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The Rainbow Family of Living Light: Anarchy, Individuality and Communitas in a Contemporary Alternative Culture

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The Rainbow Family of Living Light:
Anarchy, Individuality and Communitas in a Contemporary Alternative Culture

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Abstract

Over the past thirty-eight years, the Rainbow Family of Living Light, a neo-nomadic countercultural group, has hosted hundreds of Gatherings in forests, deserts, and mountains all around the world. For each Gathering, the Rainbow Family creates a temporary city in the woods, a city which must serve the needs of thousands of people for several weeks. The use of money at Gatherings is taboo and all goods and services are provided to the community through voluntary donations. The construction of these Gatherings requires an enormous amount of labor, all of which is undertaken in a decentralized manner free from economic coercion. The Rainbow Family has been able to successfully overcome the so-called free-riding problem and motivate individuals to donate their energy and property for communal ends through the cultivation of a feeling of *communitas*, in the classic sense described in the works of the anthropologist Victor Turner. The author outlines some of the cultural practices which create *communitas* among Gathering participants. Furthermore, the author demonstrates that the *communitas* which exists at a Rainbow Gathering is always a provisional achievement, formed at the nexus between deeply held and somewhat antagonistic ideologies of individuality and of solidarity. For Gatherings to succeed, this highly contingent experience of *communitas* must be continually recreated through cultural practices both embodied and symbolic.

INTRODUCTIONS

June 22, Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico

It took us over an hour to find a suitable spot to set up camp. Only the 22nd and already the best locations had been taken. We needed a flat area, at the minimum of six feet by six feet. Close to a trail, but not directly off of one. And not too close to a shitter. After several false leads, we finally found an acceptable plot of land. There were two pine trees on the East side, which would serve the dual purposes of blocking the rising sun and allowing us to secure our tarp. There was no tent as it had been lost with the rest of John's luggage on the Greyhound bus. It didn't matter; the tarp would suffice to keep our gear dry. We would probably end up finding tent-space with a loving Brother or Sister soon, anyway.

John was my traveling companion, a friend from New York. Our travels to this Gathering had been exhausting. First a forty-hour bus ride from upstate NY to Albuquerque, then a cheap commuter train which took us close to the Northbound highway. From there we had hitchhiked, walking along the sun-drenched New Mexican asphalt for what seemed like ages before finally getting a ride from a friendly local named Kerri. She drove us North, towards the Santa Fe National Forest, stopping to point out natural hot springs and Puebla ruins. The ride up into the mountains was slow, the roads narrow and dusty. Kerri knew all about the Gathering; Family had been trickling in for weeks now, some coming in cars, vans, or buses, some like us, with only backpacks. She didn't have any interest in going herself, but she appreciated us. We were Free Spirits, she said. God's people. We waved goodbye to Kerri on the entrance to a forest service road and started walking again. It was easy going now. We

were at a much higher elevation, so there were trees for shade, and besides, we knew we were close.

We had walked less than a mile when we heard the sound of a vehicle coming from behind us. A dusty minivan pulled up to us, and a smiling bearded man our age stuck his head out the window. “Need a ride Home?”, he asked. We hopped in the back of the van. Our drivers had decided to take an alternate route in order to bypass the Forest Service checkpoint which had been set up on the main road into the Gathering. There was no contraband in the car, but word was that the Feds had been ticketing for minor offenses like dusty license plates and windowshields. Better to be safe than risk getting a frivolous ticket; even if you win in court it still takes a whole day to hitch a ride into town and back. We drove slowly up the mountain, enjoying the natural scenery and even spotting a family of wild deer at play. As we got closer, we began seeing the unmistakable signs of a Rainbow Gathering: men, women, children, and dogs, strangely dressed, often hairy and dirty or bedorned with an astonishing variety of New Age accoutrements, carrying backpacks or driving beat up old vans. Underneath a giant banner proclaiming “Welcome Home”, we were flagged down, Welcomed Home for the first time of many times, and updated on the continuing Forest Service harassment. Remember to use your blinkers and drive under the speed limit, we were reminded. Eventually we arrived at one of the main parking lots, a converted meadow, and started our hike down into the heart of the Gathering.

By the time we had selected a sleeping space, we were simultaneously exhausted from days of travel and filled with the pulsating excitement that always marks one’s entrance into the otherworldliness of a Gathering. We cleared the spot of twigs and branches, strung up our tarp, and stashed our gear underneath. Our spot was relatively remote, the nearest encampment

being about twenty-five feet away, on the other side of the trail. By the peak of the Gathering twelve days later tents, tarps, and teepees of all colors and sizes occupied nearly every inch of space. Leaving our heavy backpacks peacefully unattended, we set off to begin exploring the Gathering. (Fieldnotes, June 22 2009).

Each year, during the first week of July, the Rainbow Family holds their annual North American Gathering. Rainbows welcome anyone and everyone to their Gatherings, which can draw up to thirty thousand participants. Money is not allowed and everything is provided for free through the imagination and initiative of individuals and small groups who cooperate in order to provide goods and services to the community. Everyone gets fed. People organize and participate in a multitude of events such as workshops, sweat lodges, nature walks, and drum circles. There is music, dancing, and prayer all day and night. Everything happens without formal organization and with little money, as if by magic. Rainbows gather in the woods in a desire to escape the perceived evils of modern industrial society – which they call “Babylon”.

Rainbow Gatherings promote, among other things, a quintessentially 1960s ethos of peace, love, and freedom. In order to create and recreate feelings of love and community among Gatherers, Rainbows depend upon carefully stylized repertoires of speech and action. Rainbows use the fictive kinship terms brother and sister with strangers. Cries of “We Love You!” followed by “Lovin' You Family!” reverberate in waves throughout the forests and meadows. Every manner of profussive excess, including hedonism and asceticism, is encouraged. Drug-use and nudity are rampant. Gatherings are mixes of the grotesque and beautiful, the thrilling and the

trite. They are beautiful expressions of human possibility while at the same time living repositories of some of the most unfortunate New Age clichés.

The U.S. government, unfortunately, considers the Gatherings illegal, and has engaged in a consistent campaign of targeted harassment since their beginning. The Forest Service claims that noncommercial gatherings of more than seventy-five individuals on National Forest Grounds require a signed permit (USFS). But the Rainbow Family, which is a loose-knit organization of individuals, operating on anarchic principles, cannot really enter into legal agreements. There are no leaders or organizers. No one is empowered by the community to have the authority to sign a permit for the whole of a Rainbow Gathering. Rainbows claim that the First Amendment's right to freedom of assembly guarantees the right to peaceably gather on public land without having to sign a permit. This deadlock has continued, off and on, since the first Gatherings. Occasionally individuals have signed a permit on their own authority, without the consent of the open Council which makes decisions at Gatherings. Many Rainbows fiercely object when this happens since signing a permit purports to give the Family's authorization to a series of objectionable agreements. Most Gatherings, however, are permitless and hence officially illegal.

The Forest Service responds to an upcoming Gathering by appointing an Incident Command Team (ICT) which is charged with maintaining public safety. ICTs are usually formed in order to respond to forest fires or other natural disasters, but play the role of law enforcement in the context of Rainbow Gatherings. The ICTs, in concert with local and state police, have consistently engaged in various forms of pernicious and possibly illegal¹ interference with the Gatherings. The level of harassment changes each year, but always involves roadblocks, car

¹ Cf. The 2008 ACLU-Wyoming report on what was called the “consistent pattern of harassment and overzealous enforcement” undertaken by the USFS in regards to the Rainbow Family.

searches, drug dogs, spurious ticketing, and the presence of armed officers at the Gathering. Some years Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) have simply ticketed everyone for gathering illegally. Rainbows, seeing Gatherings as sacred and nonviolent spaces, object especially to the presence of weapons. “Guns do not belong in church.” At Gatherings, Federal agents usually travel in groups of eight or nine, clad in bullet proof vests and carrying automatic weapons. They observe, taking pictures and film of people’s faces and bodies (which is not only threatening but also violates the norms of these Gatherings). Sometimes they sneak up on people in the woods in order to ticket them for drug use or nudity. From the point of view of Rainbows who have come out into the woods in order to escape from the violence of Babylon and pray for peace the presence of these armed and aggressive officers is deeply distressing.

At the same time, Rainbows have created a number of ways of dealing with the problems posed by law enforcement. Alerting the community to the presence of government officials is everyone's responsibility, and the appearance of a group of police in the woods or trails elicits a cry of “Six Up!”² which is picked up by others and carried throughout the encampment alerting everyone. People often take turns following the officers at a legal distance, recording their activities and making sure that people are alerted of their presence. The system is rather efficient, and one is usually given plenty of warning about the arrival of the police. Until the threat is gone, dogs are leashed, marijuana pipes stashed, and the naked disappear into the woods.

The high point in tension between the Rainbow Family and the government probably came at the 2008 National Gathering in Wyoming. A group of Forest Service officers chased a man (apparently accused of smoking marijuana) into Kid's Village (considered a particularly sacred and “safe” space) with their weapons drawn. An older woman wearing a bright tie-die

² This slang is widely used in countercultural communities of travelers, especially those involved in the distribution of narcotics. The six apparently refers to the number of bullets in a revolver. At Gatherings Forest Service LEOs are called “Seven Up” because of their green uniforms, and unarmed USFS personnel are called “Seven Up Light”.

dress approached one of the officers in order to ask him to lower his weapon. “This is Kid’s village,” she said. “There are *children* here. *Lower* your guns.” The police immediately and wordlessly handcuffed her, antagonizing a growing crowd Rainbows which had formed to observe the situation. A group of agitated Rainbows began to chant, angrily demanding that the officers leave the area. In turn, another group of Rainbows, intending to keep the peace, formed a line in between the officers and the angry crowd. They stood facing with their backs to the officers and slowly walked towards the crowd, attempting to put space between the two agitated parties. The jumpy and confused officers began to fire on the line of peace keepers. Several people were shot in the back with pepper spray paint balls while trying to help diffuse the tense situation. Others, merely observing the fracas, were also shot. This violence, happening in Kid’s Village in the presence of pregnant mothers and children, nearly led to a riot before the police retreated and people calmed down. The police later claimed that someone had thrown sticks at them.

For three days after this incident, the LEO presence at the Gathering was unusually light. On the morning of July 7th, however, the Gathering once again swarmed with Federal and local police, now apparently responding to an emergency fire. The USFS ordered a mandatory evacuation of the Gathering site, riding through the Gathering in open-top Jeeps with weapons drawn and yelling into bullhorns. Most Rainbows, suspecting a ploy, ignored the evacuation order. Dozens more quickly filled available five-gallon buckets with water and began to run towards the plume of smoke which was now barely visible over the tree line. Soon more USFS agents arrived, and the official story changed. The evacuation was not mandatory, but the fire was approaching the main parking lot at Welcome Home. Those parked there needed to leave immediately or risk their vehicles being destroyed by fire or the aerial fire-fighting effort. In the

distance a tiny plume of smoke (is it smoke?) was still visible. The smoke, however, was clearly in the opposite direction of the parking lot. Some panicked and fled, while others continued to wait and see what would happen. Eventually, the Rainbows who had run off to fight the fire returned to report that the supposedly dangerous fire was merely a carefully contained one acre grassfire, and that LEOs had refused to let the volunteers put it out, even going so far as threatening to arrest or taser them if they should try. Police were already on scene when they arrived, watching the fire burn. More reports soon came in that the LEOs were harassing Rainbows trying to leave the Gathering, apparently looking for the “instigators” of the violence three days earlier. The whole situation was highly suspicious, and most Rainbows suspected that the LEOs set the carefully controlled fire in order to end the Gathering early. Whether this is true or not, this incident has served to reinforce the antipathy between the USFS and Rainbow Family.

I happened, quite by chance, to be present for these events. Wyoming was my first Gathering and I had scarcely heard about the Rainbow Family previously. I arrived at the Wyoming Gathering after literally flipping a coin to decide North or South on Highway 141 in Utah. I was shocked by the government harassment that I witnessed, although I was then ignorant of its larger context. I myself received a ticket after being pulled over for having a blind-spot mirror on my side-view mirror, which the LEOs called a “mirror obstruction”. When I began to consider the possibility of doing ethnographic research on the Rainbow Gatherings for my senior thesis I was interested in the possibility of studying the relationship between the government and the Family. I have since moved on in entirely new directions, and this thesis does not much mention the role of government harassment in the reproduction of these Gatherings. It is important to mention at the outset, however, that whatever else goes on at a

Gathering takes place within this frame of harassment. The presence of armed representatives of the state is completely antithetical to the anarchic and peaceful ethos of these Gatherings.

Incidentally, interference by the police undoubtedly helps to recreate a sense of community or *communitas* among Rainbows. This experience of *communitas*, theorized by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969; 1973; 1974; 1974; 1978; 1984; 1992), is the thread which holds together the investigations of this paper. *Communitas* is a sense of spontaneous affectivity that arises among individuals who are separated from their quotidian existences. I will show that this idea is central to understanding how Rainbow Gatherings are able to successfully reproduce themselves on the basis of cooperation rather than competition. *Communitas* helps to understand the ways in which the apparent magic of a Gathering actually comes into being. *Communitas*, in turn, is something which must constantly be recreated through embodied praxis. It is not a transcendent principle, but a way of being which is carefully and constantly created through ritual, linguistic convention, and norms of reciprocity.

The bulk of research for this Thesis came from participant observation conducted by the author over a three week period at the 2009 National Gathering in New Mexico. My data from this period includes detailed field notes and journal entries as well as recorded interviews. My understanding of Rainbow culture has also been expanded greatly through innumerable casual conversations with Rainbow participants, both at home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, as well as on my travels throughout the United States. I also draw on internet sources, including unofficial Rainbow websites and particularly alt.gathering.rainbow (AGR) - the Rainbow message email group.

Three sustained scholarly discussions of the Rainbow Gatherings have also been helpful, although none were undertaken within the discipline of Anthropology. The first source, *The*

People of the Rainbow, was originally a Ph.D. in American Studies and is the result of long involvement by the author with the Rainbow Family (Niman 1991). It is now rather dated, although it provides detailed background information and thick descriptions of Rainbow culture. The second source, *Following the Rainbow Trail*, is an unpublished Master Thesis in sociology (Woodall 2007). The final source, *A Collective of Individuals*, is an account of an Israeli Rainbow Gathering published in a religious studies journal (Tavory and Goodman 2009). In addition to these discussions of the Rainbow Family, I have also drawn on anthropological and sociological accounts of similar alternative cultural gatherings, especially the works of Graham St John (1997, 1999, 2001) and Kevin Hetherington (1996, 1999).

Throughout this thesis I will use short ethnographic pieces reconstructed from my field notes in order to help the reader get a sense of the first-hand experience of a Rainbow Gathering. Intertwined with these pieces will be sustained analysis and discussion. I have chosen this approach of shifting between a first-person voice based on notes written at a time when I was fully immersed in the Gathering and a more detached scholarly voice consciously. I feel that this approach appropriately reflects the schizophrenic nature of participant-observation.

In the first chapter I attempt to provide necessary background information which should help to explain the fundamentals of a Rainbow Gathering. I consider in particular a number of commonsense questions about the Family, including the demographics of Rainbow Gatherings, the process of the provision of food, the use of drugs and other substances, and the political commitments of the Family.

The second chapter begins with an exposition of the ideas of liminality and *communitas* as they arose in the work of Victor Turner. I also consider common objections to Turner's work, both from postmodernists and scholars of pilgrimage, attempting to partially defend Turner

against his harsher critics. Finally I briefly conclude with a review of the application of Turner's concepts to the study of alternative culture.

The third chapter is a discussion of the way in which labor is divided at Gatherings. I argue that the fluid division of labor at Gatherings is closely related to the notion of *communitas*. The remainder of the chapter is a detailed discussion of two forms of labor done at Gatherings: peacekeeping and decision-making. I argue that the way in which these forms of activity are constructed reflects the existence of *communitas*.

The fourth chapter links the ideas of *communitas* and liminality to the political philosophy of anarchism and argues that part of the reason that the Rainbow Family have been unusually successful at maintaining their utopian anarchic experiment has been the cultivation of *communitas*.

And finally, the fifth chapter attempts to demonstrate the ways in which the sense of *communitas* is consistently recreated and reinforced through common Rainbow practices which imply the simultaneously assertion of selfhood and community.

