



'From mosh pit to posh pit': Festival imagery in the context of the boutique festival

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3 **'From mosh pit to posh pit': Festival imagery in the context of the**
4 **boutique festival**
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13 **Abstract**

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17 This paper addresses market-based cultural production in the context of the UK festival
18 field, with a focus on the framing of the festival experience through anticipation. In
19 particular, boutique festivals are discussed as examples of a contemporary cultural
20 'product category' which has emerged and proliferated in the last decade. Through
21 discourse analysis of media representations of boutique festivals we situate the boutique
22 festival in a broader sociocultural discourse of agency and choice, which makes it
23 meaningful and desirable, and outline the type of consumer it is meant to attract. For the
24 contemporary consumer the boutique festival is presented as an anticipated experience
25 based on countercultural festival imagery, whilst simultaneously framing cultural
26 participation through consumption. The paper contributes to a wider debate on the
27 construction of the consumer in the cultural economy.
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Keywords: cultural production; anticipation; aesthetic experiences; boutique festivals;
discourse analysis

Introduction

Once the exclusive preserve of the student, the crusty and the semi-pro psychonaut, festivals are now an enshrined element of the cultural calendar. (Lawrence 2007: 100)

In this paper, we examine market-based cultural production in the context of the UK festival field. Festivals have gained a prominent position in the cultural production sphere. They are seen as important mediators of cultural meaning-making, attributed significant economic importance, and constitute a popular form of cultural organization (Oliver 2014; Sassatelli 2011; Watson, Jenner and McCormick 2009). The central role of festivals in the cultural economy has been related to a general trend of 'festivalization', denoting how festivals and events have become important tools for tourism development and place marketing (Andersson and Getz 2008), and how they are primary meaning-making vehicles for performing identities and lifestyles (Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2014) through combining consumption with education and entertainment (Richards and Palmer 2010). Rather than simply providing a format for the dissemination of cultural products, the festival itself constitutes the product. The positioning of festivals as an important growth industry in the UK (Jacobs 2011) is indicative of the increasing attribution of economic importance to festivals, concomitant with a strategic significance afforded to the cultural industries as a key sector of innovation and growth. Such framings position the production of cultural goods as taking place in a market, meaning they are for example subject to competition. This is also true for festivals, which are positioned as competing in an increasingly saturated culture and leisure market (Jenner, Barr and Eyre 2013). In this paper we discuss the

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3 role and meaning of festivals in the contemporary cultural economy by examining
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5 discursive representations of a particular type of festival, the so-called *boutique festival*,
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7 in the UK. The label entered popular discourse in the last decade and has since become
8
9 an established format category. It can be noted that festivals that are attributed with the
10
11 boutique label vary in terms of scope, content and organizational features, and we do
12
13 not claim that there is a particular type of festival that can unambiguously be placed in
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15 this category. Instead, we are interested in analysing how the category is discursively
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17 constituted by examining commonly occurring characteristics and underlying tensions
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19 in descriptions of it.
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23 Boutique festivals are generally described as small-scale events with a music or
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25 combined arts profile, as having a commerce-free positioning¹, and as offering a range
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27 of participatory activities (Yeganegy 2012). Examples include craft activities, music and
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29 dance workshops, and spiritual workshops (e.g. Dibbitts, 2008; McFarland 2012; The
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31 Guardian Magazine 2011). To varying degrees, such activities encompass a philosophy
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33 of participation whereby the festival audience is positioned as a participatory agent in
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35 the production of the event (Yeganegy 2012). The benefits of accepting such a
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37 participatory disposition need to be made culturally available and meaningful to the
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39 potential festival reveller. Echoing Pratt and Jeffcutt (2009: 266), any cultural product
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41 needs a 'structure of differentiation and taste making' and 'audience preparation' to find
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43 its place in the market – that is, its cultural value and meaning need to be contextually
44
45 situated. Part of imbuing a cultural product such as a festival with value is creating
46
47 *anticipation* regarding the type of experience that is to be expected. Consumer
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49 anticipation is rooted in what Campbell (1987: 77) terms modern hedonism, that is,
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51 'being pulled along by desire for the anticipated quality of pleasure which an experience
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57 ¹ It can be said that all festivals include a degree of commercialization, for example related to ticket and
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59 other sales, but descriptions of the boutique festival, to varying degrees, frame it in terms of non-
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commercialism.

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3 promises to yield'. Anticipation draws on the construction of imagery that indicates the
4 type of pleasurable experience that will be had, and imagination and the imaginary
5 constitute key resources of contemporary consumption with its focus on 'fantasies,
6 feelings and fun' (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; see also Addis and Holbrook 2011).
7
8 Festivals are often characterized as 'time out of time' (Falassi 1987) and as such can be
9 said to be imbued with imagery associated with intensified sensations, escape and
10 communality. In effect, all products of the entertainment industry, and representations
11 of such products, are imbued with cultural meaning and value, including providing
12 consumers with imagery regarding the ordering of social relations (Rhodes and Pullen
13 2012). Festivals are no exceptions in that descriptions thereof not only describe their
14 programming content, but also attribute value to particular aesthetic sensibilities. They
15 also outline particular social relations, such as between producer and audience, and
16 between members of the audience.
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32 In order to explore meanings attributed to festivals, we examine *how*
33 *anticipation of the festival experience is discursively constructed in media texts*. As
34 such, we are first looking to examine the sociocultural characteristics which render a
35 category such as the boutique festival intelligible and desirable. Further, we critically
36 discuss the subject positions and social relations that are constructed through discursive
37 representations of the boutique festival. In so doing, we highlight an instance of the
38 commodification of cultural production, contributing to a wider debate on the value of
39 culture. Finally, we aim to place festivals more firmly within critical research on culture
40 and organizations.
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51 In what follows, we first describe the emergence of the boutique festival, and
52 situate it within the contemporary UK festival sector. We then conceptualize this
53 empirical phenomenon through a framework of aesthetic experience production, after
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3 which we outline our methodological approach of critical discourse analysis of media
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5 texts. In the subsequent findings and discussion sections we present the key themes that
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7 emerged in the empirical material, first outlining the sociocultural context within which
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9 the boutique festival is framed and then focusing on the notion of creating anticipation
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11 of the experience on offer in relation to identities and social relations indicated in the
12
13 texts. In the concluding section we discuss the contributions of the paper and propose
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15 some directions for further research.
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20 21 **The emergence of the boutique festival in the UK festival field**

