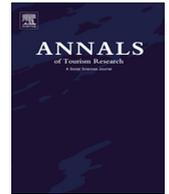




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Socio-spatial authenticity at co-created music festivals

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ABSTRACT

From the early days of hippie counter-culture, music festivals have been an important part of the British summer. Today they are commercialised offerings without the counter-cultural discourse of earlier times. Drawing on participant observation, interviews and focus groups conducted at a rock festival and a smaller boutique festival, the paper examines how their design, organisation and management are co-created with participants to produce authentic experiences. The paper contributes to research on authenticity in tourism by examining how authenticity emerges and is experienced in such co-created commercial settings. It presents the importance that the socio-spatial plays in authenticity experiences and how socio-spatial experience and engagement can also be recognised as a form of aura.

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Introduction

Contemporary music festivals, like the medieval festivals described by [Kim and Jamal \(2007, p. 184\)](#), provide experiential settings where “participants are free from the constraints of daily living and can behave in a way not governed by conventional social norms and regulations that structure everyday life”. This experiential opportunity to transcend normative constraints within a liminal setting is central to music festivals. They offer the opportunity to engage in an unfettered state of being often precluded in everyday life where arguably festival-goers have the opportunity to counter the “loss of “true self” in public roles” in modern Western society ([Wang, 1999, p. 358](#)). Despite music festivals having become a more commonplace part of life for many young people, they are nevertheless constituted as spaces apart from everyday life, where visitors can immerse themselves in extraordinary experiences away from such public roles ([Morgan, 2007](#)).

Various authors ([Belhassen, Caton, & Steward, 2008](#); [Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010](#); [Lamont, 2014](#); [Lamont, 2014](#); [Rickly-Boyd, 2013](#)) have shown the importance of place for tourists’ experiences of authenticity. The paper examines whether and how festival goers can be said to experience authenticity in two different temporary and constructed places. In particular we consider how participants interact in a socio-spatial sense with different commoditised tourist music events. Our contribution to the authenticity debate is to explore how authenticity emerges in such co-created places and to demonstrate the importance of different socio-spatial ([Rickly-Boyd, 2013](#)) experiences in creating authenticity which includes a sense of place and atmosphere captured by the term aura. The sense of aura is intersubjective and reciprocal between that

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experienced and the experienter. It is the tourist's interaction with the place and the experience which allows for an engagement with aura (Rickly-Boyd, 2013).

A short history of music festivals

The UK music festival can be traced back to the 1960s, and hippie counter culture (Anderton, 2011). Most were not commercial, offering an alternative to consumer society (Anderton, 2011; McKay, 1996) with bands playing for free, no entrance charges and little formal organisation (Hetherington, 1998). In recent years music festivals have evolved to become popular tourist destinations (Sawyer, 2011). They have assumed an important place in Britain's cultural landscape growing in size and number and becoming more mainstream (Stone, 2009). Britain is now internationally renowned for its summer programme of music festivals. This includes longstanding events like the Glastonbury, Isle of Wight and Cambridge folk festivals dating back to the 1960s/1970s, and the Reading Festival which evolved from the Beaulieu Jazz festivals held in the late 1950s (McKay, 2004).

In the last decade there has been unprecedented commercialisation and corporatisation of the music festival sector (Morey, Bengry-Howell, Griffin, Szmigin, & Riley, 2014). The largest events are now controlled by a few major corporations most notably the transnational Live Nation which has come to dominate the sector (Stone, 2009). The emphasis on management and customer care has played a fundamental role in establishing music festivals within the tourism industry (Connell & Gibson, 2003). The paper explores two aspects of how the music festival experience is produced and consumed. Firstly, it examines festivals as sites of commodified freedom (Cheong & Miller, 2000), designed by festival organisers to resonate with a particular market segment (Prentice & Anderson, 2003). Secondly, the paper explores how festivals co-create the consumer's festival experience as an escape from the everyday where people are in a situation and/or place away from their daily lives, engaging in non-ordinary activities (Wang, 1999). The question of whether the commoditisation of such events makes them meaningless has been examined in tourism since Cohen's (1988) seminal paper but it is nevertheless one that is still important both in terms of how tourist events and locations are produced and how people experience them. As Cohen (1988) has noted, authenticity when considered as a constructed concept, can be emergent and develop over time; while Glastonbury is the proto-type British music festival, others have gained credentials for particular types of experience and may therefore be viewed as authentic manifestations. The paper examines two festivals which offer co-created, commoditised experiences, and considers how people authenticate themselves through their social-spatial experiences (Rickly-Boyd, 2013).

The state of authenticity

Authenticity in tourism research has been described as a "slippery concept" (Belhassen et al., 2008, p. 669), although it might more appropriately be referred to as an essentially contested one (Gallie, 1964) given the heterogeneity of interpretations it has been subject to (Lamont, 2014; Mkono, 2013). Wang (1999, p. 353) is more positive, describing the debate as "not a matter of black or white, but rather involves a much wider spectrum, rich in ambiguous colors". As Cohen and Cohen (2012) note the discussions to date have failed to lead to a consensus but have rather resulted in a range of theoretical perspectives.

