- 3) those staged/organizationally managed by the establishment/(local) government for the people, as with music, agricultural, floral and other seasonal festivities – this last being by far the most common form.

Other helpful distinctions often made are that the festival confirms the (political /religious) world as it is, despite an element of (ambiguous) celebration. Consider the cult of war/of condoning sacrifice in distant wars that seems to have been endorsed by most politicians in Australia in the last 50 years or so.

However, the annual nature of the most encountered festival means that it can be seen to affirm (inherited/currently practiced) social order and government, even as it tolerates excess, frivolity, parody and the chaotic, since it regularly needs the presence at once of all patterns of behaviour, formal and the reverse. Thus the 'festival' is often to be seen as both inverting and intensifying/heightening the quotidian pattern – much as has been seen in Melbourne at the recent Commonwealth Games, or the Sydney Olympic Games some years ago.

AFTER 1945, THE AGE OF FESTIVALS

In Australia, the U.S.A., in Britain, and, indeed, worldwide since perhaps the 1950s, there occurred a remarkable growth in festivals, accompanying the recovery from the world economic collapse of the 1930s and from the convulsions of world war. Recall if you will the strange excitement associated with the Victory Marches throughout the then British Empire, the late 1940s' nation-rehabilitating British 'Festival of Britain', and then, in the 1952 and up to the Coronation, the much vaunted 'New Elizabethan Age' which was supposed to revitalize a jaded nation. This habit of public celebration – alongside the standard and shorter working week and the slow erosion of both mass church going and its linked and seasonal socially observed community-making mechanisms – had made the festival, procession, or celebratory public anniversary, a much facilitated and highly desirable alternative, being cohesive and related to numerous forms of helpful societal bonding. It also had the possibility of providing attractions for all age groups and most socio-economic sectors in the surrounding society, and so counteracted a feeling of pointlessness that no certain goals existed any more, particularly after the Cold War, the Korean, and then the Viet Nam War.

Such 'festivals' – by the 1950s to be widely encountered in many western countries – had also the advantage of involving and bonding together so many diverse organizations and classes of people from across the whole community spectrum. While historians might well deplore the now much fewer authentic 'feasts' and the disappearance of traditional forms of profession and dance, especially in the countries of Western Europe, the celebrative spirit was never lost, and it has continued to function throughout the English-speaking world,

as well as almost ubiquitously in the third world and in even more depressed and often more repressed former colonial societies with a vigorous /customary dynamic of its own.

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In Australia the hitherto relatively slow expansion of festivals would also, in the postwar period of reconstruction, seem a form of escape from the routine of office and assembly line to acquire a considerable momentum. This point was made somewhat cautiously by Alex Barlow in his survey article 'Festivals' (pp. 116–123, in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* (1993)). He then deemed the expansion to have come about soon after 1945, and noted that

[a] survey conducted in 1986, and again in 1987, established some 500 events throughout Australia which could be classified as festivals, using as a broad definition 'regular local events that are labeled festivals or that consist of a number of inter-related activities held as a celebration of something significant to the local community'. (*Loc. cit.* p. 119)

He opted to categorize these festivals into eight, seemingly progressively developing, clusters: seasonal, harvest, food, sport, historical, cultural, religious, ethnic/folk, and adding that the current major festivals in the Australian state capitals began about the same time, starting with Perth in 1953, Melbourne (i.e. its Moomba Festival) in 1955, Adelaide (Festival of the Arts, 1960), Sydney (1977), and Canberra in 1980. Soon after the regional cities followed the same patterning. A subsequent compilation, the Gregory Guides-issued *See Australia All Year* (2002), was easily able to get this tally to 700 and beyond.

It may also be noted here that there is a certain correlation between the pattern of such festivals and the rise of the regional Historical Societies is, for example the state of New South Wales, was early in the field with the Clarence River Historical Society, and then with a general expansion towards the west for a complex of reasons, many connected with the withering of the regional centres and districts.