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23 From the late 1960s onwards pop and rock festivals grew rapidly in the UK and
24
25 elsewhere. They were associated with the developing youth counterculture (Roszak
26
27 1969) and as such were often met with scepticism or outright hostility by local
28
29 communities that found themselves as the chosen sites of such events (Clarke 1982).
30
31 The festivals were framed as socially dangerous, anti-authoritarian sites of sexual
32
33 promiscuity and illicit drug-taking, as well as causing general nuisance and noise.
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35 Although such associations may to some extent still be made, festivals now have a very
36
37 broad social and cultural appeal. Clarke's (1982: 1) count of 'at least 24 festivals' being
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39 held in the UK in 1979 now seems very modest compared to 981 listed on a major
40
41 festival hub website, eFestivals, for 2014. The varied offering of the contemporary
42
43 festival field is usually classified according to factors such as size, timescale,
44
45 geographical scope, genre, degree of professionalism and commercialism (profit or non-
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47 profit, sponsorship), degree of establishment in the field (history and breadth of
48
49 stakeholder relations), and innovativeness (see Bowdin et al. 2001; Paleo and Wijnberg
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51 2006; Stone 2009; Ruling and Strandgaard Pedersen 2010). Most festivals are no longer
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53 emblematic of a radical counterculture, but have become a major cultural fixture with a
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3 mainstream appeal. An estimated 6.5 million people attended a festival or other live
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5 music event in the UK in 2012, generating a total spend of £2.2 billion (UK Music
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7 2013). Positioned within the so-called soft knowledge intensive cultural industries (du
8
9 Gay and Pryke 2002), festivals are afforded an important role for generating economic
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11 value. The value potential of cultural products has been reinforced through a public
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13 discourse which frames the cultural industries as a major driver of economic growth
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15 (Hutter 2011). Festivals constitute a significant part of the UK leisure economy, and are
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17 seen as an important part of the creative sector (British Arts Festivals Association
18
19 2008). The increased number of specialist festivals advertised on UK listings sites
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21 (Stone 2009) and in the media has amplified the marketability of such events. However,
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23 due to its saturation, the UK festival market is also characterized by increasing
24
25 competition (Jenner, Barr and Eyre 2013).
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30 In any market, competitors need to be distinguishable by carving out a niche or
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32 promoting some form of offering which is meaningful and attractive to the prospective
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34 consumer. There are recurring media reports on the ‘middle-classness’ of contemporary
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36 festivals (e.g. BBC News Suffolk 2014; Dahlgreen 2014; Duffin 2014), in demographic
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38 terms commonly defined as the ABC1 social group (non-manual workers). A recent UK
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40 Festival Census survey (Drury 2013) further showed that 60 per cent of surveyed
41
42 festival-goers were aged under 30, meaning that they constitute a core demographic.
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44 However, a non-negligible proportion of 20 per cent were aged 45-65, a category that
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46 generally can be assumed to have more spending power than the former. About a fourth
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48 (27%) reported that they had children, indicating a demand for family-oriented
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50 programming. Surveys such as this indicate the kind of consumer that organizers might
51
52 choose to target with a particular type of ‘festival product’. It has been suggested that of
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54 festival visitors, an estimated 80 per cent frequent so-called boutique festivals (Quill
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3 2009). The term 'boutique' carries connotations of a specialized, upscale retail
4 environment (Christersdotter 2005), and characteristics which refer to a limited size² are
5 often present in descriptions of the boutique festival. For example, Stone (2009: 220)
6 depicts boutique festivals as 'small scale, intimate, elegant, and stylish ... niche-type
7 events [which] prioritize quality over quantity' and for which 'the music often tends to
8 take a back seat'. It is mainly music-based festivals that are accorded the boutique label,
9 but they often have a degree of combined arts content including for instance poetry,
10 drama and film, as well as comedy.
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21 In the thus far sparse literature on the boutique festival it is conceptualized as a
22 highly participative event format (Seffrin 2006, 2007; Yeganegy 2012). Seffrin (2006)
23 traces the proposed participatory philosophy to the 1960s boutiques in London: small-
24 scale, independent shops that were in close dialogue with their fashion-conscious
25 customers, whose input shaped the boutiques' offerings. Seffrin relates this dialogical
26 practice to the contemporary boutique festival, defining it as an event 'in which
27 audiences have been actively involved in either the creation or direction of
28 programming, and in which events are highly interactive' (Seffrin 2006: 181). This
29 suggests a particular form of participation, which consists of active input into the
30 shaping of the production. However, 'extreme participation' (Yeganegy 2012) of this
31 kind is not the case for all boutique festivals. Conceptualizations of different forms and
32 degrees of collaboration between producer and consumer constitute a strong current
33 area of research in marketing and consumption studies, framed as the co-creation of
34 value (see Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder 2011). In short, the proposition is that
35 value is jointly created through interaction between informed and empowered producers
36 and consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). As such, value co-creation is
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57 ² Size definitions range between 2,000–5,000 (Croughton 2008) and 10,000–20,000 participants (Masson
58 2011).
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3 inscribed in a relationship between autonomous agents who deploy their skills for
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5 mutual benefit; features commonly associated with the type of agency furthered by
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7 neoliberal discourses (Gershon 2011). While consumers are afforded an active role
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9 following a co-creative approach, views differ on whether it is an expression of creative
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11 agency in their own interest, or ultimately exploitation in the form of free labour
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13 through the expropriation of knowledge, creativity and communication (e.g. Cova, Dalli
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15 and Zwick 2011; Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody 2008). Although we do not aim to
16
17 explicitly contribute to this debate, the value co-creation paradigm presents a
18
19 noteworthy context for our study. That a key characteristic attributed to the boutique
20
21 festival, participation, is concurrent with broader consumption discourses is a partial
22
23 clue to the emergence and perceived appeal of this festival format. Contrasted with
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25 traditional concert-model festivals, which commonly rely on star quality acts and mass-
26
27 audience performances, the boutique festival is said to ‘idealize participation and resist
28
29 spectatorship’ (Yeganegy 2012: 7). The positioning of festivals as mediators of
30
31 relationships between producers and consumers is in itself not new (e.g. Paleo and
32
33 Wijnberg 2006), however, in the case of the boutique festival the proposed aim is also
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35 to ‘position audiences themselves as significant agents of cultural production’ (Seffrin
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37 2007: 68). Such discursive framings create expectations regarding the types and
38
39 qualities of artistic performances, as well as the types of participants that the festival
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41 might attract (Cremona 2007). While the actual practices of participation vary between
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43 boutique festivals it can be argued that, following Yeganegy (2012), an overall
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45 *idealization* of participation is presented as a key aspect of the boutique festival.
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52 Discursive representations indicate the kind of pleasure one can attain by
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54 experiencing a particular cultural product (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Subsequently, a given
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56 type of cultural product becomes associated with particular uses and pleasures, and its
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3 discursive framing produces anticipations regarding the emotional, aesthetic and
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5 sensory experiences that the participant might expect (Author, 2013). The desire to seek
6
7 anticipated experiential pleasure is the basis of hedonism (Campbell 1987). It is
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9 regarded as a key driving force of contemporary consumption, the aim of which is
10
11 therefore to provide aesthetic experiences for the consumer (Addis and Holbrook 2011).
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13 As part and parcel of the cultural production field, festivals provide an important site at
14
15 which to explore the ways in which practices of aesthetic experiential production shape
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17 consumer subject positions. In the next section we therefore position our study within a
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19 framework of aesthetic experience production, and lay the premise for our
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21 methodological approach.
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27 **Aesthetic experience production in the cultural economy**

