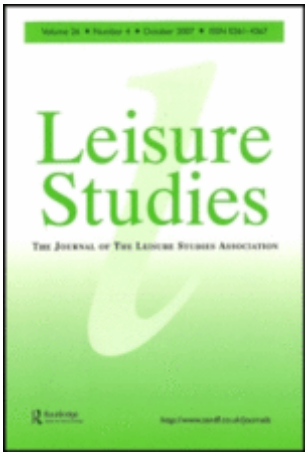

The Transgressive Festival Imagination and The Idealisation of Reversal

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Abstract

To consider the festival's potential as an activist tactic may seem naïve and disconnected from the colonizing practices of event tourism. However, today's immersive and curated festival experiences are indebted to a wider *festival imagination*: a spatial imagination suffused with reversal and transgression. In this paper, we aim to trace a *transgressive festival imagination* through four vectors of reversal that have contributed to how we imagine both festivals and activism: the crowd, play, appropriation and spontaneity.

Each of these point to the significance of a certain kind of festival space, one that is mutable, protean, volatile and transitional, extending both a *techne* of resistance and operable elements of the creative industries' somatic economy. By tracing the *transgressive festival imagination*, across festivals and activist practices, we argue that the contemporary urban festival and the performative tactics of social movements share visions of contingency, playful performance and an aesthetic-political heightened energy.

Keywords: transgressive festival imagination, reversal, crowd, play, appropriation, spontaneity

Introduction

This paper draws from a range of disciplinary perspectives with the aim of contributing a revised view of the festival. We first trace the festival phenomenon through the lens of activism, event tourism, and leisure studies in order to reflect upon the scope and capacity of the festival. By tracing layers of festival meanings through these disciplinary positions, we are then able to consider the festival by way of a *transgressive imagination* that has imbued the festival with the potential for reversal.

While the range of festivals, is vast and beyond the scope of this paper, we recognise that festivals' diverse historical and socio-cultural roles extend beyond 'themed public celebrations' (Getz & Page, 2016, p. 276). Although we consider festivals relatively broadly in this paper as contextually situated cultural celebrations, our specific focus is upon those

forms of festival, which since the twentieth-century, have been developed to support cities as destinations through hallmark event tourism (Todd, Leask & Ensor, 2017). In writing this paper, our aim is to contribute to the current understanding of the festival, beyond that of an instrumental event management view, and in doing so to dilate the leisure studies perspective.

The growth of event management and more recently event studies in the academic literature has led to a more nuanced perspective of festivals and events. Today, we see these as being of particular value, offering an alternative conceptualisation to the festival as an instrument of neoliberal cultural urban planning (Rojek, 2012). Nevertheless, despite an emerging corpus of critical event studies, which 'takes the concept of 'event' to be essentially contested' (Lamond & Platt, 2016, p. 5), much of current festival research remains framed by tourism and event management (Laing, 2018).

In contrast to the event management perspective, leisure studies provide a growing body of work that reframes the festival through critical conceptualisations of resistance and social change (Erickson, 2011; Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2012; McDonald, 2008; Ravenscroft & Matteucci 2003; Rojek, 2012; Taylor & Walley, 2019). Theorists of transgressive spaces of leisure such as Williams (2018) rehabilitate the transformative and cathartic qualities of the festival to make sense of the embodied pursuit of social change.

Still, there remains limited consideration of the relation between those *festive forms of resistance* we see in Critical Mass movements, Occupy or anti-globalization events and the urban spectacle that revitalises the city as a space of time-based cultural consumption. In her ecological approach to festivals Frost (2016) highlights their paradoxical nature: 'They can make headlines, they can make money, and they can stimulate discussions of identity, politics,

art, and more. As sites of cultural practice and experience, they are complex, multiple, and dynamic' (p.569). While it would be pointless to refute festivals' contradictions and incongruous spaces of order and chaos, there is nonetheless more to be said about how reversal is paradoxically figured in both the touristic and activist festival.

In short, we lack a conceptual framework through which to understand the festival as both activist process and event tourism product. Our paper is written in response to the ambiguity of the festival and its capacity to reach across consumerist and activist practices. It is also written in response to our perceived lack of interdisciplinary interpretations of the festival. Importantly for the authors, the paper is also a means to develop a conversation between us as researchers.