The much later and by no means exhaustive travelling/motoring companion work – of 2002 –, after dating the Jacaranda Festival in Grafton (N.S.W.) first at 1935, then chooses to underscore *inter alia* in its month by month and state by state surveys, these indicative patterns in festival commencement dates:

1969, Murray River Canoe Marathon Day, December;

1971, Lions Club Camel Cup Carnival, Alice Springs, July;

1972, Official Australian recognition of Father's Day (cp. USA in 1909);
late 1970s, Gold Coast Marathon, July;
1986, *The Age* Melbourne Writers' festival;
1988, Floriade, Canberra, September–October;
1990s, East Coast Blues and Roots, Byron Bay;
1991, Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Townsville, July;
or the 1995 Canowindra Balloon Fiesta, etc.

While one could easily substantiate the popularity of Barlow's classes of such happenings from the cited 2002 survey volume, a fresh but fairly careful survey of it would seem to suggest that one of the most widespread types, and, arguably, attracting the largest numbers of 'ordinary' people, would be the more complex Folk Festival, in which area the Gregory work discusses, amongst others, those at: the old gold town, Gulgong in New South Wales, in December; the massive Woodford Festival, in South Queensland and easily accessible from Brisbane, running for 6 days, at year's end; Cobargo, N.S.W., in February; the Blue Mountains Festival of Folk, Blues and Roots Music, out from Sydney, in March; the Dandenong Ranges Folk Festival (March); the enormously popular Port Fairy Folk Festival (from 1977) around Easter and accessible from Melbourne; the Franklin Apple Harvest Folk Festival, April, in Tasmania; the Illawarra Folk Festival, held for the region around Wollongong, N.S.W. in September; and the Maldon, Victoria, Folk Festival, held in October, while the National Folk Festival, held at Easter in Canberra, is the largest of them all for the enormous number of items – perhaps 2,000 – and performers and for the very considerable budget to stage it. This is also the most intellectually satisfying such autumn holiday occasion, since it runs – in parallel – numerous scholarly seminars and is much supported by the Oral History, Folk and like resources of the Australian National Library and the various universities in the Australian Capital Territory. Notably, too, the various more regional universities have made their mark, much like the provincial cathedrals of Europe in the sponsoring of regional festivals, as with the Bach Festival held in Armidale New South Wales, in the middle of May and utilising the small city's two cathedrals.

But while the producers, participants and audiences for any given (Australian) festival may well *seem* of a similar socio-economic class, these comings together serve a particularly useful intellectual purpose/experience by allowing alternative social, cultural and even political divergence to be addressed/experienced/observed alongside their ostensible core focus, that of the performance of music.

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Closely related to the autumnal, solstice or spring ‘folk’ events would be the numerous Jazz Festivals, or those similarly styled, viz.: that at Dubbo, in the west of N.S.W., in August; in Bellingen, N.S.W., in August, a cooler riverside location in the early spring; the Sun Coast Jazz Festival in Tasmania, in June; Morpeth’s one, inland from the city of Newcastle, N.S.W., in late May; at Kiama, in southern N.S.W., in February; the nostalgia making Riverboats Jazz Festival at Echuca, on the River Murray February; Noosa (Heads), Queensland, September; Wangaratta Festival of Jazz, November; and various others. And, interestingly, the (once American-sourced) Country Music festival is clearly a developing cluster, for it is not merely associated with the Tamworth Festival in inland northern New South Wales, held in the ‘Country Music Capital’, in late January, but with other named C.M.F.s as with: Gawler, S.A., in November; Charters Towers, in North Queensland, in May; Riverland, in the N.S.W. border region near Victoria; or the Emerald Heartland Festival, in Tasmania in October. All of these are so (strategically) located that they can pull in quite large numbers from several circling centres of population to a carnival and older style community where the setting and buildings assist the pleasures of winding back the clock.