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29 The contemporary economy is said to be characterized by aestheticization (e.g.
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31 Böhme 2003; du Gay and Pryke 2002). In the aesthetic economy value is constituted by
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33 attributing aesthetic qualities to commodities, that is, 'the production of values for
34
35 staging and display' (Böhme 2003: 72). The value created through aestheticization is
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37 further conceptualized by Beckert and Aspers (2011) as imaginative value, stemming
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39 from the qualities of artefacts that 'evoke fantasies based on symbolic associations with
40
41 desired events' (Beckert and Aspers 2011: 110). In other words, the attribution of value
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43 is based on representations of ideals and pleasures, which stem from consumers'
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45 desires. However, drawing on Campbell (1987), Beckert and Aspers also underline the
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47 risk of disillusionment, when the fantasized imagery is confronted with the reality of the
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49 object of consumption. The value of an artefact, including cultural goods, therefore not
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51 only emerges in the actual consumption of the goods, but also in the anticipation of a
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53 desired experience.
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3 The importance afforded to aesthetic experiences can be further understood in
4 terms of constituting an important part of the formation of consumer identities
5 (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). A consequence of the introduction of, and emphasis
6 on experiential consumption is that the consumer is positioned as a feeling, sensing
7 being for whom 'intense, positive experiences crystallize selfhood, [and] provide life
8 meaning and perspective' (Arnould and Price 1993: 41). In the context of this paper, an
9 aesthetic approach to understanding experience-based engagement is a potentially
10 fruitful approach for examining the proposed attractiveness of the boutique festival. The
11 arts and cultural sector presents a key site for the staging and consumption of
12 experiences, and festivals have to some extent been the focus of exploring aesthetic
13 consumption and experience design for commercial purposes (e.g. Gursoy et al. 2006;
14 Matheson 2008).

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30 Given the above, cultural production must be understood in relation to the
31 marketing and consumption of aesthetics. Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) describe the
32 cultural production circuit as being epitomized by the complex interplay of producers,
33 intermediaries and consumers. In particular, the role of intermediaries is considered
34 pivotal for conveying meaningful consumption experiences. In other words, the
35 'cultural intermediary occupations' (Lash and Urry 1994: 222) play a significant role in
36 the cultural economy. Here, we consider the media as a key site through which
37 anticipated pleasurable experiences are discursively constructed. Media narratives of
38 boutique festivals steer consumers' anticipation of pleasurable experiences by
39 suggesting, among other things, the idea of novelty. To follow Hutter (2011: 203), '[t]he
40 experience of newness comes with the emotion of surprise'. Surprise creates positive
41 experiential engagement and, from a market-based perspective, is therefore seen as a
42 primary means of generating value for cultural products. In particular, surprise
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3 generation lies in framing a product as an alternative to what is already available on the
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5 market.
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7 In sum, a framework of aesthetic experiential production enables us to
8 understand processes of value creation for cultural products, and to subsequently tie
9 such practices to the making and shaping of consumption dispositions. We argue that
10 examining the type of imagery mobilized, the pleasures indicated, and the type of
11 experiencing subject subsequently propagated is important for understanding the status
12 afforded to festivals as significant economic and cultural drivers, and for critically
13 discussing the emergence and meanings of the boutique festival category.
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24 25 **Methodology**

