

MORE THAN WORDS: ANALYZING THE MEDIA DISCOURSES SURROUNDING DANCE MUSIC EVENTS

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Over recent decades the number of festivals occurring annually has grown exponentially, with one area of events witnessing significant growth being dance music festivals—outdoor events that feature various genres of electronic dance music. This article contributes to the academic study of festivals by exploring the discourses surrounding the construction and consumption of dance music events within the niche media that support and inform the various scenes represented under the umbrella term “dance culture.” A central tenant of this article is that the positive and sensationalist reporting of events by the media and the discourses they construct surrounding events is a driver of demand for large scale events. Through studying the lexicon of the dance music media this article reveals and dissects pertinent discourses surrounding the reporting of events, which emphasize cultural significance and the centrality of events to contemporary dance music culture through a variety of means.

Key words: Dance music; DJs; Festivals; Media discourse; Demand; Expectations; Experiences; Norms and values

Introduction

The role of the media and its influence in contemporary society is widely acknowledged and researched in terms of many domains of social and political activity (Barker, 2000; Briggs & Cobley, 1998; Lewis, 2002); however, the role of the media (specifically magazines) in the social construction of events and specifically dance events has received little academic recognition or discussion to date. This is surprising considering the range of media

studies that have demonstrated the role of the media in informing and constructing sociocultural values (e.g., Barker, 2000; Briggs & Cobley, 1998; Cohen, 1972; Lewis, 2002) and its obvious influence on various elements and aspects of dance music culture (Brewster & Broughton, 2000; Bussman, 1998; Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1995). The media plays a central role in the dissemination of information and knowledge in contemporary society, and despite the contentious nature of media objectivity, holds great power in constructing social discourses.

Within dance music culture as a whole and more specifically within subsections of dance culture, various ideological discourses are promoted by the media, both overtly and covertly, directly and indirectly. These are the doctrines that form the core and structure of these cultures, the features that give them strength and credibility, what makes them unique and different, and ultimately what participants buy into as confirmation of their membership. Ideology is a key element of cultural institutions and a particular feature of media analysis. As Firth (1997) comments:

The question common to studies of all media . . . concerns ideology. How do different media work ideologically? What are their ideological effects and how are they achieved? At issue here is the concept of signification: how do different media organize the meanings with which and on which they work? (p. 163)

Events are central to dance music culture, being the point where the numerous cultural components converge, where participants meet and DJs perform; they are the sites where discourse and ideology becomes reality, creating the most dynamic aspect of dance culture. Therefore, due to their importance, a significant proportion of the media coverage focuses upon events, reporting on past events and building anticipation for future ones and constructing a number of evocative and interrelated discourses around them. It is the nature of this coverage, which is the focus of this article, that examines how media portrayals not only signify the importance of events, but also how their discourses assert and perpetuate the behavioral norms and values associated with them. This is accomplished by examining selected articles in three dance music magazines (*DJ*, *Mixmag*, and *Knowledge*) and establishing the key themes emerging both overtly and covertly through the use of language, images, and terms of reference in a number of selected articles.

Analysis of media depictions of events, both past and future, foregrounds a number of key themes, which are common to dance music magazines. In practice, as much of the ideology of dance culture is interrelated and interdependent, there is a degree of overlap between many of the discourses that support them, while some discourses converge and are intertwined within several themes. However,

for the purposes of this article emerging themes were separated to facilitate analysis. Within the first section “size and significance” consideration is given to the textual and visual portrayal of events in terms of “social spaces” and “focal points.” The subsequent sections consider “moments and the experiential,” particularly how the media emphasize the ephemeral and unique attributes of events and “behavioral norms and values,” how dance events are socially constructed as places of hedonism and escapism. The key contributions of this article are therefore to reveal and discuss the media contribution to the social construction of events and the spaces they transform and also to apply the technique of discourse analysis to the study of events in general, for these are both underexplored areas to date.

Literature Review

Such is the relationship between events and the media that many events would not and could not exist without the media attention attributed to them. Indeed, Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, and McDonnell (2011) comment that “events now have a virtual existence in the media at least as powerful as reality” (p. 238). Not only do the media inform people of certain events and play a role in attracting sponsors and generating revenue, they also play a huge role in their social construction and the pleasures associated with their consumption within the minds of consumers. As Getz (2007) highlights “media coverage of events can have global reach, influencing people around the world” (p. 309) and such coverage has the power to construct and reconstruct images of events and the destinations where they take place (Boccia, Agolo, Leandro, Gomes, & Fonseca, 2010). It cannot be denied that the manner, language, symbolism, images, and tone utilized in media reporting of events is of huge significance in terms of motivating people to attend specific events. Through constructing powerful discourses that resonate with the target markets for specific events, the media are central to the creation and consumption of a whole host of events. However, central to these processes are also the receptivity of participants to the various different media formats and channels.

