



X and Organization Studies: Festivals and Organization Studies

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	contemporary organizational discussions.

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Festival and Organization Studies

Abstract

The present essay examines the festival as a form of organizing and as a metaphor for contemporary organizations. Drawing upon classical and contemporary perspectives on festival, we focus on social ambivalences and how these are enacted and mediated through festivals. Specifically, we argue that festivals mark a tension between linear and cyclical dimensions of social time. Next, we argue that formal institutional and communitarian principles are mediated through festival. Finally, we argue that festivals mark a tension between reflexivity and social critique on the one hand and mass spectacle on the other, and problematize the notion of bodily enjoyment as a form of social consciousness. We discuss the implications of these three ambivalences – in the notion of time, the notion of community, and the notion of reflexivity – for contributing to contemporary organizational discussions.

Truth is the bacchanalian revel, where not a member is sober.
(Hegel, 1967/1808:206)

It was two o'clock in the morning, and we were still working the night shift at the Latitude festival. In the midst of an energy-infused, carnivalesque atmosphere of music, movement, and a sense of common destiny, the volunteers' faces gave everything away: after a rigorous shift, we were looking forward to being let free. The team manager arrived; the bars needed cleaning. We would have to stay and work overtime without any bonus. But, she joyfully exclaimed, we were a team, and being part of something bigger meant giving our all to the festival. "Cleaning is not part of the volunteer agreement", one of the shift-workers retorted. The communal atmosphere darkened and the tension was palpable. Our deposits, an assurance of our fidelity to the festival work-schedule, were on the line, the manager explained. If we didn't follow the rules, there could be no guarantees. It seemed, at that moment, that we were indeed part of something much bigger; what it was, was no longer certain.

This excerpt from our ethnographic observations of music festivals captures both the energy and the ambivalence of festival organizations. Attracted to festivals by an

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9 admittedly romantic curiosity to understand how experiences of liberation and
10 enjoyment were organized, we exhibited a characteristically ethnographic urge to
11 participate in a form of life seemingly more intense than that outside the festival. The
12 field was intuitively appealing as a site of organizing; popular festivals have long been
13 considered moments for popular self-organization, where communitarian, affectively-
14 laden sentiment congeals in spontaneous self-expression (Chen, 2009; Graeber, 2009;
15 Attali, 1985; Bakhtin, 1968). Perhaps we could find ideas about how to live well, how
16 to free organizations, how to combine work and enjoyment, in the swirling yet highly
17 organized chaos of the festival atmosphere.
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29 Yet, in our experiences and discussions, we felt a deepening suspicion toward
30 the Siren-like call of the festival to leave the city, to come back to nature, to live
31 musically in communal harmony. The growing economic significance of festivals and
32 the growing implausibility of their “fringe” image, the celebrity status of their
33 performers, the truly big money involved (Financial Times, 2016) left us with the
34 paradoxical sense that this deviance had been engineered, a point readily acknowledged
35 by festival organization members themselves. What was presented as liberating seemed
36 to entrench and reproduce a dominant order, reflecting a tension between freedom and
37 control. This tension, somewhat surprisingly, did not seem to detract from the festival
38 experience for most participants; cynicism was not a debilitating ethos during the
39 festival, and the “bacchanalian revel” seemed robust to the increasingly self-reflexive
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9 post-modern sensibilities of its members. In this paradox, and its social and
10 organizational consequences, we saw an allegory for much of contemporary
11 organizational life.
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15 This essay invites reflection on the notion of festival, considered in its broad
16 sense of a “sacred or profane time of celebration, marked by special observances”
17 (Falassi, 1987:2). We consider festival in its literal sense as a form of organization, in
18 its metaphorical sense as evocative of organizing more generally, and in its historical
19 sense as a recurrent and ubiquitous element of organizing. We know of no society that
20 has not engaged in festival. Yet festival is often considered an antithesis or escape from
21 social order (Turner, 1969), a moment of freedom from constraint. Festival has been
22 discussed as reflecting society’s avant-garde, the “embryonic form” heralding new
23 social orders (Attali, 1985: 4) or the “bacchanalian revel” pushing history forward
24 (Hegel, 1808:206). Yet festival imagery invokes a longing for origins, for the pre-
25 modern, mythological and archetypical tropes that seem more primitivist than
26 progressive. We use this essay to reflect on how notions of time, of community, and of
27 conscience paradoxically circulate within festivals, appearing in different guises as they
28 manifest across eras. We use these reflections to speculate on what festivals offer
29 organizational scholarship, as an object of study, and as a lens for understanding
30 organizing.
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9 Contemporary festivals have become an important part of mainstream culture
10 industries (Johansson & Toraldo, 2015; Waterman, 1998). Yet festivals are not only
11 markers of contemporary life; they play an historical role across epochs in constituting
12 social orders, with links to ritual and myth (e.g. Turner, 1969). Our essay examines
13 both historical and contemporary perspectives on festival. Focusing on three different
14 angles on festivals – how they configure time, how they configure community, and how
15 they configure conscience – we consider the three as interrelated but analytically
16 distinct elements that constitute the paradoxical nature of festivals.
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26 **Configuring Time: Cyclicity and continuity**