26 We view the emergence of the boutique festival as an instance of circulation of social
27 imaginaries (Valaskivi and Sumiala 2014) and we employ discourse analysis to explore
28 the resources mobilized in textual representations of the boutique festival. We approach
29 discourse as language in action (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002), that is, communicative
30 practices that produce objects and subjects. In this case we particularly examine
31 discursive representations of the boutique festival offered by a particular cultural
32 intermediary: the print media. As stated above, the media are key actors in the circuits
33 of cultural production (Lash and Urry 1994) and as such media text analysis is suited for
34 our research aim. Texts produced by, and circulated through, the media are
35 characterized by a dialectical relationship to culture and society (Fairclough 1995) in
36 that they constitute, and are constituted by the sociocultural context. Media texts do not
37 merely describe a phenomenon; they draw on and reinforce, or possibly destabilize,
38 social and cultural imagery. As such, texts are part of the production, reproduction and
39 potential transformation of social relations.
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Analysing the material, we consider texts as ‘providing the conditions which enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 4). In other words, they point to the range and quality of experiences made possible in a given setting. Moreover, we are interested in representations of social actors, specifically ‘how participant identities and relations are constructed’ (Fairclough 1995: 39), and the roles that they are accorded, for example whether they are active or passive (van Leeuwen 1996). Here, we are particularly interested in the agency attributed to the experiential consumer. Texts commonly make references to other texts, forming an intertextual web of discursive production and dissemination where discourses interlink (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). As such, representations of the boutique festival gain meaning from drawing on other existing discourses related to cultural production and consumption practices, for example.

Our data is drawn from publicly available material in mainstream UK media. Media articles were retrieved from the Nexis database, which holds UK national, regional and local newspapers (including web-based publications), magazines and industry trade press, including their Irish editions where applicable. A search in September 2012 yielded 290 items excluding duplicates with the search terms ‘boutique festival/s’; the search spanned 20 years. The earliest item featured in the results dated from 2003. To gain a sense of the type and range of festivals organized under the boutique label, a search was also conducted on two popular festival hub websites: eFestivals and Virtual Festivals. A search for boutique festivals on eFestivals yielded a list of ten festivals for the 2014 season. In most cases, however, the boutique label was used to describe the camping rather than the festival itself, which led us not to consider them as having been labelled boutique festivals per se. Virtual Festivals supplied a list of Top Ten Boutique Festivals (Perry 2013). In addition, lists of boutique festivals were

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2
3 found in The Observer (Turner 2007), The Guardian (2008), The Guardian Magazine
4
5 (2011), The Sunday Times (Croughton 2008) and Time Out London (2014). In our
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7 analysis we do not consider the extent to which a particular festival could be said to fit
8
9 the label description, nor whether the organizers of a particular festival do, or indeed
10
11 would, self-describe as a boutique festival. These questions fall outside the scope of this
12
13 paper, but present viable issues for further exploration.
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16 We started by organizing the items following Fairclough's (1995) tripartite
17
18 classification of the main performative aspects of texts: representations, identities and
19
20 relationships. In other words, how did the texts establish the boutique festival as a
21
22 category within existing discursive frames, what types of individuals and groups were
23
24 described, and what relationships were indicated? Overlapping, tensions and
25
26 contradictions within and between the three aspects were then outlined. Further,
27
28 following Fairclough (1995) we considered whether the texts, as communicative events,
29
30 could be said to discursively reproduce or challenge existing sociocultural ideals and
31
32 relationships. In relation to this, we were specifically interested in any stereotypical or
33
34 iconic imagery that the texts relied on, and the purpose of their deployment. Finally, our
35
36 guiding question throughout the analysis was how the texts may be seen to create an
37
38 experiential anticipation. We consider descriptions of particular festivals, whether past
39
40 or future, as contributing to the discursive production of the overall boutique festival
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42 phenomenon and that they therefore, as well as texts describing general characteristics
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44 of boutique festivals, contribute to the building of anticipation of the type of experience
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46 on offer.
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54 **Textual renditions of the boutique festival in the media**

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3 In what follows, we present the findings of our analysis in two sections. In the first
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5 section we outline some commonly occurring descriptions of the attributes of a boutique
6
7 festival and consider the wider context within which the boutique festival is discursively
8
9 placed. In the second section we discuss the boutique festival in terms of social
10
11 identities and relationships.
12

13 14 15 16 ***Festival imagery***

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18 In this section we discuss how an ‘imaginative anticipation’ (Campbell 1987: 83) may
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20 be mobilized through textual representations of the boutique festival, while also
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22 pointing to some key tensions that underlie the label.
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26 The first mention of boutique festivals in the data occurs as part of a ‘hot list’ for the
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28 2003 summer season:
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32 The place to be summer season 2003 is the ‘boutique’ festival, a more
33
34 compact, stylish and intimate version of its well-established elder siblings.