It is important therefore to outline the differences that constitute the authenticity debate in the tourist literature to frame the theoretical context and application of the current study. Wang (1999) presents four theoretical perspectives to authenticity; objectivism, constructivism, postmodernism and existentialism. Objective authenticity refers to the recognition of toured objects or events as genuine (MacCannell, 1973); in the music festival context objective authenticity might be equated with witnessing particular live acts, or attending prototypical events, like Glastonbury, Reading or the Isle of Wight festival or referring to the "original" music festival, Woodstock. The pursuit of "real" experiences as proposed by MacCannell (1973) has been extensively critiqued (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Olsen, 2002; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999;). Wang (1999, p. 353) rejects the objective turn in authenticity for its emphasis on the "experience of toured objects which are found to be objective" ignoring how tourists experience those objects, places or events.

Wang (1999) employs and critiques the constructivist approach where tourists subjectively ascribe authenticity to objects and events. In this paradigm tourists seek symbolic authenticity (Wang, 1999) which allows them to determine what is authentic; this is a more fluid, negotiable and contextual form of authenticity (Rickly-Boyd, 2012a), such that places can become authentic; Belhassen et al. (2008) use the examples of Disneyland and Graceland to illustrate the emergent nature of the constructivist approach as these places attain authenticity over time. Finally, the postmodern approach deconstructs authenticity and blurs distinctions between real and fake. Tourists are not seeking authenticity but looking for enjoyment. The postmodern is represented in Yu Wang's (2007) presentation of customised authenticity when she describes how Lijiang's Naxi homestay guesthouses present a constructed version of reality that tourists can readily embrace and enjoy.

Through concentrating on the individual, Wang (1999) moved the authenticity debate away from an object focus; people feel more authentic and are able to better express themselves than in everyday life, not because of the authenticity of the toured objects, but because constraints have been removed from their lives (Wang, 2000). Existential authenticity refers to touristic experience and the perception of "being one's true self or true to one's essential nature" (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 299). Nevertheless it is important to remember that existentialism has a subjective position and the "true" self is

dependent on choice as “every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity” (Sartre, 1948 [1973]).

Recently scholars have moved from an examination of what authenticity is to how it is constructed, the process of authentication (Mkono, 2013), with Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1297) defining authentication “as a process by which something – a role, product, site, object or event – is confirmed as “original”, “genuine”, “real” or “trustworthy””. Their hot and cool authentication are social processes through which the authenticity of a tourist attraction is “confirmed or authenticated” (2012, p.1295). Cool authentication is usually a single explicit, official performative act by which the object is deemed original i.e. certified as such and is often linked to personal experiences of object authenticity. Hot authentication is “an immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object, site or event’s authenticity” (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1300). Not typically having the verification of cool authenticity, it is loaded with socially produced “belief rather than proof” (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1314). Hot authentication is a self-reinforcing process with the performative practices of visitors building the authenticity of the event or site. Brown (2013) has added to the process debate through the conceptualisation of tourism as catalyst (noun or verb) for existential authenticity, thus tourism’s role is not to substitute for the inauthenticity of the everyday but a catalyst for authentic living allowing people to examine and evaluate their lives, while still recognising that many may not seek such existentialist moments of vision. The importance of place in the understanding of the experience of authenticity has been extensively discussed in tourism literature and this aspect of the music festival experience is presented in the following section.

The importance of place

Belhassen et al. (2008) demonstrate how place intersects with subjective experience in their study of Christian pilgrims as a linkage between socially constructed meanings and how people experience place directly; a dynamic relationship among experiences, meanings and the physical environment. In their study and others (Buchmann et al., 2010; Lamont, 2014) participants’ experiences of existential authenticity are impacted by place. In Lamont’s (2014) exploration of commercially organised visits to the Tour de France sites, tourists relished the place, its history and the carnivalesque atmosphere of road-side watching. Similarly Buchmann et al.’s (2010) film tourists had sensuous embodied encounters with places where scenes from the Lord of the Rings had been filmed. This performative turn incorporates agency, identity and contestation (Rickly-Boyd, 2013) as for example in Mkono’s (2013) description of the very different responses of Western and African tourists to the same Victoria Falls tourist site. Place is capable of acting as a catalyst for existential authenticity (Brown, 2013), through, the removal from the routine, the location and experience of the tourist place.