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28 *...history isn't man's only dimension. Rather, history requires a non- historical margin*
29 *with respect to which it can carve out a space*
30 *Esposito 2013 p.15*
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34 Modern organizations are often described as having a unique relation to time
35 (Dawson, 2014; Bluedorn, 2002; Ancona, 2001; Thompson, 1967). The “homogenous,
36 empty time” of modernity has been contrasted by Walter Benjamin (1968) with the
37 immediate time of experience (*Jetztzeit*), which is also ‘messianic’ time, and the time of
38 revolution. As Esposito (2013) notes above, these times “outside of history” provide
39 moments of social contestation and change. The subversion of homogenous time in the
40 temporal disjunction of revolution reflects a dialectical conception grounded in
41 Benjamin’s Marxist background, where history is precisely not linear. Indeed beyond
42 critical theory, conceptions of time as nonlinear have a pedigree among historians
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9 tracing back to Vico (1725) who noted that the ‘recurrence’ of events - ‘corsi and
10 ricorsi’ [course and recourse]- grounds human existence in the reappearance of actions
11 and events.
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15 The way time is conceived is not only historically, but also spatially, ordered,
16 with time imaginaries distributed across social spheres; Doron (2008), for instance,
17 contrasts the temporal continuity and homogeneity of museums and libraries with the
18 cyclical time of celebrations. In most descriptions, cyclical time is associated with
19 celebration, nature, community, as opposed to the linearity of modern time (e.g. Eliade,
20 1959), and marked pre-modern and classical rituals of nature.
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29 For instance, early Greek celebrations around the cyclical rhythm of the seasons
30 are exemplified in the Eleusinian mysteries, ceremonies celebrating Demeter, goddess
31 of the harvest. Later adopted by Athens as an institutional celebration, the festivals
32 involved spring and autumn cycles, symbolizing the myths of Demeter and Persephone
33 and the changing of seasons, but also serving as an initiation into the ‘epopteia’ or
34 secret divine knowledge (Colli, 1977). Between spring and autumn cycles, collective
35 festivals involved special initiation drinks, dance and song, and the shouting of
36 obscenities. Although celebrating divinities, the festivities were also inscribed into an
37 economic organization based around agrarian production and the cycle of vegetation.
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39 Bringing out the essential dimension of the system of production and exchange the
40 festivals related to the organising of human work.
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9 The Eleusinian festivities marked both cyclical and change, repetition and the
10 interruptions of birth and death, invoking myth as a support. As Roque-Baldovinos
11 (2001: 76) writes, “The irruption of the world of the ancestors in sacred places disrupts
12 the flow of historical time and instantiates the cyclical time of the charismatic
13 community”. The cyclical time of life is seen as an interruption into historical time,
14 bringing the essence of the community to the fore. Many authors have linked the
15 transformation of cyclical into linear conceptions of time to the onset of modernity, and
16 furthered by the industrial revolution. (e.g. Bakken, Holt & Zundel, 2012; Thompson,
17 1967; Eliade, 1959). Thompson (1967: 56) linked the change to “Puritan discipline and
18 bourgeois exactitude”, which found its correlate in the industrial factory. Henry Ford, a
19 paradigmatic figure of industrialism, was famously forward-looking in his conception of
20 time, opining that:
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35 *History or more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to*
36 *live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history*
37 *we make today (Chicago Tribune, May 25, 1916).*
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39 The progressive leaving behind of history, rather than its cyclical return, thus
40 was linked to a new economic mode of production, and a way of life. Cyclical time was
41 associated with the agrarian, the pastoral, and the imaginary, and linear time, with
42 evolution, progress, and the symbolic (Eagleton, 2009). Economically, cyclical time
43 marked the gift economy, with its focus on cyclical reciprocity, ritual and social
44 reproduction, as opposed to production and the accumulation of value; Baudrillard
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9 (1981) drew on Mauss' anthropology of the gift to posit a "political economy of the
10 sign" that contrasts the cyclical with the linear as historical modes of economic-
11 symbolic organization.
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15 The cyclical-linear distinction also marked gender order. Kristeva (1981)
16 contrasted a "Father's time", of history, destiny and progress, with the "Mother's time"
17 of generation, reproduction, and the eternal (McAfee, 2004). The time of social
18 reproduction – birthing, eating, sleeping, as well as the life cycle itself, are repetitive
19 and cyclical (McAfee, 2004). Kristeva linked cyclical time to the *chora*, a mythical field
20 containing the universe, discussed in Plato's *Timeus*, which is the origin of Being and
21 associated with the womb. The *chora*, later expressed in the Greek chorus and
22 evocative of the social collective, contrasts with the individual protagonist/actor of
23 modernity. Perhaps it is no surprise to hear Hamlet, modernity's quintessential
24 individual protagonist, proclaims "The time is out of joint; O curs'd spite, That ever I
25 was born to set it right! (1.5.188)"
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40 In this context, the long-standing association of festivals with cyclical time
41 (Islam, Zyphur & Boje, 2008; Attali, 1985; Bakhtin, 1968; Falassi, 1967) draws upon a
42 diverse history of meanings. The cyclical-linear split is echoed in Bakhtin's (1968: 9)
43 distinction between the agrarian communitarian festival and the spectacle, which is
44 progressive and distorts "the true nature of human festivity". For Bakhtin (1968: 96),
45 life in the Middle Ages was defined by the duality between this artificial distortion and
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9 the festival, constituting “two lives: the official and the carnival life”. The cyclicity of
10 social life, change and renewal were embodied in “pagan feast” and symbolic
11 subversion of authority through theater and comedy.
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15 In these treatments, festivals harken to an archaic and pre-modern form of life;
16 yet, if festivals reflect the ideologies and social production of their ages (Attali, 1985)
17 how do they become (re)configured with the modern world? Although some claim that
18 the ritualistic and sacred features of festivals, which stress *communitas* and unity,
19 diminish in the heterogeneity of modern society (e.g. Durkheim, 1964), others note how
20 modernity and capitalism themselves are replete with enchanted spaces, myths and
21 icons (e.g. Endrissat et al, 2016; Ogden 2016; Taussig, 2010; Comaroff & Comaroff,
22 2001), with some going as far as to describe contemporary society as a whole as
23 perpetual spectacle (cf. Flyverbom & Reineke, 2017; Debord, 1967).
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35 As an internal opposition within capitalism, Benjamin (1968) describes the
36 imperative of an emancipatory, lived moment within the “homogenous, empty time”
37 associated with commodity capitalism. The need for renewal and its subsequent
38 domestication as a source of value constitute a dialectical tension. The creative moment
39 is captured and brought within the system, although such a subsumption is never either
40 complete, nor its avoidance, secure. Mobilizing this argument of Benjamin, Pusca
41 (2010) notes how cultural production demonstrates this tension; analysing the fashion
42 industry, cyclicity and the changing of the seasons provide the basis of creativity
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9 while ultimately supporting commodity creation. Fashion's urge to break the
10 homogeneity of time, and capital's ability to harness this very urge in order to produce a
11 continuous succession of forms, is emblematic of how cycles of reproduction are
12 harnessed to support the process of accumulation.
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18 In our ongoing ethnographic work on festivals, the presence of the cyclical
19 makes itself felt in the focus on ritual and community, in the use of archaisms and "new
20 age" talk, in the focus on nature and music. These aspects are evocative of classic
21 treatments of festival (Attali, 1985; Bakhtin, 1968). Community is created through
22 repetition and recurrence along a circuit (participants often ask "how many times have
23 you been here?"), as well as the knowledge that the festivals reproduce and remix
24 classic "messianic" festival moments such as Woodstock or Glastonbury. Yet we know
25 that contemporary music festivals mean business, sitting "between commerce and
26 carnival" (Anderton, 2011). The reproduction of society is framed as a search for
27 authentic experience and a change to escape the drudgery of modern life (Johansson &
28 Toraldo, 2015). By framing reconnection with community and the earth as the
29 production of a positive experience, the cyclical nature of festival could be harnessed to
30 the logic of production, this time, by mass producing the experience of freedom.
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46 During festivals, the sense of chronological time disappears into an ever-
47 occurring present; musical vibrations and bodies swaying together invoke something of
48 the eternal and of the primitive. The past is experienced as return; members participate
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9 and recreate a community that feels as if it had always been there. The efficiency of
10 festival operations is not undermined but is expanded by the integration of festival into
11 the productive apparatus. In the process, collective solidarity is expressed as a vague
12 sense of personal authenticity and a search for “roots” in the neo-tribalism of
13 contemporary festival culture. Echoes of this search resound through the new age
14 management techniques that simultaneously disown and deepen Ford’s philosophy.
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24 **Communitas and Institution**