Chapter One

Since 1972, The Rainbow Family of Living Light (RFL) has annually hosted a free and non-commercial North American gathering of interested individuals. The location of these Rainbow Gatherings changes ever year, but they are always held in the woods on public National Forest land. Gatherings have historically drawn between ten and thirty thousand participants. Although officially lasting for only the first week of July, Gatherings unofficially last for nearly two months. They are based on a radical philosophy of non-hierarchical decision-making and mutual aid grounded in an ethos of peace and love. There are no official leaders or organizers, and all decisions are made by consensus through a variety of council processes in which anyone is invited to participate. There are three traditional rules to which participants implicitly agree to: no money, no alcohol, and no violence. Everything, from food to medical care to entertainment, is provided for free to all attendees through the generosity and cooperation of other participants. In addition to the annual North American Gathering (called Nationals in the U.S.), people hold each year a multitude of smaller, regional gatherings, all over the country. In recent years, Rainbow Gatherings have spread outside of the United States and become a worldwide phenomenon, including All-Africa Gatherings, European Gatherings, and World Gatherings. Today, at any given time, there is a Rainbow Gathering being held somewhere in the world.

Paradise?

In order to clear up certain misperceptions at the outset it is necessary to say a few words about the paradisiacal expectations of Rainbow Gatherings which are held by many participants. Gatherings are festivals, joyous celebrations of community, solidarity, and spirituality. They are treated by hard-core participants as sacred pilgrimage sites. Just as participants often address each other as kin, Gatherings are also mythologized as Home. In fact, for hundreds of miles around an upcoming Gathering, one can often see groups of hitchhikers clustered around dirty pieces of cardboard which say only “Going Home”. For these travelers, Gatherings are not only chances to meet with old friends, they are arenas of material abundance and hedonistic excess. Rainbows see Gatherings as paradisiacal domains carefully set apart from the struggles of quotidian existence.

This utopic aspect of Gatherings, however, would not much resonate with most contemporary Americans. Living outside for weeks on end, exposed to the elements, insects, and often disease – this experience would be treated as, at best, a rugged adventure by most urban dwellers. For Rainbows, however, Gatherings are not about deprivation but profusion, not about sacrifice but celebration. In order to understand why Gatherings are considered utopic, one must reflect for a moment on the lifeworlds of the travelling homeless, who make up a large portion of Gathering attendees.

The contemporary moment has been described as one of “the end of public space” (Mitchell 1995). Public spaces, once accessible to all, have been steadily replaced by spaces of consumption. Today, in the United States, one can drive for hundreds of miles without coming across a spot of land that is not privately claimed and guarded. Urban and suburban landscapes alike are dominated by endless iterations of franchised consumer establishments selling overprocessed food or services related to the circulation of capital (banking, insurance, payday

loan). All of this poses serious challenges for homeless travelers, who have largely removed themselves from these systems. To the wealthy professional, suburban strip-malls might represent abundance, availability, and convenience. But to the poor and homeless, similar strip-malls, which take up more and more space throughout our world, represent deprivation and hoarded wealth. As grocery store dumpsters are replaced by food compactors, even the possibilities of living off of the waste of industrial society are foreclosed.

In addition to all of this, of course, the homeless poor in the United States have been subjected more and more to various types of criminalization (i.e. laws against sitting on the sidewalk). Laws against hitchhiking or panhandling might make sense from a city council's perspective. But for someone who is broke and passing through, such ordinances make life extremely difficult ("the city says I can't eat and now they say I can't leave!"). Additionally, normal human actions, such as urination, defecation, love-making, and sleeping, which we tend to imagine as "private" activities, are all problematic for those who do not possess their own private space. The result is often continuous police harassment and a correspondingly deep belief in the injustice of the prevailing system. The itinerant homeless are often repeatedly ticketed or jailed for sleeping outside (illegal camping) or urinating in public (which is officially a sex crime). Many of the struggles of this lifestyle thus come not from lack of property ownership itself but from the active criminalization of poverty.

All of this is very important for understanding how so many see Gatherings as "Home". Not only is everyone fed and provided for, but *there is space for everyone to do what they want*. For one who has recently been on the road, struggling to find a place to lay down one's head for the night, such an experience is a welcome reprieve. There is no longer any trouble finding places to piss, shit, or fuck; there is always good food and company. For many travelers, this is

paradise indeed. And similarly, for many travelers, Gatherings, like homes, are mainstays in their lives, serving as dependable nodes of congregation for those practicing ambulant lifestyles.

Attendants

The RFLL have used the same traditional invitation since the early days of the Gatherings in the 1970s. As soon as a final Gathering site is determined, hundreds of copies of this message, along with a description of the site and travel directions are mailed out to Family across the country, where they are photocopied and distributed as widely as possible. Today, the invitation is also published on the internet. The RFLL's invitation welcomes anyone and everyone to attend:

We who are brothers and sisters, children of God, families of life on earth, friends of nature & of all people, children of humankind calling ourselves Rainbow Family Tribe, humbly invite:
 All races, peoples, tribes, communes, men, women, children, individuals-- out of love.
 All nations & national leaders--out of respect.
 All religions & religious leaders-- out of faith.
 All politicians-- out of charity,
 to join with us in gathering together for the purpose of expressing our sincere desire that there shall be peace on earth, harmony among all people. This Gathering to take place beginning July 1 thru July 7th to hold open worship, prayer, chanting or whatever is the want or desire of the people, for three days, but upon the fourth day of July to ask that there be a meditative, contemplative silence wherein we, the invited people of the world may consider & give honour & respect to anyone or anything that has aided in the positive evolution of humankind & nature upon this, our most beloved & beautiful world-- asking blessing upon we people of this world & hope that we people can effectively proceed to evolve, expand, & live in harmony & peace.-
 Amen-

This invitation makes clear the intention to create a open space where people do "whatever is the desire of the people". It also makes it clear that the make-up of Gatherings are to be highly heterogenous, constituted by a multiplicity of different "races, peoples, tribes,

communes, men, women, children, [and] individuals”. Gatherings are indeed attended by a diverse set of individuals and groups. Although mainstream media reports often refer derisively to Gathering attendees as “1960s leftovers” or “grown up flower children” (Niman 1997, 148-169), Gatherings have consistently attracted large numbers of youth throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. In fact, attendees do not fit into any sort of monolithic category. Gatherings are attended by contingents of individuals representing political viewpoints including Marxism, libertarianism, conservative individualism, communitarianism, anarchism, and deep ecology. Some Rainbows consider themselves spiritualists, including representatives of what are often called New Age or Neo-Pagan beliefs, as well as Christians, Hare Krishnas, Buddhists, Sufis, Rastas, Orthodox Jews, and others. Attendants might be students, homeless travelers, curious locals, lawyers, journalists, local, state, and Federal police, clowns, musicians, teachers, professionals, or even anthropologists. Many Rainbows see the extreme diversity of the Family as its greatest asset. It might also be the Family’s greatest weakness. As I was told on my first day at the 2008 National Gathering in Bridge-Teton National Forest, Wyoming, the “best *and* the worst thing about the Family is that anyone can join”. There is in particular a somewhat startling juxtaposition of impoverished travelers who live full time on the road surviving through performing or pandhandling and middle class New Agers on vacation.

This extreme diversity is by design. The first Gathering, Colorado 1972, was a direct response to the dissolution of the peace movement of the 1960s. The people who organized Colorado '72 wanted to create a space where those who supported ‘different’ ways living could come together to celebrate their alternative lifestyles and create a living example of what society could be like. Gatherings were meant to help heal the sectarian divisions which have for so long divided the so-called counterculture into increasingly isolated and impotent cells. They were not

to be a space where Maoists, Trotskyites, and Leninists would argue with each other about arcane theoretical points, nor a space where Christians, Buddhists, and Pagans would compete for converts. Rather, Gatherings were to be a space where all of these people, and many more, could temporarily forget their disagreements and come together in order to deploy a *positive* vision of what life could be like. And, of course, have a lot of fun at the same time. Garrick Beck, one of the focalizers of the first Gatherings, explains the context of their emergence:

The peace movement had been badly torn by violence, division between neo-Maoists and neo-Marxists, CIA infiltration, and power-hungry peace-movement bureaucrats. In fact, the peace movement as we knew it had disassembled: The back-to-the-landers, food co-ops, Eastern mystics, and worker collectives had all gone their ways; rock 'n' rollers were now putting on their festivals in the face of mounting opposition from the nation's anti-Woodstock laws; Marxist-Maoists were theorizing in progressively smaller circles; and the Kent State massacre had indicated the government's eagerness to stem the tide of collegiate rebellion...When an arts festival in the Pacific Northwest brought together a number of tribally oriented groups, it was only natural that we should share our visions of what was happening and what we could do. The idea of a gathering for all people engaged our imaginations; in the dismal and fragmented climate of the times, it was an uplifting thought (1991, 68)

As a reaction to the fragmentation of the counterculture in the early 1970's, Gatherings were explicitly created as a space which could accommodate various and heterogenous elements of alternative culture.

The RFL thus holds under its marquee an astonishing diversity of people, groups, and ideas. Gatherings are countercultural spaces of social centrality: nodes within the general diffusion of a complex and heterogeneous alternative cultural social field (Hetherington 1996). Of course, the fact that such a diverse array of competing perspectives can co-exist at a Gathering does not mean that difference is washed away. Rainbow Gatherings are rather an example of what Graham St John has called "alternative cultural heterotopias" (1999; 2001). By this is meant an alternative cultural event which "occasions disputation among constituents over philosophy and method, as well as the interpretation of the event itself" (1999, 21-2). As was

repeatedly emphasized by my informants, no definition or conception of a Rainbow Gathering will ever satisfy all participants. It is common for Rainbows to acknowledge that “there are as many Family visions as there are Family members.” If there is one thing that most Rainbows can agree on, it is that there are “many colors in a Rainbow”.

What most Rainbows share with each other despite this heterogeneity is a rejection or ambivalence for the mainstream, defined broadly as the “system of values, beliefs, and practices hegemonic under modernity” (St John 1999, 7). It would be improper, however, to gloss this diversity of rejections of the mainstream under the notion of a “counterculture”. The reality is more akin to a network of interconnected and always shifting alternatives to the mainstream which do not at any point form a totality. As St John notes, “different rejections of ‘the centre’ activate an abundance of alternative ‘truths’, other ways of being - conflicting *authentica*. Although networks enhance connections, alternative culture is not a homogeneous culture” (1999, 8). Rainbow Gatherings are spaces where a variety of ways of being which are criminalized or marginalized by the mainstream can be simultaneously performed, where dissenters and dissent of many types are juxtaposed with one another. At Gatherings, “diverse constituencies, communing around different centralities” come together in order to invest the Rainbow Family itself with “multiple meanings, variously conflictual and complementary” (St John 1999, 60). This diversity is inherently tied in with a widespread belief in independence and interdependence: different people are encouraged to “do their own things” but within the context of a larger functioning community.

Despite this heterogeneity, internal concerns persist regarding racial, ethnic, and gender representation at Gatherings. People of many different races congregate at Rainbow Gatherings to celebrate, but a huge majority of participants are still white. African-Americans in particular

are underrepresented, partially because they are underrepresented among the middle class, and also because of the considerable added difficulties faced by darker-skinned hobos in the United States (Niman 1997, 109). Occasionally people have posted Gathering invitations in nearby inner-city neighborhoods, but these efforts have been largely unsuccessful, possibly because of transportation issues (Niman 1997, 108-11). Some Rainbows also charge that Rainbow culture is sexist, and many Rainbows have complained about the prevalence of sexist “male locker-room” discourse as well as issues of representation in Council. The ratio of males to females at the height of a Gathering is about equal, but some contend that men, and “male energy” generally, are overrepresented in Council. In response to these concerns, Rainbows have attempted to innovate solutions such as women’s-only spaces, women’s-only Circles, and alternating between men and women speakers in Council. Such efforts have failed to satisfy most, but concerns about questions of gender politics continue. Although most Rainbows condemn both overt sexism and overt racism, Gatherings are not entirely “politically-correct” spaces and questions of white and male privilege still proliferate.

Getting Fed

Meals are provided to whoever is hungry, without any direct exchange of money or labor. No one goes hungry. A number of unofficial kitchens which spring up around the Gathering provide food freely on their own initiative and authority. Any group of people who want to can form a kitchen: all that is needed is the resources to serve the community at large. Some kitchens specialize in coffee or tea, others offer full meals, while yet others gain renown for serving delicious desserts. Meal times are often irregular, and different kitchens serve at

different times, on their own initiative. Besides serving food, kitchens serve as entertainment venues and community centers: many Rainbows choose to camp near a particular kitchen, which becomes their home base. A typical kitchen design includes two large fire pits, one for cooking and one for socializing around, a large tarp for shelter, counter-tops and tables made of pieces of wood lashed together with twine, logs for benches, and a make-shift oven, often a metal drum caked in dried mud.

Larger kitchens work cooperatively with one another in order to prepare a collective dinner which is served to everyone present at a nightly Dinner Circle in the Main Meadow. During a Gathering's peak it might draw well over a thousand Rainbows, while others may choose to instead eat at a local kitchen. Generally, between five and ten kitchens serve main dinner circle each night, with each kitchen focusing on making a large quantity of a single type of food. The food is carried or wheeled in giant pots or drums and served by volunteers to seated Rainbows. Rainbows bring their own dishes ("blissware"), which are often fastened to the belt, pants, or backpack for easy transport. A typical meal at dinner circle includes several varieties of stew, rice, and beans. Fresh baked bread, salad, spaghetti, curry, and stir fries are also common dishes. Food at dinner circle is usually more homogenous than food which is served independently, since such large portions must be prepared. Meals served locally at kitchens have more variation, and might include pretty much any type of food which could normally be purchased in a city, often higher quality food. Many Rainbows are vegetarians or vegans, and meat is not served at dinner circle. It is however not uncommon for individual kitchens to choose to serve meat.

The food comes from both individual donations of personal supplies and from money that is contributed to the "Magic Hat", which is passed around each night at dinner circle. The

money which is collected (in 2009 between two and four hundred dollars a night) is pooled together and used to buy staples in bulk, which are then distributed to individual kitchens. Decisions about what to purchase are made by a Banking Council, operating through consensus, which is open to participation by whoever wants to be involved. Decisions about where to distribute the supplies are made by a separate Council, also open to all. By long standing-consensus, Magic Hat money is not used to purchase meat, coffee, or sugar products. Food which is left over at the end of a Gathering is either taken to other Gatherings immediately or stored by volunteers for safe-keeping until the next Gathering.

Drug Use

There is a widespread belief, both among some counterculturists and among police officials, that Gatherings are giant drug parties of some kind. The truth is that although some Rainbows engage in illicit drug use, many do not. The most popular drugs used recreationally at Gatherings are nicotine, caffeine, and sugar, followed by marijuana and hallucinogens. Hard drugs usually associated with violence, such as cocaine, are virtually absent. Alcohol is not allowed in the main areas of a Gathering and is restricted to a special area, called A-camp, which is located on the spatial and spiritual periphery.

Kitchens serve most Rainbows' desire for caffeine and sugar, while other mechanisms have evolved to help satisfy people's desire for other substances. In the same way that food is provided freely to those who are hungry, drugs, and especially tobacco and marijuana, are routinely distributed without any thought of direct reciprocity. Some Rainbows take on the job of soliciting donations of tobacco for the purpose of redistributing it to those in need. Such

people, called “Nic at Night”, can be easily identified: one just has to look for a brother or sister carrying a modified coffee can full of tobacco. They also spend a lot of time yelling “Nic’ at Night! If you got a cigarette, I need a cigarette, If you need a cigarette, I got a cigarette”. In addition, most Rainbows are willing to share on an individual basis from their own personal tobacco reserves. The same principles hold true for marijuana: some people, called “Emergency 420”³, solicit for donations which are then used to get Rainbows in need high. Unlike Nic at Night, Emergency 420 is a physical space, where anyone can go to smoke marijuana, provided they haven’t smoked any yet that day (obviously this restriction is dependent on the honor system). The way that reciprocity functions in this regard reflects the general ethic of sharing which is encouraged at Rainbow Gatherings. It would usually be considered rude to smoke a cigarette, do drugs, or eat something in front of someone without offering to share.

The Political Dimension of the Family

Many long-time Rainbows are eager to point out that a Rainbow Gathering is not “merely” a festival. Rather, to many participants, Gatherings are a part of a larger political project which has its philosophical roots in the struggles of the sixties. This political significance of a Gathering is not immediately obvious. From the outside, one could easily imagine that Gatherings are simply huge parties where individuals enjoy the company of friends and lovers and engage in a variety of hedonistic activities. During the lead up to the first Gathering in 1972, as well as afterwards, a large portion of the politically-engaged American counterculture has had precisely this (mis)conception. Getting stoned in the woods does not equal political engagement. Nevertheless, many politically-oriented Rainbows insist that Gatherings are an

³ ‘420’ is countercultural pseudo-code for cannabis.

important aspect of the ongoing struggle to create new forms of democratic and non-coercive social organization. By living together autonomously, even on a temporary basis, people can experiment with ways of solving difficult problems, such as how to provide food for thousands, outside of the state/capital system. This argument utilizes the logic of what is sometimes called “prefigurative politics”, the idea that a revolutionary group’s tactics should accurately reflect the future society being sought. The bumper sticker version of this ideology is “Be the Change You Want to See in the World”. The idea is that if one yearns for a society free from hierarchies maintained through coercion, then one should attempt to build organizations true to this ideal. In many ways this is exactly what the Rainbow Family has done.

