The Glastonbudget festival: gender, liminality and the carnivalesque.

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The Glastonbudget festival: gender, liminality and the canivalesque

Purpose - Contemporary outdoor rock and pop festivals offer liminal spaces in which event participants can experience characteristics associated with the carnivalesque. Festival goers celebrate with abandonment, excess and enjoy a break from the mundane routine of everyday life. The aim of this conceptual paper is to explore the way gender is negotiated during the festival space in relation to costume and fancy-dress.

Design/methodology/approach - The Glastonbudget tribute music festival in Leicestershire provides the focus for this conceptual paper and Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach to gender performance offers a theoretical underpinning. Researcher observations at the event and photographic imagery are used to understand the way in which gender is displayed through costume.

Findings - It is suggested that liminal zones offer space to invert social norms and behave with abandonment and freedom away from the constraints of the everyday but neither women nor men actually take up this opportunity. The carnivalesque during Glastonbudget represents a festival space which consolidates normative notions of gender stereotypes via a complicated process of othering.

Research limitations/implications - This is a conceptual paper which presents the need to develop social science based articles connecting gender to the social construction of event space. This ideas developed in this article need to be further explored using more investigative modes of fieldwork.

Originality/value – There is currently a paucity of literature surrounding the concept gender within these festival spaces especially in relation to liminality within events research.

Keywords - Festival; carnivalesque; liminality; costume; gender; events.

Paper type – Conceptual paper
Introduction

Since 2005 a Leicestershire farm has provided the setting for the ‘World’s best tribute festival’ (Glastonbudget, 2013), namely Glastonbudget. A parody of the internationally acclaimed Glastonbury festival in Somerset; Glastonbudget offers visitors a cheaper alternative to the mainstream festival environment. A growth in the public events industry (Bowdin et al., 2011) and mirrored increase in academic interest surrounding events has provided new opportunities for research into the festival environment. There is, however, a paucity of literature surrounding the conceptualisation and understanding of carnival and festival and their relationship to gender; this article seeks to address this.

The academic subjects of events management and event studies are still relatively young and as a result much research on the topic is in relation to event management processes and structures rather than conceptual considerations of the subject. Arguably, ‘business elements have become over-privileged in the studies of events to date’ (Andrews and Leopold, 2013, p.2). It is important that socio-cultural implications of events and the investigation of event spaces are examined in order to better understand the way individuals interact and engage with events. It is perceived that varying spatial locations harbour differing gender relationships (Walby, 1997), one reason why the exploration of gender in festival space is an interesting area of study.

Gender difference is prominent within contemporary society, where it is assumed men and women have ‘different bodies, different capabilities, and different needs and desires’ (Holmes, 2007, p.1). Further to this, gender stereotyping has been historically ubiquitous within events (Andrews and Leopold, 2013). This article seeks to unpack the relationship between this notion of gender difference and stereotyping whilst positioned
within the supposed status-free refuge of liminality (Turner, 1969). Liminality can be taken to mean the socially defined area which allows individuals to experience freedom from the mundane existence of everyday life (Shields, 1990).

It is argued by some that events involve a gathering of people and are temporary in nature (Bladen et al., 2012) and spaces are created ‘by drawing symbolic and/or material boundaries in the expectation that others will recognise’ (Löw, 2006, p.128). Therefore, event spaces can be described as the tangible and/or intangible structures which occupy social interactions and exchanges which in turn assist in the construction of place. This particular definition is an attempt to move away from the understanding of place as a fixed entity and rather to view place and space in a relationship which is continually changing and manipulated by both event attendees and organisers. Place is socially constructed (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010) and the language used in these relationships is spatial in essence (Bell et al., 1994). The changing relationships between the social, economic, political, environmental and cultural also distinguish one place from another (Rose, 1993). This article will go on to explore how the notions of carnival and festival can impact upon an event space with specific relation to gender at Glastonbudget.

Carne Vale and the Carnivalesque
The concept of carnival is heavily linked to events and festivals in terms of its association with celebration and the gathering of people. The term is derived from the Latin carne vale which means farewell to the flesh (Weichselbaumer, 2012) which connects to abandonment, bodily freedom and release. As Bakhtin (1984) considers, the notion of carnival is not merely a spectacle which people observe but a celebration
which involves the participation of everyone involved. Carnival celebrations involve the,

‘temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it [they] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions’.