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26 *Melt in the music of the drums! For I am you and you are I.*
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29 Huxley, 1932: 82
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31 The way that festivals seem to exist outside of time, yet draw upon this very
32 outside to produce a sense of authenticity, is paralleled by the ambivalent role of festival
33 in social and institutional life. If institutions are built on agreed upon conventions and
34 rules (e.g. Lok & de Rond, 2013; Scott, 2001), what role do festivals play in
35 institutional processes? Why would they appear at all, and is their appearance a threat
36 to, or a support for, institutional orders?
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44 Reflecting on this problem led us to consider the communitarian assumptions of
45 festival. In the “Fragments on a State of War”, Rousseau describes the sense of
46 community as an experience of a total presence and a sense of unity:
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50 *Everything I see is an extension of my being, and nothing divides it; it resides in*
51 *all that surrounds me, no portion of it remains far from me; there is nothing left*
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9 *for my imagination to do, there is nothing for me to desire; to feel and to enjoy*
10 *are to me one and the same thing; I live at once in all those I love, I am sated with*
11 *happiness and life. 234*
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13 Rousseau characterizes the joy of the communitarian present in contrast to the “re”-
14 presentation and displacement of the immediate, either in homage to the past or
15 prefiguration of the future. Formal institutions such as the State, in this view, are
16 representational and not immediate and are dislocations of community. Such
17 dislocations of the immediacy of experience, according to Rousseau, are related to the
18 mimetic desire, a desire located in the rituals of sacrifice and the fear of death (Esposito,
19 2013). Community, on the other hand, is constituted in the moment of presence, in a
20 moment of ecstasy and connection, while formal institution relies on representation and
21 the distance resulting from fear and sacrifice.
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33 A long line of social thought tries to understand institutions beyond “see[ing] rules
34 and not the love that runs through them” (Murdoch, 1980: 64), viewing formal
35 institutions as chronically imperfect attempts to capture a communitarian spirit that
36 always eludes them. For instance, Honneth (1995) views the historical development of
37 social institutions as a dialectic between institutionalized regimes of ethical life and the
38 struggles for intersubjective recognition that always push beyond those regimes. Such
39 struggles involve the demand to “anticipate a community” where subjects can live out
40 their relations of mutual recognition, a demand that prefigures the institutional just as it
41 challenges prevailing institutions (Honneth, 1995: 85). Drawing on Hegel, Honneth
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9 (1995: 38) sees the love underlying institutions as the pre-social and prefigurative, the
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11 “suggestion of the ideal in the actual”.