Briggs and Cobley (1998) stress that “much of our media consumption is specialized . . . and

motivated by specific enthusiasms and prejudices” (p. 11), with particular groups predisposed to consuming certain media forms. Such predispositions also influence individuals’ interpretations of the media they consume and the discourses they encounter within such publications. Holding similar ideological stances and values on key issues leads a majority of consumers to similar conclusions upon engagement with particular texts. Lewis (2002) describes this phenomenon as the “dominant or preferred reading . . . processes whereby audience members draw on their knowledge of culture, cultural values, and cultural norms” (p. 137) to gain a similar interpretation. Accepting this theoretical reasoning, analysis of the dance music media and its discourses can provide further insights into the sociocultural mechanics of dance music events and the relationship between events and the media more generally.

Thornton (1997), in her seminal work on dance music culture, also highlighted the central role of the media in disseminating cultural knowledge commenting:

It is impossible to understand the distinctions of youth subcultures without some systematic investigation of their media consumption. For within the economy of subcultural capital the media is not simply another symbolic good or marker of distinction . . . but a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge. (p. 203)

However, despite making this bold statement, Thornton (1997) failed to engage in any significant analysis of the media, beyond addressing the receptivity of participants in youth cultures to messages received through different media vehicles. While niche and micromedia such as flyers and magazines were thought to be central to the dissemination of cultural knowledge, positive mass media coverage of subcultures was the antithesis of subcultural credibility. The implications of this are that within youth cultures, the niche media play a central role in the construction and dissemination of knowledge and discourse surrounding events. However, to date there has been little systematic analysis of the role of magazines in the social construction of dance music and other events.

In addressing the sociocultural constitution of dance culture it is also important to view subcultural

ideologies and the discourses that create them “not as innocent accounts of the way things really are but as ideologies which fulfill the specific agendas of their beholders” (Thornton, 1995, p. 10). This further consolidates the case for detailed media analysis, as magazines constitute key vehicles for the dissemination of cultural information and in the process of disseminating information and knowledge they play a major role in the ideologies and discourses of dance music culture on a number of levels. Thus, they promote and perpetuate particular views held by specific journalists (sometimes overtly sometimes covertly); they create awareness of and thus sustain ideologies held by specific groups within dance culture; they play a major role in disseminating cultural norms and values; they assert the value and cultural significance of the components of dance culture, identifying what, or who, is fashionable, acceptable, worthy of celebration and so forth; and finally they are also central to the social construction of events. Different media publications therefore act as a form of authority for their reader groups, with their different messages received with varying levels of credibility dependent upon the receptivity of individuals to various discourses. What is undeniable is the power that niche media vehicles hold in determining the direction and development of niche cultures.

In terms of analyzing cultural texts (including magazines) semiotics is a critical consideration; semiotics “argues that elements of a text derive their meaning from their interrelation within a code rather than looking at them as discrete entities to be counted” (Slater, 1998, p. 238). Semiotics is concerned with the generation of meaning through signs, representing a “theory of signs and symbols, especially the nature and relationship of signs in language” and as such it is a method of analyzing “signs in language” (Turner, 1982, pp. 20–21). Although authors such as Turner (1982) consider semiotics as primarily related to the study of language, others such as Williamson (1978), Hall (1997), and Slater (1998) consider it applicable to the study of all signs within systems of cultural signification. Hall (1997) and Slater (1998) consider that anything, which bears meaning within a culture, can be read as a cultural text using the methods of semiotics; indeed, cultural texts are not necessarily restricted to things created to convey

meaning, “the way people dress, the foods they chose to eat . . . can all be read as cultural texts” (Slater, 1998, p. 234).

Semiotics does not take things at their face value but looks deep into the combinations of symbols apparent and suggested, to try and discover their intended and actual meaning and significance (Storey, 2001). It analyzes how different elements come together to form an interpretable and influential whole, seeking to identify and contextualize symbols, discovering their meaning through their positioning with and relationship to other symbols. As Slater (1998) comments, “words do not derive their meaning either from the psychological intentions of individual speakers, or from the things the words describe. Rather their meanings arise from their place in a system of signs and their relations of difference or sequence with other terms in the system” (p. 238).

The meaning and cultural significance of language can be approached by breaking down words, images, and objects into several categorizations; thus, a word or image becomes a sign, which is broken down into two components the signifier and the signified (Robson, 2002). The signifier is the image or sound of the word and applies to signs whether in written or verbal form. The signified is the meaning of the sign to recipients upon hearing or seeing the sign, the ideas, and images associated with the signifier (Williamson, 1978). Signs gain much of their significance and meaning through their relationships to other signs and their location within systems of signification. Therefore, not only do we understand and interpret signs due to what they are, but also due to what they are not in relation to other signs (Saukko, 2003). Significance is thus created through differentiation between the signified meanings of signs, and their location and contextualization within given situations. This entails that the meaning of signs is highly dependent on social and cultural values and norms. As Slater (1998) states, “the relationship between signified and signifier is a conventional social or cultural one, one that is internal to the system of meaning operating in a particular culture at a particular time” (p. 239).