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Another much expanding category from the Barlow list would also seem to have now become ubiquitous, namely the clearly titled ‘ethnic’ festivals, which are not intended to be exclusively for their own recently established communities of migrants, but rather to display and share their now underscored traditions with all Australians. Here the Celtic is the strongest and most persistent, and we do well to remember here that the compassionate Governor Macquarie had in 1820 granted early official recognition to St Patrick’s Day for the many Irish – convict or emancipated. The Scottish Celts, a more mercantile group, have always been more assiduous in the scheduled and extraordinarily well-organized display of their inherited culture. Thus, sequentially in any current year, one might visit –

the Bothwell International Highland Spin-in, a biennial event in this quiet farming town on the Clyde River in Tasmania, in March;
Kopunda Celtic festival (South Australia), March;
Tasmanian Celtic Festival, Easter;

Bundanoon Highland Gathering, New South Wales, April;
Australian Celtic Festival, Glen Innes, N.S.W., May, where there are the
impressive Standing Stones in honour of all the segments of the ancient
Celtic peoples;
the National Celtic Festival, Geelong, Victoria, in June;
Toodyay (Western Australia), Highland Games and Festival of the Celts
(September); or the
Beechworth (Victoria) Celtic Festival, in November (one much associated
with the story of Ned Kelly and his gang who operated close by in the
later 1870s).

Less widespread would be the various vigorous Greek celebrations, these occasions of dance and music occurring particularly in Melbourne, Victoria, although there is also the Riverland Greek Festival in South Australia in March, or the Paniyuri Greek Festival in Brisbane, in May. Public celebratory manifestations of Italian culture, apart from those associated with 'Blessing the Fleet' for commercial fishermen often of Italian descent, – both in Western Australia and on the South Coast of New South Wales – include the Australian Italian Festival in Ingham, Queensland, in May, and the Swiss Italian Festa also in May, at Hepburn Springs, Victoria, or the occasional (commemorative) festivals for the collapsed 1880s' settlement of 'New Italy' near Casino, in New South Wales. While German traditional fests, often associated with the long traditional playful archery, were first held in the partly German-settled South Australia, there have been various beer-fests, Embassy-assisted, held elsewhere – often near the regional universities – with less national 'pulling power' – but with an obvious German/German-style core social event and activity pattern.

All these ethnic groups' functions are dynamic, music-filled and particularly concerned with noisy and parodic parading and self-mockery, as well as robust send-up of various pious and even 'wowsers'-like Australian national attitudes.

AND THE PECULIARLY AUSTRALIAN EVENT

Apart from such ubiquitous and national commemorative observations as the Queen's Birthday, or the Foundation Days for the various states and territories, – always listed in much detail in even the smallest pocket or desk diaries – those for Australia Day, Anzac Day, or the colonial period-founded popular agricultural and pastoral shows, special horse-racing occasions have an enormous (gambling/betting) appeal. And the same is true of the various 'Cup Days' in smaller centres, which are on the Australian Jockey Club circuit of assisted

race meetings. Here the Melbourne Cup is paramount, as is the like case, more regionally, for the Queensland Magic Millions in January. Certain other national sporting competitions, by their drawn-out spectacular nature and widely televised content, can and do constitute a form of nationally watched – and Australian identity-enforcing – festival. Such new style calendar events/instances, several of which now attract from the media ‘global’ attention are: the Australian Tennis Championships, in Melbourne, in January; the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, in December; or the Hoffman Cup (international tennis), in Perth, also in December.

The largest floral festivals tend to occur in the spring and in or near the cooler state capitals, from which they are reasonably accessible for large numbers who will pay for at least part of the privilege of viewing the magnificent displays. A particular and linked ‘ethnic’ festival is the Sakura Matsuri ‘Cherry Blossom Festival’ in Cowra, New South Wales, held there since 1979 from the completion of the memorial gardens, these created in commemoration of the deaths of so many Japanese Prisoners of War who broke out of the Asian and Italian Camps there and lost their lives in the suicidal mass-escape attempt in the spring of 1944. Another place of pilgrimage from the heat of the coast would be the floral festivals to the west of Brisbane in the high-level and so more cooler Toowoomba.

There are more than a score of other possible clusterings by their averred or now dominant themes. It is, however, only the longer running festivals, those in warmer areas – like the vast and convenient Woodford camping area in southern Queensland – that also have a local rationale that can attract the largest numbers of visitors and their cash, whether it be spent on accommodation, souvenirs, or in admission charges for the numerous central performances and spectacles.