For many on the left the strategy is nonsensical. Certainly, it is the precise opposite of the political strategies that have always been advocated by mainstream liberal reformers. In *Rules for Radicals* (1972), Saul Alinsky, the great community organizer whose influence on the current leaders of the Democratic Party in the United States cannot be understated, argued vehemently that any vision of social change must begin from the concrete realities of the political present. The Utopian dreamers of the New Left, Alinsky argued, were doomed to failure unless they accepted the necessity of communication and dialogue with the mainstream. “Dropping out” of this mainstream is not a viable political alternative. The Rainbow Family has ignored this counsel for almost forty years. Instead of starting from the political values of mainstream culture (i.e. representative democracy and capitalism), they have imagined an ‘ideal’ society (directly democratic and communistic) and attempted to institute it in the present, even if only on a temporary basis.

As has recently been noted, similar utopian movements “of the periphery” worldwide have long been neglected by the academic study of social movements (Price, Nonini, and Tree

2008). Such grounded utopian movements, or GUMs, do not seek recognition from capitalist institutions or modern nation states, but rather, motivated by visions of alternative ideal places, endeavor to establish alternative ways of living in the present. Such movements, among them the Ghost Dance of the Great Plains and Rastafarianism, have escaped the notice of academic theorists of social movements largely because such movements “challenge American and European conceptions of activism...[and so] they have been treated as reactionary or escapist, and not as progressive...they are considered insufficiently substantial or determinate to be considered proper social movements” (2008, 128). Because such movements do not focus on making demands upon existing governments or capitalist institutions, they have been ignored by the cross-disciplinary academic study of social movements. Ironically, even if academics have not seen these movements as serious threats to existing institutions, state-power always has. The Ghost Dance and Rastafari movements, like Rainbow Gatherings, were subjects of intense government suppression from the beginning (2008, 136-138).

Relatively recently, revolutionary theorists have begun advocating strategies for effecting social change which closely mirror the idea of “dropping out”, popular in the 1960s counterculture and typified by the Rainbow Family. In a sense, revolutionary theory has been lagging behind revolutionary praxis, and is just now beginning to catch up. Postmodern approaches have tended to focus on the limitations (or inherent impossibility) of social change. This branch of theory, arising in the context of the failure of May 1968 in France, is notoriously pessimistic about human possibilities. The theorists who have begun to challenge this academic consensus, with notable exceptions, such as Slavoj Žižek and his recent *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008), have emerged from the proverbial post-modern wasteland having abandoned the old Marxist dream of the Great Revolutionary Moment. Today theorists are beginning to

advocate revolutionary strategies which sound surprisingly similar to those which have been practiced for so long by the Rainbow Family.

Included among these emerging theorists are Marxist Sociologist John Holloway, Italian Philosopher Paulo Virno, and Anarchist writer Hakim Bey, all of whom have gained increasing popularity in recent years. Holloway's book *Change the World Without Taking Power* argues that revolutionaries should completely abandon the dream of seizing control of the government in order to re-organize society. History has shown us that such a program inevitably leads to the creation of, if anything, even more repressive and coercive institutions. Instead of cultivating the power necessary to control existing governments, revolutionary movements should instead utilize the notion of "anti-power", or power-to instead of power-over. Revolutionaries should disabuse themselves of the notion that they can or should attempt to seize state power in order to effect a transition towards socialism, and instead focus on the creation of autonomous nodes of community power outside of the state system (2003). Virno has similarly theorized "The Exodus" – meaning mass defection from the State – as the appropriate revolutionary horizon. He argues in favor of "Engaged Withdrawal" from state power rather than direct confrontation with it (2004). Bey's notion of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone" – moments of time and space liberated from the otherwise hegemonic operation of capitalism and authoritarianism but not directly confronting existing governments – falls squarely into this theme (1999). These theories are probably in some way a reflection of contemporary revolutionary movements – from the Zapatistas, to Seattle 1999, to Argentina 2002 – which have increasingly adopted elements of anarchistic organization (consensus, mutual aid, and the refusal to seize power) during the past two decades. These anarchistic ideals, practiced for so long by the Rainbow Family, have become dominant methods of organization among the emerging global justice movement

(Graeber 2009). In fact, it has become increasingly accepted that anarchism has replaced the role played by Marxism in the social movements of the 1960s (cf. Graeber 2005; 2009). I talk more about anarchism and its relationship to the Rainbow Gatherings in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: Communitas and Liminality

Victor Witter Turner (1920-1983) was a British social anthropologist who is often associated with the schools of symbolic and interpretive anthropology. He is widely known for his notions of liminality and communitas which he first discussed during his studies of the rituals of the Ndembu of Zambia and later applied to a broad range of topics. Turner borrowed the concept of liminality from the Belgian ethnographer Arthur Van Gannep's work on ritual rites of passage. Van Gannep noticed that many rituals which related to the passage of an individual from one stage of life to another were structured into three parts, (1) separation, (2) the *limen* or threshold, and (3) reaggregation, or alternately, the (1) pre-liminal, (2) liminal, and (3) post-liminal. The first stage refers to the symbolic separation of the initiand from his or her previous structural position. In the middle stage the initiand is symbolically stripped of his or her previous identity and enters a period of liminality, where he or she is between two different structural positions. And, finally, the individual is returned into the fold of society, now with a reconstituted identity and altered structural position.

Turner was fascinated by the middle stage, the stage of liminality, where the initiand is "betwixt and between" (1969, 95) two modes of structural ordering (or two different positions in a structure). For Turner, liminality was a "spring of pure possibility", a moment of "primitive hypothesis," a kind of crack which interrupts the closed operation of social structure (1974, 202). Liminality, which exists literally in the margins between two moments of structure, was a space of pure becoming whose meaning and significance could only ever be understood once this fissure of possibility had been closed by the resumption of structure. Liminality is inherently indeterminate, a time of paradox, of "being *both* this *and* that" (1992, 49). It is "necessarily

ambiguous” because it “elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (1969, 95). Because the liminal is outside of structure, liminality suggests reflection upon structure from the outside, as in art, religion, or philosophy. It is thus the “mother of invention,” a powerful source of novelty (1974, 10).

Characteristic of liminality is *communitas*, or social antistructure. Turner defines *communitas* as a “relation[al] quality of full, unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations and circumstances” (1992, 59). This “commonness of feeling” arises from the cessation of structural antagonisms in liminal states (1978, 13). In Turner’s scheme, structure necessitates division and conflict. Conflict arises primarily between individuals because of their having different, antagonistic interests arising from their structural roles:

Structure, too, whether of small-scale or large-scale social systems, is provocative of competition and conflict. Social and political systems contain offices, high, medial, and low; chains of command; bureaucratic ladders. There are systems of promotion, rules, and criteria for status elevation and degradation; laws concerning the protection, disposal, transfer, and inheritance of property, and succession to high office. There are social controls over sexuality and reproductive capacity, rules governing marriage, and prohibitions on incest and adultery. In this many-leveled, ordered, and sanctioned field, individuals find it hard not to envy their neighbor’s good fortune; covet his ex, ass, or lands; strive with him for office; compete with him on the promotion ladder; seek to commit adultery with his wife; become greedy or miserly; or fall into despair at their own lack of success (1992, 32)

The cessation of the operations of such forms of structural difference, in liminal or inter-structural moments, allows for a spontaneous bond between co-liminars who are no longer distinguished by structural standards. The liminar, who has been stripped of his or her structural attributes, is undergoing symbolic identity restructuring; she thus is temporarily identity-less, and, as a blank slate, is not drawn into conflict with co-liminaries on the basis of rank, class,

property considerations, or the like. With structural attributes cast off, liminaries experiencing *communitas* are free to commune with each other in an unmediated way not possible under structure.

In contrast with structure which “is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom”, *communitas*, as a condition of liminality, is radically open, concerned with the present, “of the now” (1969, 113). It is a moment when anything seems possible; *communitas* appears as “potentially or ideally extensible to the limits of humanity” (1969, 112). The immediacy and universality of *communitas* contrast with the individuating and particularistic operations of structure. Spontaneous *communitas*, with its “direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities” is a moment of temporary transcendence whereby the structural differences between individuals are eliminated in favor of a heightened sense of shared humanity.

Communitas is always a temporary condition, a phase or moment which cannot be permanent. Structure and *communitas* are dialectically paired, two aspects of the human condition. What begins as spontaneous *communitas* eventually becomes normative or ideological *communitas*: “*communitas* itself soon develops a structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae.” All spontaneous *communitas* must undergo a “decline and fall” into structure and law (1969, 132). Spontaneous *communitas* thus always exists in a relationship with structure; it is always transitory and fleeting. It is not however subordinate to structure. *Communitas* and structure determine each other, and neither is possible without the other. Turner emphasizes this interrelatedness:

Spontaneous *communitas* is richly charged with affects, mainly pleasurable...[it has] something 'magical' about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power. But this power unconstrained cannot readily be applied to the organizational details of social existence. It is no substitute for lucid thoughts and sustained will. On the other hand,

structural activity swiftly becomes arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of *communitas* (1969, 139).

The chaos existing between moments of structure is necessary for the creation of structure itself. Structure originates from the realm of possibility characteristic of anti-structure, but at the same time further moments of anti-structure put structure always at risk. As Turner says, “*communitas*, however, is not structure with its signs reversed, minuses instead of pluses, but rather the *fons et origo* of all structures and, at the same time, their critique. For its very existence puts all social structural rules in question and suggests new possibilities” (1974, 202). Structure draws on the novelty and experimental power of *communitas*. Social antistructure is characteristically open, a sphere of *what could be*. Propositions which are experimentally and inventively deployed in antistructure take root in structure, much like spontaneous *communitas* is eventually penetrated by structure and leads to normative of ideological *communitas*. Anti-structure rejuvenates structure by allowing individuals a necessary release from quotidian existence, but it also always threatens structure through its inherent openness. The pure possibility of anti-structure is closed off only by the reassertion of structure. Turner was well aware of the dangers of anti-structure from the perspective of structure. Although the keepers of structure recognize the necessity of *communitas* for structural reproduction, at the same time, “from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of ‘structure,’ all sustained manifestations of *communitas* must appear as dangerous and anarchical” (1969, 109). We thus find liminality and *communitas* hedged in by elaborate prescriptions, prohibitions, and taboos cross-culturally.

Communitas develops in different ways depending on the social forms of the culture in question. Turner’s main studies were on the liminal domains of rites of passage of tribal

societies and Christian pilgrimage. In traditional societies antistructure was allowed to manifest in the liminal phase of periodic rituals. Liminality is here marked by what Turner calls “symbolic inversion of social roles” (1978, 3) or “symbolic status reversals” (1992, 51). An elaborate example of this phenomenon is given in early in Turner’s career in the *The Ritual Process* (1969:97-104). Here, Turner describes the rite of passage which is undertaken in order for an individual to become the senior chief of the Ndembu, a position of great prestige and power. A small shelter of leaves (*kafu* or *kafwi*) is constructed about a mile away from the village. The name of the shelter is derived from the Ndembu term *ku-fwa*, “to die,” for it is here that the chief-elect dies from his former structural position or identity. The chief-elect, who must first abstain from sexual relations for the preceding several days, is clad in nothing but a ragged waist-cloth and brought into the shelter at sundown. Then begins a rite, *Kumukindyila*, which Turner translates as “The Reviling of the Chief-Elect”. The chief-elect is shoved down onto a mat and made to listen to the words of the *Kafwana*, or Ndembu headman, who engages in a vicious monologue against the chief-elect:

Be silent! You are a mean and selfish fool, one who is bad-tempered! You do not love your fellows, you are only angry with them! Meanness and theft are all you have! Yet here we have called you and we say that you must succeed to the chieftainship. Put away meanness, put aside anger, give up adulterous intercourse, give them up immediately! We have granted you chieftainship. You must eat with your fellow men, you must live well with them. Do not prepare witchcraft medicines that you may devour your fellows in their huts – that is forbidden! We have desired you and you only for our chief... Do not be selfish, do not keep the chieftainship to yourself... If you were mean, and used to eat your cassava mush alone, or your meat alone, today you are in the chieftainship. You must give up your selfish ways, you must welcome everyone, you are the chief! (101)

After this speech, any individual who feels he or she has been wronged by the chief-elect in the past is entitled to express their resentment, going into much detail. During all of this, the chief-

elect is required to sit silently, expressing patience and humility. The chief, according to Turner's informants, must be "just like a slave" on this night. This is symbolic status inversion at its purest.

Liminal rites like *Kumukindyila* symbolize *communitas* by expressing the human intuition that "the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (1969, 97). The *Kafwana*, who in Turner's analysis represents Ndembu society, berates the chief-elect, chastising him for his selfishness, meanness and greed. The chief-elect, who is deprived of sleep and ritually humiliated, must learn that his new position of power should not be used for personal aggrandizement. Rather, high offices provided by structure must be understood by their holders to be "instrumentalities of the commonweal" (1969, 104)⁴. The liminal stage of the chief's rite of passage is designed to teach him the proper relationship between the chief and his people, between the state and society. The lesson is that the chief's structural power must be used for the good of everyone, not merely himself or his allies. Here is the dialectic between *communitas*, the unstructured feeling of community ideally extended to everyone, and the chief's *structural* position, which includes his power as well as the alliances and enmities which go along with any position in social-structure. To ensure the success of culture over power, as it were, the status of the chief-elect is inverted. If only for a night, he is turned him into a slave. In this way his structural position of authority can be checked by his experience of the awesome power of *communitas*. The chief-elect is exposed to the vitality of antistructure and symbolically taught that he must not overstep his structural

⁴ Turner's formulation here is closely related to Pierre Clastres' (1974) thesis in "Society Against the State," which holds that stateless societies remained so through the operation of sophisticated mechanisms serving to prevent the creation of state-power. Instead of looking upon stateless societies as lacking a modern innovation, Clastres attempted to show that pre-state societies were actually organized with the specific intent of preventing the creation of centralized government.

bounds. *Communitas* thus serves to make structure possible (forcing the chief to act in such a way as to minimize social antagonisms) while at the same time presenting itself as the negation of structure, as an example of what happens if the chief fails to maintain the delicate balance between structure and *communitas*.

In ritualistic societies, antistructure is allowed to manifest not only in the rites of the most powerful, but in all rituals which include a stage of liminality. It is not a once in a lifetime moment. Rather, people experience *communitas* and antistructure in liminality repeatedly throughout their lives, as they move from structural position to structural position. Cross-culturally, liminal rites can be seen in rituals celebrating circumcision, menstruation, marriage, warrior-hood, and many other life-stages. In all these various rites, which take a myriad of forms in different societies and at different times, individuals are exposed to the vital energy of antistructure which tempers the all-encompassing demands of structure. Additionally, these rites still take place in more 'complex' or 'modern' societies, although they tend to be less frequent. Turner mentions the medieval knight's vigil, as another example of symbolic inversion, where the evening before one official becomes a knight, he must pledge to serve the weak and underprivileged and contemplate his own unworthiness. As Turner points out, the knight's subsequent power is thought partially to spring "from this profound immersion in humility" (1969, 105).

Turner also saw liminality and *communitas* in the rites of modern civilization. Whereas in traditional societies, there was a clearly defined set of rites, consecrated by tradition, which everyone was expected to participate in throughout their life, this cannot be said to be the case in large-scale societies. Such rituals of *communitas* in modern society, which Turner distinguished as liminoid rather than liminal, tend to be optional rather than obligatory. A key example of this

for Turner is religious pilgrimage, which individuals undertake out of their own volition in order to seek the glow of *communitas* outside of their quotidian existence.

Turner's diachronic analyses of pilgrimage reveal that the temporal structure of pilgrimage itself has much in common with a rite of passage. A pilgrim leaves a near place (is separated), undertakes a journey which is often long and hazardous before being exposed to sacred symbols and knowledge (liminality), and then returns, hopefully changed (re-aggregated) to his or her home. Pilgrims, like initiands in rites of passage, "are undergoing a separation from a relatively fixed state of life and social status, and are passing into a liminal or threshold phase and condition for which none of the rules and few of the experiences of their previous existence have prepared them" (1992, 29).

Pilgrimage thus exhibits the quality of *communitas*. Whereas homesteaders are coordinated by interdependence, "pilgrims and initiands are coordinated by similarity, by likeness of lot rather than interdependence of social position" (1992, 30). Like a rite of passage, structural positions of rank and wealth are subsumed under the common goal of the pilgrimage. The pilgrim, like the initiand, is removed from a realm of politico-jural structuring and transported into a liminal realm of antistructure and *communitas*. This distance from structure, experienced by liminaries whether pilgrims or initiands, provides a momentary opportunity to assess the perduring structure which they have left. Pilgrims thus have "an opportunity to take stock of their lives from which they are now temporarily detached, or, alternatively, to regain an innocence felt by them to have been lost" (1992, 32). Turner thus sees pilgrimage as satisfying pilgrim's "aspirations to *communitas* and liminal experience" (1982, 215).