Williamson (1978) also raises another aspect of signs, that of their referent, this is the objectified embodiment of the sign, in its material, physical form. The referent is external to the sign and as

such the usage of signs is not directly determined by their referents, but by the knowledge and perspectives of those using the sign (Hall, 1997). Therefore it is partially through the use of language that we construct and shape our social worlds, whilst our social worlds also shape and construct our use of language. As Slater (1998) comments, “languages do not neutrally reflect or mirror or correspond to the objective world, but rather different languages produce a different sense of the world” (p. 239).

Signs can also be broken down into two further categories or “systems of signification; denotation and connotation” (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 5). Denotation refers to the widely accepted and understood interpretation of signs within a specific culture; that is, “the descriptive and literal level of meaning generated by signs and shared by virtually all members of a culture” (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 5). Connotation therefore relates to the placement and connection of signifiers “within wider cultural codes of meaning” (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 5). Thus, while denotation concerns literal meanings, what is visible within an image, what is apparent about an object, and what particular words define. Connotation is concerned with feelings and/or ideas, wider cultural beliefs, and ideological codes and perspectives suggested by particular words, objects, images, and combinations of these (Hall, 1997). Through deconstructing articles and revealing the multiple layers of meaning within media reporting, discourse analysis can reveal much about the worlds of the cultures they represent.

Methodology: Carrying Out Discourse Analysis

In the process of analyzing cultural texts a number of methods are available to researchers, for example content analysis is one means of analyzing cultural texts. Content analysis takes a quantitative approach to textual analysis and is concerned with categorizing terms and themes and counting the frequency of appearance of sought data. Fundamentally, as with most quantitative research, content analysis must emerge from a research question and has limited exploratory capabilities, as Carney (1973) states “content analysis gets the answer to the question to which it is applied” (p. 284). While very appropriate to assessing the quantity of coverage

attributed to specific elements within a media publication (e.g., sport, politics, events, and so forth) content analysis reveals less about the nature of the discourses constructed by the media and the means through which discourse based agendas are conveyed and promoted within specific media vehicles.

As this research was exploratory in nature and given the significance of semiotics, discourse analysis was selected as the primary research method. The initial step in carrying out discourse analysis requires the selection of the data sources (Stokes, 2003; Tonkiss, 1998). While there is a range of dance music specific and related magazines, three magazines were selected as the focus for this research: *DJ*, *Knowledge*, and *Mixmag*. These publications were chosen for the various subgroups within dance music culture they target, the differences in their appearance, and the duration for which they have been publishing (all for over 10 years). Over 40 articles were analyzed from these publications, although not all feature in the discussions here and in total the research spanned a period of 7 years. The findings in this article are the result of extensive reading and analysis of selected articles to ascertain key themes, which were then further explored through the analysis of subsequent articles.

When conducting discourse analysis the researcher seeks to analyze the presentation of opinions, views, and facts, through deconstructing and analyzing the use of language, particularly with regards to combinations of terms, points of reference, points of contrast, and social contexts. It is nonlinear in nature and requires a circular approach to the data (selection of and familiarization with the text, analysis, extraction of key points, rereading the text, and so forth) (Saukko, 2003). In analyzing texts the chosen approach was to decipher the key themes within the text, then analyze it in detail to reveal how such portrayals are constructed and authenticated within the context of the text and the wider culture to which it corresponds (Tonkiss, 1998). In line with semiotic analysis, particular emphasis and consideration was given to the emotive and connotative nature of the terms used to portray various aspects of dance culture and the combinations of terms used. Investigating definitions and the denotations and connotations of such definitions within the specific contexts of their application was a key feature of this approach.

Specific articles were copied, with sections and key descriptive terms identified; these were then explored in terms of the literal meanings of what was being conveyed and the connotations of the specific terms given the cultural context they were situated within and how this related to and underpinned specific discourses (i.e., size and significance, behavioral norms and values, moments and the experiential, and so forth).

