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Emmanuel Négrier

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## FESTIVALISATION : PATTERNS AND LIMITS

Emmanuel Négrier

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The rapid development of arts festivals in the past quarter century should not make us forget that such festivals are a relatively new phenomenon in Europe, and that their current 'explosion' goes hand in hand with a growing differentiation in the events/festivals market (Klaić 2008). Notwithstanding the long history of major events, the social, economic and cultural phenomenon that we associate with the 'Festivalisation of Culture' is much more recent. It is also linked to a plurality of causes, such as the evolution of democratic regimes (notably in Southern Europe), or the decentralization of power in France (Négrier, Jourda 2007).

What is meant by 'festivalisation' is the process by which cultural activity, previously presented in a regular, on-going pattern or season, is reconfigured to form a 'new' event e.g. a regular series of jazz concerts is reconfigured as a jazz festival. Festivalisation also describes the process by which cultural institutions, such as a cinema, theatre, arts centre or gallery orient part of their programme around one or more themes or events, concentrated in space and time. Festivalisation therefore results in part from the 'explosion' of festivals, but also from some 'eventalisation' of regular, cultural offers. The current situation in the European cultural sector shows an interesting tension between the two phenomena.

On the one hand, much research in the cultural field is still focused on building based, traditional venues, fixed locations, seasons, i.e. the general idea of permanence. On the other hand, the recent focus on cultural development has led to increased attention being paid to cultural activities that are temporary and more ephemeral. This is why Klaić's vision for the European Festivals Research Project (EFRP) network with other scholars should be applauded, as it brought together research and praxis.

The purpose of this paper is twofold<sup>1</sup>. On the one hand, it relates festivalisation to more global trends affecting Western societies, and specifically those which social scientists have identified from their research into the cultural field and elsewhere. The first section will discuss several transformations (processes) which are at the heart of the transformation of our relationship to culture and particularly to the festivals' sector. We make the assumption that festivalisation is something that goes beyond national and European borders and beyond the limits of the performing arts. In the second part of this paper, a critical analysis of these changes will be presented which will draw on research into festivals' audiences. It will focus on the differences in motivation, intensity, style, practices that exist within festivals' audiences. These differences are sometimes traceable to national characteristics, even if the latter are weaker today than yesterday (Bonet and Négrier 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper presents analysis already published in Spanish under the title « La festivalización de la Cultura. Una dialéctica de los cambios de paradigma », in Lluís Bonet et Hector Schargorodsky (dir.), *La gestión de festivales por sus protagonistas*, Barcelona : Gescénic 2012, p.17-32

## 1. Festivalisation as a new cultural repertoire

The first part of the paper will consider the development of festivals as expressions of larger developments that affect our relationship to culture. A festival, as an object, and festivalisation, as a phenomenon, can be argued to be the crystallisation of changes that have been identified by a variety of researchers in very different fields of cultural analysis. These developments, because they relate to different research fields, are generally treated separately. Here the object 'festival' enables us to ask questions that relate to both. This will be completed in two stages.

We will first note some categories of change and the associated trends that can be observed today. The six "categories" shown below are only part of those we could identify with a larger study and report. But nonetheless these help us to characterise what the process of festivalisation means from a social science perspective.

The table below sets out the categories and trends with a classic, older view on the left, and a more contemporary perspective that challenges it, on the right. We comment briefly on each of these trends.

### Changing Trends in Society's Relationship to Culture

Cultural Permanence	➡	Ephemeral, Presentism
Asceticism	➡	Hedonism
Classical individualism	➡	Tribalism, new-individualism
Cultural Legitimacy	➡	Eclecticism, diversity
Cultural Specialization	➡	Flexibility, tolerance, muddling
Inheritance	➡	Path