Despite a shared interest in festivals, our disciplinary 'homes' are markedly different and as a result our scope and treatment of the festival produces contrasting representations, contexts and relations. AUTHOR 1 sits between design and urbanism and has approached the urban arts festival critically in relation to the production of space, its role in relation to gentrification and the assemblages of global *Creative City* discourses. AUTHOR 2's position is as an artist and interdisciplinary researcher who has lived experiences within festivals and events management; and has approached the urban arts festival as a phenomenon of engagement and relationship building within the *Festival City* discourse across tourism and event studies. While we have studied the urban arts festival from our respective disciplinary positions, we hope this collaborative paper develops previous informal discussions that have taken place between us, while contributing to wider understandings of the festival.

Although our approaches differ, we share the frustration with festivals' naturalised role vis-à-vis the creative and event industries where festivals still remain widely defined by their economic function. We agree that such an instrumental relation to event tourism eclipses more critical and liminal readings. Our emphasis is neither upon the festival as 'deviant leisure' (Rojek, 1999) that transgresses moral norms, nor the festival as a means of conceptualising resistance through leisure. Instead, we are interested in developing an understanding of the ways in which forms of reversal have sustained the festival as *potentially* transgressive. We suggest that distinct modes of reversal have combined to construct a *transgressive festival imagination* that intersects with both revolution and consumerism, where references to freedom, hedonism and transformation are aligned with temporary publics.

Today, the festival prevails as a ubiquitous branded phenomenon that temporalizes urban space and showcases the city as a destination. Defined by policy-makers in terms of economic and socio-cultural impact, contemporary festivals must 'earn their keep… in the age of instrumental art' (Frost, 2016, p 569) while assuming strategic positions in destinations' event portfolios (Todd, et al., 2017; Ziakas, 2019). This distinctly modern idealisation of the festival was first conceived under the auspices of a self-conscious cultural internationalism (Miller, 1993) that produced festival assemblages and social networks that exceeded the physical delimitation of the city and the nation. During this time, a series of European urban festivals emerged with a view to *staging the international* and hosting cosmopolitan audiences. The cities of Salzburg, Edinburgh and Avignon might be said to have been the destinations of creative tourism *avant la lettre.*

This marked the birth of a self-consciously modern festival identity and paradoxically fuelled a *transgressive festival imagination*; by taking the arts into the streets, appropriating buildings

and challenging social and political ideals of urban order (Bartie, 2013; Johansson & Kociatkiewicz, 2011; Quinn, 2005). During this period, the festival was re-ontologised 'as a legible sign of temporal urban identity' (Jamieson, 2014 p.300) and while we do not intend to discuss the international festival in any empirical setting here, it is at this historical juncture that the *festival imagination* was fused as transgressive, disruptive, street-based, and seemingly spontaneous.

Interpretative Method: Tracing the Festival Imagination

Our paper and the approach that supports it, argues against reducing the festival to its function in the prevailing context of semiocapitalism (Berardi, 2011), interurban competition and the pervasive development of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). To think in terms of a *festival imagination* rather than festival discourse is to think of today's festival as entangled in a wider frame of cultural knowledge. To consider the festival through the *imagination* of its potential spaces and experiences, is to acknowledge that the festival is 'sustained by often seemingly incongruous elements: facts, fictions, pasts and futures, the cognitive and the somatic, the global and the local (Jamieson, 2014 p.295).

In their article *Imagination as Method* Hayes et al. (2014) argue that to explore lived experience, we must revise our understanding of the relationship between research, society and individual experience. The authors maintain that the imagination furnishes distant communities with a capacity to generate rather than describe societies. The imagination, they argue is a productive force, both psychically and materially. Hayes et al. (2014) present the imagination as having a significant role in cultural and social life, extending as it does a field of possibilities and connections.

In *Modern Social Imaginaries* Taylor (2004) traces ways in which people have imagined their collective social life and explains a crucial relationship between the imagination and ideology. The imagination can be false inasmuch as it is capable of distorting and concealing realities, but our imaginations are never simply a matter of ideology; instead they allow us to construct, challenge and transgress society. We adopt Castoriadis' (2005) resistance to the temptation to naturalise cultural meanings, choosing instead to seek out a wider sense of the ideas and ideals that have invested the festival with its transgressive potential.

