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Art at [The Music Festival](#): Blueprints and the Chronotope

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Popular music festivals, both in recent years, and historically, often also ~~programme~~ ~~program~~ visual and performance art. The inclusion of these other intellectual elements is an important part of many festivals such as Glastonbury in the UK. These additional acts and installations are ~~programmed-programed~~ alongside the pop and rock music acts for a number of reasons. These may include audience development ~~by~~; drawing in new audiences to the overall festival experience. It also may be a response to the growing market of festival goers who are looking for a well—designed experience and view this type of ~~programming~~ ~~programing~~ as additional value for money.

The events, festivals and happenings of the late ~~1960s~~, especially those in the ~~W~~west coast areas of the US, were predominantly music focused. However, during this period, and alongside these events, new types and modes of visual art, fashion and graphic design, emerged that were subsequently shared worldwide. It can be argued that events such as the Monterey Pop Festival and Woodstock were progenitive and created the hippy style. However, at these festivals, very much like more recent events, the promotional material and documentation focuses on the formally ~~programmed-programed~~ acts on the main stages as opposed to these other elements of the festival which is often where additional critical intellectual and innovation can be found. This essay will explore the nature of these festival events as sites that ~~eatalyse~~~~catalyze~~, and subsequently promulgate new intellectual, critical and creative forms.

In my 2015 paper *The artist at the music festival: art, performance and hybridity* (Kill, 2015), I argued that in addition to any economic or audience development benefits of ~~programming-programing~~ visual artists at music festivals there could be intellectual benefits for the academic disciplines of art, design, and performance. That is, when an artist makes

new work for a festival, this context provides a unique site where different critical and creative languages can hybridize and generate potentially new forms, genres, and practices.

One of the key theoretical frames in this work was the writing of Nicolas Bourriaud. He defines something called relational art—~~“art. This is ‘art’~~ as a state of encounter” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 18). He states that this is “art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 14). Relational art can be found in traditional spaces such as galleries, museums and theatres, but it may also be located in “meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality.” These key notions of human interaction, social context and conviviality are crucial in my understanding of the events of the Summer of Love.

Visual artists have wanted to show their work beyond the academy for decades. This is driven both by the desire to disseminate their ideas to new audiences and to allow different intellectual disciplines to cross fertilize. Many critics and writers describe the death of the old galleristic model of artists making work, and galleries showing and (sometimes) selling that work. Art critic Jerry Saltz recently wrote an influential article on the death of art galleries. For Saltz, when art is viewed in a gallery space, it can be hard to view it as an experience as anything other than a singular visual voice. He states:

Looking, making, thinking, experiencing are our starting point. Art opens worlds, lets us see invisible things, creates new models for thinking, engages in cryptic rituals in public, invents cosmologies, explores consciousness, makes mental maps and taxonomies others can see, and isn't only something to look at but is something that does things and sometimes makes the mysterious magic of the world palpable. Proust wrote, “Narrating events is like introducing people to opera via the libretto only.”

Instead, he said, one should “endeavour to distinguish between the differing music of each successive day.” That’s what we do when we look at art, wherever we look at it, however much noise surrounds it. In galleries we try to discern “differing music,” and it’s still there right now. I love and long for it. (Saltz, 2014)

For some critics the art fair, or digital spaces, are the new platform that will replace the gallery. Others have talked about temporary, community or socially engaged events as the emergent dominant form for engaging publics with contemporary art practice. This is not, however, simply about the “art world”; it’s much broader than that, but the debate about why artists might withdraw from the art world also echoes this shift. For Martin Herbert (Herbert, 2017), “what’s at stake in the work” is “how art can propel genuine, measurable social change”; he concludes that, “that art as contained within the exhibiting system is not enough.”

So, although we may acknowledge that institutions such as galleries and universities are often the place where new knowledge, ideas and modes of practice can be found. Other sites can offer the potential to make a bigger impact on society. In these sites, art practice is co-located with music, design, writing, film and other practices creating a particular kind of discursive space. These events draw together temporary communities with knowledges and specialisms in making that are rarely co-located, into a space that catalyzes and supports new ways of working and doing. This newly generated knowledge is subsequently shared, managed and disseminated in a particular way within this community.

Festival scholars describe the context of the music festival as “fattening food, intoxicating drink, sexual promiscuity, altered ego-identity, the inverse and the heteroglot” (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.189). This has led to some of these scholars (Hewison, 1986; Blake, 1997; McKay, 2000; Hetherington, 2001) characterizing these events as contemporary

carnavalesque. In the carnivalesque, we exist in a different space and time and are “temporarily liberated from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10). In this space, we can escape our everyday existence, behave in a transgressive way, and social norms are turned on their heads. For many involved in festival research, music festivals during the late 1960s provided the blueprint for this contemporary carnivalesque. It was a space of liberation.