The conduct of discourse analysis therefore entails much "sorting, coding, and analyzing" data (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 253), reading texts, highlighting key themes and descriptive processes, and then deconstructing these to facilitate a fuller understanding of their ideological role within this specific culture. Therefore, there must be a continual effort when considering the construction of texts to relate to both the specific social contexts of the given media and widely accepted definitions of key terms. Here cultural knowledge and capital also comes into play, how meaning is built through cross references to other events, places, spaces, DJs, and other markers of cultural worth and distinction. What cultural knowledge must come into play in the interpretation of texts and how are readers rewarded for the possession of this cultural knowledge. It is often the case that the greater the investment of time and effort into the specific culture the more the reader will gain from the media, as through their deeper appreciation and understanding of its facets. Tonkiss (1998) also stresses the importance of "looking for variation in the text" (p. 255), "reading for emphasis and detail" (p. 257), and "attending to silences" (p. 258). Where are the key points of emphasis within specific articles and the sentences that create them, which features are brought to the fore and which are relegated to the background. Such analysis helps identify where the author wishes to focus the reader's attention and the specific discourses they wish to promote. Other issues for consideration in the analysis of discourse concern factors such as equilibrium; as Stokes (2003) states, within certain contexts it is relevant to "identify the 'equilibrium' at the beginning and at the end of the text" (p. 70). Do particular texts readdress and alter power relations and if so how do such functions operate and why are they constructed to operate in such a manner? However, as discourse scholars such as Schiffrin (1994),

Howarth (2000), Bell and Garrett (1998), and Wooffitt (2005) all state, there is no one set methodological approach to conducting discourse analysis due to the complexity of its nature.

At this stage it is also worth considering the processes involved in the analysis of visual texts, as the images utilized are also central to media discourse analysis. The starting point for visual texts is a thorough examination and description of the written and visual ideas and elements of the texts. Stokes (2003) considers this initial stage of analysis should:

Focus on the denotation—where is the setting?—is it urban or exotic? Domestic interior or wild countryside? How many models are there? Describe their pose . . . discuss text and its relationship to image; is color used? How? Try to stick to description of the literal image and text, or what is denoted by the images. (p. 74)

After describing texts in a very literal sense it is then possible to consider the meaning of texts through interpretation. As with written texts interpreting images requires analysis and discussion of “the meanings and implications of each separate sign individually and then collectively” (Stokes, 2003, pp. 74–75). It is at this stage where the connotations of the images and language used must be analyzed for their symbolic significance and how the connotations of image and language relate to wider social conventions and meanings. One must question whether these elements generate the same significance alone or how else they may be interpreted in such a context. Such a process enables the extraction of cultural codes. For instance, “what kinds of cultural knowledge do you need to know to understand the text? How are the images [and language] drawing on our cultural knowledge to help us create particular kinds of meaning?” (Stokes, 2003, p. 75). These forms of cultural knowledge must also be related to the target audience for specific texts and whether they are likely to understand such presentational approaches. Having conducted such a process you are then able to produce generalizations about the nature of the texts, the types of messages they are trying to convey, and the manner in which such communications are conducted.

Results and Discussion: (Don't) Believe the Hype *Size and Significance*

Dance music events and clubs form the core or the “hub” of dance music and club culture (Jackson, 2004; Thornton, 1995; Wilson, 2006). These are the places and spaces that are central and sacred to the participants, spaces imbued with liminal properties (Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010) where all the elements of dance music culture converge to create the much celebrated synergy of cultural forces combining to create unique and fulfilling experiences for attendees. These are the sites and locations where the ideologies and fantasies of participants are lived out, where dance culture becomes more than discourse, and music and everything acquires meaning (Rietveld, 2003).

Events are undoubtedly focal points within dance music culture, they are where the DJs perform to their fans and participants dance to their favorite DJs. They are the location for the synergistic climax of dance music's cultural components, where participants, DJs, music, and technology come together in a dynamic and often drug-fueled environment (Bussman, 1998). They are the sites of playful vitality (Malbon, 1999), where carefully selected crowds come together to dance and socialize (Jackson, 2004). These are the places where participation acquires its full meaning for the devotees of dance, where moments are created and shared amongst friends and strangers, where escapism and hedonism reign supreme, and many of the norms and values of wider society are subverted (Jaimangal-Jones, 2010). These are the places where DJs lead and participants take part in quasi religious experiences—such is their significance that they can be described as the churches and temples of dance culture (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003).

Being the focal points of dance culture, events are spaces where participants congregate and socialize: They are liminal social spaces deeply intertwined with discourses of hedonism and escapism, otherworldly places where prevailing social norms and values lose their grip and alternative role performances are explored (Jackson, 2004; Jaimangal-Jones, 2010). Certainly the lexicon of the dance music media plays a major role in constructing dance events as different, dynamic, and

distinct—both through their social and physical qualities. Conveying the size and significance of different events is a prominent element of media reporting, for there exists a symbiotic relationship between the size and perceived cultural significance of events, with a general preference towards larger events (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010). Scale not only has direct implications for the spectacle, but also for the event's cultural value, and within the media's portrayal of events a plethora of signs is used to emphasize the size and cultural significance of events.

An event review of one of Ibiza's largest clubs "Amnesia," begins as follows:

Searchlights beam through Amnesia's cavernous terrace like something out of a superhero movie. A thousand arms, heads and hearts aim skywards, waiting. The supersonic salvo of a colossal ice cannon blasts out, and the crowd descends into frenzy.