Communitas and Liminality Reconsidered

Turner was originally trained in English social anthropology during the early 1950s at a time when the field was dominated by structural functionalist approaches to ethnography. Turner, who studied under Max Gluckman in Manchester, was deeply influenced by the functionalist emphasis on social structure. In fact, by Turner's own account, he actually refused to collect ritual data during the first nine months of his fieldwork among the Ndembu. During this time, Turner felt separated from the actual daily lives of his informants, until he realized that if he "wanted to know what even a segment of Nedembu culture was really about," he would have "to overcome [his] prejudice against ritual and start to investigate it" (1969, 8). In his investigation, Turner discovered culture's moments of becoming; his study of ritual led him to embrace diachronic cultural analysis. Moving away from the static paradigm of functionalism, Turner sought to understand the re-production of culture and the processes of cultural change. Previous approaches, Turner argued, had ignored "at least one half of human sociality" (1974, 293-4) an oversight which had led to the "obdurate evasion of the rich complexities of cultural creation" (1969, viii). Turner hoped to remedy this lack by calling attention to the dynamic process of cultural re-recreation as well as to those liminal realms – the cracks and margins operating within and around structure – which are ultimately social fields of transformation. Emphasizing change and dissolution, Turner's focus was substantially different from the functionalist scholars of the generation preceding him.

Although Turner's approach was at the time refreshing in its novelty, his general assumptions were nevertheless firmly inscribed within the modernist project. In other words, while Turner should be considered an early "post-functionalist" (Flanigan 1990, 52), he is still

clearly a “pre-poststructuralist” (St John 1999, 35). Turner’s approach has been too ambitious to be compatible with post-structural approaches. As one commentator argues, “Turner’s quest to understand the ‘total’ constituents of experience (cognition, affect, volition), a ‘unified science of man’ drawing him to Freud, Jung and even sociobiology, but notably not embodiment, is clearly a modernist project” (St John 1999, 39). Such critiques are important; the Turnerian approach can undeniably be informed by some of the concepts of post-structuralism. In particular, the limits of the Turnerian framework need to be carefully circumscribed. However, some criticisms of Turner seem to reflect critics’ own reflexive desires to distance themselves from any sort of grand project, rather than reasonable scholarly engagement with Turner’s ideas.

One criticism of the Turnerian paradigm is that *communitas* is granted ontological ascendancy over structure; in effect, that Turner champions one side of the dialectic over the other (St John 1999, 40)⁵. One commentator, in particular, notes critically that *communitas* and liminality “acquired a transcendent value and became depicted as that which was quintessentially real, a kind of primal unity” (Flanigan 1990, 52). On the surface, these critiques seem sensible. Turner, certainly, does often enter into moments of rhetorical flourishing during his discussions of *communitas*. And Turner certainly argues that *communitas* constitutes a positive potentiality – a repertoire of action created outside of structure – which can then influence structure. In reality, however, such a criticism really makes little sense. Turner’s early writings on *communitas* were directed to his colleagues, most of whom were, like Turner, deeply influenced by structural functionalism. He was thus addressing his ideas to a group of people,

⁵ Interestingly, Barbara Ehrenreich makes precisely the opposite claim, curiously declaring that “Turner’s theories have been widely credited with giving ecstatic - as well as merely spontaneous and unruly - group behavior a legitimate place in anthropology. In fact, it was a marginal and second-rate place he offered it. To Turner, the central thing about a culture was its structure, meaning, essentially, its hierarchies and rules. The function of ecstatic ritual, he proposed, was to keep the structure from becoming overly rigid and unstable by providing occasional relief in the form of collective excitement and festivity” (2006, 11).

who, practically speaking, did not separate anthropology from the study of social structure. The fact that Turner privileges *communitas* over structure is a consequent of this context. Turner focuses his discussions on *communitas*, because that was his contribution to a discourse *which had already privileged structure*. Turner was one of the first to argue that “the social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being (except insofar as 'being' is an example of the static, atemporal models [people] have in their heads), and for this reason studies of social structure *as such* are irrelevant” (1974, 24). To criticize Turner for this is a bit like attacking Darwin for under-emphasizing the role of God in the process of natural selection.

Some of the issues raised by poststructuralists and postmodernists are more important. Postmodernists have criticized Turner because his account of interpretive anthropology fails to problematize the hermeneutic project. Instead, Turner often seems to uncritically accept the naïve presumption of the anthropologist as neutral omniscient observer who is able to interpret effectively because s/he can see the “total” cultural system which insiders are precluded from observing (McGee and Warms 2004, 550). Vincent Crapanzano attacked what he saw as the modernist tendencies of Turner's work, declaring that he “was trapped in the fantasies of his own Anglo-American culture, with its modernist emphasis, its faith in the novel and the new, [and] its celebration of inventiveness”. Furthermore, and possibly more damning, the concept of *communitas*, Crapanzano noted, “has a hippie ring to it” (1984, n.p.).

Ethnographers have critically appraised Turner's notion of *communitas* and its relationship to pilgrimage. Most important among these critiques is John Eade and Michael Sallnow's influential collection *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian* (1991). Turner argued that pilgrimage, being as it is a liminal, anti-structural domain, is likely to exhibit the qualities of *communitas*. And, as we have seen, *communitas* implies the dissolution of

difference. Eade and Sallnow argue contra Turner that a recurrent theme throughout the ethnographic literature on pilgrimage is “the maintenance and, in many instances, the reinforcement of social boundaries and distinctions in the pilgrimage context, rather than their attenuation or dissolution” (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 5). Such critics have focused on the heterogeneity of the pilgrimage field, and the multiple interpretations of the event which participants themselves are likely to hold. Eade and Sallnow argue that Turner’s discussion of *communitas* does not tell the whole story of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a complex social field that encompasses both “drives towards consensus and *communitas*” and “counter-movements towards separateness and division” (Eade and Sallnow 1991, xii). The notion of *communitas* therefore imposes a “spurious homogeneity” onto the phenomena of pilgrimage, ignoring the wide differences in the practice of pilgrimage in different historical and cultural settings (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 5).

These findings are important in order to understand the limitations of Turner’s framework, which does exhibit certain tendencies towards homogenization. This criticism, however, does not necessarily contradict Turner’s essential theses. For example, Micahel Sallnow, one of the foremost critics of Turnerian *communitas*, finds in his study of Andean pilgrimage a lack of *communitas*, instead of pilgrims being unified by the experience of *communitas*, “different communities maintained a ritualized distance from one another which accentuated, rather than attenuated, the boundaries between them. At the shrine itself they each maintained their separateness, and never coalesced into a single unified congregation” (Sallnow 1981, 176). Sallnow thereby concludes that “the concept of *communitas* is dispensable” for an understanding of pilgrimage (Sallnow 1981, 164). The problem with Sallnow’s conclusion is that he incorrectly presumes that *communitas* is a principle which is quantifiable, and therefore

falsifiable. *Communitas*, arising as it does, however, in a liminal realm of paradox and inconsistency, is almost by definition outside of the sphere of that which accepts empirical verification. Sallnow concludes that the concept of *communitas* should be abandoned because it never in practice amounts to the actual cessation of all structural antagonisms. Of course this is true; it is also something Turner knew well. Both structure and *communitas* are abstracted forms, ideal types, which are never realized in full consistency: in practice the structure-*communitas* dialectic is realized in a wide range of forms. Turner was keen to emphasize the temporality of *communitas*. “Spontaneous *communitas* is a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition,” he wrote. “The moment a digging stick is set in the earth, a colt broken in, a pack of wolves defended against...we have the germs of a social structure” (1969, 40). As such, pointing out that there are occasions by which *communitas* does not manifest, or manifests in less dramatic ways than paradigm cases, should not be accepted as an argument against *communitas* as such. *Communitas* is always subjected to structure to at least some degree. To attempt a synchronic investigation as to whether *communitas* exists in a particular social field, as Sallnow does, cannot prove that *communitas* is inapplicable to the study of pilgrimage in general, but only in a particular case. To assert that such a conclusion is generally applicable, as Sallnow does, is to abstract *communitas* from its context in an ongoing dialectic with structure. In other words, Sallnow’s critique, and other similar attacks, incorrectly presume that *communitas* is an independently observable variable which can be profitably measured at any one point in time.

Turner’s framework is also much more solidly geared towards understanding difference than his detractors seem to recognize. For example, the fact that interpretations of a ritual might differ from liminal to liminal is no secret to Turner, who argued, following Freud, that ritual symbols were multivalent, that “a single sensorily perceptible vehicle (the outward form) can

carry a whole range of significations” (1992, 19). In fact, this heterogeneity of meaning is characteristic of the liminal realm of paradox and juxtaposition. At least in his later work, Turner was actually eager to emphasize that liminality can never be regarded as monolithic: “a tribal ritual of any length and complexity is in fact an orchestration of many genres, styles, moods, atmospheres, tempi, and so on, ranging from prescribed, formal, stereotyped action to a free ‘play’ of inventiveness... The essence of ritual is its multidimensionality” (1992, 52). Turner was acutely aware of the complexity of the phenomena under study. His insistence that “a symbol’s meaning is much more than its legitimate interpretation” allows implicitly for the notion of a broad range of discourses being centered on the pilgrimage experience (Turner and Turner 1978, 146).

Criticisms of Turner have circumscribed the scope of Turner’s analysis but not substantively challenged his fundamental theses. It is necessary to think critically about the ways in which Turnerian thought runs the risk of essentializing phenomena like pilgrimage. The ethnographic record makes clear that the relationship between *communitas* and pilgrimage is not a universal constant “applicable to all cases in all societies” (Morinis 1984, 255). This does not however mean that the notions of *communitas* and liminality lack value. As has been pointed out recently, the recent shifting of focus in pilgrimage studies from *communitas* to contestation has fetishized contestation itself. In reality, both schemas are finite and conceptual, and cannot be confused with the external world. And, in fact, contestation and *communitas* are not necessarily mutually exclusive: “neither *communitas* nor contestation should themselves become fetishized in order to produce neatly symmetrical anthropological theory...made of views that appear to constitute a simple binary opposition” (Coleman 2004, 359). Understanding the limitations of *communitas* is important, but there are however still domains where talking about

communitas makes sense, as evidenced by the wide-ranging attention which this notion still draws from scholars.

Communitas and Liminality in the Study of Alternative Cultures

Turner's notions of communitas and liminality have often been applied to the study of countercultural groups in the United States and Western Europe. This should not be surprising: Turner's first work outlining his theory of social anti-structure, *The Ritual Process: structure and anti-structure* (1969), contains several references to the countercultures of the then contemporary 1960s. Turner wrote that "the values of communitas are strikingly present in the literature and behavior of what came to be known as the 'beat generation,' who were succeeded by the 'hippies'...", a group of drop-outs who opt out of the prevailing social structure and acquired "the stigmata of the lowly, dressing like 'bums', itinerant in their habits, 'folk' in their musical tastes, and menial in the casual employment they undertake", symbolizing communitas as opposed to structures of hierarchy. In addition, the hippie emphasis on immediacy, spontaneity, and egalitarianism all reflect the principle of communitas. The spiritual element of communitas, Turner noted citing Allen Ginsberg, is not lacking among the hippies either (1969, 110-113).

There is little doubt that Turner's work was influenced and informed by the emerging countercultures of the late 1960s. Studies have applied Turner's theories of liminality and communitas to rave culture (Olaveson 2004, St John 2004; Rill 2006), New Age pilgrimages (Hetherington 1996; Prince and Riches 2000, Ivakhiv 2003), and to annual alternative culture outdoor festivals such as ConFest in Australia (St John 1999; 2001), Burning Man in Southern Nevada (Gilmore 2005; 2008), and the now outlawed Neo-Pagan gathering at Stonehenge

(Hetherington 1996; 2002). Some studies, following Eade and Sallnow's work discussed above, have criticized Turner's concept of *communitas* as 'essentializing' and 'homogenizing'. St John, writing on Australia's ConFest, attempts to rehabilitate the Turnerian paradigm by emphasizing the embodiment of *communitas* (1991; 2001). He argues, echoing Eade and Sallnow, that Turner's focus upon the "exclusive, non-sensual and homogenous field of liminal ritual" fails to "apprehend the din of voices and morass of bodies in cultural performances" which, perhaps particularly at alternative cultural events, are likely to be "convoluted, crowded, cacophonous...Not necessarily chaste, they may be carnal and libidinous" (St John 1999:49). Although St John is critical of Turner, the affinity between Turner's framework and the study of alternative culture is made clear throughout his work. Alternative cultural festivals, such as the Rainbow Gatherings, as well as Burning Man, ConFest, and Stonehenge, are paradigmatically liminal realms, existing on the periphery of mainstream society and complete with real and symbolic masking, inversion, and the spontaneous affectivity of *communitas*.

Chapter Three: Communitas at the Rainbow Gathering

Communitas: Towards the Abolition of Division (of Labor)

According to Turner, structure imposes a reign of differentiation and difference upon human communities. People adopt discrete roles in a particular society; individuals become teachers, plumbers, law-makers, engineers, police, janitors, shamans, and so forth. A division of labor is established; individuals become persons, from the latin *personae*, which suggests speaking from behind a mask (Turner 1992, 140). The logic of communitas is precisely opposite. Instead of the division and differentiation characteristic of structure, communitas implies a spontaneous vision of all of humanity as a uniform mass, as unformed human clay. This makes sense: liminality, after all, is precisely that moment in between structures when an object's status is ambiguous, indeterminate, in between two structural states. Turner saw this principle realized, for example, in the uniformity of dress and action of initiates during the liminal stage of rites of passage. In these rituals, individuals of different clans or tribes, different class positions, or even different genders would hide their differences by donning the costumes of a "liminal masquerade" where difference would be, for a time, abolished. Rainbow Gatherings last significantly longer than the liminal stage of such traditional rituals, but the presence of communitas is nevertheless discernible. Perhaps the most important way that communitas can be observed is in the extraordinary way in which physical labor is organically and non-coercively distributed in a non-specialized manner.

This is one of the main elements which make Rainbow Gatherings unique phenomena. Although it would be easy to carelessly lump Rainbow Gatherings in with the many other

alternative cultural gatherings which proliferated in the 1960s and since, Rainbow Gatherings are importantly distinct in terms of organizational structure. Other outdoor alternative Gatherings, such as Bonnaroo, or the Woodstock Music Festivals of 1969 and 1994, have operated within the confines of capital, within the logic of the division of labor. The formula of these events is well known: tickets are sold, and the money is used to pay for permits, chemical toilets, security, janitors, and to pay performers. Even the Burning Man Festival, which cultivates an explicitly anti-capitalist image by banning the exchange of money within the event and banning the display of corporate logos, sells tickets (over \$200 each) and uses the money to pay non-participants for unpleasant tasks like trash-removal. These events operate with careful and marked divisions between participants, performers, and workers.

In contrast, there is never any fee to attend a Rainbow Gathering. Instead of paying people to do unpleasant work, *all* of the necessary labor (as well as the creation of entertainment) is done by actual participants on a voluntary basis. As should be expected, the amount of work necessary to make a Gathering successful is immense. For National Gatherings, in particular, the work begins with site scouting almost immediately after the last Gathering is over. It often takes months to find a suitable event site (one at a high altitude, with plentiful water sources, parking space for thousands, and a centrally located meadow). A month before a national Gathering officially begins, people are already on site making preparations. Water systems must be devised, latrines dug, fire pits made. Eventually, infrastructure capable of supporting several thousand people for at least several weeks is constructed: elaborate kitchen structures made of poles and tarps, more latrines, more fire pits. During the official duration of the Gathering there are any number of jobs which must be done: people to work 'Front Gate' (welcoming Family home and organizing parking), people to work the Info center, to work CALM (Center for

Alternative Living Medicine), to continuously cover up old latrines and dig new ones, to provide sufficient firewood to all of the kitchens, to cook for the kitchens, to haul water from a central source in five gallon buckets, to filter the collected water by hand. Tents and teepees must be set up. Supply runs to town (often fifty or sixty miles on dirt roads) must be made. As no cars are allowed on site, a tremendous amount of time and energy must be spent just hauling heavy supplies through several miles of forested trails from the parking lots (and eventually back). After the Gathering is officially over and people start to disperse, clean-up starts. The entire Gathering site is re-naturalized: rocks from fire pits dispersed, latrines covered up, trails aerated, seeds replanted. Every scrap of trash, every cigarette butt is picked up. Clean-up for a National Gathering often takes another full month.