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13 This conception of the “love running through the law” was seen by Hegel
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15 (1808) in the figure of Antigone. Antigone mythologizes the fissure between personal
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17 and institutional ties and how the one depends yet struggles with the other, a point taken
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19 up by and adapted by Butler (2000). Normative institutions enforce taboos against
20
21 transgression and attempt to contain and stabilize social relations. Such stability is,
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23 however, a fantasy of institution, a fantasy of “schemes of intelligibility” that “make our
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25 loves legitimate and recognizable, our losses true losses” (Butler, 2000:24). Butler sees
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27 social transformation in how such schemes of intelligibility draw upon the formative
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29 source of sociability itself, in love and kinship. The tragedy of Antigone, to Butler, is
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31 the tragedy of how institutionalized orders deny the demands of love, and how the
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33 children of both (Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, and Haemon, son of King Creon),
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35 intimately coupled, perish as a result.
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40 A deep tension exists, in these writings, between communitarian and institutional
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42 principles, where the former is necessary to legitimize and embody the latter, yet stands
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44 against it as a challenge and a higher law (Esposito, 2013; Turner, 1969). Moreover,
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46 while communitarian principles can “humanize” organization, emphasizing spontaneous
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48 sociability and self-affirmation over formalized, “cold” process, the rejection of the
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50 formal can risk creating a totalitarian organization (Chen, 2009), where the
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9 accountability of formal process is thrown out and personalistic, charismatic processes
10 dominate. Chen's (2009) ethnography of the Burning Man Festival explores precisely
11 the question of how a "creative chaos" can be organized as a middle road between the
12 stifling dehumanization of formal institution and the destructiveness of chaotic
13 sociability.
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19 Different from a middle road, however, literature on symbolic events suggests
20 that the efficacy of such events often relies not on denying their opposition, but
21 precisely on enacting this opposition (Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1960). In Turner's
22 (1969: 97) discussion of 'communitas', for instance, he describes a "dialectical process
23 that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure,
24 homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality". Festivals are moments in
25 which this dialectic is played out ritualistically, such staging being necessary because,
26 in the transition from one principle to its opposite, an undefined or "liminal" state
27 adheres, where social order can dissolve and new orders can emerge.
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39 Such an ordering and containing function, characteristic of ritual events (van
40 Gennep, 1960), is echoed in the peasant festivals drawn upon by Bakhtin (1968). For
41 Bakhtin, festivals are moments of cyclical, agrarian in nature, and focused on the
42 community rather than the hierarchy. At the dawn of modernity, as Bakhtin describes,
43 the linear, image oriented principle of spectacle replaced the cyclical, sensuous festival,
44 as a principle of organization (Islam et al, 2008). Festival was considered archaic and
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9 subversive, rather than as a support for the social system. Stories of how festival was
10 relegated to a subversive sub-culture are common in this literature, from Attali's (1985)
11 history of music, to studies of specific festivals. Smith's (1994: 74) study of the Mardi
12 Gras festival, echoes a similar sentiment:
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17 *'The common people's carnival — with its subversion of the dominant order, wild*
18 *dancing, and festive transgressions, iconoclastic celebration of freedom through*
19 *cross dressing, 'obscenity', and other behavior offensive to genteel Americans —*
20 *was relegated to the back streets and ignored by the press.'*
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23 Festivals, then, do not seem to be moments of political subversion by nature, but
24 become framed as such only with respect to an institutionalized order that no longer
25 recognizes in the liminal moment of *communitas* its own constitutive foundations.
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27 Festival from the perspective of formal institution can only be conceived of as spectacle
28 (Flyverbom & Reineke, 2017), as an escape from life, whereas for Bakhtin (1968:7) it is
29 in reality "life itself, but shaped accordingly to a certain pattern of play".
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36 Contemporary dystopian visions of festival highlight the paradoxical conformity-
37 cum-freedom brought about by collective unity. Huxley's (1932) *Brave New World*, for
38 instance, features an orgiastic music ritual, the "Orgy Porgy", in which members lose
39 themselves in the oneness of the "Greater Being". This ritual, far from emancipatory,
40 serves to increase cohesion and conformity, as noted in the introductory quote. The
41 participants, caught in ritual, chant, "we are twelve; oh, make us one/Like drops within
42 the Social River, Oh, make us now together run", and exposed to the excluded drums of
43 the "Savage", they strangely recognize in the primitive beat the rhythms of the Orgy
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9 Porgy. Ultimately, this release is less a source of emancipation than a channeling of
10 violence, as seen at the end of the book. The chant of “orgy porgy” instinctively returns
11 during a murderous group attack, ironically led, this time, by John Savage, the greatest
12 social critique and Shakespearean ascetic. A warning, it seems, both of unreflexive
13 abandon to desire and of the ascetic rejection of desire.
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20 Considered as a release rather than an emancipation, what should one make of
21 the spectacular resurgence of music festivals and other festival-like events (e.g.
22 Anderson, 2011) in recent years? Some festivals, which seem more spontaneous and
23 highly politicized, appear to be protests against political and economic domination, and
24 are “brimming with the possibility of violent insurrection” (Graeber, 2009: 503). Some
25 seem much more like spectacle, avoid politicized themes, and appeal to “boutique”
26 sensibilities to providing a highly controlled positive consumer experience (Johansson &
27 Toraldo, 2015; Chen, 2009; Waterman, 1998). Other festivals seem to provide a variety
28 of spaces, in which different actors stake out claims and contests over the meaning and
29 politics of the festival play out (Munro & Jordan, 2013; Islam et al, 2008).
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42 One could see in this plethora of festival types and spaces the opportunity for
43 social contestation, politics and progressive change. Yet optimism in this respect should
44 be taken with a grain of salt. How apparently “subversive” and “self-expressive”
45 movements become branded as fashionable new commodities and organizational
46 fashions is well-known to contemporary theorists (e.g. Endrissat et al, 2015; Fleming,
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9 2009; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). The purportedly subversive moments of festivals
10 could be just as easily imagined as ideological cover for a commodified production that
11 entrenches and reinforces social circumstances, patterns of actions and social identities.
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13 Burning Man is telling in that sense, as the festival is increasingly seen as a tourist
14 destination for Silicon Valley tech elites (Spencer, 2015; Waterman, 1998), rigorously
15 accompanied by loyal temporary staff that set up comfy executive shelters. The week-
16 long Coachella festival is replete with commercial and luxury fashion brands, offering
17 glamorous side-events in the desert. The first time opening of an H&M retail store at
18 Coachella with a special H&M collection inspired by the Festival seems to be a nail in
19 the coffin, a proof of the fact of commercialization and the façade of subversion.
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30 31 **Festival, Reflexivity and Spectacle**