For Castoriadis (2005) the imagination of society "creates for each historical period its singular way of living, seeing, and making its own existence" (p. 128). It is this generative capacity of the imagination that Hayes at al. (2014) argue, should not be seen to exist outside of social and cultural inquiry. In the case of the festival, we argue that four elements of reversal are imagined; each of which support both the consensus of the festivalized city and the antagonism of social protest. By privileging the *festival imagination*, we recognise what Hayes et al (2014) refer to as 'the intensity of differences'; how one thing blends with another and where the intersections might be felt. Moreover, by focusing attention on the qualities of reversal embedded in the crowd, play, spontaneity and appropriation we are able to reveal the capacity of the imagination to generate hopeful futures, tactics of freedom and idealisations of a creative self.

In the paragraphs that follow we explore each of these four elements in turn. We begin by considering how reversal is played out through the invocations of the crowd. It is after all, ultimately the crowd that performatively institutes ideals of freedom through proximate bodies. Secondly, we consider reversal in relation to play and the more insurgent revolutionary forms of reversal associated with the carnival. Thirdly, we turn to appropriation with its tactics of

revision to discuss the more structural relations of reversal to the festival. Fourthly, we address spontaneity, to explore whether the prospect of the unplanned and uninvited carries with it a potent currency of reversal. After reflecting on these four elements we discuss ways in which they are mined by creative and event tourism industries and activist assemblages. Finally, we conclude by reflecting on how our attention to the four elements of reversal we identify with a *transgressive festival imagination* might benefit scholars of festivals and protest.

REVERSAL: Activism, Transgression and The Festival Crowd

Canetti's Nobel Prize winning contribution to the study of *Crowds and Power* (1962) chronicles the behaviour of the festival crowd and its relation to society. He tells us that "nothing and no-one threatens and there is nothing to flee from…Many prohibitions and distinctions are waived…[but] there is no common identical goal …The feast *is* the goal... the equality is in large part an equality simply of indulgence and pleasure" (Canetti, 2000, p.62).

Unlike the festival crowd, Canetti identifies the reversal crowd as organic and 'open' rather than 'closed' (which he relates to the organized festival crowd). The reversal crowd senses its own collectivity while the festival creates a temporary and delimited space where the extended body of the crowd is temporarily amassed before being emptied back into everyday life. His distinction between the reversal and festival crowd identifies a phenomenological divide: one where the reversal crowd sensing its own modulating vitality seizes the capacity to discharge its power, whereas the festival crowd sensing its contained conditions complies with the spatial order.

Canetti argues that dispersed crowds devoid of touching are most often aligned with an authoritarian spatial configuration. Touch, he argues is fundamental to the crowd's inter-subjective communication and its capacity to act as one. As a spatial and haptic phenomenon, he insists we must understand the crowd relationally and politically. Canetti recognises the untapped potential of the dense crowd as that which is capable of negating and transcending social order. Crowds for Canetti, allow "individuals to lose themselves, get absorbed, and, in this way, are able (temporarily) to escape commands …crowds not only negate but also transcend: they pave the ways for new alternatives" (p.5).

Ossewaarde (2012) contends that the fleeting counter-worlds produced by the reversal crowd should not be understood as vying for power over rational structures of democracy. Rather, 'the will of crowds is growth, vitality, density, equality, physical discharge, standing together, body to body, tongues getting together, chanting, clapping, dancing, reciting poems' (Manoukian in Ossewaarde, 2012, p.14). The crowd and its relation to social order is historically situated and for Kahn (2015) it is specifically during the 1960s when the idea of the crowd shifted from that of the undifferentiated mass to that of a diverse and reflective crowd. During the cultural revolution of the 1960s, crowds emerged as both more creative and diverse in age, gender and race. This shift was allied to other changes in the planning and design of urban space that saw an increase in pedestrianised space, amenities and communal space more generally. These concomitant shifts subsequently gave way to new visibilities and inventive ways of occupying and appropriating space.

By tracing these meditations of the crowd, we are able to make connections across periods of technological and social change, and identify a shift towards intentional, collaborative and temporary social groups. These reversal crowds were unified through an intention to *claim* space whether through festivals, protests, sit-ins, or happenings; space became a matter of collective contention. The counter-cultural crowds of the late twentieth century developed a vocabulary of reversal that performed creative and defiant tactics.