Much of this necessary labor is tedious and physically demanding, the kind of work that no one wants to do. And, at a Gathering, no one has to. Everyone is provided free food and entertainment whether they work or not. There is no centralized authority which directs people to work, and there is no monetary incentive for participating in the labor. Much of the hardest work is done by the most impoverished Rainbows (the poor and homeless are more likely to show up for set-up and stay for clean-up, while middle-class Rainbows with jobs and homes are more likely to attend only the official Gathering). However, experienced Rainbows, of whatever means, are generally happy to help while they are on site. Most everyone understands that Gatherings are only possible on the basis of mutual aid and solidarity. Ironically, the hardest-working Rainbows tend to be precisely those people who are perceived as 'lazy' or 'bums' by mainstream society. Those who might refuse to chop vegetables for wages in a restaurant are happy to chop vegetables for hugs at a Gathering. As one Rainbow explained to Michael Niman,

“I don’t like to *have* to cook. I like doing it cause I want to; feeding my brothers and sisters. Doing it for somebody else to get rich off it isn’t the idea” (Niman 1997, 88).

What is fascinating in this is not only that such an immense amount of labor is actually undertaken without coercion or monetary incentive, but also that this labor tends to be distributed in an extraordinarily undifferentiated manner. By this I mean that participants are likely to perform a number of different roles within a single Gathering, or even a single day, instead of specializing in a particular role. There is thus no permanent underclass of individuals who must do unpleasant jobs like digging trenches or collecting garbage. It is probably this factor, more than any other, which makes it possible for all of this labor to be performed without the influence of force or money. At Gatherings, participants are happy to occasionally dig shitters, because they know that this relatively unpleasant task will be widely shared. In contrast, most people would not be willing to perform this role consistently, whether at a Gathering or not, unless they are forced to, either by economic necessity, physical power, or some other form of coercion. There is of course a certain level of specialization. Some people simply don’t participate in certain aspects of a Gathering, and there is no mechanism or desire to force individuals to do so. Regardless, the general trend is towards the abolition of any division of labor. This principle is most clear in the two activities which would seem to present the greatest potential for the establishment of power-structures: peacekeeping and lawmaking. At a Rainbow Gathering, these two forms of labor in particular are performed in such a way as to prevent the possibility of exclusive specialization. What follows are accounts of how this is accomplished.

Peacekeeping

True to the ethos of anarchism, there is no such thing as Rainbow police, nor Rainbow jail. Perhaps the most commonplace objection that is routinely raised against Rainbow Gatherings, and about the principles of anarchistic social organization generally, is the problem of what to do about violent individuals who refuse to conform to community norms of non-violence. Probably most people would find the principles of anarchism appealing in a certain sense, but far too idealistic, in a word: unfeasible. They see police and courts as necessary evils which allow humankind to overcome its own flawed nature. If everyone were saints or angels, sure, police and government would be unnecessary. However, some people are natural predators, lacking a social conscience, and willing or eager to harm others. This is, of course, a very real problem. What to do about such individuals could even be seen as a fundamental part of the human condition, with different cultures adopting different strategies of dealing with this dilemma. True to the logic of *communitas*, the strategy adopted at Rainbow Gatherings is one of decentralized, participatory peace-keeping, rather than the creation of a specialized role of police agent.

Rainbow peacekeepers are called “Shanti Sena”. However, to say this is misleading, because as indicated previously Shanti Sena is not a structural role, but rather something which Rainbows conceptualize themselves as *doing*. In principle, everyone is Shanti Sena, which is also the cry used to alert surrounding people of a need for assistance. If someone yells Shanti Sena, they are asking for help, and it is expected that any capable person who hears this call should *become* Shanti Sena and involve themselves in the situation. The idea is that if enough people intervene, a tense or violent situation can be diffused through the wide-scale adoption of

nonviolent tactics, such as surrounding an aggressive or violent individual in a circle of linked arms and ohming quietly, or just physically placing oneself between hostile parties. Barry Plunker, one of the focalizers of the first gathering, explains the history and philosophy of this practice in the “Shanti Sena Hipstory”. The ellipses are from the original article, which was published on a popular Rainbow website:

After Vortex I [a countercultural festival which prefigured the first Rainbow Gathering], in 1970, folks who wore the Rainbow "colors" and were wanting to be 'peacemakers' were called the Tactical Love Force... then because "we" didn't like the name "force"... it being too aggressive "we" took up the name and started using the name "Shanti Sena", which is words that come from Hindu - - Shanti meaning Peace and the word -- Sena, for "scene" i.e. hippie language for a cool scene...

(it is my understanding that Ghandi or someone used the concept "Sena" to mean 'army'.. and somewhere this got attached to "shanti sena" of the gatherings...no one thought of Ghandi's "army" - 'sena', in 1970... which if i were translating i would have translated as "peace people" from the Hindu - i can't imagine Ghandi expressing the concept of what he was doing as being an 'army" on the move... english translations tend toward more aggressive translations..)

so Shanti Sena meant/means: "Peace Scenes" and "we" started using it first at the Eugene Renaissance Faires... and on the streets of Eugene, oregon, outa "Rainbow House" where volunteers became Shanti Sena i.e. a form of "security ways" the idea being.. in an assembly of folks if a not-cool scene starts happening, that folks, anyone, someone, everyone will stand up; out of the folks in the community, commune, crash pad, festival, gathering, volunteers will step up and try to "cool the scene".. amongst the "carnies" they use the words "'Hey, Rube!" and folks come running to help knowing that this is a way of calling for help...

anyone/Everyone is "shanti sena" if they choose to step up when help is needed... and ideally, if everyone understands this, then the scene remains cool. many early folks in the Gatherings were/are military Veterans and the last thing we had any interest in, is/was being part of an "Army"... Shanti Sena is not some particular people... it is a signal for folks needing help... and anyone who answers a call for help becomes Shanti Sena... [just like] if you work Front Gate, you become Front Gate etc.. (Plunker n.d.)

People accustomed to the ubiquitous presence of armed police might not imagine so, but this method has worked successfully at Rainbow Gatherings with few exceptions. I witnessed the effectiveness of the Shanti Sena principle during an incident at the 2009 National Gathering: July 6th, Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico

The strangest incident from earlier today. Just past high noon; sun beating down. I was sitting in Council. There were about thirty of us, sitting in a circle near the center of the main meadow. Beautiful day, sun beating down, sunscreen generously passed around Circle. We were discussing people's views on drug use at the Gathering. Drug abuse at Gatherings, like everywhere, inevitably causes certain problems. Some people were interested in forming an auxiliary council, set to meet the next day, in order to discuss what could be done. The feather had just been passed to an older Brother; based on his demeanor and manner I guessed him to be ex-military. He had just begun to speak when I heard someone yelling Shanti Sena from behind me. I turned around to see a middle aged man in camouflage pants and white t-shirt chasing someone through the meadow while wielding a metal baseball bat.

I was only twenty feet away from the man, and within seconds myself and a dozen others from the immediate vicinity had scattered in front of him. He looked deranged, snarling and cursing after his would-be victim. Before we had even had time to lock-arms the aggressor apparently gave up, angrily throwing his bat onto the ground. He knew that he had no chance of overcoming the assembled Shanti Sena. Someone quickly picked his bat up, in case he should change his mind, and the man, now unarmed but still cursing loudly, turned and walked back towards the woods. Three Brothers followed him to find out what was going on. I returned to my spot in the council circle. Having had looked into the attacker's eyes, I felt sure that he had been entirely serious. It was a blessing that no one had been hurt. (Notes, July 6th 2009).

If not for the principle of Shanti Sena, this situation could have easily led to unnecessary violence. Because people at Gatherings accept that peace-keeping is a cooperative, decentralized effort which might require anyone's participation, it is relatively easy to take action when it is necessary. One does not have to stand alone, but can expect immediate and unconditional help from those around. In contrast, having policing performed by a specialized group tends to dull one's senses, so that individuals are likely to act as if a cry for help is not their responsibility. We see this phenomena all too often in the persistent media stories about horrific rapes or murders which take place in some busy city while throngs of passersby ignore repeated calls for help. Individuals who expect to have some form of authorized authority intervene are unlikely to be willing to get involved in such situations.

Rainbows who I discussed this incident with were eager to point out that not only would such a situation, if it had happened in Babylon, have resulted in a bloody assault, but that the violence would not have ended there. Not only would the narrowly-averted assault probably have been successful, but then, only afterwards, the police would have shown up. The result would be one person badly injured, or even killed, and one person subjected to violence on the part of the government. Rainbows I spoke with vehemently rejected the desire to be punitive. It was obvious that the attacker was very angry, acting irrationally and violently; it was assumed that he would calm down and regret publicly embarrassing himself with such an outbreak of rage. The people who followed him did so not in order to punish him, but to find out what happened, why he was so angry, to talk, and, indeed, to provide support for a Brother who was obviously in a very fragile state of mind. By examining the root causes of the situation, they

would also try to ensure that such an altercation would not be repeated. Luckily, this particular situation is extraordinary at Gatherings. Shanti Sena, however, is also routinely invoked in less dramatic cases, such as the need for mediators to deal with neighborly disputes about camping space.

Rainbow Council

In the same way that peacekeeping is ideally performed by everyone, so too is lawmaking. The Rainbow Family's governing body is a "Council" whose membership is open to all interested individuals. Decisions are based not on representative democracy, nor majority-rule, but can only be made by consensus of all parties. Thus, even at a Gathering of twenty or thirty thousand individuals, a single person can block any proposal. This, however, would be extraordinary. To block a proposal in a consensus system is qualitatively different from to vote against a proposal in a majoritarian system. Participants are expected to generally accept the will of a super-majority, or as many Rainbows conceptualize it, "the workings of Spirit" through the council process. Only a decision that one finds truly unacceptable should be blocked if it has otherwise unanimous support. To block a proposal is in effect to assert that one could not be part of the Family if such a decision was made.

Although everyone is welcome to attend at any time, not everyone at a Gathering is present for every council: most people only come if they have business to be attended to (a council decision is of course not considered legitimate unless those people that it directly affects are present). Still, the process is exceedingly difficult, sometimes even excruciating. During a 2009 council I participated in, one experienced Rainbow invoked Benjamin Franklin's

description of the original attempt to collaborate on the writing of the Declaration of Independence apropos of Rainbow Councils: slow motion suicide. The difficulties of the process, however, are functional in that they ensure that only truly important issues, those worth fighting for, will be raised. Rainbows will make every effort to solve problems outside of Council, if possible. Thus rules and declarations will not be proliferated unnecessarily, and the principle of decentralization is reinforced.

Council is conducted in a Gathering's main meadow, usually from high noon until dinner time. Participants sit in a circle. Everyone in a council, of whatever size, has the right to speak in turn. A focal object, often an eagle feather, is passed counter-clockwise from participant to participant. Only the person who has the focal object is supposed to speak. If people have questions, they should raise their hands, and the speaker can choose to call on them or not. No one has to speak if they don't want to, and it is perfectly normal to just pass focus if one has nothing to say. Focus must go around the circle at least once before consensus can be called for. Thus, at a Council with thirty people, if everyone talks for an average of five minutes, the council will take a minimum of two and a half hours, and often much longer. Vision Councils, which occur every year on the last day of the Gathering (July 7th) have the important task of choosing where the next annual Gathering will take place. These councils can often attract over a hundred participants. In New Mexico, it took three days of discussion for the council to consense on having the Gathering somewhere in the East (New Hampshire, Vermont, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, or Kentucky). Most Rainbows, however, do not seriously see the slowness of the process as much of a liability: it is the only way of ensuring that everyone's voice is heard. The council process is not seen as a debate but as rather an opportunity for everyone to listen and learn from one another: Council is "not a

talking circle, but rather a *listening* circle”. The process ensures that compromise will happen; for a resolution to be accepted it must satisfy everyone. The end-result is thus the best one possible: one that everyone can live with.

The anthropologist David Graeber notes that consensus decision making is typical of anarchic societies in which there would be no way of to compel a minority to agree with a majority decision:

If there is no way to compel those who find a majority decision distasteful to go along with it, then the last thing one would want to do is to hold a vote: a public contest which someone will be seen to lose. Voting would be the most likely means to guarantee humiliations, resentments, hatreds, in the end, the destruction of communities (2004, 89).

The existence of a majoritarian, vote-based system is thus predicated on the existence of a functioning government, or some other form of coercive apparatus. Where this is absent, such as at Gatherings, the consensus process is necessary to allow for the continued reproduction of the Rainbow Family. If decisions could be made which individuals strongly opposed then they would simply leave the Gathering and go elsewhere: there would be no reason not to.

Besides being highly functional in this manner, consensus reflects the principle of *communitas* in the same way as Shanti Sena: by precluding the establishment of a division of labor. Instead of having certain individuals chosen to make decisions on behalf of the community, decision-making is something which is engaged in by whomever wants to, whenever they want to, and usually on a highly temporary basis. Instead of the view of the human person as atomized individual, for Turner representative of structure, the Rainbow Family Council process binds all participants into a non-hierarchical group-process which results in a single decision that everyone can live with. As Sky Bear, a Rainbow brother from Pennsylvania explains:

All of us need the practice to be quiet and listen. We might have our idea that seems to want to jump out now, being impatient, as our past experiences have led us to believe in contradicting others, picking apart their ideas, [but we] need to wait until our time comes back around. How surprised [are we] to learn that another has expressed our very own idea before us, and maybe in a clearer fashion. Or another idea has changed ours. So we listen to the GROUP mind, and try to quiet our own (Niman 1997, 39).

The paradox is thus that *because* any individual has the power to block any proposal, all individuals must learn to take seriously the ideas of others, to listen and learn, to submit to the will of the group. This process both reflects and serves to recreate *communitas*.

Conclusion

Family Council and Shanti Sena are the clearest cases of decentralized, participatory work which precludes the establishment of a division of labor, but the principle is the same, if less explicit, for nearly all forms of labor which are undertaken in order to create these Gatherings. A small number of Rainbows, such as those who are professional cooks or medics, might spend most of their working time performing these roles. But the majority of participants cycle between any number of different tasks: cooking, carrying and filtering water, working Info or Front Gate, hauling supplies, Counseling, performing Shanti Sena duties, digging shitters and fire-pits, and so forth. Moving throughout the Gathering and doing different types of work is the best way to get the full Rainbow experience, to meet new Family, and to gain new skills.

Michael Niman explains this lack of specialization, which I take to represent the triumph of *communitas* over structure:

Anyone, however unskilled, can work in whatever area of the Gathering they find interesting. People learn their tasks on the job, with coworkers as teachers. If bored with the task at hand, a Rainbow can choose another and start out fresh. This Rainbow version of career mobility undermines the development of entrenched hierarchies in any one area

of the Gathering. It also lets workers escape boring, monotonous, or aggravating jobs, while still showing community service. Sharing skills also builds workplace democracy. Since most workers understand all aspects of the task at which they are working, they can contribute both managerial and production skills. After a few Gatherings, a Rainbow can do most of the jobs necessary to make the Gathering work (1997, 90).

Sharing of jobs, rather than specialization, enforces the democratic and egalitarian norms shared by the majority of Rainbows.

Of course, some people choose to not work at all, or to work very little, and there is no apparatus, other than peer-pressure, for forcing them to do so. Such “Drainbows” are likely to be those visiting a Gathering for the first time. To most experienced Rainbows, not working would be unthinkable. A common Rainbow proverb explains the necessity of participation:

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Anybody, Somebody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody and Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

The lesson is that if someone realizes that something needs to be done, it is their responsibility.

Because there are no structural roles, it is no one else’s job any more than it is your own. This philosophy is accepted by enough Rainbows to make Gatherings successful without the necessity for coercion or monetary incentive.

Chapter Four: Communitas and Anarchism

“All directly social or communal labour on a large-scale requires, to a greater or lesser degree, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious co-operation of the activities of the individuals, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the motion of the total productive organism, as distinguished from the motion of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor: an orchestra requires a separate one”

- Capital Volume One, Karl Marx.

“There are no official organizers or leaders at Rainbow Gathering. All work, including all management of the work of others, is done by volunteers...There is no centralized management of any of the major operations that keep the gathering functioning.”

- Rainbow Rap on Disorganization

Anarchism?

I have frequently referred to Rainbow Gatherings as having been organized based on the principles of anarchism. In order to unpack this claim, it is necessary to discuss what has been meant, historically, by the notion of anarchism. Anarchism, from the Greek, literally means “without rulers”, and social anarchist theory has traditionally been concerned with elaborating the conditions under which human beings could live peaceably without the institution of government. Anarchist theory is often associated with names of nineteenth century political theorists – most commonly, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin – who were engaged in at times vitriolic debate with the Marxists of their days. Most accounts of the history of anarchism basically present these thinkers as the founders of a school of social thought – anarchism - which subsequently became (marginally) influential in the worker’s movements of the time, became a locus of political struggle, and finally divided into squabbling

sects. As David Graeber has correctly pointed out, such a narrative has the effect of incorrectly casting anarchism as “Marxism’s poorer cousin, theoretically a bit flat-footed but making up for brains, perhaps, with passion and sincerity” (2004, 3). In reality, nineteenth century writers on anarchism did not see themselves as “inventing” anything; anarchies – societies without states – have existed since the beginning of humankind. As ethnology has made abundantly clear, the vast majority of human societies which have actually existed have been organized without centralized governance. In fact, until relatively recently, say ten or fifteen thousand years ago, this was probably the only form of social organization that had ever occurred to people (Clastres 1974; Barclay 1982).