(Bakhtin, 1984, p.10)

The phrase “carnivalesque” develops from this which encompasses the idea of abandonment and festivity. Bakhtin describes the change of high and low hierarchical structures during carnival time, which do not simply invert but are blurred and merged (Weichselbaumer, 2012). Furthermore, ‘carnivalesque loosens the knots of power’ (Shields, 1990) and according to some theoretical perspectives the everyday rules and constraints evaporate during carnival time. Carnival time is that of celebration, banquets, festivity and excess. These characteristics are very similar to those expected to see at a contemporary outdoor musical festival and therefore the notion of carnivalesque is an important one within this article.

Carnival participants and festival goers enjoy ‘moments of freedom’ in public spaces (Aching, 2010, p.417) whereby some normative ideologies and social statuses are suspended temporarily. These can be likened to the consumer’s quest for perfect moments in which the everyday is transformed into something more special, more fantastical (Beaven and Laws, 2008). However, Aching (2010) and Ravenscroft and Matteucci (2003) acknowledge that the allowance for such carnivalesque and social freedom may actually be instrumental in maintaining and reinforcing social stability in the long-term by providing a temporary release for chaos. Bakhtin’s (1984) version of carnivalesque is criticised by Aching (2010) for not allowing the carnival participant’s sense of agency but also ultimately acknowledges that absolute freedom, even within a
celebratory environment does not exist. It is thought that once the festivals come to an end whether that be the close of a music festival or the end of a street parade, all social structures and norms are restored (Anderton, 2009).

Festivals, festivity and the merge with carnivalesque

Festivals originate from religious and spiritual rituals and gatherings of people (Ravenscroft and Matteucci, 2003) which often involved celebration (Sharpe, 2008), food, drink and fancy-dress. In recent decades the festival scene has deviated from its original, religious roots (Raj, et al., 2009), but the essence of ritual and make-believe continues to exist. Getz (2007) proposes the definition of festivals simply as ‘themed, public celebrations’ (p.31) but he goes on to question the authenticity of some events that have been inaccurately branded as festivals for commercial reasons. Furthermore, festivals have been consistently linked to resistance and social protest over the years but this increasing commodification of festivals makes them more difficult to act as appropriate platforms for social change (Sharpe, 2008).

According to Sharpe (2008, p.219) the ‘light-heartedness’ and jovial atmosphere absorbed by attendees at festivals is one of the main features which distinguishes festival events from other leisure events such as carnivals, parades and sporting fixtures. However, other writers do not see a separation of the two and instead view festivals as ‘carnivalesque inversions of the everyday’ (Ravenscroft and Matteucci, 2003, p.1) and perceive the act of play (Turner, 1987) as instrumental to both carnival and festival. Festivals are themselves considered events; but other types of events can also include festivity, such as Christmas markets. The words festival and festivity are associated with feasting, joy, merriment, celebration and party (Allen, 2001). Festivity allows for the social coming together of people to meaningfully construct a sense of belonging through staged and non-staged performances (Picard & Robinson, 2006). Festivals
allow for a break from the everyday routine and instead offer an ‘opportunity to honour the mystical and spiritual in shared community’ (Jones, 2010, p.276).

**The fragility of liminality**

Liminality stems from the anthropological work of Van Gennep (1960) and his work on transitions and thresholds which are linked to human progression and rites of passage. According to Turner (1969, p.95) ‘liminal entities are neither here nor there’ and instead occupy an in-between space, an unclear and hazy existence which blurs convention. Turner explains two models for human socialisation; the first is the structured society, full of rules, hierarchy and inequality. The second model is one of liminality, unstructured and welcoming of equality which can be likened to the festival experience and feeling liberated and status free. However, the constraints to the festival organiser are also similar to Turner’s first model which subscribes to structure and status.

A liminal zone is a phrase used to describe the bounded nature of liminality where people ‘can engage in “deviant” practices, safe in the knowledge that they are not transgressing the wider social structure they encounter in everyday life’ (Ravenscroft & Matteucci, 2003, p.1). The liminal zones created by transformed social spaces allow for more flexible social rules and changes in acceptance of non-traditional behaviours (Picard and Robinson, 2006). However, this liminal space in essence creates a barrier for the overflow of celebration and excess, people are confined to the festival space and ultimately these spaces “remain prime sites of governance and discipline” (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist, 2009, p.36). This juxtaposes the festival between celebratory chaos and a social vehicle employed to maintain order and discipline in the long term. Providing individuals liminal space to momentarily *lose themselves* and behave in a care-free manner promotes the ethos of chaos as limited, constrained and restrictive. Therefore the liminality that festivals offer can be viewed as a social tool which affords attendees
a controlled space to escape to and be deviant within before returning back to normality.