Today, the 21st century crowd is often imagined as a *collective* at home amongst the mediated crowds of social media: where networked relationships do not necessarily have boundaries, but cleave to values, identities and experiences. The 21st century crowd is borne of mobilities and formed through global networks. Today, the mediated reversal crowd is brought together by shifting allegiances and practices of sharing, preserving the reversal crowd's affinity with temporary, fluid, immediate and contingent space.

REVERSAL: The Transgressive Festival Imagination and Play

Play is fundamental to both the imagination of the urban arts festival and the serious play (Bogad 2016) that creatively disrupts urban order. Play underwrites the *festival imagination's* capacity to transgress whether through the licenced transgression of the festival, or the contemporary power of creative protest to invert and play with social structures. Play as it is imagined through protesting crowds, jeers and taunts, and mischievously mimics social order. Whereas play as it is imagined through the spectacle of the cultural festival, choreographs an inquisitive audience through the city's temporary spaces.

Critical tourism scholars such as Swain and Hall (2007) consider the festival through its capacity to create playful interactions between spaces and audiences. They identify how the inquisitive crowd is generated through a touristic vocabulary of western embodied gestures. Although useful to the embodied interactions of the *transgressive festival imagination* this kind of critical attention to playful bodies, materials and spaces is not prevalent in tourism literature. Conversely, research around critical play is extensive in leisure studies where it is invoked to describe the tactical performances of critical play; in particular those of culture jamming (Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2013), mass bike rides (Williams, 2018) and parkour (Raymen, 2019).

The principal social theorist of play Johan Huizinga, encourages an appreciation of play's space and time as 'imaginative actualisations' that play *with the order of things*. He avoids such binary opposites of play/work, fun/serious, instead suggesting that more consideration is given to the ways in which play's spaces and times 'promote the formation of social groupings' (p.13). Similarly, Gadamer (1977, 1986) conceives play as a creative experience, which takes place neither *within* the individual nor *to* the individual; but is constituted by two or more subjects in an intersubjective space. These conceptualisations of play endow the festival imagination with a language of ordered disruption; what Dissanayake (1988) refers to as 'the fiction of an alternate life, the excitement lacking in normal experience, and the opportunity to pretend' (p.70). Here, the art of play does not belong to a universal sacred time-zone, but to a horizon of 'still undecided possibilities'.

A further evocation of play that emphasizes a temporalized 'potential space' comes from the psychoanalyst D.A. Winnicott (1971) who argues that play functions as a 'third space'. It is beyond the scope of this paper to reflect upon the breadth of influence psychoanalysis has had upon the *festival imagination*, but it is worth identifying the ways in which play has been understood as both liminal and future-making. Firstly, liminality is often understood in relation to the masking of identities and the exaggeration of bodily figures, both of which are common idealisations of reversal in the festival and contemporary protest. These figurations of play celebrate the performing body and its capacities for disruption. Winnicott argues that the body at play makes possible a liminal space wherein the subject is neither 'me' nor 'not me', but exists between that of the individual's own fantasy world and exterior world. Although Winnicott and Lacan are generally thought to occupy opposite poles (Ruti 2011) of psychanalytic thought Winnicott (1971) develops a structuralist distinction between the Real, Imagination and Symbolic Order, to consider play as a 'potential space' that is, both fluid and peopled by unidentifiable masked subjectivities, each of which are commonly associated with the *festival imagination*.

Winnicott was interested in child development and specifically, the *futurity* of play's potential. The recurrence of the childmotif in Winnicott's psychoanalytic thought signifies the primacy he gives to the power of play in the development of the child's potential future. Play in this formulation, endows the *festival imagination* with a future-giving capacity. We can begin to see the ways in which play provides the *festival imagination* with a time of experimentation, potential and futurity. Through Winnicott's work, play is presented as expressive, embodied and potent with the ability to imagine a more rewarding and authentic future. In this way, play

is imagined as a route to self-actualization, which continuously revises the parameters of possibility by probing, testing and pushing at 'reality'.

Ruti (2011) describes the Winnicottian self as that which is neither passive nor compliant, instead it pursues what both "Heiddeger and Lacan describe as the subject's poetic relationship to the world" (p.140). For Winnicott, play is a means to confront the monotonous, repetitive and predictable rhythms of life. Play, as it is invoked through Winnicott, provides the tactics to reject a futile compliance with social order and a path to creative living.