The change from cultural permanence towards more ephemeral experiences is one that some might describe as a negative phenomenon. This is because the focus and legitimisation of cultural policies and decisions about which cultural activity merits public support are largely based around places, seasons, and the primacy of cultural permanence (Dubois 1999). The spontaneous, unbridled and ephemeral vision of festivals' audiences and their relationship to culture and the arts appear less compatible with this model. The association with 'cultural permanence' also created an association between policy, funding and cultural forms in which the audience brings a commitment to learning (and the development of their cultural capital). By comparison much contemporary cultural development is increasingly being influenced by what Hartog called "presentism", i.e. a culture that lives only in the moment (Hartog 2003) or in more or less random patterns, a culture Zygmunt Baumann has defined as "liquid" (Baumann 2011). Permanent zapping, the "gas" aspect of contemporary cultural practices (Michaud 2003), corresponds to what the philosopher finds in the world of the feast. They also correspond to some more concrete findings too: the decline in the market for subscriptions and late booking by audiences of tickets for shows, except for those that

the public rates as a truly exceptional event. Amongst others, we could mention here festivals like Glastonbury in the UK, Bayreuth in Germany, or the Paléo Festival de Nyon, in Switzerland, that can sell out several months before they run, on the basis of their reputation not their programme, that are sometimes still only partially confirmed when the sold out happens. The nature of our relationship to classical culture would have been broken and would be rebuilding according to new, distinct rhythms. Festivals, it is argued, would be an obvious expression of this development.

The transition from asceticism to hedonism goes hand in hand with this category. It is an old debate for philosophers and sociologists of culture (Veblen 1899, Donnat 2009), who forecast the decline of this kind of culture that society cannot appreciate without experiencing a certain degree of asceticism, while in its place is substituted a culture more associated with notions of entertainment, leisure, hedonism (Rodriguez Morató 2007). Festivalisation seems to correspond well to this decline of cultural asceticism.

The transition from classical individualism toward tribalism or new individualism, is another important perspective. Classical individualism - in the sense of the social construction of the individual - included a personal and institutional relationship to culture (Finkelkraut 2002); a quality embodied in the concept of the honest man, "mature and calm" (Tocqueville 1892). But what we see more of today is that cultural consumption is inherently a social activity. The number of people who attend a cultural event on their own is small. This collective participation in cultural activity is not limited to what some sociologists have called the ambiguous and vague term 'tribe' (Maffesoli 1991). It also reflects the diverse perspectives of what we might call the "second individualism" (Corcuff, Bart & The De Singly 2010), i.e. a collective practice indeed, but limited, and marked by short-termism and continuous change (Elliot, Lemert 2009). Such a practice is not contradictory but complementary to the end of the great collective narratives and practices, such as activism, for example (Ariño 2010).

Understanding the transition from cultural legitimacy towards eclecticism is partly informed through a sociological analysis of cultural practices. Cultural legitimacy predicts a strong correlation between a person's upbringing in terms of education and family background and their interest in those levels of artistic expression that are colloquially described as high or elitist art (Bourdieu & Darbel 1969). However, other research has not supported that view but instead revealed that people's cultural choices may be more diverse and eclectic (Donnat 1994). This research showed that those who are the most active are not necessarily followers of culture, in an elitist sense. Instead they are essentially eclectic, and able to move easily between 'high art' and 'low art', by which we mean art that requires less cultural capital to understand and enjoy it. This shift of legitimacy toward eclecticism led some to think about access to culture in a new way. Inequality was seen as referring less to the "quality" of cultural consumption by the elite, than to that group's ability to consume more of everything, in all categories, and also in larger quantities than others (Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007).

This theme is also closely associated with the sociology of taste (Peterson 1992). While a theory of legitimacy may demonstrate the existence of stratified tastes based on a hierarchy strongly related to structural variables, empirical studies give us a different perspective. Research on taste has demonstrated that there are a wide variety of taste profiles (Négrier, Djakouane and Jourda 2010) which, whilst relating to the social

hierarchy, point to a different conclusion. Consumers of classical music may, on average, be older, female, and members of higher academic and social categories than others but today those who are exclusively lovers of classical music are in the minority. Most of them combine their love of classical music with other genres, some of which can be very different both aesthetically and "socially." From our survey at the festival *Eurockéennes de Belfort* we found spectators who were simultaneously fans of metal and classical music (Négrier, and Djakouane Jourda 2012).