IN SUMMARY

In short, it may be said that Australia today enjoys a vast variety of festive celebrations, civic, playful, religious, popular, and traditional. While the British origins of many are obvious, most have become either celebratory of things Australian, or angled at the wallets of overseas tourists, notably British/European ‘backpackers’ or Japanese, and more and more Chinese or Thai visitors on tour here. But we must be wary of seeming classificatory absolutes and binary opposites in style/purpose, since the categories and moods overlap, compete and interact even within the same event.

For the catalysts/determinants to the regular performances and their attractiveness are: (present) power; (residual) class; the distinctive/seeming enclave; or the perceived/energetically claimed/promoted 'regional' style. Yet one cannot but be struck by the commonality of key elements, the fusion of the new and the emergence from the seemingly familiar matrix of novel elements, as micro-cultures are constructed or de-constructed, with larger cultures creolized, Australianised, and manipulated to help residents' and visitors' subjective evaluation of their fellows in this symbolic/somewhat frenetic display of their 'community'.

SOME THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE LATE MODERN/ POST-MODERN PUBLIC CELEBRATION WHICH IS AT PRESENT STYLED 'FESTIVAL'

It may now be helpful to consider, in some degree of overview, the recent and very persuasive theories of two major scholars of the late-modern festival in the United States of America:

William M. Johnston, as in his *Celebrations: The Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today* (1991); and

Jack Kugelmas, as in his 'Wishes Come True: Designing the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade', *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 104 (1991), pp. 443–465.

Both these writers choose to see most/all (current) festivals as fields for the celebration and enactment of perceived/residual/latent identities, and as depending for their vitality and their more meaningful interpretation on the disciplines of art, anthropology, history, politics and sociology, as well as drawing considerable strength and meaning simultaneously from their sympathetic study, one from the emerging and hybrid fields of cultural studies, ethnic studies, the women's movement and women's studies, and, more recently, (public/participatory) performance studies.

In short, they would consider festivals and celebrations as total social facts that have emerged with great power and dynamic attraction from their surrounding societies, and so they must be studied as cultural manifestations which have boldly encoded the histories and memories of various groups/preferences, as well as offering their 'triumphal' resistance to cultural conformity to the 'regular' behaviour and workaday practices of most of the participants.

For their natures have not succumbed to conformity or ‘assimilation’, as in that terrible Australian bullying of all recent migrants in the early 1960s, a persistent pressure to conform totally to the local and, apparently, somewhat vulgar and anti-authoritarian, and then so smugly approved dominant Anglo-Saxon-derived culture.

More recently, indeed, the U.S. experience has regarded the modern/post-modern festival as a new life-cycle of rites that are progressively more widely to be accepted as valid expressions of actual or wished for and psychically comforting identity. Thus the host/surrounding society has been able to explore and contest the dimensions of both the accepted and the old and the unknown further festivals/celebrations, from the micro-scale of the family reunion, up to not quite lemming-like commemorative pilgrimages, such as our late April Australian war-commemorative journeyings to Gallipoli, to Borneo, to Changi, or the pilgrimages by American veterans and their families, in both large scale and small groupings, to the Arlington War Cemetery.

Thus, assisted by a fresh perspective, we may choose to adopt/ compare the Johnston /Kugelmas thinking, and so arrive at a more appropriate and tripartite form of festival typology:

- I. Persisting Colonialism and so the Festival as the Art of Resistance to the dominant and traditional ‘WASP’/British culture present since white settlement.

This progressive style may be best witnessed in our campaigns : first for Federation, then (intermittently, but very persistently) for a say in the deployment of Australian troops overseas; in the rise of the Australian Republican Campaign; or the various congresses/referenda/union attempts to modify the Constitution. The treatment of the native peoples here has been harsh, with natural justice coming very late and most unevenly. Yet there are helpful parallels between the two countries of the U.S.A. and Australia. Thus, although the Afro-American Community there has had a much longer and more challenging public presence than the Australian Indigenous, yet each has had to embrace the struggle for a political voice, and against endemic racism, and so to obtain full participation as citizens and proper respect and respectability from the broader civil society. The faces of all these movements have been more and more obvious in public occasions and marches/processions.