The social in authenticity

Despite the conflicting interpretations, authenticity describes a concept which is relational to other phenomena (Rickly-Boyd, 2012a). Highlighting its relational character underlines the importance that social interaction can have in the experience of authenticity. This is more explicitly examined by Wang (1999) in his proposal of two forms of existential authenticity: intra-personal, involving self-making or self-identity and inter-personal, which depicts a sense of *communitas* (Turner, 1974), which transcends everyday social relations. Kim and Jamal (2007), in their analysis of medieval festival experiences, identify sexual experience, alcohol consumption, self-transformation, the emerging self and constructing self-identity as examples of intrapersonal authenticity, and equality, acceptance, ludic interaction and enduring bonding as examples of inter-personal existential authenticity. Inter-personal existential authenticity involves the search for authenticity among fellow travellers (Wang, 1999), revealing that it is not only an individual pursuit but also about a collective experience (Belhassen et al., 2008; Buchmann et al., 2010; Rickly-Boyd, 2012a). Buchmann et al.’s, film tourists, Lamont’s, cycle tourists and Kim and Jamal’s Renaissance festival tourists all build authenticity through the experiences they share, the practices they pursue and the feeling of being together and away from the everyday, creating *communitas*.

Practice and performativity may help unlock further understanding of the social in authenticity research. In her discussion of affective practice Wetherell (2012, p. 23) refers to conceptualising social action as “constantly in motion while yet recognising too that the past, and what has been done before, constrains the present and the future.” This view is reflected in how Belhassen’s et al.’s (2008) pilgrim tourists exhibit an inherent social construction of the experience through the pre-conceived (historical) understandings of the sacred places they visit alongside the performance of the pilgrimage. Important to Wetherell’s (2012) idea of affective practice is the combination of the physical, social and material figurations; an organic complex where the parts relationally constitute one another. This approach helps to understand how shared experiences can be part of the affective aspect of authenticity. The feelings, relationships, and sense of self that emerge from the performance of tourism can produce existential authenticity as seen in Rickly-Boyd’s (2012b, p.87) lifestyle climbers as their bodily practice is “framed by frequent travel and enacted within a community”. While lifestyle climbing is a demanding bodily practice it can also involve “collectively performing and experiencing the journey” (Rickly-Boyd, 2012b, p. 88).

Authenticity constituted through people’s experience with the setting, its history and how it contextualises and enables identity practices and a sense of *communitas* resonates with the idea of ‘aura’ from Benjamin as interpreted by Rickly-Boyd (2012a, p. 270), where “Aura is an experience, an engagement”. Rickly-Boyd suggests that Benjamin’s concept of aura can be extended to the experiential in terms of its dynamic, performative and communicative properties. What Rickly-Boyd and others have identified is the linkage, connection or overlapping elements that create the experience of authenticity.

Belhassen et al. (2008) present it in a framework of overlapping elements they refer to as Theoplicity, Cohen and Cohen (2012) describe it through the term imbrication which is one of the features of hot authentication and Wang (1999) through inter and intra-existentialist authenticity. The next section considers how the literature reviewed may be applied to the music festival experience.

The music festival experience

In this paper we consider how authenticity is constituted through people's relationship with the festival setting and how it contextualises their experiences. We examine the music festival aura as encompassing the engagement with the place, the performative practices of the participants and their experiences of self-discovery and social belonging, thus following the view that bodies and the spaces they engage with are inseparable (Duffy, Waite, Gormann-Murray, & Gibson 2011). The paper focuses on two British music festivals, the Reading Festival and The Big Chill, and examines how the design of each festival setting anticipates, constructs and manages the consumption practices of festival consumers, and engages them in the co-creation of an experience. Such co-creation reaches beyond a consumer-producer binary to something closer to an imaginary which builds upon understandings of practices that are widely shared by all engaged in them (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Music festivals are not only physically produced but also through the knowledge and understanding of the place and how it is used and experienced, which in turn contributes to the aura of the festival. How the design and production of commercial spaces shapes experiences and behaviour has been explored in business research literature (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Venkatraman & Nelson, 2008). Theoretical discussions of music festivals often allude to a process of creeping commercialisation, which is said to have undermined the music festival's counter cultural discourse and critique of mainstream society (Anderton, 2008; Stone, 2009). Others suggest that in a context where socially embedded notions of place have been disturbed, highly constructed settings such as music festivals can serve as idealised locations (MacLeod, 2006), wherein people can feel more authentic. Anderton (2006, p. 40) describes the music festival as "a temporary or ephemeral place", which is annually reconstructed. Unlike music festivals of the past, which evolved as undifferentiated social spaces, contemporary music festivals are now highly structured and carefully designed to attract and accommodate their target audience. (Morgan 2007). The opposing views of what music festivals should be necessarily affect whether they are perceived as authentic and whether festival goes experience authenticity.

2. Socio-spatial authenticity at two festivals

British music festivals are situated on sites apart from local residents, and attract visitors from all over the country. The importance of music festivals as tourist destinations for visitors, businesses and the local economy have been well documented (Anderton, 2006). There is clear differentiation in terms of the production and management of the two festivals in this study. Tourists' experience and add to the atmosphere they are consuming and imagining, albeit within a managed environment. The following section describes the history, setting, construction, market segmentation and management of the two festivals under study.

Reading festival

Reading is Britain's longest-running commercial rock festival. Its association with rock music was forged during the 1970s when the event started to attract a loyal following of predominantly white working class rock music fans. The advent of the Reading Festival into a large mainstream event in the 1990s has corresponded with increasing levels of corporate involvement, and a demographic shift in its audience, which is now younger and more middle class. The festival targets the young audience with a line-up which tends to reflect the demographic and traverses Rock and Indie genres.