In the booth a figure appears through the smoke as though emerging from an interplanetary spacecraft, eyes glazed and arms outstretched—and Amnesia stands transfixed. Then the bass drops. Paul Van Dyke has Landed, and with this year's Cream opening party, the 2010 Ibiza season has finally, properly, begun. (Monypenny, 2010, p. 46)

Within this article references to a whole range of pertinent discourses are evident, with notions of the spectacle and the size of the event being particularly prominent in addition to the centrality of the DJ themselves—Paul Van Dyke and the crowd response he received. We can see how the size of the event is not only conveyed directly through reference to the thousands present, but also through the "searchlights beam[ing] through Amnesia's cavernous terrace" and the "colossal ice cannon." Here the author creates a spectacular, otherworldly image of this event as a transcendental place, emphasizing the liminal qualities of dance events (Jaimangal-Jones, 2010), while terms such as "beam" and "superhero" also have very positive connotations. The crowd themselves are commonly highlighted within such features and in this instance attention is not only drawn to the numbers, but also to their actions, their receptivity to embracing the moment, and putting their hearts and souls into the party as they "descend into frenzy." Finally we also

have reference to the hosting brand, in this case Cream; they are bestowed with the prestige of organizing this highly successful event and starting the 2010 Ibiza season.

Indeed, when discussing events reference is often made to the cultural standing and competence of the event organizer. Verma (2003) uses the terms "definitive" to describe the organization involved in hosting a particular event and "sprawling" to describe the venue it was staged in. While conveying the size and significance of this event through the use of these words, this opening sentence of an event review immediately adheres to a number of discourses prevalent within the dance music media. Describing the cohost as the "definitive d&b website" (Verma, 2003, p. 76) denotes a highly culturally significant organization. With its connotations of being the authority, the ultimate, the best, the most comprehensive and complete, "definitive" suggests an organization with a weighty cultural influence. Here we can see how the media chooses its words carefully to highlight the importance and competence of the event organizer, validating the event through highlighting the cultural status of the organization behind it. The intangible and temporal nature of dance music events means that many authors emphasize the physical qualities and cultural importance of events through leveraging them off and linking them to more tangible entities.

In the above feature the physical nature of the venue is described as "sprawling," which not only signifies the size of this event, but also hints to its unruly nature. Describing the venue as "sprawling" indicates a large club, with a range of different areas spreading out from one another in haphazard and organic nature; it also creates the impression of a venue with a chaotic and almost anarchic character (the perfect environment for a dance event), thus emphasizing the liminal qualities of dance music spaces, while simultaneously creating the impression of a more interesting, stimulating environment or range of environments.

"Capacity" is also commonly mentioned to convey the size and therefore the significance of events, particularly when they were "full to capacity" (Aston, 2004, p. 102). Such references provide further confirmation of the importance and quality of specific events, if they achieve maximum attendance

and thus have to turn people away; they are both successful and significant. It appears that within media commentary on dance music events, as with most other events, confirmation of attendance is a key feature of reporting. This is not surprising given the significance of crowds in the construction and consumption of event experiences (Jackson, 2004; Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1995). The inseparability of production and consumption means that crowd density and composition have a direct impact on the event experience and facilitate the feelings of escapism that many seek to gain from dance events (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010).

In addition to the venue, promoter, and the numbers attracted to events, the acts and DJs performing also constitute major signifiers of importance and cultural value (Brewster & Broughton, 2000). For example when discussing a large dance festival a *Mixmag* journalist (Anonymous, 2003) comments “Homelands has secured a huge line-up of live acts . . . the real pull is The Streets—he’s conquered the suburbs now he wants to convert you” (p. 38). Referring to the “huge line-up,” this journalist is both confirming the number of acts performing while also emphasizing the status of the performers and to exemplify this they drop in the names of some of the most famous ones along with some evocative comments. For example, when referring to DJs references are often made to their unique artistic qualities and accomplishments, their links with other markers of cultural distinction (e.g., specific clubs, venues, events, records, record labels, radio stations, and artists), and their ability to influence crowds in a positive and masterful manner.

The accomplishments and the influence of the artist are both highlighted in the comment “he’s conquered the suburbs now he wants to convert you” (Anonymous, 2003, p. 38). Here the artist’s achievements in conquering the suburbs assert his accomplishments, while the religious connotations of converting the audience likens this artist to a spiritual or religious leader; such is his profound skill and knowledge that witnessing his performance could be an overwhelming, life-changing experience. Indeed, the quasireligious leadership qualities of DJs and the corresponding influence they have on crowds discussed by others such as Hutson (2000), Rietveld (2003), and Takahashi and Olaveson (2003) are often echoed within the dance

music media. Being the sites where the quasireligious rituals of participants are performed and where ideas and ideologies become reality, the unique temporal qualities of events are also commonly stressed in terms of moments and experiences, which are the focus of the next section.