The first and very different such Festival held by the Indigenous people of Australia has had a very difficult gestation, and it has chosen to retain its traditional elements in a purity that can only be seen in their essence to be timeless. This was *The Dreaming*, Australia’s International Indigenous Festival, and one organized by the Queensland Folk Federation for the Dreaming

Board, the Dreaming Organising Group, the Queensland and Australian Government and the Australian Council for the Arts, and many other sponsors – and celebrated at Woodford, Queensland, 10–13 June 2005. It is appropriate to quote from the profoundly reflective Welcome Address for it –

All around us exists a knowledge, a lore that has been alive for scores of millennia. In our midst is a living cultural heritage which is the oldest known to humankind – that of our Indigenous people.

Our organisation promotes the notion that it is our intangible knowledge, our lore, that we carry in the deepest part of our being is that which sustains us. The exploration of that culture, and the expression of it we think critical to the development of our well being. As a nation we search for that national well-being – an Aussie identity that aims to bring us together which all too often ends in gimmickry... soulless and empty.

The Welcome then concluded with these words –

We hope that the Dreaming will be a vehicle from where we might listen and learn from some of the finest cultural expressionists in the world.

We hope the benefits for each of us and our nations will be enormous and we hope that this vehicle will be overloaded with laughter and joy.

The Contents of The Dreaming included, *inter alia*,:

Ceremony; Dancestry; Theatre;
Music; Comedy; Galleries; Workshops; Film; Talks; etc.,
the whole having an impact that was both intense and indescribable.

As the festival Director, Rhoda Roberts, would say at the outset:

The Dreaming 2005 will tell our stories from our hearts and through our eyes. It will be an experience for all, a great journey of ceremony, song, dance stories and culture.

We pay our deepest respect to the local Dungidau peoples and we thank them for allowing us to celebrate, touch, learn and participate on their lands.

Through this festival we have the opportunity to celebrate annually with other first nations. I know you will be elated with the diversity of events; from the spiritual to the spectacular, the contemporary to the traditional – there is something for everyone.

Let's share the knowledge, respect the earth, and above all let's have fun.

OTHER FORMS OF ETHNIC PUBLIC RESISTANCE TO THE DOMINANT MODE

Thus there has been in Australia a like sequence of struggles for full public participation from other groups deemed lesser – those by the Irish (and Catholic) from their position of social and religious exclusion; those of massive racism and exclusion of the Chinese communities from the time of the Gold Rushes to well into the 20th century; of the Italian and then the Greek communities to overcome the earlier prejudice and then the ‘Mediterranean’ slur on them and their vital family life, this largely post World War Two; for the Australian Indigenous, the fact, for them then necessary, of the Freedom Rides of the early 1960s, then the Voting Campaigns, Land Rights struggles, and so to the recent and carefully planning for the much larger scale, proactive, and very confident Indigenous Woodford Festival.

- II. Rituals of Renewal and Return, with elements of deliberate Pilgrimage, to achieve valorization, to restore and rejuvenate a discrete sense of self respect within and despite being tied to a larger community.

This process of personal re-integration – one often contemplated in the U.S.A. for Afro-Americans involving return to West Africa –, would in the White Australian case frequently involve travel from the coastal city to a distant place, perhaps far inland. Further, it might/may well involve consuming special/traditional foods, the watching of special performances such: as a ‘festival’ rodeo, with its Indigenous people proudly steer-riding; responding nostalgically to Highland /Caledonian Games, and to massed pipers; attending a ‘B and S’, or Deb. Ball, or savouring the sense of an almost Rites of Passage phase in a ‘Back to’ function – to an often ailing rural area or town/hamlet, which would come with some historical, school, or clan re-union.