In the context of considering the transformative potential of play it would be remiss if we did not introduce the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) whose work is central to theoretical readings of spatial and embodied reinvention and reversal. Bakhtin first conjured the potent force of the carnivalesque in his celebrated *Rabelais and his World* (1968) to describe forms of unofficial culture that use festivity, parody, and grotesque realism as a weapon against official culture and totalitarian order. Bakhtin's original conception of the medieval carnival imagined it (through Rabelais) as a space wherein official divisions of gender, class and social knowledge became the subject of hilarity and ridicule: as masked men dressed up as women and begged for money (an activity known in medieval society as 'mumming') and conventions of class were dramatically inverted through codes of dress and social conventions. Viewed in this way, the carnival is employed to convey playful spaces of dissent.

That Bakhtin's carnival is rooted in a historical context of public community life and a time not wholly given over to industrial clock time provides us with a vocabulary that at once preserves the distinction between spontaneous and institutionalised culture. Igrek (2018) attends to this distinction in her theorisation of festival, laughter and performativity where she considers readings of transgression in relation to excess. For her, 'the affirmation of play is therefore a release of energy which has been masked, veiled, and restricted according to the principles of a utilitarian social organisation" (p.248). For Igrek (ibid.), play as it is formulated in the carnivalesque, imagines the active participant rather than the passive spectator. Similar to Winnicottian play, Bakhtin's play is both future-oriented and a tactic of release if not denial, from an oppressive social order. Both authors present us with forms of critical play that can be seen in the festival tactics of today's performing protestors in *Reclaim the Streets* and *The Rebel Clown Army* where the clowning behaviours of the crowd are transformative, albeit temporarily.

REVERSAL: The Transgressive Festival Imagination and Appropriation

The binary between order and chaos is implicit in the paper's title and is germane to the *transgressive festival imagination's* distinction between the festival and more overtly disruptive spaces of protest. This binary reflects its modern origins by acknowledging the design, manipulation, management and engineering (Bauman, 1991, p.7) of social space. Lefebvre (2003) provides a helpful distinction when he distinguishes between the appropriation of space through festivals and through protest:

> 'The parades, masquerades, balls and folklore festivals authorized by a power structure caricaturize the appropriation and re-appropriation of space. The true appropriation characteristic of effective 'demonstrations' is challenged by the forces of repression, which demand silence and forgetfulness' (p.21).

In leisure studies appropriation is written into the potentiality of reclaiming civic space through the shared pleasure of guerrilla gardening (Reynolds, 2008), the political act of walking and singing (Taylor & Whalley, 2019) and the appropriation of urban infrastructure by *traceurs* (Raymen, 2019). For Taylor and Whalley (2019) these *acts of leisure* appropriation are both artful and critical and are initiated by the community to formulate a 'resistant stance'. Here we identify a propensity to read marginal cultural practices alongside appropriation as acts of reclaiming and celebrating minority space and identity. Through tactics of appropriation these communities re-present themselves as counterpublics (Warner 2002) whose force lies in their capacity to claim and transform.

Since the postmodern turn, appropriation beyond an aestheticized antagonism is harder to find. Instead, Graw (2004) identifies a surfeit of aesthetic games that engage with playful practices of poaching and revision. Following Crimp's seminal distinction between critical appropriation (that revises material realities) and a more postmodern form (that appropriates style rather than content) Graw reflects on the persistence of the potency of 'real appropriation' in the arts, at least as an enduring ideal that fuels the festival imagination with the prospect of revision and reclamation.

Within a sliding scale of authentic acts of appropriation Bakhtin's carnivalesque continues to provide a generative framework for understanding the festival as a spatially potent arena: reversal is intrinsic to the blurring of boundaries between spectator and performer, private and

public. In this arena, official spaces can be 'turned upside down' by the alternative rhythms of play. St John (2008) identifies what he refers to as an 'explosive resurgence' of the carnivalesque in the 1990's. Citing the *Carnivals Against Capital* (and For Global Justice) and *Global Days of Action* as part of 'massive anti-capitalist and anti-war convergences'. He argues that this period of intensive street protest signalled the emergence of the 'protestival' as 'a variegated complex of action performances enabling exposure and revelation' (p.168).

> ''Protestival' is a term coined by radical technician John Jacobs, and offers a useful heuristic for contemporary events simultaneously negative/positive, transgressive/progressive, aesthetic/instrumental. Becoming virulent in a period which has seen an increase in political mobilizations deviating from those conventional to social movements, these events constitute a creative response to the traditional political rituals of the left: those ritual marches from point A to point B' (St John 2018 p.168).