Moments and the Experiential

Notions of moments and the experiential are key elements of dance culture ideology; such discourses not only promote experiential consumption but also hint at dance culture’s authentic, dynamic, and progressive nature—that no two events are ever the same in this progressive evolving culture. Both the written and visual texts of the media contain numerous references to the value of moments (i.e., living for the moment and the unique experiential values of dance events). Indeed, such discourses are privileged within youth cultures, which often value the present above the past and the future and place greater value on experiential consumption and the acquisition and accumulation of “subcultural capital” rather than material goods (Thornton, 1995). Just as within wider society where the accumulation of social and cultural capital influences status (Bourdieu, 1984), within dance cultures accumulation of subcultural capital, partially through participation, confirms the degree of cultural immersion and therefore status (Ebare, 2004).

Let us take, for example, a comment by Cream’s Jim King in *Mixmag* May 2003. In discussing his highlights from a previous Creamfields festival he states, “My highlight was Underworld playing as a rainbow was forming in the sky, it was just a wicked atmosphere” (Anonymous, 2003, p. 36). Deeply engrained within this comment is the value of first-hand experiences and how there is no substitute for being there, as for people who experienced this event the memory is a cherished moment, while for those who missed it, it invokes the sense of one. Such comments signify the power of experiencing specific “special” moments and hence the necessity to live life to the fullest. They also remind us that there is no substitute for being there, that seeing is believing, and once a moment has passed it may never be repeated. Such references to the experiential also enforce the ephemeral nature of dance events; since they only exist for finite periods their

elusive properties are soon gone, but the experience lives on (Berridge, 2007).

In this same feature there are numerous images supporting the themes of living for the moment and the pursuit of the experiential. Accompanying the text “Homelands” (the name of a festival) is a large image of people sitting on the grass (Anonymous, 2003, p. 38). Within this image the composition (smiling people, green grass, and blue sky) and angle are all used to emphasize the event’s vibrant but laid back atmosphere. The camera angle emphasizes the green grass of the countryside where this event took place; the clear blue sky evokes notions of being relaxed and care free and carries associations of happy summer days. The combination of green grass and clear blue sky also induces a sense of escaping from the hectic urban lives that most people live, getting away to the countryside, to a more relaxed and self-determined pace of life and of living for and appreciating the moment. The subjects are all wearing sunglasses and smiling, again emphasizing the happy, summery, and “cool” atmosphere of this event (Pountain & Robins, 2000).

The atmosphere is frequently commented upon, with the mood and tone of events being a major contributor to positive and negative experiences (Berridge, 2007; Jackson, 2004). Atmosphere is very difficult to articulate, but very significant in respect of the experience gained at events. Therefore it is common to read comments such as “the atmosphere was electric” (McGrath, 2004, p. 104), which try to convey the energy, power, and value of events. Terms such as “electric” create impressions of positively charged, exciting, powerful, dynamic, and enjoyable events and therefore memorable experiences. Commenting upon the atmosphere at an event, Charles (2004) states that it had “the kind of beamingly optimistic vibe that events such as Homelands 2004 always strive for and only rarely achieve” (p. 82). This again highlights the role and significance of atmosphere whilst also stressing the uniqueness of such moments.

Of course crowds play a major role in the creation of atmosphere and in the generation of experiences and significant moments. As service products are produced and consumed simultaneously, those present form part of the overall product and the product experience (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1998). The crowd is as central as the DJ to creating

the atmosphere and experience at events. Crowds are commonly portrayed as “up for it,” “clued up,” and “mad for it,” which connotes their awareness of cultural discourses, willingness to party, and the enthusiasm with which they do so. For example, when reviewing an event Aston (2004) comments, “in true Room At The Top fashion the crowd interacted with the DJs, cheering every tune, and clapping and shouting encouragement” (p. 102). Indeed, as Thornton (1995) considers dance music cultures to be largely taste cultures, the media seeks to emphasize the positive attributes of the crowd, which facilitates reader identification with the crowd and the event.

Another feature of the crowds at dance events is the unity and common purpose that individuals share; indeed, there is often felt to be some form of common bond between those at dance events (Jaimangal-Jones, 2010; Rietveld, 2003; Thornton, 1995). Verma (2003) describes one particular event crowd as a “mass of bouncing bodies” (p. 76), a phrase that emphasizes the volume, purpose, density, and activities of people there. It is notable that such terms create a sense of drama and unity, while terms such as “mass” have associations of religious gatherings too. This phrasing evokes notions of the unity of the crowd, that they are one together as a result of their shared purpose, passion, and musical preferences. Unity was a major element of early rave culture ideology and an integral part of utopian ideals (Bussman, 1998), which again signifies the liminal properties of dance spaces, as significantly different to other social spaces. Here we can also see embedded notions of dance events as places of worship and attendance as a symbol of patronage (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010).