The Big Chill

The Big Chill was a smaller, less obviously commercial event with its origins in rave culture. Started in 1994, in 2003 it settled at the 300 acre site in Herefordshire. The event attempted to be distinct from Britain's large commercial music festivals by marketing itself as a smaller, more intimate boutique festival. Employing the strapline "more than a festival, it is a way of life", the festival combined an eclectic line-up of alternative music, dance and electronica, live bands and DJs, with other cultural attractions including art, film, poetry and cabaret, a Body & Soul field with healers, masseurs and alternative therapists, and a wide selection of stalls selling gourmet food. Targeting an older, more middle class and ethnically diverse audience than Reading Festival, the Big Chill was said to cater for the "escapist fantasies" of a middle class audience of "responsible hedonists" (Lea, 2006).

Study methods

The paper draws on a three year comparative study of commercialised music festivals, which was conducted between 2007 and 2010. It discusses two case studies of Reading Festival and the Big Chill conducted in 2008. The overall aim of

the research project was to examine how festival goers dealt with the commercial aspects of music festivals in their festival leisure, social and cultural experiences. In exploring these experiences we sought to understand what festival goers felt about their time at the event in order to understand and explicate whether and how these experiences could be viewed as authentic given the commoditisation of music festivals.

We employed a multi-modal qualitative methodology that began with an online “market mapping” of corporate involvement in Britain’s commercial music festival sector, identifying the commercial aspects, including sponsorships, ticket prices and exclusive branding rights assigned at the two festivals. This was followed by participant observation of festival practices and mapping the actual leisure and consumption spaces of the festival. The next stage was to conduct a series of group and individual interviews during the music festivals. 84 participants were interviewed including on and off site (follow up) discussions and individual interviews. Interviews were all conducted following the participant observation phase which helped to develop the interview discussion (Miles & Huberman, 1994), while allowing participants responses to guide the discussion. Interview questions were also modified to follow emerging themes (Spradley, 1979).

The analysis presented here draws on three data sets: (1) official festival site maps; (2) systematic fieldnotes that researchers generated at each event; (3) on-site group discussions and interviews with festival attendees. The latter included 49 participants at the Reading festival (22 females and 27 males, all white, aged between 15 and 43, average age 21); and 35 participants at the Big Chill festival (17 females and 18 males, all white, aged between 16 and 31, average age 25). Music festivals in the UK appear to present a similar ethnic white bias as those in the US (McKay, 2015). Researchers approached people for interviews and the total sample is made up of those who agreed to be interviewed. Interviews, lasting between 40 min to an hour were recorded, transcribed, anonymised and then analysed by all authors following an iterative process of identifying themes and comparing notes. Codes moved from descriptive to conceptual through a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The analysis went through several cycles of coding and theoretical review in a process of coding-theory-coding-theory. The data was worked with in order to generate and develop ideas (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and those ideas were checked and rechecked against theory with some themes taken forward and others not. We then returned to the literature examining theories together with identified themes to provide a “theoretically informed examination” (Kim and Jamal, 2007, p. 188). It was at the first theory stage that we reviewed the research on authenticity identifying our data as having resonance with the theoretical constructs and empirical examples of authenticity (e.g. Belhassen et al., 2008; Cohen & Cohen 2012; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Rickly-Boyd, 2012a,b; Wang, 1999) and the call for further empirical research which examines both authentic experiences and the construction and management of such experiences by business (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Olsen, 2002).

There are two strands to the analysis, the first draws on the site maps and field notes to examine how each festival location is constituted to organise, differentiate and facilitate particular forms of festival setting in which participants may experience authenticity. This is our perception of the environment and context of the festivals and necessarily reflects our experience. The second strand draws on the discussion and interview data to examine how participants constitute, inhabit and engage with each festival, its setting and organisation, and how they express their feelings and situated experiences at the time the festivals were taking place.

Although the Big Chill has not run since 2011 (it clashed with the Olympics in 2012), it remains an exemplar of boutique festivals which continue today.

Findings

We begin by examining how each festival is constituted as a managed experiential consumption environment, and setting. This part of the analysis is developed primarily from the participant observation of two of the researchers and their subsequent fieldnotes.

Co-Creating the music festival place

Each festival is separated into zones of discrete experiential, consumption and functional spaces. Attendees at both events are differentiated and spatially distributed around the site, with certain groups granted privileged access to some areas. This process of differentiation is introduced on the approach to each festival location as holders of different types of tickets are ushered along particular routes through specified entrances; vehicle owners are required to pre-purchase passes to use generic car parking areas, or those reserved for specific camping zones, like the family camping and disability accessible camping zones at the Big Chill, or the campervan fields and “easy camping” zones (premium accommodation in restricted areas with security) that exist at both events.