The carnival deconstructs and deconsecrates official meanings of spaces and buildings, which Vaneigem (2001) argues is the 'principle of subversion'. Theorist and influential member of the Situationist International (SI), Vaneigem provides us with an enduring conceptualisation of appropriation. He imbues appropriation with powers of reversal, emancipation and the freedom to change that which serves power: 'the freedom, for example, to turn Chartres Cathedral into a funfair, into a labyrinth, into a shooting range, into a dream landscape' (p.259).

The Situationist project argued 'the whole of life experience under capitalism is in some sense alienated from itself' (Plant, 1992, p.2) and that reality and authenticity lie outside the structures of capitalism. Premised on the separation of art from everyday life (a separation

wrought by the powers of the market and commodity fetishism), they urged transgression beyond the confines of capitalism, imperialism and party politics and triumphed through the powers of urban re-coding. The subversive capacity of re-coding is not a given, instead it lies in revealing the contingency of language, materials and space. Its performative act is one of reclaiming (stealing, borrowing, hacking, jamming) language, materials or space: re-inscribing them with meanings or resistance. Today, these feature as prevalent tactics in the aesthetics of protest: for the activists that take to the streets in a theatrical reclamation and appropriation of urban space and for those media activists engaged in hacking and jamming. 'Here, the *hack*, not exclusively a negational practice, is radically creative since it involves the intentional disruption, disorientation and de-programming of 'consensus' reality' (St John, 2008, p.172).

We commonly associate the disruption of the Occupy movement, Global Street Parties and the mass mobilizations of the Arab uprising with make-do grassroots aesthetics and strategies of appropriation. In the hands of protestors, the city is cannibalized in establishing provisional spaces from where protestors can physically disrupt the streets with their bodies by singing, dancing and marching. By appropriating spaces and objects these embodied playful modalities test the limits of their environment countering conformity with improvisation. An improvisational disposition is, as Hanna et al. (2015) argue, crucial to the tactics of appropriation and provides the *transgressive festival imagination* with a vocabulary that yokes appropriation with an imaginative and opportunistic appetite for protean spaces.

REVERSAL: The Transgressive Festival Imagination and Spontaneity

Tracing the festival's relation to protest to the mid twentieth century, Bey like St John identifies an emergent creative force of reversal to an era of happenings, when spontaneity had a less adulterated currency of its own. In the context of the *transgressive festival imagination*, it is important to consider spontaneity as a spatial tactic. As part of the 1960's avant-garde performance art movement, groups such as *Fluxus* explored the potentiality and immanence of spontaneous borrowed spaces and everyday subjectivities. Situationists sought to reclaim the spaces and times of the city that institutionalized time had embezzled from its citizens, regulating, categorizing and commodifying how and when the city was used. During this period, performance, theatricality and play became weapons of spatial appropriation.

In its idealisation spontaneity serves as ammunition capable of penetrating the enforced temporality of the city. During the late 60's and 70's, theoretical writing from the Situationist camp and that of Derrida in particular, equated spontaneity with transparency and influenced the trajectory of cultural criticism, the proliferation of spatial metaphors and, a distinctly potent and volatile cultural imagination of festivals.

In his book *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* Belgrad (1998) emphasizes the political intent behind spontaneity, arguing that its opposition to imperialism and bureaucratic control was primary. The alternative it promoted, he suggests, was founded on intersubjectivity, 'in which 'reality' was understood to emerge through a conversational dynamic' (p.5). Avant-garde spontaneity was intentionally generative of participants rather than spectators. Spontaneity, he argues, was aligned with a certain performative emancipation: an unlocking of the participants' creativity.

In this way, the aesthetic of spontaneity was a phenomenological project that sought to include bodies as part of a *feeling collective*, but as Belgrad (1998) points out, the aim was also to extend the activity and potency of spontaneity beyond the confines of the intellectual cultural sphere. Spontaneity, as a creative idea and socio-political ideal was disseminated through the arts, but its force and application spread through critical platforms emerging as the *techne* (Greek: meaning craft) of carnivalesque protests. As a cornerstone of the *transgressive festival imagination*, spontaneity delivers the promise of unmediated experience. It gives play its immediacy and disruptive force and it is the crowd's spontaneous force that continues to breathe potential into the *transgressive festival imagination*.