Following on from the description of the “mass of bouncing bodies” Verma (2003, p. 76) then focuses on how the audience was “sent into rapture” by the arrival of a DJ, denoting a very powerful and emotional effect on the audience. Rapture can be defined as “ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy; the carrying of a person to another place or sphere of existence” (Dictionary.com, 2010). Or in a religious context “the experience, anticipated by some fundamentalist Christians, of meeting Christ midway in the air upon his return to earth” (Dictionary.com, 2010). This again emphasizes the effects of this DJ on the crowd and highlights the

spiritual nature of the emotions that clubbers undergo during clubbing experiences. Being transported “to another place” and experiencing “ecstatic joy” evoke profound moments indeed and the reactions of the crowds also highlight the alternative behavioral norms and values expressed at such events, which are the focus of the final section.

Behavioral Norms and Values

At the heart of the lexicon of dance music events is the notion that dance culture embraces a different set of values and norms to those of wider society. This is intertwined with many of the above points, since it is these different behavioral norms and values, which lead to the significant experiences and unique moments for many participants. For when participants cross the threshold into dance events, they do so knowing they are entering a socially constructed space which is significantly different to the world outside; liminal spaces where they are able to escape, to indulge, to perform and to play, and to experience new social situations (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010). This section will explore how the dance music media promotes and positively embraces a different set of behavioral norms and values to wider society.

The alternative norms and values within dance culture are represented in its media in both images and language and relate to social interaction, body language, dress, expression, and identity roles. While some of these themes emerge very obviously through the media, there are also numerous subtexts within the language and imagery which can be explored. A prime example appears in *Mixmag* (May 2003, p. contents page) where a feature on festivals entitled “FESTIVAL FRENZY” is accompanied by the text “Fuck war, let’s get mashed in a field! *Mixmag*’s ultimate guide to where to go and who to see.” The title feature “Festival Frenzy” connotes celebration and cultural events (Merriam Webster, 2010a), special days, and religious ceremonial events (Cambridge, 2010a). Defining these events as festivals is significant in itself, as this portrays them as important cultural events, with their own unique ceremonial dimensions. There are further associations here of festivity, a term that has associations of positive events, associated with people enjoying themselves and socializing during

special often religious occasions. Therefore, simply terming these events festivals heightens their significance and cultural centrality and shapes the expectations of participants, as well as carrying connotations that these events are deeply meaningful occasions for “those who participate and attend” (Goldblatt, 2011, p. 13).

The combination of the terms festival and frenzy adds additional weight to the promotion of alternative behavioral norms. Frenzy has various undertones, associated with both activities and state of mind. Frenzy signifies uncontrolled behavior and emotion, wild excitement, temporary madness, delirium, intense, wild, and disorderly activity. This title therefore raises the significance of these festival events and the type of behavior that may be expected at them. It also signifies their relatively unrestricted nature in contrast to clubbing environments that are more tightly regulated by clubbers’ social codes and policing by doormen and security staff. Hence, festivals are less restricted and may be seen as more liminal than club events. The term frenzy also gives the impression of very vibrant, hectic, lively, and emotional events, places where uncontrollable excitement and emotions may be experienced, without need to suppress the actions arising from such experiences. It also conveys the intensity of the events as sites of hedonism.

The statement “Fuck war” and “let’s get mashed in a field” has a number of different connotations and can be interpreted in several ways. The anti-war stance echoes the 1960’s peace protest and hippy culture, a movement concerned to contest the dominant norms and values within society. This also echoes the early rave culture ideology of peace, love, unity, and respect, all of which are contradictory to war (Bussman, 1998). The initial impression is that the magazine’s editors consider festivals provide a good means of escaping from the reality of the UK–US conflict in Iraq. *Mixmag* is positioning itself against this war and getting intoxicated (mashed) in a field is seen as a solution to the frustration felt by many of feeling powerless and marginalized in the political process. However, not only is the magazine condemning the war, but also promoting drug use in the same sentence, something regarded by the government and mainstream society as undesirable and not the “norm.”