At Reading the festival arena is located within a wider entertainment, leisure and retail complex that contains a silent disco, funfair and a retail space. The “village area” serves as the commercial-retail hub for the festival, and includes a small number of independent and charity shops, but is mostly large commercially branded stalls. At the Big Chill all entertainment, retail and leisure facilities are contained within the arena, which is accessed through roped corridors that traverse an otherwise open rural space. This creates a very different experience, more akin to a gentle stroll through countryside, rather than the slow passage through a busy commercial hub encountered at Reading.

The central arena is regulated differently at each festival. At Reading it is a fenced enclosure situated within the larger containment zone of the festival. Entering the arena involves joining a tightly packed crowd and gradually filtering through a bank of turnstiles. At the Big Chill there is no perimeter fence around the arena, which is only demarcated by a band of small lakes, trees and hedges that enclose the site. Access to the Big Chill arena is a gentle process subject to only low level security checks.

Yasmin and I had planned to walk around the Tangerine fields area, as we had at the Big Chill, but were stopped from entering by security. At both Reading and the Big Chill the Tangerine Fields area were completely fenced in, but at Reading access to this area was more carefully managed. People who were staying in this area had special armbands, which they wore in addition to the main Reading band, and the security on the gates were only letting people access this area who were wearing these arm bands. There had been no security managing the gate at Big Chill and Yasmin and I were able to access the area and walk around without being questioned. (Researcher Fieldnotes, Reading).

At Reading tents are generally used as crash pads and camping zones operate as intensely social spaces, wherein festival goers socialise within friendship groups, and with other festival goers who they befriend during the festival. These informal social groups often converge around camp fires situated within tent “corrals”, and co-create shared festival experiences through a convivial combination of irreverent conversation, spontaneous performances and impromptu entertainment.

Over the course of the weekend, conviviality at Reading sometimes escalates into disorderly behaviour, which is more divisive. Some young people build large fires, particularly on the final night of the festival. Among certain groups that regularly attend the festival these fires symbolise a culmination of the weekend’s festivities. The large fires transcend the more orderly social function that campfires served earlier in the festival, and take on a ritualistic function, wherein tents, camping equipment and other unwanted items are burned, and, in some cases, young people dance around and run through the flames. Reading’s fires vividly illustrate its difference from the Big Chill. For participants that had attended both events, they are a key marker of distinction between the two festivals.

Interviewer: Ok, so how’s this [Big Chill] compared to Reading?

Mike: A million times better. Reading’s like a refugee camp (Laughter)

Sue: The average ages are much older here as well than Reading

Interviewer: So why, what do you mean when you say?

Mike: Oh, Reading the fires in the bloody camp sites, it’s an absolute, it’s just horrible, absolutely horrible

Tracy: And everyone’s absolutely wrecked

Mike: It’s just, the site at Reading, it’s just so small that everybody, you just get no space, you can’t even sit down

Sue: People don’t seem to get wrecked here

Mike: Really? Did you not speak to us last night? (Laughter)

Rich: That’s not too wrecked

Interviewer: So what’s the difference, people get wrecked in a different way?

Sue: Yeah they do, they’re not kind of “rah rah rah”

(Big Chill Group Interview: 4, 3 male, 3 female)

Many Big Chill participants had attended Reading Festival when they were younger, and constituted the Big Chill as a more sophisticated festival experience. Here they positioned the Big Chill experience in opposition to Reading, suggesting that the festivals are produced by the organisers and co-created with participants for different expectations and experiences.

A metaphor employed in many participants’ accounts at both festivals is the constitution of the festival as an exploratory setting, in which to discover different experiences. A common practice at festivals is to drift between different sections of the site, without any preconfigured schedule, and explore the entertainment and experiential spaces that one encounters.

Keith: So I think when I come I’ll plan to see maybe four or five acts over a weekend and then to look at everything in between and see if you can see, well stumble across something really good. I sort of came up on Friday morning and I was only planning to see a couple of acts on Friday but I was at the *Rizla* stage for Annie Nightingale, it was amazing. That’s the sort of thing you just stumble upon and

Interviewer: Yeah, so stumbling upon something’s a nice part of it then is it?

Patricia: Yeah, that definitely is an enormous part, it’s not like a gig where you go and just see. . .you have a chance to see some other stuff.

Keith: Yeah, it’s nice not to have like a full plan. Just uh drift around and see what’s going on and stuff.

(Big Chill Interview Group 10: 2 male, 1 female)

“Stumbling” across something good or new distinguished festival experiences from the more predictable ones that might be encountered in other leisure settings. The size of both festival sites and the co-scheduling of the main bill of entertainment and other attractions preclude the possibility of consuming everything, so drifting served a functional purpose by providing a means of sampling as much as possible from what is on offer without collapsing into a state of anxiety. The festival is a setting where work is rendered impossible and entertainment is compulsory, with festival goers participat-

ing and co-creating the experience. In a wider social context where work and productivity are highly valued, festivals provide a guilt-free opportunity to be non-productive, drift aimlessly and whimsically consume experience. While the settings are commodified and segmented, they allow for co-created experiences as participants make choices of what they see and do.