Consequently, some scholars have developed a new vision of the spectator as less sensitive to the influence of their legacy (Bourdieu 1979) in developing their personal path<sup>2</sup> (Djakouane & Pedler 2003). An individual's relationship to culture, is no longer thought to be influenced exclusively by a person's genetics but by a very wide range of social factors, such as school, family, friends, colleagues or neighbours (Lahire 2004), all of which can contribute as discrete elements to the cultural path that someone travels through life. Monographs dealing with specific venues or festival experiences (Leveratto 2010) show the importance of local contexts in the acquisition of "cultural competence", particularly among socially disadvantaged spectators. But the qualitative optimism of such a notion of path has to be related to a greater pessimism about the quantitative magnitude of the phenomena. The relationship to culture, beyond the strict notion of inheritance, remains subject to the iron law of unequal access. However, while the quantitative statistical analysis of cultural practices tends to engender a certain fatalism about the reproduction of inequalities, the concept of path, more qualitative, offers better opportunities to public action, less pessimistic about the democratization of culture .

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Festivalisation is thus a phenomenon that combines a plurality of theoretical and empirical approaches, involving both consumer practices and tastes, on the one hand, and political and economic strategies of many stakeholders, on the other. This presentation might suggest that this is an irresistible and widespread process. To test this, the six categories were subjected to further critical analysis because for each dimension, the change is not necessarily inevitable, linear, and positive...! The next section relates these points to some research into festivals' audiences.

## **2. Contrasted changing trends**

If the 'explosion' in the number of festivals has been accompanied by a strong differentiation in the nature of the events market, then the social perspectives noted above are definitely affected by these differences. This is the point we will develop in this section through examining how a change of perspective can alter our understanding of the different dimensions. This approach highlights the fact that the categories discussed do not constitute a 'tablet of stone' or a 'road map' but a 'palette' of potential future developments. This reflects previous observations by us that some commentators have misunderstood the theories they were discussing as describing a linear process. If

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<sup>2</sup> Djakouane and Pedler use the term of « carrière » (career) that can be understood, in French, in a broader sense than in English. We use the term « path » in order to respect this mix of legacy from the past and the plurality of determinations and directions one can take.

it is not a question of a particular direction, this is because there is not just one, and for several reasons.

### *What kind of change? From substitution to hybridization*

For most people their relationship to culture is characterised by 'intermediacy' rather than by an affinity to one side or the other. The new practice or behaviour that they adopt does not delete the old one, even if it is now dominant. Thus, when we speak of the rise of eclectic tastes, this does not mean that an individual loses all sense of their own taste or that we become indistinguishable in our selection from the "taste of others" (Négrier, Djakouane, Jourda 2012). This can be observed in the tastes for classical music (e.g. fans of baroque) and for more popular aesthetics (e.g. fans of heavy metal). Fans of particular genres have their reasons for retaining their allegiances so, when devising new products, there are good reasons for taking appropriate account of those people who "resist" eclecticism.

Three important reasons are: One 'resistors' represent a significant percentage of the public. It is therefore logical that they should be taken into account by the organisers of special events. Second they form a symbolically important group for the festival. Indeed, 'fans' are at the heart of the programme (e.g. baroque or heavy metal) and often the movers and shakers behind the public success of any event, and are likely to be among a festival's most loyal audience. Third, they are more motivated to express their satisfaction or their dissatisfaction with respect to a festival's programme. They are therefore important social partners, and not just 'targets' for a festival. Finally, these groups of fans represent a singular identity when compared to the average member of the public: fans of baroque are older and more educated than the average audience; heavy metal fans are overwhelmingly male. Therefore while the trend of festivals for popular music is towards feminisation, we must therefore take great care with our interpretation of the thesis of 'triumphant eclecticism'.

Similarly, the new wave of second individualism, which promotes micro-groups and tribes, speed and constant change, has not diminished the importance of the 'solitary aesthete' at a concert or festival. Again, the solitary spectator most often corresponds to specific characteristics in terms of social practices. Our research shows that in addition to it being hard to be 'lonely' at a festival, first time attenders rarely go along alone; when they do it was found that the solitary spectator is more likely to be male and to have achieved a higher level of education.

