

## Space and Festivalscapes

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### Abstract

In this paper I explore a number of ways in which space and festivals interact. My main concern is to describe the impact of festivals on their host cities and to develop a critical approach to the use of space by festival organisers. Using the ideas of Doreen Massey, Michel Foucault, Gay McAuley and Ric Knowles, this essay explores the relationships that are generated by the placement of festivals in relation to the space in their host communities. The text also questions the traditional conception of empty space, a place without ideologies, and argues for a more open notion which includes dynamic processes of both physical and mental spatial constructions, the burden of ideology implicit in each space, and the diverse ways in which people become attached to particular places. The conceptualisation of space has implications for the way we construct our social relations, and can have an impact on the shaping of festival structures. I consider festivals as meeting points where distinct trajectories coexist and multiple shapes and uses of space are possible. I argue that we have to consider, along with particular forms of interaction with specific spaces, the many possible ways of experiencing them.

### Space and Festivalscapes

Festivals are permeated by conflicting ideologies, and these in turn generate diverse *Festivalscapes*. A Festivalscape is the constellation of contrasting trajectories and flows impelled by local, national, and transnational practices and discourses at a festival. Its constitution can vary radically from event to event due to the different ways the distinct trajectories can articulate in a specific festival. Drawing on Appadurai's definitions of *ideoscapes*, *ethnoscapes* and other terms with the suffix *scape* (indicating relations that are dependent on perspective, and which are inflected by varying socio-historical situations and actors), I argue that Festivalscapes help to delineate a festival's heterogeneity by

foregrounding the impossibility of an event being articulated or experienced in the same way by any two people or groups.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to consider space when investigating the interaction of local, national, and transnational flows present at festivals and the construction of multiple Festivalscapes. The conceptualisation of space has implications for the way we construct our social relations, and can have an impact on the shaping of festival structures. In this essay, I consider festivals as meeting points where distinct itineraries coexist and multiple shapes and uses of space are possible. By considering some theories behind the use of space, I explore the ways in which festivals and space interact to form different Festivalscapes.

Space conditions movement. It gives us dimensions to act upon: scales, textures, colours, and forms. It directs our bodies and shapes the distribution of people; it gives us patterns of movement, and even rhythms and trajectories. Although the way space alters or stimulates our responses is not always evident, all our actions, paraphrasing Gay McAuley, take place within a space (2-3). This notion of space as a container has perhaps led to some theatre practitioners, Peter Brook for example, to conceive of empty space as a vessel to receive the actors' actions. According to this notion, the development of actions is what gives sense and meaning to space, thus relegating it to a subsidiary plane.

The idea of space as a container relates to what Doreen Massey describes as the prioritisation of time over space, and the reduction of space to representation, concepts that she derives from theorists such as Bergson, Deleuze, Zeno, Laclau and de Certeau (*Space* 20-30). In this sense, space is considered to be divisible, static, where only the temporal is mobile. Movement is thus considered as passing from one point to another, traversing the immobile space (23). Actions have duration in opposition to space, which is fixed. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup>For more information see Appadurai, *Disjuncture* 27-47.

space, as something stationary and motionless, has the ability to seize the temporal, the action; it can freeze movement and the flow of life, transforming both into science, or, in other words, an object of study, a representation, a divisible space (25-28). According to Massey, the idea of space as something fixed has led us to see it as a free territory, as something that needs to be filled or conquered. This, in turn, has prompted some researchers to view the conquest of space as an implacable force of nature, a natural and unavoidable condition implicit in space (*Space* 4-5). For if space is a free territory, an expanse, then it remains empty and open to occupation. In other words, considered as an expanse, space cries out to be filled, and therefore, its fate is to be conquered.

For Massey, the idea of space as an expanse is an image that has been constructed to promote globalisation and its consequences (*Space* 5). Space is conceptualised as surface because it can be crossed without taking into account either the people that inhabit that place, or their trajectories. Countries such as Mozambique and Nicaragua are put into a historical queue: they are not recognised as having their own trajectories but instead as forming part of the trajectories of more ‘advanced’ countries (*Space* 5). These countries are seen as empty spaces, as recipients that need to be filled or conquered. This conception, according to Massey, ‘reduces simultaneous coexistence to [a] place in the historical queue’: the conquered countries are not only behind in time but also distant in space (*Space* 5). Consequently, the conception of space as an expanse has implications for the way we construct our relationships with different countries, social formations and human beings.