When I refer to anarchism in this essay, I am therefore not referring explicitly to any particular theory of social organization which is associated with any one thinker or group of thinkers. Rather, I am speaking generally about anarchy – human existence without rulers – and the principles (self-organization, mutual aid, and voluntary association) which are necessary to make such a way of life possible. Thus I have not meant to attribute any explicit political ideologies to members of the Rainbow Family (although, indeed, many Rainbows do self-identify as anarchists). It is not as if all, or even most, Rainbows have an explicit commitment to the various principles of anarchism. Rather, as these individuals, who have a wide range of differing political commitments, come together to live temporarily in a stateless society, the principles of anarchism are inevitably employed in order for things to run smoothly.

Free-riding

The Liberal tradition of political theory has long concerned itself with justifying government as necessary in order to provide for public goods. The conclusions drawn differ radically, from Thomas Hobbes' famous defense of government as a “Leviathan” all the way through to Robert Nozick's more recent defense of minimal government. The common element, however, is a fundamental belief that the state is necessary in order to provide for common goods, things that cannot be owned privately, such as a national defense or clean air. Paying for the common defense – warfare – is perhaps the clearest example of this argument, and one that is often made by adherents to this tradition of thought. In order for a people to fight wars they require a national army. Successful fighting forces are not organized autonomously; in order to be effective an army requires centralized co-ordination and administration. In order to pay for such a centralized army, each individual represented in this association must logically put up a certain sum, their fair contribution to this shared good. The problem, it is alleged, is that there is no way that this can be done non-coercively. If there is no apparatus to force everyone to contribute their share, then some people will simply shirk their obligations. According to this “rational-egoistic” view of human nature, each individual rationally desires to shirk their own obligations but also to gain the benefits of the collective good. In order to escape this dilemma, individuals must establish government in order to force everyone to pay their fair share so that collective goods can be provided (this is the mythological “social contract” made famous by Hobbes and Locke).

The problem of shirking identified in this argument is often called the “free-riding problem”. It is supposed that people will attempt to maximize their exposure to shared goods

while minimizing their personal contributions. Scholars, especially in studies of political science and economics, have taken this problem extremely seriously. And, indeed, it is the basic justification given for the existence of governments in political philosophy. As one commentator puts it, the liberal tradition attempts to show that the state “is necessary because it alone can maintain conditions in which contribution to the provision of public goods *is* rational... essentially by altering the structure of incentives facing potential free riders” (Taylor 1982, 54). I find all this interesting, of course, because the process of labor undertaken at Rainbow Gatherings, described in the last section, successfully overcomes the free-riding problem. Without being coerced, enough people are willing to contribute to the common good of a Gathering in order for them to be successfully reproduced. Given how much importance the problem of free-riding is often assigned, it is certainly worth asking the question of how this is accomplished. It turns out that the answer is closely linked to Turner's notion of *communitas*. In order to see how, we must look a little more closely at how the dilemma is discussed in the social sciences.

In the social sciences, the classic exposition of the so-called free-rider problem is Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action*. Olson laid out the fundamental premises of the free-riding problem (also called the collective action dilemma). All members of a group, he argued, “have a common interest in obtaining” any collective benefits but contradictorily “have no common interest in paying the cost of providing” collective goods (1965, 21). Each individual would rationally prefer that others pay the entire cost if possible. What needs to be emphasized here is that the free-riding problem is predicated on some sort of antagonism or contradiction between the greater aims of a group as a whole and the goals of the individuals which make up the group. Additionally, the goals or interests of the individuals in the group are

presumed to differ from one another. Collective and individual interests, as well as the interests of different individuals, are from the beginning imagined as incommensurable and contradictory.

Now, it seems obvious that such a presumption is true to *some* extent in all group situations. What needs to be suggested, however, is that different group situations almost certainly imply different degrees of such contradictions of interest. It is not as if this degree of antagonism is some sort of constant, rather it surely varies due to many different factors. Given this, it must be assumed that those situations where the contradiction between the aims of a group and of its members is least severe is also one where the free-riding problem is least salient. On one pole, group situations where the interests of the group as a whole and its corporate members aligned completely would not be affected by free-riding at all. And on the other pole, group situations where the interests of the group as a whole and its corporate members was completely in conflict would have an almost impossible time getting anything done. In reality, all possible situations fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

Rainbow Gatherings are a very good example of successful collective action that overcomes the free-riding problem in practice. As I have noted, most Rainbows are happy to contribute to the communal whole. In fact, pretty much all the work that is done at a Gathering is in furtherance of the group; everything is done for others, for the Gathering. This is where Turnerian *communitas* comes in. The idea that people will not undertake to act in concert unless their individual interests align with the common good holds implies an *a priori* antagonism between the preference of individuals and of the society. But within Turner's framework, such an antagonism only applies to the structural pole of the *communitas/structure* dialectic. In structure, people are differentiated into structural roles. These structural differences imply different and contradictory interests. After all, a persons 'interests' in the economic sense are

defined by their positions in a number of structural arrangements (consider, for example, the difference in the interests of laborers and managers, kings and popes, or wait staff and kitchen staff in a restaurant). As Marx puts it in the *German Ideology*, “the division of labour implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another” (1845, 14). The division of labor – the proliferation of roles, the turning of individuals into personas – in fact, social structure itself, is constitutive of contradiction between the interests of individuals and their group.

But in a realm of *communitas*, which in many ways a Rainbow Gathering typifies, such a contradiction should be minimal. The logic of *communitas* implies the abandonment of structural roles and consequently the abrogation of structurally-produced antagonisms. Instead of heterogeneous and oft-conflicting interests, *communitas* implies a vision of the entire human race as “*prima materia*”, as undifferentiated human clay. In such a group of blank-slates there can be no contradiction of interests; here the notion of cost-benefit analysis means nothing and the dichotomies of self/other and egoism/altruism collapse. Of course, it must be stressed that this situation – spontaneous *communitas* – is a complete idealization. As Turner himself noted, spontaneous *communitas* is always subjected to structure to some degree or another. However, it is clear that Rainbow Gatherings are domains where *communitas* flourishes. This flourishing is relative and indefinite, but, as I have shown, notable in a number of ways. Because of this, Gatherings are realms where the contradiction between the general good and the individual good, and thus the free-rider problem itself, is less salient. It is this factor which allows for the success of collective action which Rainbow Gatherings represent.

Anarchism and Communitas

The fact that the free-riding problem can be more effectively overcome in practice during moments of communitas should be significant to anarchists. If we can take seriously for a moment the argument that a state is necessary in order to ameliorate the free-riding problem, then we can immediately see that if it was possible for this to be done without the existence of government, then the state would be unnecessary and unjustifiable. In other words, moments of communitas should be situations whereby anarchic forms of social organization are most possible, and in fact it seems that the Rainbow Gatherings are one example. This connection between communitas (and implicitly liminality) and the possibilities for voluntary cooperation has mysteriously been missed by anarchist thought.

Anarchists who have speculated on the conditions where anarchist ideals could best be realized often point to small scale communities. Michael Taylor argues that “small groups of individuals who share common beliefs and values, have direct and many-sided relationships, and practice reciprocity” are more likely to be able to realize anarchist ideals of direct-democracy and solidarity (1982, 3).

What has not been noted is that the same possibility exists under the condition of communitas, which is likely to be quite a different situation. Communitas is a temporary condition which closely mirrors the dynamics of community while allowing these dynamics to be extended indefinitely. That this has not been commented upon is surprising because the historical record seems to corroborate the thesis. Those who have argued that the existence of the state is unnecessary have often pointed to historical moments where anarchy broke free, where individuals and groups took their future into their own hands on their own initiatives. Common

examples include the Paris Commune of 1871, parts of Spain during the Spanish Civil War, parts of Ukraine during the Bolshevik Revolution, and the so-called Pirate Utopias of the early modern period. What has not previously been understood is that these situations are, without exception, paradigmatically liminal, and hence natural seed-beds for the creation of *communitas*.

The Commune, Spanish Civil war, and Ukraine examples were all liminal occasions when the perduring structures of social order were temporarily damaged by ongoing wars. Paris had just been invaded by Germany in 1870 and the National Government was in ruins. The anarchists of the Spanish Civil war organized themselves autonomously during the midst of wholesale war (a “revolution within a revolution”). The Free Territory, a stateless anarchic society (1917-1919) in present-day Ukraine was established in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution and the context of the Russian Civil War. And pirate utopias, as the name suggests, were peripheral enclaves, removed from the mainstream of economic and political life, which successfully enacted a liminal realm of autonomy and self-governance. The connection between *communitas* and anarchy implies that it was not only a negative – the absence of state repression, which allowed for anarchist forms of organization to be temporarily established in such liminal situations, but also a positive force – *communitas*.

An extraordinary recent book called *A Paradise Built in Hell* touches on this issue from a different angle. The author, Rebecca Solnit, comparatively analyzes accounts from several dozen disasters, from the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco to Hurricane Katrina. Solnit concludes that, contrary to popular imagination, disasters often lead not to anti-social behavior – looting, rioting, raping, or murdering – but on the contrary, to intensely pro-social and pro-active actions on the parts of individuals and spontaneously-organized small groups. The widespread misperception of disaster-aftermath as being marked by anarchic violence is perpetuated by

sensationalist media accounts⁶ and the actions of public elites who want to use disasters as opportunities to consolidate their own power. The myth is further reproduced by popular culture, such as Hollywood disaster movies, which invariably portray a post-disaster world as a Hobbesian ‘war of all against all’. In response to these dominant narratives of anti-social destruction, Solnit recounts many compelling stories of voluntary self-organization, of spontaneous launched community centers and relief projects, of the paradoxical enjoyment of “that sense of immersion in the moment and solidarity with others caused by the rupture in everyday life” (Solnit 2009, 5), in other words, spontaneous *communitas*.

Although she doesn’t make this connection explicitly, the situations of disaster that Solnit discusses are distinctly liminal – moments outside of the closed operation of structure. As such, they are moments of possibility, of what could be instead of what is. Solnit finds in post disaster situations a sense of hope for human possibility. In disaster lurks the unrealized possibility of paradise:

The citizens any paradise would need – the people who are brave enough, resourceful enough, and generous enough – already exist. The possibility of paradise hovers on the cusp of coming into being, so much so that it takes powerful forces to keep such a paradise at bay. If paradise now arises in hell, it’s because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way (Solnit 2009, 7).

In the same way as those revolutionary experiments in living mentioned were possible because of a structural rupture, the *communitas* which is realized in the aftermath of a disaster too depends on the “suspension of the usual order”. Such a situation cannot be permanent,

⁶ This problem was clearly discernable in the coverage of the recent Haitian earthquake. A January 16, 2010 New York Times article, “Looting Flares Where Authority Breaks Down,” leads with a telling picture. About a dozen people are standing on top of a collapsed building, digging supplies out of the rubble, and passing them down to an assembled crowd. The Times article tries to cast this as dangerous social unrest – but a close examination reveals that the premise is dangerously strained. What is happening in the picture looks more like the organized and autonomous collection and distribution of badly needed provisions than any sort of anti-social behavior.

communitas will always be subjected to structure, but it nevertheless “hovers on the cusp of being” – an eternal threat to structure.

Conclusions:

It should be emphasized that my argument is not that situations where anarchistic principles are allowed for flourish are anarchic situations, per se, which would of course be tautological. Rather, my claim is that such situations are, to quote Turner, “phases of history that are in many ways 'homologous' to the liminal periods of important rituals in stable and repetitive societies, when major groups or social categories in their societies are passing from one cultural state to another” (1969, 112). This is something that Durkheim himself knew well. In fact Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence is closely related to Turnerian communitas (Olaveson 2005). Durkheim mentions the transformative and generative power of dramatic and unprecedented situations in *Elementary Forms of Religious Experience*:

Under the influence of some great collective shock in certain historical periods, social interactions become much more frequent and active. Individuals seek one another out and come together more. The result is the general effervescence that is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. The result of that heightened activity is a general stimulation of individual energies. People live differently and more intensely than in normal times. *The changes are not simply of nuance and degree; man himself becomes something other than what he was* (Durkheim 1995, 212-213; *emphasis added*).

Liminal or inter-structural moments of chaos qualitatively change the mode of human life being undertaken. Human possibilities are unlocked. Ways of being otherwise impossible are successfully deployed. These situations, as Turner said, are springs of pure possibility and primitive hypothesis.

The result of some sort of great collective shock is a renewed sense of the importance of the community. A community or society itself is put at risk and individuals feel more acutely than ever their dependence on others. The goals of the group and the goals of its members are for a moment integrated; people identify less with their structural roles and more with the success of their community. *Communitas* implies an integration of individual and collective will which also implies the ability of individuals to cooperate on collective aims. This sense of *communitas* is one which is deliberately cultivated and which must be continuously reproduced. In the next chapter I attempt to show some of the forms that this process takes.

Chapter Five: Individualism and Collectivism

I argued in the previous section that the so-called free-riding problem is inherently tied to the existence of a contradiction between the aims and values of an individual and those of her society at large. *Communitas*, in turn, is a situation whereby this contradiction can be temporarily overcome, where there is no longer antagonism between the individual and group. In effect, *communitas* renders the dichotomies between individuality/solidarity and between individualism/communitarianism null. This has special significance for my discussion of the Rainbow Gatherings because these Gatherings are located precisely at the intersection of these dichotomies. Gatherings are fields of extreme personal liberty and individual freedom, but their reproduction is only possible through practices of radical collectivism, solidarity, and mutual aid. This section discusses the apparent tension between these values.

The question is that of the “collective of individuals”, as Iddo Tavory and Yehuda Goodman perceptively term it in their 2009 ethnographic study of Israeli Rainbow Gatherings in Hazan caverns and the Negev desert. Tavory and Goodman examined the relation between practices of individuality and practices of solidarity at these Gatherings and found that social practices seemed to emphasize the simultaneous (re)constitution of both self and community. Rainbows “use the communal arena to express their individuality” while at the same time “the self they celebrate is constantly molded by practices of solidarity” (262). They find that through institutionalized rituals, metaphors, and interactions, presumably antagonistic conceptualizations of individual and community are “worked out, overcome, or redefined in action” (265). I accept and extend their argument, wishing to especially emphasize that notions of individuality and solidarity are always provisional and subject to renegotiation.

Communitas, or solidarity more broadly, are always tenuous achievements which must be constantly reinforced. The success of Rainbow Gatherings depends on the willingness of individuals to engage in voluntary acts of labor undertaken out of solidarity with the community generally. This willingness, I have argued, is closely related to a sense of communitas which is cultivated at the Gatherings. In this chapter, I attempt to look at some of the actual practices whereby this sense of communitas is (re)created. First I briefly sketch some the contradictory drives towards individuality and solidarity which are embodied in a Gathering. Then I look specifically at one of the most dramatic ways that this tension manifests. Finally, I look at practices which seem to help resolve the supposed antagonism between individuality and solidarity by implying the dual construction of both self and community in a dialectical process.

Assertions of Selfhood

Many Rainbow practices emphasize an assertion of selfhood; there is tremendous emphasis on the individual as locus of political and religious power, as well as a focus on expressivism and individual liberty. This should not be surprising. Alternative culture, generally, is often considered paradigmatically individualistic in both popular and scholarly conceptions. The countercultural ethos stresses freedom – both in the negative sense of freedom from established roles and in the positive sense of the freedom to create entirely new ways of living and being. This emphasis is reflected in countless ways, including in the forms of spiritual beliefs.

Scholars have long considered the so called “New-Age” and “Neo-pagan” religious movements, which arose largely out of the 1960s countercultures, to reflect the dissolution of

community ties and the concomitant rise of individualism. Paul Heelas, an authority on New Age practices, argued that one of the basic tenets of New Age spiritualities is a “celebration of self” whereby truth always comes from self-experience rather than established norms (1996). New Age practices, it is alleged, are based on a paradigm of self-centric spiritual bricolage, whereby individuals actively create their own personal spirituality, a unique fit for only them (Partridge 1999). This aspect, it is claimed, reflects the logic of capitalism, invoking the image of an individual shopping in a supermarket of religious wares (Heath and Potter 2004). Even scholars who have attempted to work out the communitarian practices of New Age and countercultural groups maintain an emphasis on the expressivist/individualist aspects of such groups. Kevin Hetherington, for example, argues that individuals assert their own sense of self through participation in a New Age community (1996; 1999). In his framework, then, the community is just another site for the staging of subjectivities.