The social in music festivals

Festival goers frequently compared the routine of home and work life with festival norms which embody the liminality of the festival experience. This liminality is constructed socially and experienced by festival goers as a sense of *communitas* among likeminded equals.

Paul: It's just part of the British experience. There aren't any other countries that really do so many. I mean there are one or two kind of token music festivals but every weekend in the summer there's something, and it's the randomness as well, like the community spirit of, the randomness. the banter and it's just cool, everyone gets along, people dress up it's a bit bohemian everyone's a bit out there and, you know anything goes which is just really cool and, like in your home town in Surrey, you can't walk up the High Street wearing a nun outfit but you can do it here and people would just like love it. (Big Chill Group Interview 1: 1 male, 2 female)

Despite the commodified elements of festivals, the usual structures and norms, as typified by the reference to a high street in Surrey, are done away with and replaced with bohemian practices such as dressing up. Paul's account of his experience constitutes the festival as a site of equality and acceptance of others (Kim & Jamal, 2007). The notion of the festival as detached from ordinary life emerges frequently within participants' accounts. The Big Chill is constituted as a place, wherein social conventions and cultural barriers that ordinarily regulate people's lives are discarded, and increased opportunities for sociability, conviviality and playful expression (in Kim and Jamal's (2007) terms, ludic interaction) emerge whereas at Reading it enables wilder practices and daring.

Time spent at a music festival is regularly described in terms of a holiday and an escape from the mundane spent with like-minded people. It is also constituted as a place of safety, with those within the temporal community understanding one another, even if they have only recently met:

Rachel: I love the fact that you can just start talking to different people, like, you know, we met loads of people this time didn't we? Like just from chatting and, I think that's the good thing about festivals, people are pretty open and welcoming.

Tracy: Everybody's, it's like being on holiday isn't it? It's pretty relaxed.

Mike: It feels, it feels safe, yeah.

(Big Chill Group Interview 6: 3 male, 3 female)

In the festival context participants feel comfortable and able to share experiences with others. The value that participants ascribe to a music festival is predicated on the wide range of experiential opportunities that are offered and taken up individually, but also through the collective interpersonal experiences of *communitas*.

The sense of boundedness at Reading is physically reinforced by the large security fence that encloses the site, which visually obscures the everyday world and partitions the festival from the town of Reading and local residents. At the Big Chill the remote location and band of countryside that surrounds the site serves a similar purpose. Participants are aware of how the festival location helps to create and bound the particular festival experience. The festival setting also engenders a feeling of bonding among people who are physically and emotionally situated in a separate place:

Jon: Yeah. It gives you a feeling that you are separate from the rest of the country. We all know something that they all don't and I think that is all basic isn't it. And everybody feels that to a degree. Some people feel it really keenly and thrill to that, some people just kind of think, "doing something a bit daring". You know, "where have you been this week end?" Everybody else is doing the same mundane thing but everybody here feels like they're just in a bubble, you know.

(Reading Interview 4: Male)

Jon distinguishes between those experiencing a sense of commonality "keenly" and others who view the festival as just "doing something a bit daring". In terms of the former, he has an emotional engagement with the festival whereas his description of others suggests his perception of a less authentic engagement. The shared experiences are located within a spatially, temporally and culturally bounded place, "a bubble". It is not just the atmosphere that brings people together, but also a desire to connect with similar others, and experience, what Kim and Jamal (2007) have termed enduring bonding:

Sharon: I guess it's kind of like being around like-minded people in some ways. Like a belonging. Because you see a lot of people and you see them at every festival you go, if you go to the same festivals. But you don't necessarily talk to them or anything, but you see them year after year and it becomes like your family. And it's nice for the kids, yeah, so it's like a grand scale global community.

(Big Chill, Interview 5: Female)

Later, Sharon compared this sense of festival community with her experiences in everyday life where she felt it was difficult to be part of the community. In contrast the *communitas* encountered at the music festivals she attended with “like-minded people”, enabled her to feel a sense of belonging.

Co-creating the personal

The foregoing suggests that the spatial isolation and voluntary segregation into “like-minded people” heightens feelings of *communitas*. Escaping to a socially sanctioned place of fun allows festival goers to emerge out of the constraints of their everyday lives and experience their identities in an intense and concentrated way. Participants described the music festival experience as enabling them to behave differently than they would in their home town, which many equated with a freer way of being:

Paul: I think there’s something about the whole “go free” thing which is quite beautiful.

Cath: It is very English.

Paul: And maybe because it’s something you can’t do in your home town that’s what makes it so liberating and why people come and even if you’re not dressing up, it’s just being in an atmosphere where people do and it’s quite hedonistic and it’s like being in Brighton.

(Big Chill Group Interview 1: 1 male, 2 female)

A critical part of Paul’s experience was escaping constraints and being part of the hedonistic festival atmosphere, which he constituted as personally liberating. Similarly Reading festival goers described it as a place where everyday conventions and cultural barriers were discarded, allowing a dystopian embodiment of youthful revelry and drunkenness where the playful and even infantile was an essential part of the experience:

Cath: It’s total like escapism.