The functioning of any such ritual/return has many layers of meaning, often distinctly subversive, even as it involves constant transformations from the urban/prosperous/established present place and lifestyle to the earlier and happier self and identity. For it conjures up the ur-, the formative, and the sure and satisfying. A typical such event would be: the yarn-telling Tenterfield (N.S.W.) Oracles of the Bush, held every April; the surprising range of Bush Laureate Awards linked with the Tamworth Country Music Festival and so announced and awarded each January; or one of the literary festivals associated with the work of such immensely popular colonial figures as A.B. Patterson, Henry Lawson, or John O’Hara, all such events being possessed of this spine-

tingling national heritage and identity-arousing dimension. Indeed, as in many parts of the world – especially in highly urbanized countries, as in Western Europe – the festival primarily organized to facilitate the live telling of stories, particularly about the putative events in the region in convict and colonial days, is remarkably akin to actual ‘return’ journeyings to earlier (experienced) mores and/or places.

ACTUAL PILGRIMAGES

In their identity-affirming way, both of the last types of ‘festival’ are strikingly similar to the cult of (neo-medieval) pilgrimage and the ‘Way of the Cross’ that is again such a feature in the Western Europe of the 21st century. Various of them occurred in more Irish/Roman Catholic regions of Australia, much as have occurred outside Newcastle, New South Wales, in areas there of much (former) heavy industry and coal-mining.

Yet, even in this ‘returning’/‘back-to’ category, there are so many echoes of the first ‘resistance’ grouping, as there are, in muted wise, of the next, the comic or ludic/subversive.

- III The third core element that the named Northern Hemisphere scholars of festival identify is the spirit of carnival, or Huizinga’s ‘the ludic’, a mood best and most obviously to be seen in Australia in the outrageous Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras held each autumn.

PARADES, FESTIVALS, AND CARNIVALS

As was said above, the borderline between parades and festivals is a hard one to draw, the first often being prone to slide into carnival, which, in Australia, was for too long simplistically deemed too ‘Mediterranean’, or viewed by older members of society with considerable suspicion as somehow savouring of irresponsible university students and of their ‘rags’, this last particularly in the region of the older University of Melbourne. Quite certainly, in the 21th century the parade has become more frequent and is much less likely to be industrial/political, as in the decades of the earlier twentieth century, although the protest dimension has again been to the fore in recent years, whether because of America’s wars in the Middle East and Australian participation therein, or from attempted industrial/workplace ‘reforms’ and other apparent manifestations of (American style) social engineering.

AND WITHIN THE LUDIC, THE BEGUILING ROLE OF MUSIC AND GENDER TRICKS

Music will always draw large crowds of visitors/spectators from all social groups to create a broad 'communitas', even as it embodies the subtle and reformist 'politics of mirth', and so, equally, the liberating associations of freedom and of exuberance. Similarly the 'parade' often flaunts exaggerated sexuality, and teases by means of cross-dressing traditional/strict notions of gender identity, even as it appeals beguilingly, and however subconsciously, to the whole of society. Thus the carnivalesque in parade is deliberately ludic and subversive, as it seeks to gain for its members and adherents a measure of power, to present alternative if fanciful agendas, and so to win new loyalties. Indeed, we may well question whether a true carnival parade is merely joking and chaotic, or endeavouring to be loosely/deliberately formative of new and desired attitudes, sympathies and understandings.

Thus it is difficult not to accept the views of that articulate scholar of public display, Victor Turner, as in his 1986 essay, 'Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film and Spectacle in Cultural Performance' – or in his earlier, 1983, piece, 'The Spirit of Celebration' – that a parade allows people to transform themselves, to assume socially challenging personae, to enter a fantasy/utopian world of behaviour and expression with freedom and enthusiasm.

As Turner also observes in various of his publications, carnival/the carnivalesque is in mind and at heart didactic, as it moves from its own anti-structure to the transformative and the hypothetical, as it tests, explores, and demonstrates alternative views of the status quo. He and other theorists like Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) would argue that carnival is by its nature related to the religious, the ludic, and the celebrative, to the annexation of public space by those usually dismissed from it. Indeed, that same public space has become the most significant theatre for the contentious in our culture, where by performance, so much of the customary or given may be challenged.