Liminal areas are viewed as socially defined and provide liberation from the monotonous routines of everyday life (Shields, 1990). An interesting separation between liminality and the carnivalesque is proposed by Shields (1990) who states that liminal zones can be exploited to make people think they are escaping the structures of everyday life when they are in fact not. However, the carnivalesque, according to Shields concentrates of the central role of the individual and the agency they possess in order to engage and interact with the social surroundings. Therefore subversion comes from the individual who has control over the exploitation of the surrounding social world. Henceforth, liminal zones are arguably easier to manipulate and control than the slippery notion of carnivalesque. In practical terms, festival organisers are able to control the temporary abandonment festival goers experience as part of the limen but may find it difficult to manage a more dynamic, chaotic movement instigated by the festival goers in the form of carnivalesque celebration. This consolidates Sharpe’s (2008) suggestion of festivals being more ‘light-hearted’ and therefore easier to control than the perhaps historical and ritualistic carnivals. The ramifications for this proposition are very interesting in terms of how gender negotiates the festival space in terms of liminal zones and the carnivalesque.

Modern rock and pop outdoor music festivals can be viewed as event spaces which are used to instigate experiences associated with carnival time. The physical locality of the festival place helps to create a liminal zone in which festival goers can participate in the entire festival spectacle. This involves feasting, drinking to excess, masquerading and expressing abandonment; all characteristics which link the festival
space with the performance of carnivalesque. However, this relationship is very complicated and the carnivalesque celebrations manifested in liminal spaces can create paradoxical connotations. It seems the carnivalesque simultaneously provides a space for freedom and change but then also links to social order and governance (Weichselbaumer, 2012; Aching, 2010).

**Gender, liminality and the topsy-turvy festival world**

The concept of hegemonic masculinity first appeared in an Australian school report which identified that gender and indeed class was governed by multiple hierarchical relations (Connell, 1982). It is understood that hegemonic masculinities are of the highest status and this belief perpetuates to subordinate others (Hinojosa, 2010). Hegeonomic masculinity is two-fold and can be viewed as hegemony over women and hegemony over subordinate masculinities (Demetriou, 2001). Literature surrounding the carnivalesque and liminality often refers to the subversion of hierarchies and status which must be assumed to relate to gender hierarchies amongst others. During the Whitby goth festival existing gender structures are reversed and temporarily deconstructed (Goulding and Saren, 2009). Therefore, within liminal spaces it is expected that inequalities will disperse and status based on normative gender beliefs will also disappear temporarily.

Gender is an area of research that is yet to be adequately explored in relation to events and specifically music festivals. However, gender features so centrally in festival environments because its significance in everyday lives; therefore the opportunity of festival goers to play at the edges of gender seems obvious (Tokofsky, 1999). Leisure spaces such as music festivals serve as sites for ‘gender work’ where femininities and masculinities are ‘made’ and re-constructed (Green, 1998, p.183). Also, some events are ranked in gendered ways (Andrews and Leopold, 2013) and it is thought men and
women have differing roles in the festival environment (Picard, 2006). Further to this, festival practices have been known to consolidate and recycle dominant normative power relations, rather than appease them (Sharpe, 2008). Therefore progressing this understanding of how gender is negotiated and represented in festival spaces is highly significant.

Festivals can offer complete release for attendees and a chance for self-expression through gender and dress (Goulding and Saren, 2009). However, it is debatable to what extent this self-expression is completely agency-led or rather socially constructed through the festival hierarchies. For example, Picard’s (2006) research discovered women’s festival jobs included dance, choreography and cake selling whereas men were involved in the construction of the festival site. Data collected by McCabe (2006) between 2001 and 2004 demonstrates the different gender roles during a community festival, the men played the sport and the women followed their men and also looked after their children. This is conceptualised by Aching (2010) who believes carnival time represents the intensification of social antagonisms and not their absence.