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36 As this new breed of festival nestles itself more firmly in the summer’s
37
38 social calendar, so the events become increasingly diverse. (Knight et al.
39
40 2003: 22)
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44 This extract serves as a useful starting point in that it includes several aspects that are
45
46 relevant for our analysis. The text states that the boutique festival is a ‘new breed of
47
48 festival’, thus pointing to an existing cultural field in which a new entrant has appeared,
49
50 with a labelled identity. It establishes the category as a factual occurrence while
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52 emphasizing its novelty, making it a fashionable phenomenon. The boutique festival is
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54 further designated as ‘the place to be’, which carries connotations of a trend-conscious
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56 audience in the know, possibly including the reader. In order for such descriptions to be
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3 meaningful there is an assumption that the reader has knowledge of festivals, whether
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5 actual prior experiences or familiarity with popular representations of them, to enable
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7 the placing of this new category into an existing discursive frame. The ‘elder siblings’
8
9 which denote the established field represent the opposite of being ‘compact, stylish and
10
11 intimate’, which suggests the type of experience that may be expected. Such
12
13 descriptions carve out a niche for the boutique festival through differentiation from the
14
15 existing field. The use of ready-made stereotypical festival imagery recurs in several
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17 texts:
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22 Think festivals and mud, horrendous toilets and smelly tents spring to mind.

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24 But, thankfully, there is a new breed of posh summer parties, aimed at those
25
26 who don't want to rough it – and at families, too. (Tyler 2010, n.p.)
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30 Along the same lines, the boutique festival experience is described elsewhere as ‘two
31
32 days of music, arts, movies, workshops, flushing loos and hot showers’ (McDonagh
33
34 2009: 6). A crucial part of the festival experience is made up of the physical and sensory
35
36 realities of thousands of people setting up temporary camp. The contrast between
37
38 potential less palatable consequences, and the ways in which more upmarket amenities
39
40 improve the stereotypical festival experience draws on a common shared imagery to
41
42 establish an alternative. The issue of novelty is also raised in the example by Tyler
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44 (2010) above, regardless of it appearing several years after the initial mention of
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46 boutique festivals in 2003. This can be interpreted as the wider establishment of the
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48 label only having happened some years later³, as well as being indicative of a market
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50 discourse which hinges on novelty as a key part of the attraction. A particular framing is
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52 also presented by referring to the boutique festival as ‘posh’, which invokes
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³ The hot list constituted the only item found in the database for 2003, while the peak occurred in 2008.

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2
3 connotations of social status and class that diverge from traditional festival imagery and
4
5 promise an upmarket experience – a shift ‘from mosh pit to posh pit’ (Atkinson 2010).
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7 A key characteristic of classification is establishing difference, that is, establishing
8
9 what the object is not, and descriptions of boutique festivals often contrast them to
10
11 large, corporate, mainstream festivals as in the following example:
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15 Enough with festivals the size of the Falklands. Enough of the endless
16
17 marketing and the toilets in association with T-Mobile. And enough with the
18
19 mass-produced botulism burgers you wouldn't feed to a dying dictator.
20
21 Instead, here are a dozen of the UK's finest boutique festivals – all catering
22
23 to no more than 5,000 people, all with a considerable nod towards green and
24
25 ethical living, and all a lot more fun than that Glasto [Glastonbury Festival]
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28 lark. (The Sunday Times 2008: 20)
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31
32 Glastonbury's unrivalled size makes it a convenient discursive antithesis of the boutique
33
34 festival. Being a well-established cultural reference the festival will also be known to
35
36 many, which makes it a powerful counter-example. The references to corporate
37
38 sponsorship and mass-produced catering frame the festival as a commercial event for a
39
40 mass audience. In contrast, the boutique festival is presented as the informed
41
42 consumer's choice; one who appreciates, and has the means to adhere to, a green and
43
44 ethical lifestyle as part of leading a sustainable and responsible existence. Stylistically,
45
46 the text adopts the tone of a manifesto, urging the reader to join in saying ‘enough’, thus
47
48 rhetorically offering a collective stand against the dominant existing formats. The
49
50 implication is that by choosing the boutique experience, the consumer also performs an
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52 active choice of separation from the mainstream.
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3 Some discursive framings of festivals in general refer to an original ethos, which
4 has been lost, but which will perhaps be reclaimed. References to nostalgic imagery
5 include evoking 'festival days of yore' when describing the overcrowding of the
6 contemporary market (Sherwin 2006: 14) and lamenting the changing of Glastonbury
7 from a 'countercultural hippie gathering' to becoming 'middle aged and respectable'
8 (Coyle 2007: 11). Meanwhile, a return to the festival core idea is exemplified by
9 'disheartened music fans taking matters into their own hands' and organizing a boutique
10 festival based on an ethos of 'pure, unadulterated' music programming (Knight et al.
11 2003: 22). Such framings draw on an implicit sense of authenticity of a countercultural
12 ethos in which the modern festival is seen to be rooted (Hetherington 1998). This is one
13 of the key tensions through which the boutique festival is placed in a broader discursive
14 context.
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29 At the same time there are indications that the boutique festival is perhaps not
30 'the real deal' but a sanitized version, an appropriation of what is implicitly considered
31 an authentic festival. This notion of authenticity is presented in tension with current
32 dominant ideas of festivals operating in a market and forming part of an economic
33 discourse:
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42 For all the village fête trimmings, pancake-tossing, egg-and-spoon races, and
43 pictures of happy hippies on the programme, these are modern festivals
44 replete with security, big fences and branding, and thus emphasise that the
45 companies behind them are big corporate concerns and a little less cutesy
46 than they'd have you believe. (Muggs 2008: 24)
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53 The text refers to a sponsored festival described as 'a civilised affair, designed for
54 lazing in the sun reading the weekend supplements, sipping organic cider' (ibid.). A
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3 disjuncture between the presented imagery of such festivals and their commercial
4 foundations is pointed out in the text. Further, the hippy ideal alluded to in the excerpt
5 evokes the iconography of festivals of the 1960s (Clarke 1982), to make the point that
6 such countercultural ideational associations are not necessarily translated into an
7 organizational reality. Contemporary festival organizing is regulated by licensing
8 restrictions and health and safety procedures, which arguably make for a different
9 experience to the festivals of the 60s and 70s. What the excerpt alludes to, however, is
10 not just the realities of contemporary festival organizing, but also an implied loss of the
11 hippy ethos associated with 'original' festivals. The excerpt draws on stereotypical
12 festival imagery in line with previous examples; however, instead of indicating the
13 types of pleasurable experiences that may be had, it aims to unmask the 'ugly reality' of
14 the boutique festival, a revelation which potentially creates disillusionment (Hutter
15 2011).