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33 *That I might drink, and leave the world unseen*
34 *And with thee fade away into the forest dim*
35 *Keats, Ode to a Nightingale*
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39 The preceding discussion should make clear the ambivalence of festival with
40 regards to institutionalized order; scholars of festival have acknowledged festival spaces
41 as fora where power is played out and hegemonic contests are waged (Munro & Jordan,
42 2013; Clark & Jepson, 2011). But a related, third ambivalence adds to the temporal and
43 institutional quandaries posed by festivals; in these contests between social and
44 communitarian forces, what is the role of critical consciousness, memory and
45 reflexivity? Do festivals, set apart from the everyday norms and practices of social life,
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9 create spaces for critical reflection, to support the emergence of environmental, social
10 and political alternatives? Or rather, as Keats suggest above, does drunken musical
11 ecstasy of mass collectivity dull the critical sense, replacing with distraction and
12 spectacle the possibility for a critical discursive community, replacing democratic
13 solidarity with the palliative of mass intoxication?
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20 Classical perspectives situated festivities within ritual frameworks, for instance,
21 the Greek festivals of Dionysus, which engaged citizens in ethical self-reflection on
22 what it meant to be good citizens. Organised by the polis, tragedies represented
23 moments for self-knowledge, social values were displayed publicly (Fusaro, 2012).
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28 These ritualistic displays demonstrated the dangers of *hubris*, and generated reflexivity
29 around the finitude and ignorance of humankind. In *Sophocles' Ajax*, for instance, the
30 proud and valorous hero, guilty of arrogance, is punished with insanity and suicide.
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Festival in its tragic and ritualistic enactment instructed ethical consciousness and
stirred collective memory.

Later writings on festivals emphasize the visceral, non-reflective, and irrational
aspects of carnival over their ability to promote critical reflection. Goethe's (1976)
writings on the Roman carnival already demonstrate festival's ambivalence vis-à-vis
reflexivity. Previously writing that "at last the foolishness is over. The innumerable
lights were another mad spectacle", and that "it is not worth writing about", Goethe

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9 (1976:228) in fact kept writing about festival, seeing in his later experience of the
10 carnival the wisdom of the living mass of people and sensations.