Massey identifies three points that need to be considered in order to engender a new conception of space: first, the recognition of ‘space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions,’ and the awareness that these interactions occur across the whole planet; second, the understanding of ‘space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which

distinct trajectories coexist' (in this manner, heterogeneity and space implicate one another simultaneously); and third, the recognition of "space as always under construction ... as a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (*Space* 9). Therefore, identities are always changing, in the process of becoming, forging a future open to possibility. Hence, I delineate two main propositions in the theories of Massey discussed above. On the one hand, diversity can be seen as the separation of identities, existing simultaneously in different spaces. This is in line with Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation, imagining others sharing the same conditions and living together simultaneously in time, each individual playing his/her role in the construction of the whole within the same historical conditions, but without necessarily interacting (6-7). On the other hand, diversity considers a fusion, an interrelation between the distinct identities. In this sense, there is, according to Massey, a dynamic simultaneity (*Space* 23): everybody evolves in space and time simultaneously in a net of mutual relations. Consequently, a space is permanently in connection with other spaces and trajectories; space and time are articulated, they are 'places-moments' in evolution.<sup>2</sup> Identities are not isolated entities but processes constructed through numerous dynamics of interchange. Space is a structural part of these dynamics because it helps to build identities. In this conception, space is not static but an entity capable of affecting human trajectories.

Festivals can be seen from a similar perspective because they are not located in an empty space. We should abandon the idea of space as a container or as a site of emptiness, because space bestows our actions with meanings. According to David Wiles, 'Brook's ideal of an "empty space" was always philosophically untenable. In order to take a space and call it a bare stage, he (the unseen director) needs to frame that space, and separate it from the clutter

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<sup>2</sup> '*Lugares momentos*' in the original conception. The notion refers to the way Mexicans conceived space in opposition to Spanish people. That is, as a combined process, without the Western separation into two dimensions: time and space. The concept is taken from Soustelle, J: *La Vida Cotidiana de los Aztecas en Vísperas de la Conquista*. Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956.

round about. The shape and contour of the frame confers an identity on that which is framed' (243). Space provides schemes to receive and understand the actions performed in a designated spot. Space is never empty or absent of ideologies or meanings. Therefore, space design provides a way of seeing and at the same time a way of behaving. Doors, windows, seats, for example, influence the way we perform in space; colours, textures, and lights generate thoughts and feelings.

Festivals 'take place' within specific, local spaces, which already bear the burden of ideologies and memories. In this sense, there exists a correlation between the location of festivals and the host city's spaces. For example, the *Festival de México* (FMX), currently carried out across a number of venues and sites in Mexico City, was previously held in the town centre, a place with abundant historical and ideological implications. Within the town centre it is possible to find Aztec ruins, colonial Spanish churches, and modern buildings, all of them coexisting side by side. These constructions bear witness to the existence of differing ideological trajectories, interactions, and clashes that have helped shape the social landscapes of Mexico City. Therefore, the FMX has had to negotiate its 'placement' with the historical and ideological flows that run within and through the city. The organisers of the FMX have had to implement strategies and dynamics of space appropriation and distribution to deal with the inhabitants of the town centre. It is worth noting that the *Festival de México* started as a small event in the town centre of Mexico City. The former *Festival del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México* was part of a bigger project of redevelopment and economic growth implemented by private and public organisations such as the federal and local governments, and media entrepreneurs. By means of an advisory council, whose prominent head figure was the tycoon Carlos Slim, the project 'Rescate del Centro Histórico' aimed, among other things, to diversify the tourist industry by redefining traditional use of space in the historic centre (Mora 20-24). In this sense, the present-day FMX had to re-negotiate space with social

organisations that were suspicious of private corporations and with city inhabitants who were making the historic buildings their homes. The festival, through artistic events and with the aim of bringing about cultural development, supported the privatising project. In this way, the traditional use of city space has been transformed: the FMX has contributed to the appropriation of old buildings in order to develop a historic-cultural space administered by the private sector.

Festivals can also establish nuanced relationships with the spaces of the host cities. Festivals frame and delimit spaces either by ‘taking place’ just in one venue or zone within the city, or spreading into the streets, parks and other spaces. In doing so, they activate spatial and temporal relationships with other places both within and outside the host city. On the one hand, festivals can be enclosed in a specific spot limiting their presence to a designated place in the city and going almost unnoticed by the community. On the other hand, festivals can try to conquer the host city, to penetrate its daily functioning, and thus exert their influence on the whole community. For instance, the FMX shows the evolution of a festival confined in its beginnings to a designated spot – the town centre – to a festival with activities scattered across different venues and sites in the city. With this expansion, the FMX has increased the diversity and type of activities it offers: the event now comprises not only classical music, as in its beginnings, but also theatre, workshops, concerts, exhibitions and street performances. These new activities have allowed the FMX to reach new audiences, including children and young people, and have created a new type of interaction with the festival community.