Yvonne: You know people run round and like they make such a big deal over stupid things like trolleys you know, it is so much fun it’s just

Grace: Hmm we dressed up as super heroes yesterday and made songs about different things. It was great.

Yvonne: Yeah and it was just to have a laugh and kind of get away

Cath: But it is like you’re in a totally different world and you know anything goes like you know

Yvonne: Nobody cares about what anyone does and it’s great.

(Reading Group Interview 8: 2 male, 4 female)

Participants at both events expressed similar, if less constructive, self-making desires to those identified by [Kim and Jamal \(2007\)](#). They suggested they were able to behave in a way that would not be acceptable outside of the liminal space of this music festival. Although it was a temporary practice, engaging in activities such as dressing up in costumes served as a vehicle for self-expression and as a display of the suspension of everyday conventions.

Sarah: I don’t want to get so drunk though. I want to actually remember the bands and stuff.

Patsy: It’s a release though isn’t it for lots of people. It’s like we were saying, the majority of people here are being quite eccentric. They’d normally be working in a bank and wear a suit Monday to Friday and they come away for the weekend, get absolutely hammered, take loads of drugs, go slightly mental.

Dave: Yeah, have their wacky weekend being, yeah dressed like a fairy and then go back to normality kind of thing (Laughter) as opposed to the, yeah.

(Reading, Group Interview 8: 2 male, 4 female)

The quotidian life typified here by wearing a suit and working in a bank is contrasted with the release associated with getting dressed up, hammered, taking drugs and acting in an eccentric manner. These expressions of personal freedom, being able to go beyond even the bounds of legality are expressed primarily in a sense of bodily freedom. While these experiences may not be symptomatic of a truly authentic experience for all, the activities mirror the bodily feelings of sexual experience and alcohol consumption identified by [Kim and Jamal \(2007\)](#) among their medieval festival goers as existentially authentic.

For the participants at the Big Chill, the self-making was associated less with the music but with practices such as sitting around, talking to friends and just seeing what was going on. This relaxed way of life was referred to by some as something they would like to have in their real lives “back home”. Many participants juxtaposed how they could be at the festival, with the personas they inhabited in their everyday lives:

Trudy: . . . with what I’ve heard from all the festivals this felt like the one that I thought would make sense to me more; like Reading and stuff never really appealed to me. Like the whole life of the campsite and then you come to see the music whereas I don’t really come, . . . the music is really the bonus. I come to live the way that I want to live every day for a weekend but I haven’t found a way of doing that in real life yet. Yet.

(Big Chill Interview 6: 2 men, 1 woman)

Trudy compared two lives, that of her so-called “real life” and that experienced at the Big Chill. This resonated with many accounts of feeling free expressed by the Big Chill participants. Rather than illustrating the balance between the reality and pleasure principle (Wang, 1999), which allows self-expression in contrast to the norms of the work environment, Trudy would have liked her experience to be more than a liminal moment in time. Trudy came for “the whole life” encapsulated in this festival to which the music was not central, but a bonus.

The findings show how through co-creation of experiences the two British music festivals enable participants to experience “authentic life” (Cohen, 1988, 373). Buchmann et al. (2010) considered that the extent to which a tourist might find their experiences authentic were constituted by a “collusion” across setting, other people and the tourist’s interaction with these elements. In this study we considered whether the co-created music festival could lead to an affective practice that when imbricated with the social and the personal could be described as authentic. The participants’ behaviour and responses have resonance with the findings of Kim and Jamal (2007), in their acceptance of the commercial festival setting, contradicting a view that such attractions are merely spectacle or inauthentic. These are places where the combination of the physical, social and material produce an organic whole (Wetherell, 2012) where people can feel “belonging” with “like-minded” others; this constitutes the music festival aura.

The Reading and Big Chill music festivals were experienced by many participants as spaces ‘apart’ from everyday life (Morgan, 2007), despite their commercial nature. The settings were developed and produced with the intention of engaging with different target segments. Mike and Sue, attending the Big Chill, presented themselves as adults in opposition to the “kids” that frequent the Reading Festival and turn it into a “refugee camp”. The festivals are organised to allow people to drift around and stumble upon the unexpected whether that is other people or new experiences; this socio-spatial aspect is an essential part of the authentic experience. Few participants captured the festival experience as going to see a particular act, what might be considered to be the source of objective authenticity, rather it was the aura of the event they that most excited them.

In Cohen’s terms it would seem that for participants in this research authenticity remains a ‘negotiable’ concept (Cohen, 1988), and one that may emerge in different ways in different places over time. Regular festival goers such as Trudy, Sharon, Mike, Rich and Sue experienced hot authentication (Cohen & Cohen, 2012), self-reinforcing their performative practices across place and time (Zhu, 2012). They may experience existential authenticity through their individual self-discovery and their feeling of belonging to liminal places with like-minded others at different times. They bring their own memories to the process of place making. Performativity, therefore, plays a role in connecting the social the individual, the place, the past and the present (Wetherell, 2012).