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13 A Romantic writer, Goethe struggled between the ideal sublime and the
14 exaltation of the body, an ambivalence reflected in the spiritual orgy of carnival.
15 Understanding human truth required looking to the ground rather than the sky, and
16 Goethe affirms of carnival that “whoever looks seriously about him and has eyes to see
17 must become strong; he is bound to acquire an idea of strength that was never so alive
18 for him” (1976: 17). What is this idea of strength and life that is so available for those
19 with eyes to see? He continues, “through this carefree crowd of maskers, everyone will
20 be reminded with us of the importance of every one of the momentary and often
21 seemingly trivial pleasures of life.” (1976: 677). Thus, far from a system-
22 transformational consciousness, the festival reflexivity promotes an appreciation of the
23 mundane collective life of sensory presence. Yet his tone suggests that the mundane
24 has a radicalism of its own, and is far from apolitical. A romantic riposte to
25 Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality, Goethe finds in the mass festival (1976:
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44 *“that freedom and equality can only be enjoyed in the intoxication of madness*
45 *and that the greatest desire rises to its highest pitch when it approaches close to*
46 *danger and relishes in voluptuous, sweet-anxious sensations.”*
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48 The use of emotional and visceral enactments to dramaturgically enact social tensions
49 and codes runs through the study of social rituals. Geertz’ (1973) well-known accounts
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9 of the Balinese cockfight makes it clear that the ritual brings out the spirit of the
10 community, as members are “fused into a single body, a superorganism” (Geertz, 1973:
11 414). The paradox of expression and control is enacted because, as Geertz explains, the
12 cocks at once stand for the self-identity of the owner and the ritual, an enactment of the
13 community, while at the same time, they enact ‘the direct inversion, aesthetically,
14 morally, and metaphysically, of human status: animality’ (Geertz, 1973; 419). As
15 Goethe’s reflection of the intoxication of carnival against the sublime contemplation of
16 Ash Wednesday, the enactment of the cockfight brings members to reflect upon the
17 paradoxes of animality within the social order.
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29 The potential for emancipation within the animality and emotion of festival, and
30 its recognition of the visceral, are key elements of festivals’ appeal. Bakhtin’s (1968:
31 394) description of festival as “grotesque realism” emphasizes the ability to critique
32 through parody and caricature, and to “bring down to earth, turn their subject into
33 flesh..the zone in which conception and a new birth take place”. The notion of birthing
34 appears throughout Bakhtin, who speaks of the “regenerating flames of carnival”.
35 Related to the cyclical versus linearity of social time discussed above, regeneration
36 and rebirth are able to be seen as progressive from the point of view of cyclical time,
37 while in linear history, the return to the past is destined to seem as a reactionary move.
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Turning to the cyclical, metabolic principles of the body – feast, harvest, sexual

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9 reproduction - can from this lens be framed as revolutionary (literally “turning”)
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11 consciousness.