In leisure studies, spontaneity is often aligned with an intensity of pleasure, with feeling oneself and with the flow of happiness (Watkins & Bond, 2007). Interestingly, it is also linked with the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures, youth cultures and rebellion (Heath & Potter, 2006). Within the context of late capitalism these are recurrent bedfellows in packaged products and experiences that mine rebellion and resistance; from aged graffiti tagged converse trainers to tattoos and body piercing the aesthetics of nonconformity have become the mainstay of mainstream consumerism. McGuigan's [1](2006) portrait of 'cool capitalism' remains relevant in 2019 when 'cool' is still 'obliged to act out antibourgeois nonconformity'. McGuigan's criticism of the stylized *acting out* of nonconformity and its seeming spontaneity is set against a more defiant, tactical, authentic and *P*olitical resistance *to* power. Spontaneity, like play is

[1] That 'cool' sells everything from Hollywood films to New Labour is not McGuigan's point, instead it is capitalism's appetite of endless appropriation, incorporation and colonisation. For Belgrad, (1998) spontaneity continues to embody a cultural stance of refusal, commodified or not, it is read as a symbol of defiance, unpredictability, uncontrollability and disruption. Non-conformity sells and we readily find readings of spontaneity that situate it within a consumerist paradigm. Packaged and sold to youth cultures seeking unmediated authentic cultural experiences (Hamilton & Dennis, 2005) spontaneity offers the promise of 'performative resistance' (Raymen, 2019) and a more authentic, improvisational and creative self

subject to commodification, offering as they do the trappings of authenticity.

Despite the fact that spontaneity can readily be incorporated as a strategy to lend flash mobs and pop-up shops authenticity, it continues to provide the *transgressive festival imagination* with a quality that prefixes each of the other four forms of reversal. The crowd, play and appropriation are all augmented by the velocity of spontaneity; it is spontaneity that amplifies their capacity for reversal.

Festival Management and the Mining of the Transgressive Festival Imagination

Küpers et al (2017) argue that those regimes of knowledge we identify within the *transgressive festival imagination* are both highly mobile and open to multiple readings. In particular the four elements of reversal are prevalent within the experience economy wherein feelings are imagined as intrinsic rather than extrinsic to places and events. The *transgressive festival imagination* in all its capacity for imagining reversal provides festival management with a language of revision: the recipe for endless possible re-inscriptions of festivalized space.

It is important to consider the relation between the ambiance-centric (Thibaud, 2011) *business* of events tourism and the *transgressive festival imagination*: wherein the possibility of embodied transgression and reversal is co-opted by festival management to produce what Raymen (2019) describes as '*symbolic* identities of 'cool transgression', effectively displacing the Real by attempting to represent the non-representational through the imagination' (p.149).

In their critical re-thinking of Management Studies in relation to cultural turns in the humanities Küpers, Sonnenburg and Zierold (2017) point to the ways in which the cultural imagination permeates disciplines. They discuss the critical potential of cultural theory and its exploitation within what they refer to as the 'dark side of cultural turns in management'. "Topics and concepts, such as, materiality, embodiment, space, performance, mediality, narration, and sense-making… have moved more and more into the forefront in the last few decades"(p.22).

They argue that the language of creativity is over-used by the cultural management profession to sell curated experiences of freedom and authenticity. Within this context, the authors identify a 'dark side' of cultural management that exploits the imagination of cultural theory: mining aesthetic experience and cultural practices for consumerist ends. The authors suggest that the seductive appeal of cultural theory lies in the prospect of discursively claiming what Pink (2007) describes as 'the sensory potentials of urban space' (p.66). It is as Frost (2016) insists, important that we consider the disciplinary complicity of event tourism research: 'those studies that embrace the new policy environment are frequently at the same time part of it, producing identikit economic impact assessments to order, without interrogating underlying assumptions' (p.570).

Discussion: The Transgressive Festival Imagination and the Four Elements of Reversal

Our emphasis upon the *transgressive festival imagination* does not fit neatly into conceptualisations of leisure as a context for social change, instead our focus rests upon the predominance of the festival's imagined vectors of reversal. Each of the four elements of reversal discussed above point to the idealisation of a certain kind of festival space, one that is

mutable, protean, volatile and transitional.