For, even as carnival engages the community, so it can reshape it in a much more cohesive form. This means that the private space's different/licentious thoughts and behaviour, now become public, alike can now echo, or reinforce, or question the official. Thus the two threats – those of being totally ignored, or, worse, of being totally assimilated, are both avoided. Finally, as Turner sees it, all these trends are in conflict, and so differing identity can be lost, tradition and culture are re-enacted, problems are confronted and society's courses of further action are hereby rendered both fluid and excitingly malleable.

AND WHAT OF THE POST-MODERN?

A key tenet of postmodern theory is that, due to globalization, the rootless urban populaces worldwide have developed a pronounced longing for the (more accessible) past, a nostalgia best catered for by symbolic activities that allow a temporary blurring of the barriers between past, present, and future. In Australia, as elsewhere, this view tends to support the hypothesis that the number of festivals – as places and times of such ‘reality-testing’ – will continue to grow, as will the public’s emotive urges to attend these refreshing and invigorating events.

AND SO TO FORGING AND, PERHAPS, AFFIRMING BOLDLY LARGER AUSTRALIAN IDENTITIES

These nostalgic and reformist/and, perforce, anti-British and anti-monarch attitudes may indeed be said to involve much greater national awareness and participation, as with the powerful force that ‘Australia Day’ has been able to muster up in the last 30–40 years. It is – as elsewhere around the globe in emergent nations – peculiarly marked by the vastly greater array of public heroes, no longer in our case just bushrangers and the lawless, or the war hero – witness the earlier cult of idolizing of holders of the Victoria Cross, and of ANZAC. For so many others have become (lesser) icons, foci for local sentiment and national identity – artists like Albert Namatjiri; country music stars; medical figures who have been selfless in their witness; achievers in a vast array of sports; and those who have steadfastly given supportive community service/ shown ‘volunteerism’ far beyond the normal, and so been recognized in the various grades of the Order of Australia, an initiative of the Labor Government of the early 1970s, and continued with ever increasing popularity since that time by all the major political parties.

What is displayed here is, surely, the present generation’s resistance to mass market culture and to commercial television, with the festival having an important live and community-based role to play. And, as in the all important paradigmatic and necessarily pragmatic folk festival, there is also served the most useful purpose of allowing alternative social, cultural and even political divergence to be addressed alongside the music, the costume and the parades of so many hitherto largely ignored groups. This is now a post-modern return to personal pride and to vigorous competition, for both men and women, the latter with a return to traditional crafts such as quilting, the country fair, and

the splendid array of so satisfying activities of the CWA (the Countrywomen's Association), and a vast range of volunteering/community-serving activities, now available to both sexes, and so markedly and enthusiastically taken up.

The proliferation of the festival/celebration/parade as a welcome public institution in Australia, especially since c.1990, is rightly to be deemed a reaction to the common loss of all feelings of satisfying personal attachment, these now deemed to be under threat from ever increasing global and impersonalizing forces. Thus such community-staged events – unlike the innumerable professional and television sponsored sporting contests which are all too like the games in the Roman circus – are believed to be the sole occasions on which visions, true or false, of the shared past, the present experience and group identity can be framed to stabilize/affirm the needed and comforting inheritance. And so they reconstitute for the many their personal identity in a highly satisfying fashion, being able, like family history, to assist in establishing a unique personal history, a more leisurely pace, evidence of small business capitalism and so perforce the chance to recreate (parts of) one's blurring personal history amidst small retail stores, small manufacturing enterprises and older craft shops/workings. In short, they are able to actualize nostalgia.

Regardless of their type, our located festivals, parades and seasonal events are, however, only truly meaningful to the individual if they are within the viewer-participant's surrounding/regional experience and understanding of his/her culture. As Robert Merton had said as long ago as in 1938, there were five inter-related modes of adaptation to the condition of anomie, namely: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreat and rebellion. And all are part of the often nostalgic responses associated with festivals.

AND WHAT OF CURRENT RESEARCH INTO FESTIVALS?