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13 Recent organizational perspectives have noted this interrelation between the
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15 human and the animal and the blurring of boundaries between the two (Labatut, Monroe
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17 & Desmond, 2016). Labatut et al (2017), for instance, note how revolutionary
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19 movements may use animal icons as part of a subversive symbology, drawing on Scott
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21 (1990). Skoglund & Redmalm (2017) discuss the mutual imbrication of the human and
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23 the animal, managed together through their interaction, which is co-constitutive of both
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25 humanity and animality. Although festivals have historically involved forms of animal
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27 interaction (animal rituals, games, etc), they also reproduce animality within humanity,
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29 though masks, disinhibited “animal” behavior and the like. If a constitutive feature of
30
31 human organization its distinction from and contrast with the animal, the festival
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33 internalizes the human-animal dialectic within its ritualized activities. Festival, if
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35 emblematically human in its theatricality and ritual, is also a moment of embodying the
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37 animal.
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42 The consciousness-raising through muck-raking, displaying the visceral core of
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44 humanity, has been contrasted with the emotionally charged but sanitized notion of
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46 spectacle, whose aim is to lull the audience with images and ultimately corrode critical
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48 consciousness (Flyverbom & Reineke, 2017; Boje, 2011; Islam et al, 2008). Once the
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50 opposition between the sublime purity of thought and the unconscious body is called
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9 into question, possibilities arise for sensual pleasure to move from distraction to a form
10 of reflexivity.
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12 Relatedly, “new age” visions of festivals often highlight their consciousness-
13 raising goals within counter-cultural movements, which attempt to imagine alternative
14 communities and effect ideological change. For instance, Anderton (2011; 2009) notes
15 that from the 1970’s, festival culture became imbued with a system-critical function,
16 and social movements began to influence festival events. Coining the term
17 “countercultural carnivalesque”, Anderton (2009) describes how festivals have been
18 used to critique consumer capitalism and materialism, and to canvass for environmental
19 and alternative cultural movements. Often with a pastoral rhetoric, narratives of “getting
20 back to nature” invoke consciousness-raising activities around indigenous cultures,
21 “sacred sites”, and other forms of non-mainstream culture that Partridge (2006) lables
22 “rejected knowledge”. The recuperation of such knowledge and its application in
23 critiquing business-as-usual is evocative of the *communitas* ethic described above, and
24 shows how *communitas* can be used as a critical lever in a “back to roots” style
25 activism.
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44 Anderton (2011: 151) emphasizes that despite a rise in commercialization in
45 recent festival events, commercialization must tread with caution for fear of
46 compromising “certain elements of that heritage [that] are regarded by some as essential
47 to festival culture”. Festivals are by no means incompatible with markets, and indeed
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9 are intimately historically connected to markets (Attali, 1985), yet, as Anderton (2011)
10 argues, core values such as the liberty to critique, to express alternative lifestyles, and to
11 engage in activism are central features of festivals that successful marketing campaigns
12 must be careful not to overshadow. To this end, he cites the Glastonbury Festival's
13 prohibition of branding activities and also their vetting of corporate presence in terms of
14 value alignment, excluding companies with poor environmental records and socially
15 questionable actors such as tobacco companies. Possibly for this reason, companies
16 have focused on more participative and experiential forms of marketing such as
17 memorable activities, rather than traditional branding activities (Anderton, 2011).
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29 Similarly, Chen's (2009) ethnography of Burning Man highlights dialogue as
30 part of the "creative chaos" of festivals. Chen (2009: 159) stresses that festivals can
31 "raise awareness about whether members are reproducing practices by rote, particularly
32 in introducing bureaucratic forms of control". The need to plan and recreate continuity
33 while dealing with chaos produces a type of organization that is relatively responsive to
34 member opinions, "preventing individual members from uncritically conforming to a
35 majority view" (Chen 2009:159). In this way, although the loss of individuality, high
36 emotion and sense of collective freedom (Yang, 2000) in festivals can seem to promote
37 an unreflective mass consumerism, festival scholarship has at least held out the
38 possibility for critical and counter-cultural practices.
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In our own work, we have seen this ambivalence play out in both organizer and volunteer attitudes to the festival. While observing and talking to festival volunteers, we were surprised by the coexistence, on the one hand, of a progressive political concern, a discontent for contemporary consumer capitalism, and a strong discourse of environmental, communitarian, and counter-cultural transformation. On the other hand, festival organization members often voiced cynicism about how much politics was “really” taking place, noting that festivals were business, and their volunteers, unpaid workers. Older members wistfully harkened back to the days of the 1970’s, when music festivals were “authentic”, much as the new age movement of the 1970’s themselves invoked pastoralist images of medieval village festivals and the “good old days” before mass culture (Sutcliffe, 2003). The golden age, it seemed, was a moving target, and if members could come together around the rejection of an implied “other” of capitalism, modernity and urban life, the possible alternatives to such a life seemed themselves limited by the temporal, spatial and economic constraints of the festival form. This form seemed almost perfectly suited, not for an alternative society, but for a quick getaway, to vent frustrations before the return to normalcy.

Organizing Festivals, Organizing as Festival

Philosophy comes on the scene too late...By philosophy's grey on grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only understood. The owl of Minerva comes only at the falling of dusk
(Hegel, 1967/1821:13)

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9 The transformations of time, community and suggest an enduring power of
10 festivals forms of organizing for the reproduction, and even perhaps the transformation,
11 of social orders. Moments where society celebrates itself in popular events, festivals
12 have been seen as politically charged, emancipatory moments, “festivals of resistance”
13 challenging social hierarchy (Graeber, 2009: 503). The sense of collectivity or
14 communitas (Turner, 1969) felt during festivals seems to undo the alienation and
15 individualism of private property, and proposes a return of the collective repressed
16 (Graeber, 2009). Yet, the increasing normalization of festivals as part of pop culture
17 (Johansson & Toraldo, 2015; Chen, 2009) gives pause to revolutionary pretentions;
18 indeed, the “new spirit” of capitalism may require excess, affective intensity, and fluid,
19 liminal experience as part of its internal functioning (Johnsen & Sorensen, 2014; DuGay
20 & Morgan, 2013; Dean, 2009; Boltanski & Thevenot, 2005). Festivals present a
21 paradox, one perhaps emblematic of contemporary organizing more generally. When
22 moments of liberating connection reinforce institutionalized order, when political
23 critique is turned against itself, when enjoyment has been recruited by capital to a force
24 of structuration, what can festival mean, and what can it celebrate?
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44 The ambivalence of festival makes it an interesting object of study, in its own
45 right but also as a metaphor for organizing. In our own thoughts on festivals, we find
46 ourselves continuously moving between these two registers, and wonder if it is not
47 somehow redolent of the spirit of festival itself to call into question the literal as
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opposed to allegorical modes of presentation. Yet it worth stressing that festivals are organizations in their own right; a growing segment of many economies (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) they are an important economic sector with particular organizational dilemmas and particularities. That said, festivals are appealing in large part for the more general insights they give around organizing, and for the even wider questions about social order and change that they raise.

Taken literally, festival organizations are interesting because of their ability to organize seemingly chaotic mass gatherings. Building creativity out of chaos (Chen, 2009), festivals organizations mould and shape collective energies into designer experiences (Johansson & Toraldo, 2015). Positioned at the interface of cultural, economic and environmental issues, festival management involves managing an entire ecosystem of different stakeholders, participants and meanings (Getz, Anderson & Carlson, 2010). Due to their location at the interface of production and consumption economies (Chen, 2012), festivals organize both work and leisure activities, breaking boundaries between management and marketing fields, motivating work through the promise of enjoyment and disciplining enjoyment through the offering of semi-structured activities. In short, festival organizations are interesting to study in their own right, even outside of their metaphorical value.