This mutable spatial quality of the festival crowd is most succinctly captured by Canetti's (2000) politics of touch and related codes of proximity. Such codes of proximity are intrinsic to the experience of both protest space and urban festivals where bodies are choreographed in to produce what Nieland (2008) refers to as, the 'eventfulness of sensation'.

Canetti conjures reversal through the sizeable sensing crowd, which feels its own collectivity and mutable potential. He identifies a phenomenological divide between the reversal and festival crowd, which he argues is rooted in the sensing crowd's reflective capacity to discharge its collective power and feel the force of its action. The reversal crowd performs alternatives through the language of transgression, or what we have called a performative *techne* of resistance. This performative *techne* of resistance associates the protesting crowd with critical play (volatile and oriented to deconstruction and deconsecration). In a similar way, the element of appropriation provides the *transgressive festival imagination* with an opportunistic relation to space. In the act of appropriation, new meanings and new possibilities are made visible. Appropriation in this context belongs to a spatial vocabulary that idealises the protean and the transitional potential of festivals. Appropriation heralds a participative form of urban engagement, one that summons protestors or festival audiences to read urban space as contingent and playful.

Today's playful appropriating crowds of Occupy and Reclaim the Streets are future-oriented and mobilised through creative reality-making activities. Their tactics of spontaneous appropriation reveal the contingency of the city and open up spaces of revision and hope.

Spontaneity, in this context provides the prospect of interruption, intervention and emergent forms of being.

Together, crowd, play, appropriation and spontaneity fuse in the *transgressive festival imagination* to extend a 'prefigurative politics' and a performative *techne* of resistance. Each of the four elements of reversal has become operative across the divide of consensus and antagonism. Sharpe's (2008) prism of 'pleasure-politics' addresses the intersectionality of politics and leisure and allows for a more nuanced understanding of festival beyond merely paradoxical (Frost, 2016). Moreover, echoing the work of Day (2004) Sharpe (2008) identifies a shift in the modalities of protest; from protest politics to prefigurative acts. She argues that in the shift 'from a 'politics of demand' to a 'politics of the act'…the attempt is to 'refuse rather than rearticulate' hegemonic structure' (p.228). We suggest that this shift towards the 'act' of refusal revitalises 'the ephemeral and evanescent, the transformable, the multipurpose and the ambiguous' (Pringle, 2005, p.145) qualities of the festival.

Because of rather than despite their capacity for reversal, these four elements of the *transgressive festival imagination* are integrated into festival planning and aligned with neoliberal inter-urban competition. In the prevailing context of ambiance-centric urban planning and what Böhme (2016) refers to as *aesthetic economics*, pop-up events, appropriated buildings, flash mobs and temporary publics provide 'something more' to the sensorial experiences of the city.

Conclusion

Our aim in this paper has been to draw upon our previous discussions and interdisciplinary

views to consider the *transgressive festival imagination* through four vectors of reversal: the crowd, play, appropriation and spontaneity. We have argued that together these elements have contributed to the idealisations of both festivals and activism. Integral to the experience economy of cultural event tourism, reversal can be mined as both strategic and operable constituents of the somatic economy. We have aimed to re-conceptualise the festival through the prism of the *transgressive festival imagination* moving beyond the event management perspective, to dilate the leisure studies' perspective of the festival.

The *transgressive festival imagination* continues to inform the transformative potential of the festival and the *techne* of resistance. The vibrant crowd offers an aesthetic-political heightened energy to the street that is pursued through urban cultural strategies. Play is both critically potent and embedded within leisure's timescapes. Appropriation offers the promise of a prefigurative politics and the possibility of endless re-inscription of leisure spaces. Spontaneity too, speaks of the possibility of unmediated pleasures and the invisible packaging of curated authenticity.

It is hoped that our desire to understand the *transgressive festival imagination* as it exists at the intersection of politics and leisure might lead to more nuanced understanding of the seemingly incongruous functions of festivals and social protests. We argue that our attention to the imagination is important, revealing an attention to the intensity of differences; how one thing blends with another (Hayes et al 2014). While our analysis of the *festival imagination* adds to the leisure studies literature, we conclude by suggesting that it may also be of use to scholars of the contemporary festival and culturalised urban policy, and those seeking an understanding of festivals beyond the instrumental logic of tourism and event management.

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