One outcome of this research might be that 'festivalisation' is not a source of new practices, but of hybridisation between permanence and transience, between hedonism and asceticism. Thus we observe the growing trend for permanent cultural venues to organise 'special days'. These 'special days' form an important part, in conjunction with the main programme, of many organisations' audience development and long term strategic marketing plans. Such approaches are designed to move people from the outside to the inside in terms of their commitment to a festival and its programme; the future loyal audience. In this way an event can develop a strategic role as part of a long term sustainability plan for a venue.

Consequently, the challenge for a venue becomes one of how to ensure long term benefit from an initiative which can too often be limited to the short term, to the "coup". Indeed the first issue of cultural democratization is certainly the transformation of a non-public into public of cultural offer. Experimental partnership between festivals, cultural venues and social stakeholders generally get a timely success of renewed audiences, with new social profiles, participating in these actions. But the second issue is the transformation of this new public, attracted through an exceptional action, into an ordinary public of culture. And this goal is difficult to achieve (Oldershaw 2011). This is the problem faced by festivals which cooperate with new communities (e.g. economic migrants), and social centres in outlying municipalities, for example. It is the common challenge of cultural democratisation, how to measure the deeper social impact that festivals may deliver, beyond their economic impact (Maughan and Bianchini 2004).

Thus, for each aspect of the festivalisation process, it would be wrong to talk in terms of substitution, because the "old" ways of cultural behavior may coexist with the new ones. It is thus better to oppose diversification of regimes (of practices, of goals, of strategies) and their specific combination in the concrete reality of a festival or a family of festivals, of an individual or a social group. In our recent study, we show for instance that practices, goals and strategies developed by classical festival differ from those implemented by rock & pop festivals, about important themes like cooperation, price fixing, or communication. At a first glance, we could say that these are two festival worlds, one marked by the "old model", and the other by the new one. It would be an error, as in each side one could find different mixes of traditional and innovative tendencies. The mutation is therefore a comparative hypothesis, not the only possible and legitimate trend. This is the reason for this change is structurally uneven (Négrier, Bonet & Guérin 2013).

### *Uneven changes*

All relationships to culture are not affected in the same way by these changes. Thus, with respect to audiences, our research shows that participation in a festival is a social activity, and rarely something that people do alone. This is the default position but the modality changes according to the types of programming. The dominant form of social modality and participation at classical music festivals is the couple. That at popular music festivals it is the group of friends (Négrier, Djakouane, Jourda 2010).

Against the assumption of widespread hedonism, several cultural offers remain for which an ascetic relationship to culture is dominant, sometimes so demanding with regard to the consumption of cultural goods that it looks like suffering is an intrinsic part of the fun of this contact with art. Stéphane Dorin's analysis of the audience of the *Ensemble Intercontemporain de Paris* (Dorin 2011), reflects this high level of requirement with the single statistic: 10% of the audience had a PhD! By contrast other events are more hedonistic, especially the main folk, rock and pop music festivals, which can be seen in the way that the audience 'lives' at the event. But it would be a mistake to confuse hedonism with an 'uncritical' and 'uneducated' relationship of the audience to the cultural offer, or that the audience possessed only limited awareness of the artistic programme they were receiving. On the contrary, in our analysis of *Eurockéennes*, we showed that the audiences' critical knowledge of the artistic offer was at least as high as that of a fan at a great Baroque festival.

## Conclusion

The spectacular impact in the phenomenon of festivalisation can be seen in the 'explosion' in the number of events now on offer. But this is a deceptively simple explanation. Behind this apparent simplicity, we are also seeing a strong differentiation in the events market, as has been described by Dragan Klaic. This differentiation not only relates to the strategies and cultural and artistic objectives of festivals but also to the social practices surrounding participation in festivals. At first glance, we consider, that festivalisation does fit with the anthropological and sociological trends that characterise the contemporary Western world. But some festivals still derive their appeal from traditional practices. So instead of being a monolithic and linear movement, festivalisation is deeply differentiated. This is why it could, under certain conditions, appear as a new modality of cultural policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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