Yet, as performance and ritual, understanding festival also means understanding the larger questions that festivals enact. As noted above, Geertz (1973) emphasizes how

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9 such enactments reflect society and its constitutive tensions, making their study
10 important for understanding society beyond the phenomenon itself. As an allegory for
11 organization, many of the particularistic aspects of festivals point to larger issues in
12 organization studies. For instance, the event-oriented, project based nature of festivals
13 stands in a tension with the continuity of festival organizations over time. Festivals
14 build a reputation over years of repetition, and their planners must retain capacity during
15 the interim spaces between festival events, spaces which are both empty of festival yet
16 remain active in planning, marketing, and preparation. In concrete terms, the
17 ambivalence between the linear time of production and the cyclicity of reproduction
18 finds an ideal representation in the production and reproduction of festivals and their
19 organizations. From the Grammy awards (Anand & Watson, 2004) to SWAT teams and
20 film crews (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011), the movement between single and salient
21 events and underlying organization has been a key issue in organization studies.
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37 Further, organizational studies have been increasingly concerned with fluidity of
38 organizational forms, the increasing porosity of boundaries, and the liminality of
39 subjects within such organizations (e.g. Shortt, 2015; Dobusch & Shoeneborne, 2015;
40 Sheryogg & Sydow, 2010). Some note how boundary fluidity creates unique spatial
41 configurations (Shortt, 2015) or states of “permanent liminality” in organizations
42 (Johnson & Sorensen, 2014). As an allegory for fluidity and liminality, festivals enact
43 the paradox of constraint and freedom running through much of this literature.
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Emblematic of freedom, the fluid atmosphere of festivals requires exacting organization and the policing of boundaries. Marked as spaces where one can be oneself, festivals become hubs of social norm formation, fashion and consumption. The fluidity of festivals does not mark the absence of order, but its sublimation in a ritual trance that does not necessarily bode well for critical movements.

Thus, a third allegorical use of festivals is to mark the dialectic of resistance and neo-normative control that has become central to critical management studies (e.g. Endrissat et al, 2015; DuGay & Morgan, 2013; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). Festivals are heavily branded as sites of resistance; they derive their appeal from the image of being set free, of going back to nature, and of finding authentic connection and self-expression. Yet the increasing marketization of such moments and their ability to be steered into productive activity – whether through free volunteer labour, consumption of the various products and substances on offer, or establishing fashions and social norms that carry over into the wider economy – belie such emancipatory claims. Ultimately, the tension between control and freedom at festivals could lead one to question what it would mean to be free within an organized space, highlighting the neo-normative question of whether our own desires can be and have been turned against ourselves.

Moreover, the diversity of festival types illustrate how tensions of power and resistance can play out in different organizational forms. From more spectacular, mass-marketed festivals to the more carnivalesque, back-street variants (Islam et al, 2008),

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9 from the creative chaos of Burning Man (Chen, 2009), to the absurdist puppetry of
10 street protest (Graeber, 2007) or the emotional mobilization of mass movements (Yang,
11 2000), control and resistance are played out at festivals according to a diverse array of
12 material, organizational and emotional dynamics. While studying such an array might
13 not untie the paradoxical knot of neo-normative control (Endrissat et al, 2015), it can at
14 least illustrate the potential ways in which such paradoxes instantiate themselves in the
15 world.
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24 In performing allegories of organization, festivals reach into deeper questions of
25 social theory more generally, as anthropologists such as Turner have argued. The
26 antinomies of pleasure and consumption and the socialization of desire; the tenuous
27 boundary between society and community and the ongoing struggle of each to
28 overwhelm and colonize the other; the yearning for the earth in the very acts that de-
29 naturalize the pastoral and erect cultural forms to mourn the ensuing loss of purity –
30 each of these oppositions can be seen in the organizing and enacting of festivals. It
31 appears almost as if, at its core, the significance of festival itself is to give voice to these
32 foundational problems of social life, to put them on stage, to enact once again,
33 ritualistically, the joys and impossibilities of living together.
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46 At a basic level, finally, festivals present us with the problem of locating
47 ourselves as scholars, citizens, and economic actors in a world in which the coordinates
48 of emancipation and control seem to be in a strange kind of rotation. Where joy and
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9 pleasure alternately express a longing for liberation and present a mechanism of control.
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11 Where progressive thought reaches back into archaic visions of pastoral to find
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13 constructive visions of the future. Where escape from society seems to be the most
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15 viable form of togetherness. In this bacchanalian revel, as Hegel suggested,
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17 contemporary culture seems be deeply intoxicated, a cycle of boom-and-bust
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19 reminiscent of its underlying economic foundation. Do such revels calm our fears by
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21 demonstrating the eternal cycle of return, or is there an impending hangover after the
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23 party ends? In this era of permanent liminality, one begins to ask what the dusk (or is it
24
25 the dawn?) will bring.
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