This emphasis on individuality is evident in several ways at Gatherings. I won’t belabor the point, because I imagine that the individualist aspect of such neo-nomadic, anarchic, alternative cultural events is well understood. It is present in the injunction towards self-expression through costuming, name changing, dancing, acting, and other types of performance, as well as in the ubiquitous and often hedonistic use of mind altering drugs. It suffices to say that Gatherings are places where participants feel safe to be themselves; they are not only allowed but actively encouraged to perform endless varieties of uniquely subversive or transgressive identity practices. One Rainbow consultant informed me that Gatherings were “different from Babylon because...one has an opportunity to find their *true self* without worrying about feeling judged” (Joseph, Personal Interview July 29th 2009). The emphases on

uniqueness, spontaneity, personal pleasure, personal liberty, and self-expressivism constitute an ethos of individuality which sometimes comes into contrast with norms of communitarianism.

Practices of Solidarity

At the same time that there is embedded in many alternative cultural mores an emphasis on individuality, Rainbow tradition is in many ways explicitly designed to combat this emphasis and work towards creating a temporary community among a diverse set of groups and people. This task is accomplished through a number of different strategies, the biggest of which that I have identified are (1) the strict symbolic boundary between Babylon and Rainbowland, (2) the proliferation of Circles of various types, and (3) stylized scripts for personal interactions in terms of language use and physical contact which recreates feelings of togetherness among the community.

Rainbows draw sharp divisions between “Babylon,” which is often considered more or less evil, and “Rainbowland,” which is seen as a paradigm of peace and love. The boundary is enacted physically; Gatherings are located deep in the forest, far away from the cities and industries of Babylon. It is also enacted symbolically through the use of a “Welcome Home” area at the beginning of the Gathering. Here pilgrims from Babylon are greeted and given hugs. Passing under the giant Rainbow banner, they leave Babylon and enter into the liminal realm of the Gathering. This separation from Babylon helps to create the feeling of *communitas*; it is a division that must be constantly recreated. On the trails to and from the parking lots “Welcome Home!” is a standard greeting, and in fact “Home” is used at Gatherings almost invariably to refer to Gatherings themselves. It is a tradition that no doubt grew out of usage by people who

meant it literally. Many of course still do; for a travelling person who has no immediate biological family, Gatherings are often literally their homes, perhaps the only place they know they can depend on, be welcomed, and see their Family. Today the expression is also used by middle class Rainbows who take a week off from work to Gather and then return to their jobs and families. In both cases the expression helps to create and recreate strong feelings of community and *communitas*.

Other linguistic expressions serve the same end. People take joy in saying that they love each other, an action which is considered transgressive of dominant notions of love. “Lovin’ You” or “Lovin’ You Family” are standard valedictions. The expressions of love are profuse and, some say, disingenuous. Loud calls of “We Love You” erupt from groups of Rainbows and are repeated by other groups, flowing in waves throughout the Gathering. Similar is the nudge “I love you pass it on” at dinner circle. This use of language is reinforced through the norms of physical proximity and relationships which exist at Gatherings. Hugs, rather than handshakes, are the normal form of physical greeting. In contrast to what is seen as the Babylonian style of hug, Rainbow hugs are rarely accompanied by a quick withdrawal and embarrassed pats on the back. They are likely to be longer and more intimate. As Tavory and Goodman argue in their ethnography of an Israeli Rainbow Gathering, the use of hugs at Gatherings is not only a way to create interpersonal intimacy but also to recreate the Gathering community itself. They find that “while these signs [hugs] denote intimate relations in the Israeli (and Western) society, they are transferred in the Rainbow to the realm of the whole community, so that the community itself is signified as an intimate realm” (2009, 274). I would add that the same is clearly true of the loose use of the signifier “Love”: all of these things serve to construct the Rainbow community as sphere of *communitas*.

This ethic of communitarianism, which in turn helps to foster *communitas*, is also seen in the institution of Food Circle. At North American Gatherings there is one Food Circle a day, which is Dinner Circle. European Gatherings however usually have Lunch and Dinner Circle, which many Rainbows think helps to foster an increased sense of unity. In both the U.S. and Europe however dinner circle begins with a group Ohm. The entire circle, which might be hundreds of people, stands holding hands. Someone begins to chant Ohm, which is a meditative sound sacred in some branches of Buddhism, and eventually every one joins in, closing their eyes and chanting. The chanting goes on for several minutes until someone stop chanting, opens their eyes, and raises their hand. After everyone has done this, everyone claps and the food is served. This ritual fosters solidarity through not only physical contact but also the sharing of focus. Participants literally stand in a circle, so that they are all focused on a common point and so that everyone can see everyone else's face. At the same time they synchronize their chanting and their attention. The Ohm chant is seen by many Rainbows as a sacred syllable which is used to connect the individual with the "vibration of the universe". It should be noted that outside of the United States, a group song precedes the Ohming. The song is still sung at U.S. Gatherings, but not at every Circle:

We are circling, circling together.
 We are singing, singing out heart song
 This is family, this is unity,
 This is celebration, this is sacred

All of this no doubt helps to foster communion and solidarity. These practices create the conditions for *communitas* and challenge the individualistic assumptions that are embedded in parts of alternative culture. This project is important for many Rainbows; community is key. Rainbows are eager to point out the differences between Gatherings and festivals such as Burning Man. Although these two celebrations are ostensibly similar, both being anti-capitalist

events structured around free performance, some Rainbows insist that they are actually *opposite*.

Burning Man, which is held in the Nevada desert, works on the basis of self-reliance.

Participants are expected to bring all of the food and water that they will need for a week of rugged living. At Gatherings, people are expected to share what they have in order so that no

one is turned away. For many Rainbows this is the essence of what these Gatherings are about.

There is however still a great deal of ambivalence between this ambition towards community and the principles of individuality discussed above.

Tensions of Individuality and Solidarity

In fact there is a continuous tension at Gatherings between ideals of individual liberty and collective goals. The continuous renegotiation of Gathering norms is often centered on this issue. The question of alcohol, for example, is a divisive and important issue for Rainbows and one which is deeply implicated in different conceptions of individuality and solidarity. Alcohol has been traditionally banned from the main parts of Gatherings, and many Rainbows fiercely defend this tradition as an essential aspect of Rainbow culture. Other Rainbows, however, feel strongly that the policy on alcohol is a misguided tradition which interferes with Rainbow values of liberty and personal responsibility. The issue is often contentious. The anti-alcohol policy is regularly challenged both formally in council and informally by simply ignoring it. Both actions can create something of a crisis.

During the 2009 Vision Council in New Mexico a respected member of the Rainbow community, a man who has regularly focalizes a well known and popular kitchen, brought the issue up. He stood up in council and spoke eloquently and humbly about the problems of the

alcohol ban, arguing that it criminalized the behavior of some of the hardest working Rainbows. In this instance, he suggested, tradition needed to be reevaluated. Although this man had waited his turn in circle to speak and had every right to speak his mind, many in the circle were clearly irritated by his extended comments. Eventually someone outright interrupted the speaker asking him to limit his remarks, which in turn lead other people to break Council protocol by speaking out of turn, both in agreeing with the interrupter and in condemning the interruptions as uncalled for. During this chaos, the original speaker accidentally dropped the focal object, an eagle feather, onto the ground. This caused people to claim that he had to pass the feather as it had touched the ground. This, in turn, caused a procedural crisis which completely broke with normal Council process. Finally the original speaker, highly flustered by this time, passed the feather without continuing to speak and sat down. It is unlikely that anything formal could come out of bringing the alcohol issue to Circle. Because Council operates on consensus, in order for a change in rules to officially take place agreement would essentially have to be unanimous.

Others raise the same issue by simply ignoring the prevailing norm against alcohol consumption. In both principle and in practice this occurrence is a Shanti Sena moment, where bystanders become involved to convince the offender to drink in A-camp or their own tent. The only enforcement of this norm is peer pressure. If someone brings alcohol to a late night fire, they will usually be asked to put it away or leave. For many Gatherings are opportunities to sober up. Many Rainbows who drink in Babylon don't desire to be around alcohol while they are 'Home'. This issue is very tense, and many people don't understand why alcohol should not be allowed; it is the only drug which is singled out for disapprobation. An incident which occurred on July 6th 2009 at the National Gathering in New Mexico exemplifies the contentiousness of this issue. A crowd of young Crusties – dirty, travelling kids who take the

punk anti-aesthetic to extremes - were walking down the main trail openly drinking a 40 oz beer when a crowd of New Agers spotted them and started yelling about “alcohol on the main trail”. This led to a shouting match. The kid holding the beer dismissed the objection claiming, “whatever its not like I’m getting aggro or something” while the New Agers claimed that the drinkers were “destroying Rainbow”. Eventually the Crusty kids walked away and the drunk who had claimed he was not getting ‘aggro’ ironically yelled “Fuck Off” to the crowd of annoyed Rainbows. The issue in these cases is clearly one of different conceptions of the relative value of contradictory notions of the values of individuality and community.

Practices enacting a resolution of the tension between individualism and collectivism

Gatherings are social fields where the supposed dichotomy between individualism and collectivism is effectively resolved in practice. *Communitas* and *Solidarity* are not static properties of the Gatherings but only provisional achievements which must be continuously recreated through daily practice (Cf. Tavory and Goodman 2009). Such practices have the common effect of (re)creating *communitas* and thereby allowing for the successful perpetuation of the Gatherings. I have already discussed some of the contradictory tendencies towards communitarianism and individualism. In this section, I describe practices which seem to bridge the gap. Such practices imply the simultaneous construction of both self and community. In particular, I discuss in detail two Gathering mainstays which stand out as being particularly important in this regard: drum circling and 4th of July Circle. Through such praxis Rainbows effectively integrate antagonistic notions of self and community into a unified perspective. This unity is in effect *communitas* itself; it is what allows for the voluntary and altruistic sets of

behavior which I have described as anarchistic and which are a necessary condition for the continued existence of Rainbow Gatherings.

Drum Circles

July 5th, 2009, Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico

Dinner Circle ended three hours ago, and the moon is rising in the clear New Mexican sky. Last night I walked over to Lovin' Ovens kitchen for the first time – up the big hill to the main parking lot, then down the main road South, and then down the hill to the right when you reach the yellow cattle guard – you see the kitchen as soon as you get down the hill. The Kitchen is a good hike from the main meadow, and this is by design. Lovin' Ovens is renowned for serving pizza, “fresh cooked in the woods”, all night long. By locating themselves in the periphery of the Gathering, the kitchen lowers the demand for pizza and ensures that everyone who does make the hike will have plenty to eat. The “pizza in the woods” was worth it, but I am still exhausted from yesterday's trek, and have resolved to stay near the meadow tonight.

The sound of drums fills the air from every direction. I look around and survey the main-meadow. It is an abyss of blackness, but the surrounding tree line is ringed by a number of burning campfires. Seeking warmth, I walk towards what seems to be the brightest one. As I get closer, I hear the distinct sounds of over about a dozen drums being played in rhythm. I stand by the fire, greedily absorbing its warmth. The fire is huge. Not only branches are burning, but whole logs. Summer in New Mexico is wet season and the risk of forest fires is low. I appreciate the fire pit, a work of true craftsmanship, and huge – probably eight feet in diameter. It consists

of a big shallow pit surrounded by a ring made out of several layers of expertly placed large stones caked in dried mud.

Standing around the fire with me are about sixty people. Some talk and smoke. Some sway to the drum music with their eyes closed, and some dance more raucously, their limbs swaying and jerking in the glow of the fire. With prime seats around the fire are the drums and drummers, an elaborate and eclectic collection of percussion instruments. Among the instruments I recognized a djembe, doumbek, and a beautiful pair of bongos being played enthusiastically by a young dreadlocked man. Drumming is constant at Gatherings – much of it mediocre and frequently annoying (“crappy hippy drumming”) but I could tell by the look of rapture on the faces of the dancers that this particular group was doing something right. Dancing in a semi-circle around the fire with particular vibrancy were three younger Rainbows – one man, nude, and two women in dresses. Their long hair cut through the dark night. Nudging me, a young man gestured excitedly at the dancers. “Look at them, man”, he exclaimed. “They’re right there! – Right in the middle of it!”. I asked what he meant, but he couldn’t articulate it. “You know, man...they’re in the thick of it!” He was right, I did know what he meant: the dancers were trancing – experiencing an altered state of consciousness caused by the synchronization of the drums. Their faces were overcome with that look of ecstatic glee that is at once uncomprehending and yet somehow all-knowing. I watched the dancers for some time, appreciating the rhythm of their movements. Their consciousness was somewhere else, but their flesh knew just how to deal with the constant drum beating. It was, I considered, a tremendous victory of the limbic system over the nervous system. Eventually I wandered away for a midnight snack, breaking my vow to stay in the meadow. When I returned, the drumming

had not ceased or quieted, but the dancers had been replaced. Among the new dancers I saw also that look of ecstatic glee (Notes, July 5th 2009).

Drum circling has been a common element of countercultural praxis since the 1960s. The practice is mimetic: drumming and dancing around an open campfire under the stars self-consciously recreates the practices of exoticized ethnic Others. Within alternative cultural mileus, such mimetic performances of presumably ‘authentic’ pre-modern practices allow for middle-class drop-outs from mainstream post-industrial society to symbolically ‘Other’ themselves as a route to some sense of authenticity which is found lacking in modernity (St John 1999). The performance of indigeneity has often been utilized by countercultural actors to this end (St John 1997; 2006), and symbolic identifications with the indigenous peoples of the North Americas, including loincloths, teepees, and the use of eagle feathers are common at Gatherings. Many Rainbows, fetishizing what they imagine to be a ‘simple’ or ‘natural’ way of being, see themselves as somehow replicating the ways of life of indigenous peoples. A common Rainbow myth, usually presented as an ‘ancient Native American prophecy’, reaffirms this belief:

When the earth is ravaged and the animals are dying, a new tribe of people shall come unto the earth from many colors, classes, creeds, and who by their actions and deeds shall make the earth green again. They will be known as the warriors of the Rainbow.

In his book on the Rainbow Family, Michael Niman refers to the appropriations of Native culture at Gatherings as “fakelore,” and certainly it is problematic in many ways (1997, Chapter 7). Such dangers are ignored by many Rainbows, especially when it comes to drumming. Many would merely shrug and note that people have gathered to dance together under the sky for thousands of years.

Drum circles, however, represent more than just the drive towards a narcissistic conception of authenticity. At their core, drum circles are communal activities, emphasizing equality and implying the dissolution of the boundary between Self and Other. No less of an authority than Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart explains, “the drum circle offers equality because there is no head or tail. It includes people of all ages. The main objective is to share rhythm and get in tune with each other...to form a group consciousness. To entrain and resonate. By entrainment, I mean that a new voice, a collective voice, emerges from the group as they drum together” (1991). Rainbows often use similar language in order to describe drum circles. Individuals are *submerged* in an *emergent* group mind – seized with a common intention that transcends all particularities. Commentators have noted that drum circles often create a feeling of Turnerian *communitas* and that “drumming levels out differences... and brings people together” so that “participants feel as though they are part of a single entity engaged in a unique creative experience” (Foltz 2006, 134). Participants experience a feeling of almost transcendental connection or supranatural unity with one another.

At the same time as the creation of *communitas*, another of the goals of a drum circle for many is to enter into an ecstatic trance, an altered state of consciousness brought about by immersion in the rhythm of the drums. A guide to ‘Shamanic’ drumming describes this experience as a “mystic, prophetic, or poetic trance” whereby an individual partakes in “an inward spiritual journey of rapture” (Drake 2002, 13). This experience is deeply personal, “an individual journey into nonordinary reality”, of which no two experiences are the same (Drake 2002, 31). Trance is thus a deeply individual experience, a solitary ‘journey’ into the depths of the Real of the unconscious. However, it is often described in transcendental terms which seem to contradict this aspect of individualization. Participants may interpret such an altered state of

consciousness as an experience of “Oneness” with all of creation, or talk of the “dissolution of the Ego” (Landau 2004, St John 2006).

Perhaps because of this inconsistency, it is extremely difficult for people to communicatively relate the trance experience to others (we could thus say that the experience is Real in the precise Lacanian sense of resisting incorporation into the Symbolic Order). One researcher notes that the “transformative experience associated with music is highly idiosyncratic” and thus “resistant to linguistic expression” (Fatone 2004, 203) while another declares that such experiences are spaces “where meaning fails” and “where representation collapses” (Landau 2004, 112). The inability of participants to linguistically classify their experience – and the radical ambiguity between two interpretations of an event which seems on the surface to be polar opposites – speaks of the liminoid character of drum circling, of a form of experience that is paradoxically “both this *and* that” (Turner 1977, 34). A contemporary guide to Neopagan drum circles refers to this paradox as the “incredible duality” of the drum circle. On the one hand we have an emphasis on improvisation and “creative freedom,” and on the other hand the need for “the unity found in the common pulse” (Stevens 2003, 13). In one way there is individuality in expression and experience, but also there is the realization that any personal experience, any ‘idiosyncratic’ and personal altered state of consciousness is necessarily the result of the shared and co-ordinated activities of a community of drummers. The individual and her ‘personal’ experience is literally predicated on the existence of a group willing to work in concert. This realization of the connection between Self/Other is particularly important for the study of Rainbow Gatherings because, as I argued in previous sections, precisely the same presupposition is the *sine qua non* for the overcoming of the ‘free-rider’ dilemma and thus the perpetuation of the Rainbow Gatherings themselves.