Moreover, festivals can scatter their influence to other places and other festivals: for example, advertising campaigns that state ‘as seen in the Edinburgh Festival,’ imply a connection, flow and resonance between different times and places. These connections between disparate geographical sites can also be observed in the similar kinds of performances and themes emphasised by distant festivals. Notably, FMX 2010 foregrounded

internationally renowned performances. Shows such as *Hey Girl!* by Societàs Raffaello Sanzio, an Italian company that has presented work in the USA, Germany, Romania, Canada, Spain, France, Slovenia, and Italy, constitute a key component of the international festival circuit. This international circuit shares cultural products, creating nets of support and interchange. The inclusion of hit performances in this festival circuit also reflects the distribution of an aesthetics that gives prominence to the visual aspects of the performance. In order to appeal to an increasingly numerous and diverse audience, and to avoid the language barrier, these festivals rely on performances that emphasise the visual. Consequently, similar conceptual uses of space travel from country to country, from venue to venue, necessitating the same conceptual use of the set in distant spaces. For example, the type of venue in which the majority of these performances are staged is the so-called Italian design. In this sense, Ric Knowles considers spaces such as the proscenium stage to represent an ideology. For him, the proscenium design in a theatre implies the use of a perspective attributable to an aristocratic order that emerged in the seventeenth century: the seat with the best perspective, as well as ‘the best seat for being seen by the rest of the audience,’ was literally ‘that of the king, prince, or duke’ (63). Although the spatial design remains, to some extent, the same for each festival that forms part of the international circuit, this does not indicate that the performance’s meaning remains the same for every community. However, the spatial design conveys a particular conception of the space, an aesthetics that travels from community to community, disseminating in each festival a particular (in this case Western) perspective of theatrical space. Accordingly, the international festival circuit can be considered a one-sided vision that distributes a particular conception or aesthetics of space.

However, it is not only place that conditions the meaning of a festival, nor only the festival’s activities that imprint meaning on the host city’s space. Instead, meaning is found precisely in the mutual interaction between space and event. Therefore, space at festivals is

always under construction. For instance, an intervention of an event in a community can frame the space in a different way, creating or constructing a new sense of place.<sup>3</sup> Further, festivals can designate specific spots for particular performances, which contradict the normal functions of these places, establishing a dialogue between their historical and/or traditional meaning and the new relationships brought about by a different kind of use. For example, the *Festival de Teatro Container* is known for generating a huge urban intervention through the installation of equipped containers as small theatres in the hills and squares of Valparaíso, Chile. In this sense, there is a dialogue between the city's historical identities and those of the performances and containers, which refer to the production and transportation of goods around the globe. In this way, performances can reach remote places, where there is normally no theatre, and interact with inhabitants there. Festivals are not simply located against a background – an immobile context, a place lacking in agency – but rather enacted through spatial and temporal framings. They flow into the space and time of a city, propelling a trajectory, mobilising structures and conventions. Thus, the use of space becomes central to the negotiation of a festival's principles and the dissemination of its perspectives.

In one way festivals resemble heterotopias because they embrace both tensions and contradictions in relation to the use of the space. Foucault describes heterotopias as mirrors, a metaphors for the double meanings and contradictions contained in a space, or the reality and the unreality of spaces (that is, the inversion of relations that some spaces designate or reflect). Heterotopias are unreal places because the image that these spaces project, and that we perceive, does not exist. But they are also real, because the projected image or imagined space materially shapes the way we relate to the actual place. Foucault lists several possible types of heterotopias or spaces that have double meanings. For example, a garden is a

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the 1996 Adelaide Festival was constructed trying to respond to the city's history and identity through the use of specific spaces within the city. See Hunter.



heterotopia because it is a real space intended, through its incorporation of plants from around the world, as a microcosm of different environments; it contains the world in one place, and, as such, is both particular and general at the same time. Museums constitute another kind of heterotopia because they are 'linked to slices in time' (26). They deconstruct traditional understandings of temporality, either by accumulating slices of time, or by putting together in one place objects from different times. They enclose in one place 'all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes' and styles (26). Thus, they exist simultaneously in and out of time (22-27).