While most current research on the Australian festival/public celebration has tended to focus on the numbers of attendees and on interviewing such persons, there is clearly a considerable research field to be tapped in ascertaining the more hard-headed views – of the organizers, of those then selling consumables of all sorts, and of those who do not participate at all, or are satisfied with very occasional attendance rather than any participation. For it is essential that folk/all other festivals, however public or select, should come under the academic microscope, since they continue to present some of the most enigmatic behaviour patterns in Australian society, with important performative and cultural dialectics – whether these be passive (?), value-added, agenda-free, conser-

vative or left-wing – and normally and unquestionably challenging society's apparent/ traditionally subscribed to 'givens' of the public identity.

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Clearly this small seminar held for the Institute of Australian Geographers at the University of New England in July, 2005, was intended to focus on the rise and fall, as well as the proliferation, of particular/localized festive activities, much as has been done so helpfully since 1997 in the Sage-issued *Space and Culture*, an interdisciplinary journal that fosters the publication of reflections on a range of socio-spatial areas such as those related to urbanism, new contemporary ethnographies, virtual (and new) citizenships for large numbers and other identities, the destruction of erstwhile values, and the endeavours of postmodern men and women to 'feel part of something' (Sarah Bonnemaïson, 'City policy and Cyclical Events', *Design Quarterly* 147 (1990), pp. 24, ff.).

It is to be hoped that the field of investigation will not be left to the purely descriptive and cash-driven sphere of (academic) tourist studies alone, since its implications are many and of considerable significance to the societal (dis-) satisfaction of global man with his peculiarly limited and media-manipulated mental climate in the new millennium.

Indeed festivals are to be seen at one level as strange New Age fragments, perhaps surviving from the 1960s' counter-culture – itself once the refuge of those unable to cope with the alienations of cyberspace –, as well as now being signs/manifestations formative of new, if fluid, fresh and so often not closely localized communities in the age of globalization.

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In earlier times and other cultures, festivals/festival-like events – particularly pre-Industrialism and the proliferation of cities – would have fallen within tight bounds of time and space and action, as people celebrated the changes in the seasons or the landmarks in regional and national life, yet also letting off steam, paying very human tribute to their own forefathers. For then, in their carnival/festive manner, they could also loose their mundane identity behind disguise, perhaps challenging the bonds which hold a community together, making explicit the various divisions/segments within that same community.

Now, after massive urbanization and more recently the conforming pressures of globalization, our post-modern festival and its complex of dynamic associations still constitutes the sphere in Australia in which public and private folklore – or the traditional culture – can interact in brave fashion. In 1993, Barlow (*loc.cit.*, p. 121) had hoped that Australia might develop its own concept of the folk festival – this would seem to have been a generic term for him – and that it would be appropriate to the Australian context, he then added that there was some evidence that such a style was starting to occur.

However, his other prediction was that it was almost inevitable ‘that local folk festivals will become increasingly similar in content’, with the only differences being those of the ostensible theme, or the differences in the way of life of the particular community. But perhaps he had not considered the British summation of a generation earlier, as by the leftist Jeff Nuttall, when considering cultural retreat

Naivety was equated with honesty, ineptitude was equated with sincerity, and merit was gauged in terms of proximity to the animal; and the vegetable (in his *Bomb Culture*, 1970, pp. 37–38).

Many Australian folklorists would differ from both Barlow’s deterministic views, and Nuttall’s simplistic and pessimistic ones and they would argue that the Australian festival is continually modifying and evolving in its deeper significance. For, in its very prolixity and, perforce, far scattered and hard to access locations, even as it has retained its primary importance, so it continues to celebrate daily life and satisfaction at personal place and identity. Certainly it is always asserting the right of community members to enjoy themselves and to express their feelings in their places and in whatever ways might seem appropriate.

A GENERAL CONCLUSION

Our Australian/post-modern festival complex/area of associations – and one somehow close to the area of meaningful and accessible ‘heritage’ – is one evolving in its deeper significance, and acting as a bowl mirror to tell us much about the actual local/national past and its possible future. Yet it continues to defiantly celebrate life, and so it remains, as it always has been, the most important/uncertain/enigmatic presentation of a culture’s/any culture’s values, meaning, more spontaneous behaviour and place on history’s spectrum.

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