In this respect the work of Goffman (1959) is useful in exploring the way gender is presented in festival environments. Similarly to the live performances of the music bands, gender is also performed by those individuals attending the festival. According to Goffman gender is scripted by the performer and is acted out differently and flexibly dependent on situation and context. As later discussed, the performance of gender at Glastonbudget is assisted by costume and a sense of play instilled by the festival environment. This dramaturgical approach to gender is based around social interaction and the performance of gender as a means to please and satisfy others. The extent to individual agency could actually be restricted by the maintenance of rigid gender hierarchies during festival time.
Masquerading gender and oppressive othering

The use of disguise, fancy-dress and masquerade is a prominent feature of gender performances in relation to celebration and carnival. Masks are seen as an instrumental way to express ‘self-recognition and misrecognition’ during carnival time (Aching, 2010, p.415). Bright and revealing clothes are worn by performers which would not have been appropriate elsewhere (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010) which supports the idea of celebration and subversion. In his seminal work on the carnivalesque, Bakhtin (1984) refers to the grotesque image of the body being expressed during carnival. The body is used symbolically during such events and the concept of cosplay (costume and play) is displayed by participants of the festival experience (Andrews and Leopold, 2013). Character costumers offer freedom to the wearer from ‘straightforward inversion to more ambiguous juxtapositions’ (Ware, 2001, p.236). The use of costume is paramount to the performance of gender in relation to Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach. Costume allows for performance, role play and a presentation of self. It seems that the use of costume and fancy-dress is significant in the creation of the carnivalesque and to further establish the festival separation from reality (see Figure 1).

When exploring gender and costume it is very important to acknowledge how the body is portrayed within the festival space. The concept of gaze is often used to investigate the relationship between body and observer which was developed by Foucault (1973) in relation to the medical gaze. The medical gaze refers to the way doctors diagnosed patients by examining their exterior in order to make an informed decision about their internal components. Following this, the concept of the tourist gaze (Urry, 2002) encapsulates the way tourists are drawn to landscapes and townscapes and the tourist spends time to look and capture the visual site with interest. In relation to Foucault’s concept of gaze, here the tourist is making judgements about the place based
on what they can see and capture from it externally. In the festival site, festival goers may spend time to assess and gaze at the surroundings and capture the scene through photography. Attendees will look at the bands playing on stage and the other attendees dressed in fancy-dress and acting in unrestrained ways. In line with Goffman (1959), when gender scripts are being performed, the audience will gaze at the actors and make their judgements based on how well their performance is being delivered.

There is a hierarchal structure in force in relation to gender, ethnicity and class which determines how gazes are given and received and the heterosexual man gazing at women is at the top of the power hierarchy (Löw, 2006). It can be argued that “to gaze is to consume; to be gazed upon is to be consumed” (Voase, 2005) which has significant connotations for the relationship between the festival space, the tourist gaze and gender displays. Fancy-dress and costume demands the gaze of others and this contributes to the way gender is negotiated on the festival site.

Substantial academic work around festivity and carnival has centred on the Mardi Gras events which have featured gender very prominently. Ware’s (2001) research explains that women now take on a more leading role in the organisation of the festival than before. The costumes play a central part in the Mardi Gras celebrations for these women who use masks to take on new identities and ‘play with fundamental cultural categories’ (p.234). Ware explored the separate male and female events and found that lady Mardi Gras displayed many different images of themselves, some tested traditional hierarchies whereas others reinforced them.

Gender boundaries are blurred during festival time and Mardi Gras provide a space for both women and men to invert and manipulate gender displays. Ware (2001) also illustrates the importance of cross-dressing for men during festival time. Men will wear wigs, dresses and lipstick and take on the comic role of la vieille femme (the old
women). It seems costume is a very important social tool for both men and women in order to express their identities in the in-between space of the carnivalesque. However, men seem to use the liminal space to create a comic version of ‘women’ whereas women sometimes use it to accentuate their femininity and further reinforce hierarchies.

The concept of othering (Schwalbe et al., 2000) is an important one when trying to understand the differences in gender costume behaviour. Oppressive othering takes place when one group aims to dominate another group by defining the other group as inferior in some capacity, perhaps morally or intellectually. When men dress-up as old women they are having an impacting upon the notion of ‘woman’ as comical, old, ugly, inferior and frail. During a gothic festival Goulding and Saren (2009, p.44) note, ‘when goth men dress as women they do so with extreme confidence and even competitiveness, often with their performances of femininity overshadowing their female counterparts’.

It appears that the traditional view of male supremacy within social circles features heavily within festival spaces. Men dominate the performance of femininity in a way which marginalises women simultaneously. Even when women at Mardi Gras masquerade as men or as androgynous they are ‘masking “up” as less marginal and more powerful figures’ (Ware, 2001, p.242) thereby also contributing to the impact of othering.