For others such as Paul, Cath and Patsy, music festivals could be a catalyst (Brown, 2013) for living temporarily in a more authentic way and allowing them to examine and evaluate their lives at home. For Sharon it was the *communitas* (Turner, 1974) experienced as a regular festival goer that gave her a sense of “belonging” from “being around like-minded people” that become “like your family”. The different experiences of participants at these music festivals reflect the variety of possibilities that can exist together in one place. This may include acceptance or resistance to the choreography of the event or the prescription of their roles and their own bodily and social dispositions. As Edensor notes (2009, 551), it is “essential to acknowledge the affordances of place and space, those qualities that are spatial potentialities, constraining and enabling a range of actions”. We acknowledge the potentiality of individual and collective imaginaries experienced and the different ways of being that festival goers could embody (Nash, 2000).

The research has shown how the festival setting and the participant’s relationship with it contextualises and enables identity practices and *communitas* thus extending the importance of the socio-spatial in tourists’ experiences of authenticity. The setting, despite its commoditised nature, is co-produced with participants and this appears to aid in the process of removal from the routine. Its commoditisation, rather than destroying its meaning (Cohen, 1988), allows participants to identify the right place for them and also illustrates the importance of what Goulding and Shankar, (2011, p. 1450) in their study of club culture referred to as “the dynamic and mutually beneficial interplay between producer and consumer”. In terms of their self-making, participants were able to be a different, or in Kim and Jamal’s terms, an alternative self which included being able to dress up and be silly particularly for those attending the Reading Festival where they could be “eccentric” and “slightly mental” but which in its most profound incarnation allowed Trudy to live in a way that was most true to how she wanted to be all the time. While for some, festivals are probably no more than a “wacky weekend” for others there is a sense of a place apart where they can be something closer to their real selves with like-minded people. Therefore the place enables but does not ensure authentic experiences as the true self remains, as Sartre noted, dependent on choice (1948 [1973]).

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined how two forms of contemporary music festival, different in setting, structure and management, produce alternative touristic experiences. The management of each festival anticipates and caters for a particular set of consumption practices, which intersect in the construction of the festivals as bounded locations providing different experiential settings that resonate with particular subgroups of festival consumers. Although the process of collaboration and co-creation is a commercial imperative it does not make the participants’ experiences any less authentic and they often take the initiative in co-creating experiences of authenticity. The socio-spatial engagement that contributes to the music fes-

tival is both individually and collectively performed to create the festival aura which is dynamic, performative and communicative. Festival goers contribute to the production of this aura along with the other overlapping elements of the festival place and experience which together create socio-spatial authenticity.

Both festivals are presented by their respective organisers and audiences as non-mundane places apart from ordinary life, where everyday conventions and demands are momentarily suspended. We argue that authenticity can therefore be constituted through people's relationship with the festival setting and how it contextualises and enables identity practices and communitas reflecting Rickly-Boyd's (2012a, p. 270) concept of aura as "an engagement", in terms of the performative and communicative properties that it engenders among festival goers. In this paper we have responded to Belhassen et al. (2008) who called for a greater understanding of the socio-spatial aspects of tourism experiences and in doing so we have also shown how "places are something we authenticate through our emotional/affective/sensuous relatedness to them" (Rickly-Boyd, 2013, p.681). Steiner and Reisinger assert that "the existential self is transient, not enduring, and not conforming to a type" (2006, p.303). This is what we observe in terms of the different festival experiences participants seek and enjoy, be it communitas, playfulness, freedom or different ways to live. The placeless place of a music festival is notably devoid of "real" inhabitants and "real" communities (unlike those of Belhassen et al.,2008; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Lamont, 2014) but is a liminal place claimed by its temporary occupants as a site of social identification, which reinforces an intense, albeit ephemeral, sense of touristic communitas (Wang, 1999). Showing how such temporary places can co-create authentic experiences of this kind is a contribution to the research on touristic places as sites of authentic experience. We recognise, however, that wanting to be one's true self remains subjective in nature and while the festival, its place and its sociality offer some the escape from the mundane world into something that is better and closer to how they want to be, for others it may be little more than a timely distraction.

The distinction between the everyday world outside and music festivals is encapsulated in the way in which these two settings are constituted and negotiated, where the everyday world is represented as a site of task and goal-orientated instrumental activities, while the festival is a place of expressive activities which are invested with symbolic value and personal meaning. Music festivals such as these can therefore, be said to present forms of emergent authenticity within a commoditised setting (Cohen, 1988) where people do experience a sense of escape and personal freedom from their everyday lives.

While different, both festivals offer the opportunity to experience intra-personal existential authenticity through release and "going free" and inter-personal existential authenticity through liminal communitas not apparently experienced in their everyday lives (Wang, 1999). The study therefore not only shows how integrating the physical environment is important to understanding experiences of authenticity but also how important it is even when the places experienced are constructed and liminal.

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