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32 The countercultural hippy association not only provides the means for deploying
33 an anti-corporate discourse, but also mobilizes imagery related to the implied festival
34 participant. How identities are constructed in the context of the boutique festival is
35 discussed next.

36 37 38 39 40 41 42 ***Social differentiation***

43
44 Descriptions of the boutique festival which include adjectives such as 'posh' link it to a
45 particular social status. In some instances the issue of social differentiation is more
46 explicitly stated, as in the following, arguably satirical, description:

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51 [T]wo distinct kinds of people cut a path to the boutique festival – those
52 who came prepared for a "festival" (plastic bags over feet, feet inside
53 wellies, and wellies inside more plastic bags); and those who came prepared
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3 for a “boutique” (high heels, blow dries and flight attendant baggage
4
5 trolleys). (Dalgarno 2008: 19)
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9 The description of the former group evokes well-rehearsed images of preparing for a
10 potentially muddy experience, while the latter is evocative of a cosmopolitan, well-
11 heeled traveller going for a weekend break. The satirical contrast may be an
12 exaggeration, but it is indicative of a perceived clash between the ‘original’, down-and-
13 dirty festival and its boutique reincarnation, and the type of festival participant
14 associated therewith. The same text continues to present the boutique festival in terms
15 of its incongruities:
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25 The queue for the mussels was unbelievable. I couldn't help thinking that
26 this was a bit weird for a festival. I guess, unlike other places, people here
27 can get a real taste sensation, rather than simply a boozy one. [...] Tear
28 yourself away from the food tent and there are other treats, such as the
29 Rest And Be Thankful spa, where you can get a massage, a good hair wash
30 or other, non-essential, pampering. (ibid.)
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40 In this example the upscale connotations of the type of food served at the festival are
41 drawn on to highlight the atypical quality of the festival experience described,
42 counterposing it to an underlying idea of what might count as a more traditional festival
43 experience. Food, commonly described as local and organic, is a key theme that is
44 deployed to exemplify the special status of the boutique festival (e.g. Bristol Evening
45 Post 2010; Croughton 2008; Lawrence 2007; Robinson 2008). Eating is an important
46 ritual activity that structures social relations, and the quality, origin, preparation and
47 presentation of food is imbued with social symbolic meaning (Plester 2014). Taste
48 refers both to the sensorium of ingesting food as well as the symbolic judgment of taste
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3 that the eater is exercising in her choice of food; it is a means of distinction (Bourdieu,
4
5 1984). The aesthetic economy is partly premised on satisfying the desire ‘to stage
6
7 oneself’ (Böhme 2003: 81), that is, providing consumers with the means for presenting
8
9 a valued self, which is seen by others. The consumption of high quality, non-processed,
10
11 sustainable food is a marker of a particular taste and lifestyle and these representations
12
13 provide vehicles for indicating the kind of aesthetic experiences and the social
14
15 differentiation which can be expected at boutique festivals (cf. Campbell 1987).
16
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18
19 The individual is at the centre of many descriptions of the festival, whereby
20
21 consumption subjects validate their self-identity through choosing from a diversity of
22
23 performances and activities. The identities of boutique festival consumers are presented
24
25 as revolving around a desire for refinement and upmarket consumption, represented by
26
27 the availability of saunas and spa treatments, organic and locally grown food as
28
29 mentioned above, and glamorous camping (glamping) arrangements including yurts,
30
31 podpads and tipis. The hedonism implied in the consumption of such experiences is
32
33 further constructed as a means to an anticipated greater release:
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37 A chance to escape the drudgery of our normal lives: Secret Garden Party
38
39 is there to be playful, to break down barriers between people and create an
40
41 environment where you have perfect freedom and perfect nourishment,
42
43 intellectually and visually. (Quill 2009: 5)
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46
47 The excerpt refers to an often mentioned boutique festival example, Secret Garden
48
49 Party, instructively describing how it facilitates the means for participants to socialize
50
51 while simultaneously offering individual intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction. As such,
52
53 texts like this suggest the nature of social relationships and forms of engagement
54
55 available to boutique festival participants. The notion of escape is not surprising given
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3 the carnivalesque associations of the festival as a space for the temporary suspension of
4
5 the mundane (Falassi 1987). However, representations of the boutique festival
6
7 paradoxically allude to a possibility of escaping the mainstream by advocating a
8
9 countercultural aspiration and anti-corporate sensibilities, while at the same reinforcing
10
11 particular practices of consumption and by extension reproducing the very social
12
13 position from which the alleged escape is to happen. A key tension in the resulting
14
15 positioning of the boutique festival participant is on the one hand confirming an identity
16
17 as a successful middle-class consumer, identified by specific consumption practices,
18
19 while at the same time providing the means for a temporary release from this
20
21 positioning. Festivals provide an ideal vehicle for the 'weekend hippy' (Clarke 1982),
22
23 that is, a site for temporary countercultural identity performances. Cultural production is
24
25 deployed as an economic resource, which attributes value to particular groups, and some
26
27 cultural dispositions are utilized to 'enhance new middle-class selves' (Skeggs 2005:
28
29 60). Skeggs refers particularly to the appropriation of working-class culture by the
30
31 resourced middle-class in their desire for a temporary experiencing of a 'downwardly'
32
33 lifestyle (see also Brewis and Jack 2010). While the boutique festival does not
34
35 reproduce that particular pattern it can still be understood through this lens. Skeggs
36
37 (2005) explains that the appropriation of culture for the middle-class self is necessarily
38
39 about selecting 'user-friendly' elements fit for consumption. By evoking selective parts
40
41 of 'original, authentic' festival imagery discursive representations of the boutique
42
43 festival present it as an escape made possible in a culturally familiar, safe space. The
44
45 boutique festival paradoxically appears to allow for the maintaining of a middle-class
46
47 material existence while presenting an ideational proposition of returning to an
48
49 authentic festival experience. This potential rift between the ideational and the material
50
51 does not present a conflict to the consumer, as a feature of modern hedonism is to treat
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3 sensory data as ‘real’ while knowing it is ‘false’ (Campbell 1987), that is, the sense of
4
5 having an ‘authentic festival experience’ is possible in an ordered, comfortable space.
6
7 As such, there can be a sense of escape from everyday life while simultaneously
8
9 retaining its material manifestations.
10