**Glastonbudget and Mardis Gras**

So how does Mardis Gras costume come to be of importance to a tribute music festival in Leicestershire? Researcher observations of the Glastonbudget Festival 2013 inspired the conceptual framework for this article. The Researcher attended the Glastonbudget for one day and captured observations through visual methods of photography. Photography was viewed the most powerful way to capture costume and gender
displays. This paper is designed to conjure discussion around festival space, gender and costume and it is acknowledged further empirical study is required to take the analysis and exploration to greater depths.

Many groups of men at the festival dressed-up as old women; the outfits comprising of grey wigs, dresses, cardigans and handbags (see Figure 2). This relates to the men in Ware’s (2001) study who took on the role of *la vieille femme* during Mardi Gras. Whereas many women at the festival were dressed in overtly sexualised outfits as to exaggerate their femininity. One example of this being a woman dressed as a Playboy Bunny, demonstrating a level of *porno-chic* (Duits and van Zoonen, 2006) which links to the commodification of sexual images. The outfits of both men and women contribute to the festival experience and notion of the carnivalesque; further to this all costumes command the attention of the tourist gaze. The dramaturgical approach of gender (Goffman, 1959) is supported by the researcher observations whereby both men and women used the festival space as a stage to entertain the gaze of an audience.

The way in which cross-dressing and costume is used did have its limitations. No women were observed dressed as men at Glastonbudget, a similar finding to the festival researched by Goulding and Saren (2009). This may reflect the maintenance of the normative gender order; whereby anybody has the ability or skill to play at femininity through costume but masculine masquerade is out of reach to women. It could be argued that women did not want to be consumed by others’ gaze when dressed in masculine ways. Despite the display of emotive and controversial costume being used it appeared that both women and men wore fancy-dress in both comical and playful ways.

Glastonbudget provides an interesting site for gender performance and self-expression. The controlled festival limen certainly promotes the notion of carnivalesque
in terms of feasting, celebration, costume and a break from the everyday routine. However, it is questionable to what extent status-free experiences (Turner, 1969) and dismantling of gender structures (Goulding and Saren, 2009) are presented in this liminal zone. Unlike some aspects of Mardis Gras, Glastonbudget did not portray hierarchical freedom through costume for the wearers. When groups of men dress as old women they arguably remain in a privileged position due to the process of othering which in turn preserves their dominance.

Women also used costume comically but this often had sexualised undertones. Women mask as American authority figures (Figure 3) which initially could represent power and status but this is questionable due to the revealing nature of the costumes. The sexualised costumes and general outfits of women and girls at Glastonbudget further consolidated women’s potential marginalised position in the othering process. It is not disputed that individuals view festival spaces as an escape from the everyday and a place to be playful and merry. However, the way in which play is demonstrated by men and women through costume potentially illustrates a difference in the way liminal zones are used. It is thought that ultimately space continues to be bound by the power relations within it (Löw, 2006). The liminal zones offer space to invert social norms and behave with abandonment and freedom but neither gender actually truly takes on this opportunity. The carnivalesque of Glastonbudget represents a festival space which consolidates normative notions of gender via a complicated process of othering.

**Conclusion**

It is hoped this article encourages further research into the area of events, gender and the use of social spaces. It is important that the academic field of events management continues to develop paying particular attention to the sociological underpinning of events. The relationship between festival spaces, the carnivalesque and liminal zones is
a complicated one. Contemporary outdoor music festivals offer attendees a liminal space to party and celebrate, but one which is exploited and ultimately manipulated by event organisers. The music festival also mirrors experiences linked to the carnivalesque, namely inversion of the everyday routine, abandonment and excess. However, due to legal and safety constraints the festival space can not allow for traditional carnivalesque chaos and unrest.

In the liminal space of the music festival gender continues to be performed in traditional normative ways, supporting Goffman’s (1959) understanding of gender. It seems that the status-free notion of liminality (Turner, 1969) is not applicable to gender and the marginalisation of women is demonstrated through costume. Festivals do provide spaces to both consolidate and resist social norms and values (Getz, 2007) in terms of sexuality and excess. However, the use and performance of gender via costume at Glastonbudget served to reinforce normative views of gender and promoted a position of male omnipotence. This article hopes to catalyse questions about the way in way in which gender negotiates festival spaces. It is acknowledged that the lack of empirical support of this article is a limiting factor. However, this article hopes to raise awareness of the lack of research currently available in relation to festival spaces, the carnivalesque and gender.

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