For Chris Anderton, (2009), the carnivalesque experience that once characterized all music festivals is becoming increasingly sanitized, packaged, and commercialized. Some contemporary festivals are no longer counter cultural, but instead nod to a previous countercultural influence: typified by the “legal highs” sold at festivals and luxury yurt accommodation. This, for some is a highly commercialized, almost unrecognizable, version of the contemporary carnivalesque. In other words, the authentic contemporary carnivalesque, that site that has innovative, generative and relational potential is clearly an historical site for these writers.

So, what were the events of the Summer of Love? Were they actually this ideal space, or perhaps this is simply nostalgia? Were they really the archetype of counter cultural unsanitary, un-packaged, non-commercial contemporary carnivalesque? Or were they about music acts staging enormous concerts? Did the events of that period create a space where we could exist in idealised liberated time and where relational conviviality could flourish and produce art forms that genuinely initiated social and intellectual change? George McKay states that,

at their best, music festivals aren't really about music, are they? Its centrality is undercut by the sheer range and wealth of other entertainment on offer.... [Arguably] it was the free festival movement that really widened out the cultural ambition of

festival culture (though the ambition was there at Woodstock in 1969, called the Music and Art Fair). ...

(McKay, 2000, pp. 150-51; emphasis original)

Here McKay points to the intention of Woodstock to be a “Music and Art fair.” Woodstock, Music and Art? Really? That’s not how it’s remembered, is it? So, what kind of art was there? There’s not much documentation, so I needed to dig a bit deeper.

I initiated a period of primary research; interviewing artists, hippies, musicians, academics; all of whom in one way or another engaged with the festival scene of the late 1960s. They all described creative and interdisciplinary events and spaces with a wide range of art forms represented; including the poster art exhibition at Woodstock. Some described a highly intellectual and political engagement with these events, for others it was almost entirely hedonistic. There was very little consensus on many counts but on one is there was. For all, it was predominantly the music, and the writing to a lesser degree, that was the key mechanism by which ideas spread across the world. Visual art or design (posters, record sleeves, fashion) were less important in terms of the dissemination of key ideas for everyone that I spoke to. The fine art from this period was described as a reflection, a different kind of articulation, that was very important at the festivals and events but did not function in the same way as music as a method for dissemination. And it also seems that those fine artists who were involved in festivals during this period, due to discomfort with cashing in, selling out, or being seen to be commercial motivated were not terribly interested in any new practices spreading beyond the event. So, any new intellectual and creative practices were predominantly developed and disseminated at the events as opposed to beyond it.

I began to realize that I was asking the wrong questions in this research. I was separating out various forms of making. Music and writing versus design and fashion versus painting and sculpture. I was creating a hierarchy of modes of making that, perhaps, wasn't there. All of the people I interviewed spoke about the importance of the experiences that they had, about eventness and about the co-location of multiple practices.

For the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, heteroglossia is described as a complex mix of world views and languages that is fundamentally dialogic. Each language is viewed from the others' perspective and meaning exists, floating, at a point between writer and reader, speaker and listener, artist and musician. When creative and critical languages are brought together in a community of practice ideas of authority and expertness are challenged, these languages begin to mutate. But, importantly,

Heteroglossia is not characterized solely by the ability to process multiple languages. It is not enough to quote, cite or simply reproduce those 'alien languages' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 366) that are incorporated into a text. What is vital is that the languages be viewed from each others' perspectives, that they be 'hybridized' so that an 'interminable' dialogue is created (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 314)

If we begin to think of communities such as Haight Ashbury, or events such as Woodstock in these terms visual art becomes one language in the heteroglossic stew. These events shift us away from Saltz's singular voice into a space where all kinds of noise exists. It is also clear that this model of a creative site has recurred and reiterated during the last 50 years. Even if festivals scholars have been critical of these subsequent iterations. These festival and event sites became a kind of blueprint for future events; one, that was deeply relational, many voiced and unpredictable in terms of social and cultural progress. When

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Mikhail Bakhtin ~~describes~~ explains various forms of the chronotope. ~~He~~ states that a chronotope is a way of describing meaning using spacial and temporal concerns, not semantics. Semantics for Bakhtin are the method for measuring spatial and temporal phenomena, but it is a mistake to imbue them with meaning. In order for meaning to become visible to us, it has to be experienced, “every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished through the gates of the chronotope.” This is the key to understanding the importance of the festivals and events of the late 1960s. The specific semantic outputs and developments are less important than the spatial and temporal blueprint that began with these events. The Summer of Love functioned as a space of relational conviviality and social change and the key to this is “idealised liberated time.” It ~~is~~ is this chronotope that is the gateway to meaning ~~making~~ and its subsequent dissemination.

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