Similarly, festivals are at once actual and fictional places. They bring into one space, the stage, many different times and places. It is precisely this double meaning that gives festivals a special recognition in societies: their capacity to appear as mirrors, as metaphors, as utopias for specific communities. Festivals construct dualities by accumulating performances from different regions or countries (as in the case of international festivals). They generate a fictional space and time within the real space-time of a community (for instance, the fictional space-time of a particular performance in opposition to the real space-time of the theatre with its curtains, lobby, and lights). They bring together invented stories and situations, and daily activities (for example workshops and performances). In some cases, they are oriented to remain in the collective memory of the target community, to preserve the memories of a specific local culture (as in the festivals to honour local figures or important dates/events that become a hallmark of the cultural development of a community); but they are also ephemeral acts, fictional spaces that disappear as soon as the activities finish. Moreover, they can 'create a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] as still more illusory' (Foucault 27). For instance, when there is a gathering of people from many different countries, the festival can create the illusion of a place where disparate cultures coexist in harmony, and from there a festival utopia, a site where differences between cultures are dissolved. They can also transform a local city into a fantasy city (as tourist centres where the

whole city is festivalised), or provide the illusion of their functioning as ‘a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, [as happy], as meticulous [and] as well arranged’: in other words, contrary to the unhappy ‘messy and ill constructed’ world in which we live (Foucault 27). Thus, festivals contain double spaces: one and many places, real and unreal, normal and extraordinary, chaotic and ordered. Yet, these doubly meaningful spaces provided by festivals need to be constructed. Festivals frame reality – mark and symbolise places and actions. Their spaces embody metaphors through material references and actions, through analogies and parallels with reality. They express a system of preconceptions and assumptions particular to a given community; they reflect and locate the memories of a society.

The relationship between festivals and the space of host cities also depends on the bonds and ties people have with specific places. These connections between places and people are created by the passing of events in a place, by the memories and history incorporated in particular places.<sup>4</sup> According to Ric Knowles, the meaning that a performance acquires in a particular context depends on the performance’s ‘ideological coded material conditions in production, circulation, use and reproduction’ (16-17). For Knowles, ‘the geography of performance is both produced by and produces the cultural landscape and the social organization of the space in which it “takes place”, and to shift physical and/or social space is to shift meaning’ (63). Hence, spaces are not only full of ideology but also inhabited by memories. Even though it is possible to suggest that a particular space has an order – that is, an implicitly biased preconception that conditions its use – this order can, in turn, be modified by the actions performed in such space as time goes by. In other words, the preconceptions

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<sup>4</sup> According to Tacita Dean, place differs from space in that the former is history incorporated and is related to daily life, to the passing of events, while space is considered in a more expansive sense, as a tool to identify the position of things in relation to other things. In opposition to space, place is more related to belonging, something grounded in the particular. Dean considers place as a phenomenal reality that can be contemplated and experimented with, but also as a means to bring memories back. See Dean 11-26.

associated with a given place are both triggered and contested by the accumulation of memory in that designated place.

When a festival project does not consider people's attachments with places of memory, some participants can experience it as an eruption within the host community. The current *Festival de México* was created to save the city centre from deterioration. The developers, with the support of the government, appropriated spaces with the intention of rescuing and restoring historic sites. Behind this idea was the objective of making profit out of the spaces after their refurbishment. People inhabiting these places were then considered an obstacle. The festival, primarily rooted in the city centre, was promoted as bringing new life to this part of the city; this masked the deals and trade-offs being sealed. Consequently, the *Festival de México* can be conceived as an instrument that aided the gentrification of the city centre. In contrast, it can also be considered an incursion into the normal life of a community, a project that obviates the sense of belonging and attachments people have and looks to commoditise the memories and actions invested in a particular place for a community.

The ideology behind the use of space by festivals also relates to perspective in terms of the attitude festival organisers or participants have to the ideology implicit in a particular place. People can support the festival structure or confront it; they can consider the event a stratagem for the plundering of cultural artefacts, an instrument of domination, or an ally in the production and maintenance of locality. It is also possible to find different ideological standpoints in the use and arrangement of the space in a single festival. The position of the festival in relation to its background and context, the order of the events within the festival itself, the location of performances in specific sites or venues, the setting of artists and audience within a space, and the distribution of people in the space can drive festivals to multiple outcomes and prompt people to experience a variety of different Festivalscapes.

Festivalscapes can help to analyse the metaphors and ideologies propelled by diverse local, national or transnational trajectories at festivals, as well as the power relationships that these transactions imply. The concept can also shed light on the interaction and articulation of differing ideological standpoints and how they acquire form through cultural artefacts, spatial arrangements and participants' actions. An international festival does not mean the absence of local or global forces; on the contrary, these forces come together in one place and time, manifesting their ideologies through spatial arrangement and actions. The social, political, aesthetic or spatial arrangements can, in turn, help to frame the way people from different communities perceive and judge festivals. Festivals act as frameworks in which human actions are developed and imbued with meaning; they help to construct social life at the same time as they reflect it.

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