This paradox of drum trancing is shared with other types of altered states of consciousness experienced at Gatherings. The psychedelic experience, which is often celebrated and sought at Gatherings, presents the same paradox: an inward journey of intense introspection, something which happens only in one person's mind, an experience which resists symbolization is nevertheless widely interpreted as an experience of egoless-ness: the confrontation of the individual ego with its own radical contingency *vis a vis* Being itself. Individuals journey deeply into the unfathomable depths of their own psyche, but at the same time experience what is often interpreted as a form of *satori* or oneness. Although the journey by definition cannot be shared with another (it is a subjective experience after all), the journey itself is an experience of radical togetherness, where the boundaries of the individual dissolve. There is in this paradox also an integration of supposedly contradictory notions. This successful integration of individual authority and communal loyalty is the secret to the magic of the Gathering.

4th of July Ceremony

The Fourth of July circle today was as beautiful as ever. The ritual is considered by many to be the high point of the Gathering – the experience's spiritual peak. Every year, at high noon on July 4th, Family congregates in the main meadow, holds hands in a grand circle and ohms for world peace. Silence for spiritual consideration is encouraged in the morning; I was pleased to have a temporary chance to relax and write. The silence was after awhile almost eerie. Knowing eye-contact, smiling, and nodding, but no speaking. People sat in the meadow, meditating, stretching, doing yoga, praying, and smoking. The attitude was solemn. Eventually it started raining. Looking for shelter, I sat down under a large pine tree. Wordlessly someone handed me

a bag full of powdered mushrooms. I ate a pinch of it before passing the bag to the guy next to me. As the rain poured down I wondered what would happen to our Circle.

Rain be damned, circles began silently forming in the middle of the main meadow. In previous years, there had only been one giant main circle following the boundaries of the meadow, but this year, because the meadow isn't big enough, there were several concentric circles. I walked to an open spot in one of the circles and grasped the hands of my neighbors. Looking around the circle I saw that many had abandoned their rain soaked clothes. The rain was still pouring down, but I could see the thousands of Rainbows slowly trickling out of the woods and joining the burgeoning circles. After several minutes of waiting, very wet, we began to ohm. I don't where the chant started, but it was eventually taken up by each circle. The sound of thousands of voices harmonizing in a triumphant ohm filled the forest. For perhaps ten minutes we prayed like this. The prayer ended at the conclusion of the parade from Kid's Village, which marches directly into the middle of the meadow. In this instant there was a single moment when the passage of time seemed to be suspended. Immediately afterwards people looked around, as if emerging from a trance, and began to smile. A raucous cheer went up, participants threw their hands in the air, hugging and kissing each other, and surged forward into the middle of the meadow to celebrate.

The silence of the morning was replaced with the noise of exaltation. The sounds of drums, flutes, and a saxophone filled the air. Prodigious quantities of fresh watermelon appeared throughout the meadow. A man dressed as an alien ran around, taking comical, tentative steps. A tie-died youth in a straw hat blowing bubbles embraced an old man dressed in white robes holding burning sage. A group of musicians near the middle of the meadow burst into a joyful rendition of a series of traditional Rainbow songs ("We're a rainbow made of children/ We're a

Family just singing our song/ There ain't no weapons that can stop us / Cuz Rainbow love is much too strong"). *Soon heavy dancing in the rain had turned the center of the meadow into a slippery mudpit, and dozens of people were dancing nude, their bodies covered with wet earth. The celebration has gone on all day and will likely last all night.*

(Notes, July 4th 2009).

Perhaps the first thing to note about this ceremony is that it preserves (or recreates) the classic tripartite ritual form discovered by Van Gannep and elaborated by Turner. Participants are separated from the quotidian operation of a Gathering and removed into a liminal zone of reflective silence. Ritual silence, as Turner repeatedly emphasized, is often representative of liminality (1969; 1981). An absence that is always a presence, silence suggests the indefinite openness and possibility that is characteristic of liminality and *communitas*. The silent prayer for world peace takes place in this realm of possibility, and derives its power and meaning from the sense that, under these ritual conditions, it is actually possible. Afterwards, the silence is broken and the celebration begins. Participants are reincorporated into structure.

Turner suggests that such rituals often have a transformative or healing purpose; liminars are reincorporated into structure somehow *changed*. Certainly this is the case with the 4th of July ceremony, which is often considered by participants to be a spiritual rebirth. Participants are rejuvenated. Weeping is common; in New Mexico I was told that the point of the 4th was to "have a little cry". Individuals endeavor to transform not only the world, but also themselves. For Rainbows, these two ends are intimately connected in what an expert in alternative culture calls the "self-globe nexus" (St John 1999, 209). The idea, which probably traces back to the failures of the peace movement of the 1960s and subsequent countercultural fascination with

Eastern mysticism and self-help in the 1970s, is that one must fix themselves before one can begin to fix the world. Thus, a Rainbow ritual which is ostensibly about world peace – a political project – is at the same time a deeply personal project of self-improvement. The world can realize peace only when individuals have peace in their hearts. Through the 4th ritual, individuals are symbolically consecrated as subjects-supposed-to-intend-peace. Ritually purified, participants are reincorporated into structure powerfully transformed, and are now able to return to ‘Babylon’ with the strength to face a violent world with the resolve to live peaceably.

Such a performance is also interesting in that its purpose is broad enough to allow many people of different belief systems to find meaning in it. The ritual physically represents the symbolic ‘founding’ of the Rainbow Family: people of many different subcultural mileus able to come together with common intention for the good of the whole. People overcome their differences by linking hands together in a common goal. The services end with a raucous night-long party – but the party is temporally preceded by the solemnity of the ritual prayer. The lesson is that communal work – common intention acted upon – is necessary in order to open up a sphere for individual acts of expression and experiences of hedonism. Following Turner, we can say that this ritual “makes the obligatory desirable” – makes the sort of hard work necessary for personal and social transformation a communal goal.

The openness of this ritual, the fact that people of diverse faiths are able to come together with the common intention of praying for peace is the central aspect of this ritual for many Rainbows. The primary goal of dissolution of difference in shared commitment reiterates the symbolic founding of the Rainbow Family itself. One participant states that :

One really sweet thing that I always loved about the Rainbow Family Vision was that all people were invited, regardless of their beliefs, to come and pray for Peace. Many of those people's private religious beliefs were that their religion was the ONE way. Many hoped for, (and often found) converts simply by setting a good example and sharing their heartfelt spiritual convictions. But the second anybody got up and said, "I know the truth, and YOU don't... etc. etc.", people would vacate the area ("Dragonfly" Feb. 1999 AGR).

The emphasis then is on tolerance and acceptance for the beliefs of others. The goal of the Fourth of July ceremony, a peaceful world, is for many Rainbows the ultimate goal of the Gatherings themselves:

The one thing I do think I can safely say is a "Rainbow" value, though, is non-violence. The gatherings were started to pray for peace (in the most generic way possible--through silence) and the silent prayer for peace on the 4th of July is still, for many people, the entire purpose of the gathering. Yes, folks go for many other reasons, as well, but the central focus, overwhelmingly, is that heartfelt wish to create a non-violent world. To do that, we create this amazing and miraculous community in the woods; temporary, open to everyone, free, and with a sense that we are all family. We try to work our problems out lovingly and fairly. Sometimes we don't do so well, but for the most part when we are on the land, our little village is remarkably harmonious ("Leah Dossantos" Apr. 2004 AGR).

The prayer for peace is why the non-entity known as "The Rainbow Family of Living Light" was founded, not as a family reunion, not as a exercise of civil liberties, not to promote environmentalism, these things are a side effect of gathering to pray for peace, one might say that peace is not possible without them, but make no mistake, the primary focus should always be the prayer for peace, there are other events that promote other goals, our gatherings are to promote and manifest peace in this world. ("TeaMasterGeorge" Jul. 2003 AGR)

Peace implies immediately a respect for diversity and difference, a recognition that others have the right to live in ways of their choosing. For many Rainbows the beauty of the 4th of July ritual is that so many different types of people come together in order to pray for peace. The fact that a diverse group of people can come together with the common goal of creating peace and successfully live together peaceably is seen as significant by many Rainbows. In order for a

wide array of people to be brought together in furtherance of this goal, the 4th of July ritual is necessarily as broad and generic as possible:

The dawn to noon silence is respected that all who want to, may pray, vision, wish for, contemplate, or meditate about World Peace and Healing in their own individual way. Everyone is welcome. Even atheists long for peace. (“Ben”, Personal Interview July 11 2009)

Everyone observes the silence in their own individual ways. It is this very flexibility and attention to individual freedom which allows for the communal ritual to be as popular and inclusive as possible. The result is the emergence of a group subjectivity which leaves room for a wide range of particular differences. The fact that the Fourth of July ceremony is sometimes called interdependence day (a play on independence day) illustrates this fact:

Why I glowing feather gather is to celebrate my I & Your I and all Our I's: New ones, old ones, krisna ones, jesus ones, pagan ones, all the ones and other I's and to becom the We in WE LOVE YOU... July 4th is the common element for all us gatherers. Its my life/love/hope/blood for the whole year...one beautiful noon moment when we explode & implode our celebration of our interdependence & inner dependence (“Glowing Feathers” June 2003 AGR).

The lesson of human interdependency speaks deeply to the possibilities of peace and freedom. Different human groups can retain their distinctiveness but must accept their interconnectedness. The implication of this is a sense of personal responsibility, the idea that what you do has a direct effect on others. It is a sense that is characteristic of *communitas* and also the *sine qua non* of anarchistic social organization.

Rainbow Gatherings successfully weave together *societas* and *communitas* into a single entity, affirming the dialectic between structure and antistructure and creating a powerful and transformative vision of the relationship between the individual and the community. Through every day practice at Gatherings, participants constantly reaffirm the interconnection between the

individual and community. The result is a vision of human society where individual freedom is not abrogated by communal commitments.

Conclusions

Is the Rainbow Family a cult? This question does not much occur to those who have attended Rainbow Gatherings. Cults focus on controlling their members, while Gatherings are mostly liberatory realms of comparatively extreme personal freedom. It is, however, a reasonable question in the sense that the Rainbow Family attempts to construct interpersonal affinities through an elaborate ideology of fictive kinship. In this sense, how is the Rainbow Family distinct from, say, the Manson Family? There are superficial differences, of course; the Rainbow Family does not organize kidnappings or murders. But there are also important similarities in terms of the construction of *communitas*. This question sheds important light on a troubling aspect of *communitas* which is nowhere made explicit in Turner's work. For Turner, *communitas* is an idealized state which tends towards universalization; it is ideally "extensible to the whole of humanity". In practice *communitas* is often related to the creation of group identities which are based on the exclusion of some Other group. At Gatherings, Babylon, and their representatives in the form of the police are Other, and this opposition, as I have noted, is an important boundary which allows for the construction of *communitas* among the "outsiders" who populate a Gathering.

An even clearer example of this paradox of *communitas* was displayed following the recent triumph of the Saints football team in the 2010 Superbowl. The victory of the Saints led to a huge, night-long party in New Orleans. The celebration cut across lines of race and class, with everyone wearing the Saints' colors of black and gold. In a city polarized by racial and class tensions, difference was for a moment abolished in a huge liminoid procession emphasizing the revelers' common humanity. This experience of *communitas*, however, was fundamentally predicated on the victory of the Saints against some Other, in this case the Minnesota Vikings.

This is the paradox of *communitas*: an entire city is subsumed in spontaneous *communitas*, a transformative unity transcending all particularity is enacted, and the reason is because Brett Favre got violently knocked down. This paradox emerges in more unsettling ways. A theory of *communitas* may be necessary in order to understand the spectacles of fascism, or even the Holocaust.

A comparison of the Rainbow Family in relation to the genocidal authoritarian-collectivist governments of the twentieth century provides an opportunity for the recognition that *communitas* is itself an a-moral phenomenon. It can be utilized, as I have argued, in order to enact a domain of generalized reciprocity and mutual aid, but it can also be used as an accessory to terror. Nazism and Stalinism share with the Rainbow Gatherings a program of creating group solidarity through the demonization of some Other: “The Jewish Menace”, “The Bourgeoisie”, and “Babylon” respectively. What is unique about the Rainbow Family in relation to Nazism and Stalinism is the cultivation of an ethos of individuality (in thought, expression, and action) which is maintained at all costs, regardless of the existence of parallel drives towards solidarity. The Rainbow community is one made up of individuals, and the strategies and practices of social unification I have noted share the common goal of preserving space for this individuality. The ultimate purpose of a Rainbow Gathering is to create a space where people can “do their own thing” – but yet do it together with one another. Rainbow Gatherings force us to rethink modernist conceptions of individuality and individual freedom. Instead of the locus of freedom resting with an autonomous individual engaged in a choice between fetishized objects, as in a supermarket, perhaps we must begin to think freedom as a communal affair. Perhaps we must begin to re-conceptualize the problematic of individual liberty in terms of the freedom to make commitments, and enter into relationships, with others.

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Glossary of Rainbow Terminology

A Camp	Alcohol Camp. A place where those who wish to drink congregate, usually on the periphery of a Gathering.
Babylon	The world outside of the Gathering. “Mainstream” culture or the “straight” world.
Babylometer	A watch or clock. Time-keeping devices are only useful in Babylon.
Banking Council	A council convened to decide how to spend Magic Hat Money
Blissing Out	Not working, enjoying the Gathering in a carefree state.
Bus Village	A large camp of live-in vehicles, usually located on the main road.
C.A.L.M.	Center for Alternative Living Medicine. The Rainbow healing establishment, a comprehensive medical unit.
Consense	To agree by consensus.
Council (verb) given topic.	To meet as a group with the aim of reaching consensus on some
Council (noun)	Any group of Rainbows meeting to make a decision. Usually refers to the Family Councils which convenes on the land at North American Gatherings from July 1 st to July 7 th .
Dumpster (verb) dumpster.	To Dumpster Dive. Retrieving food or other goods from a garbage
Early	Word of respect for long-time Rainbows. Politically correct alternative to “elder” which is problematic because it implies some sort of authority figure.
Facilitate	To take responsibility for making sure a given task is accomplished.
The Feather	A focal object used during Council to identify the person who is speaking.
Front Gate	The main entrance to a Gathering.
Full Ride	Staying at a Gathering from seed camp through cleanup.

Green Energy	Money. Not appreciated at Gatherings.
Happy Trails	A common good-bye to people leaving a Gathering.
Heartsong	Personal feelings, emotions, and visions. Often juxtaposed with “business” in discourses about Council process.
Hipstory	Collectively told oral history of the Rainbow Family. Recited each year at North American Nationals.
Home	At the Gathering.
Hug Patrol	A group of people who wander around Gatherings sharing hugs.
Info Center	An area where information is exchanged, usually an information booth and bulletin board in the main meadow.
Kid's Village	The camp for parents, children, and expectant parents. Provides childcare as well as special activities and special meals to children.
Lovin' You	Term of endearment used among Family.
Magic Hat	Money collection; usually used to fund Main Supply.
Main Circle	A central area where Family Council, Dinner Circle, and the 4 th of July Silence take place
Main Supply	Central Area which receives and redistributes donations, mostly of food.
Main Trail	The central most heavily traveled trail through a Gathering.
Movie	A spectacle that has recently transpired, as in an “A Camp Movie” or “Cop Movie”.
Om	A sacred syllable in Tibetan Buddhism.
Om Circle	A group of people chanting “Om,” often to diffuse a tense situation or preceding Dinner or Council.
Rainbow Land	At a Gathering.
Rainbow Noon	When the sun is high in the sky. Usually between 11 AM and 1 PM, but varies depending on the moods of participants.
Rainbow Time	A system of keeping time without watches.

Shanti Sena	A peacekeeper; also the call for assistance.
Shitter	A Rainbow latrine.
Shuttle	A vehicle used to move Rainbows back and forth from parking areas to the main trailheads into the Gathering.
Six Up!	Slang for gun; cry used to alert others about the presence of armed police officers.
Trade Circle	A designated area where people go to barter
Vision	A picture of how things should, could, or will be.
Welcome Home	Standard greeting for someone entering a Gathering from Babylon, also the physical entrance to a Gathering.
Zuzu	Edible treat; usually candy or doughnuts.

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