11 12 13 **Discussion**

14
15 Through our analysis we found that media texts deploy particular themes and tropes to
16
17 frame boutique festivals, which we explore conceptually in relation to creating
18
19 anticipation. The introduction and application of the boutique festival category produce
20
21 ranking lists, evaluations and recommendations that position festivals in a value
22
23 hierarchy within a market discourse and attribute a seemingly objective status to the
24
25 label. Representations of desired forms of consumption and lifestyles draw on existing
26
27 discourses to attach meanings and values to the boutique category and thereby also to
28
29 educate the consumer regarding how to approach this particular category and the types
30
31 of experiences it can deliver. While the artistic programme constitutes part of the
32
33 descriptions, it is the emphasis on the material realities of the boutique festival that
34
35 constitute a significant means of conveying its qualities and establishing its category
36
37 characteristics. Anticipation is concomitantly constructed in several ways.
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42 First, some texts deploy a discourse of authenticity through mobilizing a
43
44 nostalgic imagery traditionally associated with pop and rock festivals (Anderton 2008).
45
46 However, the implied authenticity of a counterculture is a construct, which rests on the
47
48 assumption that there exists a choate mainstream (Desmond et al. 2000) against which
49
50 an alternative position can be carved out. In this case, the mainstream is described in
51
52 terms of the massification and marketization of festivals – the commodification of
53
54 cultural production – against which the boutique festival is positioned as offering a
55
56 small-scale, genuine experience. However, there are also instances of texts framing this
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3 as a false impression, pointing behind the façade to draw attention to the corporate
4 running of some boutique festivals. Such revelations may provoke a sense of
5 disillusionment even before the cultural product has been experienced. However, the
6 disillusionment is not necessarily effective in this context. In order for disillusionment
7 to happen there has to be a negative discrepancy between the anticipated and the actual
8 experience, or in this case between the ‘false’ and ‘true’ representations of the boutique
9 festival. Yet, we may posit that for the primary target audience of this particular cultural
10 product this discrepancy does not necessarily occur. In effect, dominant framings of the
11 boutique festival do not denounce consumption; instead, it is the means by which an
12 aesthetic countercultural position is achieved. Commodification is the proclaimed vice
13 of the mainstream, but the boutique festival is framed as relying on the same
14 mechanism. Further, in reference to Campbell (1987), the contemporary consumer is
15 well versed in accepting something as real while knowing it is false; this may be another
16 reason why revealing the boutique festival as a corporate affair does not necessarily
17 produce a sense of disillusionment.

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Second, representations of the active and participating consumer constitute a central motif associated with the boutique festival. The idealization of participation (Yeganegy 2012) indicates at least the possibility of an agential, empowered subject. As such, the values that are reinforced are that the opportunity, and also the responsibility to be enterprising and engaged rests with the individual. Contrary to what is claimed, the festival experience is not providing a means of escape to a space where an authentic self may be released as much as suggesting how an authentic self may be performed. In order for representations of the self as reflexively performed to be desirable to cultural consumers, there needs to be a general acceptance of the imperative of being a self-knowing, self-directed individual. Representations of the reflexively performing self

1
2
3 also affirm an entrepreneurial discourse, revalidating assumptions that individual
4
5 entrepreneurialism is a valuable characteristic in contemporary society. Here, a link can
6
7 be made to the paradigm of value co-creation which rests on the utilization of the
8
9 creative skills of individuals (e.g. Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Alternative to the
10
11 view of the empowered participant outlined by Seffrin (2007), we interpret the
12
13 affirmation of co-creative agency as a means whereby value is generated through the
14
15 appropriation of the creative work of socially cooperative consumers (Zwick, Bonsu and
16
17 Darmody 2008). Here, a link can be made to the notion of bio-power, where human
18
19 bodies are inserted into the machinery of production present at every level of society,
20
21 and utilized by institutions operating in the economic sphere (Foucault 1976/1998).
22
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24
25 Third, anticipation of the boutique experience is created by associating the
26
27 festival with the deployment of particular values and tastes, which represent and
28
29 reproduce social ordering (cf. Rhodes and Pullen 2012). This can be framed in Böhme's
30
31 (2003: 78) terms as the 'aesthetics of existence and the ethics of the good life' of
32
33 affluent society. The spending power of the target category of consumer coupled with a
34
35 contemporary propensity towards the commodified production of self-actualization
36
37 (Rindfleisch 2005) in line with a consumer choice discourse provides a fertile ground
38
39 for experiential consumption of this kind. The notion of choice, which is a fundamental
40
41 contemporary market-based consumption discourse, also underpins the texts.
42
43 Participants are discursively positioned as subjects that validate their self-identity by
44
45 choosing; first, the boutique festival; and second, among consumption alternatives
46
47 available at the festival. What is most interesting here is that the texts are not just
48
49 describing and promoting a new cultural form, they are also alluding to the constitution
50
51 of 'valued subjects' in contemporary society. A particular type of individual is implied
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53 in the promotional texts; one who appreciates the small-scale, green and non-
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3 mainstream, but whose lifestyle choices are nevertheless carried out through
4
5 consumption of predetermined options (Gershon 2011).
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7
8 Finally, in relation to the above, anticipations of the boutique festival are
9
10 premised upon an embodied, sensuous aesthetic, which ties in with the notion of the
11
12 feeling subject. As Hesmondhalgh (2008) points out, we are supposed to have and be
13
14 able to express emotions, thereby asserting our capability to engage with the world. The
15
16 focus of the festival representations is on an embodied experience: of eating, being
17
18 pampered, and undertaking physical, kinaesthetic activities. This is achieved by
19
20 constructing a temporally and spatially bounded site specially designed to facilitate
21
22 sensory experiences. We can, however, also see these as sensory regimes; as prescribed
23
24 ways in which to experience intense sensations in order to reap the greatest benefit from
25
26 the experience. There might no longer be an explicit radical agenda, but how festival
27
28 experiences are designed and represented can nevertheless be read as having ideological
29
30 underpinnings. The purpose might on the one hand be to deliver temporary enjoyment
31
32 and the aforementioned escape, but on the other hand it has longer-lasting implications
33
34 for how we understand what a 'good' experience is, and how the experiencing subject
35
36 should behave.
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43 **Conclusion**

44
45 In this paper we have examined how anticipation of the boutique festival experience is
46
47 discursively constructed in media texts, conceptualized through a framework of
48
49 aesthetic experience production. In so doing we contribute to debates surrounding the
50
51 current conditions of cultural production, which are increasingly framed through a
52
53 market discourse. The emergence and proliferation of the boutique festival is one
54
55 example of how a broader discourse of cultural commercialization is translated into
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3 particular products and practices. The emergence of the boutique label has reconfigured
4
5 the festival market by articulating a form of specialization, which unlike traditional
6
7 classifications of festivals is not primarily defined by genre. Instead, the boutique
8
9 festival is primarily defined by modes of engagement. Experience design and delivery
10
11 are important elements of the market-based approach to culture, and we suggest that an
12
13 overlooked aspect of aesthetic experiential production is the creation of anticipation
14
15 regarding the type of experience that may be expected. Significantly, the boutique
16
17 festival experience is to a large extent framed in terms of the organizing of amenities
18
19 and services, and by extension of lifestyles. Our study contributes to debates about the
20
21 value of cultural production through shifting the site of value production from content to
22
23 infrastructure and mode of delivery. Specifically, this paper provides an example of
24
25 festivalization, foregrounding festivals as significant sites of economic and cultural
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27 production and consumption.
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31
32 This paper also contributes to the literature on aesthetic experience production and
33
34 consumption. Through our focus on subject construction in the context of experience-
35
36 based cultural production our study contributes to the critical examination of the effects
37
38 of what may be termed experiential regimes. The boutique festival category is
39
40 associated with particular ideals and values, indicating the kind of individual or social
41
42 group for whom the festival is suited. Discursive representations of this product include
43
44 a romanticization and sanitization of what is termed an 'original' festival experience
45
46 associated with a radical agenda. The appropriation and repackaging of cultural forms
47
48 for consumption by affluent target groups raise important questions about social and
49
50 cultural inclusion, which have bearings outside the context of the boutique festival.
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52 Commodification creates boundaries of access aligned with for example financial
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54 resources and class attributes. One of the ways in which the boutique festival is
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3 presented as an exciting yet safe space is that the space is not only materially familiar
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5 but also implicitly socially familiar due to its lifestyle consumption profile being
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7 associated with homogeneity of class and ethnicity, for example. Taking our study as a
8
9 starting point, we see it as important to further examine the social stratification
10
11 consequences of cultural commodification mechanisms in the festival context.
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13
14 Our study enables us to link discourses surrounding cultural production with the
15
16 discursive production of valued subject positions. In order to have the anticipated
17
18 lifestyle experience on offer, the consumer is positioned as an active agent in the
19
20 production process through a philosophy of participation. As such, it ties in with wider
21
22 dominant discourses on the value of the autonomous individual who exercises choice.
23
24 Market-based consumption is based on the very notion of choice, and the purported
25
26 empowerment that comes in its wake. It relies on a perpetual restlessness which, in
27
28 accordance with a reflexive project of the self, is fuelled by a willingness to spend a
29
30 considerable amount of time, effort and resources on personal renewal and
31
32 transformation. An opportunity to work on the project of the self becomes part of what
33
34 the boutique festival experience implicitly offers, which addresses a deeper
35
36 contemporary desire. Consequently, where we see there is scope for further research is
37
38 into articulations of aesthetic reflexivity, that is, an empirical focus on the lived
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40 experience of participating in these kinds of events; the meanings that are attached to
41
42 them; and their anticipated and actual outcomes. This entails closer examination of the
43
44 engagement with different forms of participation on offer, and the kind of sociality that
45
46 it produces. As a manifestation of a broader sociocultural trend, the case of the boutique
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48 festival raises questions regarding in whose interest it is to further and sustain a
49
50 discourse of the imperative of participation and choice, and how such discourses are
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52 upheld. As such, we see there as being scope for critical organization studies of not only
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3 the consumption of festivals but also the organizing practices and forms of work that
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5 produce them.
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