The article to which this contents page text refers is entitled, “FUCK WAR! LET’S GO FESTIE MENTAL” (Anonymous, 2003, p. 35). This again illustrates the strong anti-war position of dance culture and its utopian ideals of peace, love, unity, and respect (Wilson, 2006). “FESTI MENTAL” is also interesting in its associations, connotations, and the similarity between terms. “FESTI” is the abbreviated term for festival and linking it directly with the term “MENTAL” indicates a number of things, all revolving around festivals and the mind. Arguably the term “FESTI MENTAL” is similar to the word sentimental and whilst various interpretations are possible, it is hard to ignore the connotations of using such a term. It helps evoke within the reader the emotional significance of these events and the fact that actions and opinions towards and at such events are governed more by emotionality than by rationality. This again indicates the hedonistic ideology and alternative values of dance culture. Mental has various definitions such as, “relating to the mind, or involving the process of thinking” and is also “UK SLANG [for] crazy” (Cambridge, 2010b), and, “of, relating to, or affected by a disorder of the mind” (Merriam Webster, 2010b). Therefore the combination of terms invokes notions of going crazy at festivals, acting abnormally, and forgetting about society’s expectations of conformity to behavioral norms of public conduct. Indeed, this is much of the appeal of participation in dance music and club culture in that it provides liminal, other worldly environments where different sets of values and behavioral expectations exist to those of the everyday world (Jackson, 2004; Jaimangal-Jones, 2010; Malbon, 1999). Also evident here are connotations of altering the normal functions of the brain (i.e., through drugs), which confirms the different attitudes towards drugs within dance culture; here the dance music media is emphasizing how festivals provide an opportunity for playful disorder and carnivalesque misrule (Bahktin, 1984), for getting intoxicated and letting go of our socially ingrained behavioral codes.

The plethora of these direct and indirect references to drug culture, clearly visible within the media provides clear representation of the alternative values within dance culture. Comments such as “it’s all good unclean fun” (Madden, 2004, p. 86), “you could just tell this was going to be messy” (Ti,

2004, p. 100), and “the ‘emergency services’ theme merely encouraged people to further excess” (Brown, 2004, p. 94) all indirectly infer the normality of drug taking at events. Such references also signify the inseparability of drugs from the other altered behavioral norms associated with dance events.

A further way to challenge everyday norms is through dress. While many youth cultures have readily identifiable dress codes (Hebdige, 1979) this is not the case for participants in dance cultures; participants who are perceived by some to be more of a neotribe (Bennett, 1999). The identities and membership of neotribes are both more flexible and fluid and it is only at dance events where the distinctive dress styles of dance participants are apparent. Here, the adoption of these unique styles contributes to both the different norms and values at dance events and the adoption of different behavioral roles amongst individuals (Wilson, 2006). Indeed, the dance music media commonly feature images of individuals in distinct dress at events, and recent research by Jaimangal-Jones et al. (2010) reveals how many participants seem “to derive considerable enjoyment from people watching” at events, which “emphasize the symbolic role of style, dress, and identity to participants” (p. 258).

The clothing and hairstyles of many of the people featured in magazine photos are also very outgoing and bright, symbolic of their determinedness to have a good time and embrace the ethos of dance events. Dress makes a strong statement that people are there to have a good time, express themselves, and conform/not conform to expectations (Wilson, 2006). Playful expression is also very evident through the use of vivid colors and all these styles demonstrate the youthful vibrancy of the crowds attracted to dance events and are symbolic of the type of extrovert behavior participants may engage in at dance events.

The following quote demonstrates the effect of dress and the adoption of identity roles on clubbing participants; it sums up a number of the altered norms and values held by participants and projected within the dance music media. Gary Marto, promoter for 2Kinky, cited by Brown (2004) comments:

Because we theme each of the nights the crowd always dresses up, which helps push the party into the realms of surrealism—big burly rugby players

in little dresses, dwarves, people on stilts; it's wall-to-wall wrong—the dance floor looks more like a circus ring than a dance floor. But they're a real unpretentious lot . . . these people just want to have fun!!! (p. 95)

Many participants at festivals and certain club events wear fancy dress of some kind, revealing that wearing costumes facilitates the performance of different roles, enabling individuals to become less self-conscious and more immersed in the event experience. When we dress we do so consciously or unconsciously to meet a specific role or image and create a specific persona; therefore, our clothing affects our perception of self and others (Kaiser, 1990). In different clothes we can feel different and may also be treated differently by those we encounter, therefore wearing clothes radically different to those worn in day-to-day life enables people to break the constraints of normal routine and act less conventionally (Goffman, 1969). Such abilities lead to less restrained behavior and greater openness, which is ultimately a major part of the appeal of participation in dance music culture for many individuals.

Images of dance events in magazines commonly feature people dancing, smiling, and cheering with their hands in the air as an expression of the extent to which they are embracing the music and the event. The waving of hands in the air is an expression of approval and an acknowledgement that these people are very much enjoying themselves. In terms of body language having their hands open and palms facing out or pointing upwards indicates their openness to the situation and that they are very much at ease with the entirety of their surroundings. Many of these people (men and women) also have their arms around each other, demonstrating the pleasure received from experiencing this event with their friends and their willingness to show affection. This again is an often cited appeal of dance music events, the extent to which people feel at ease among thousands of strangers due to a shared sense of values and purpose and the media also seek to emphasize this in their reporting (Jackson, 2004; Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010).

Summary

This article has provided significant insights for events management and related areas of academic

enquiry by exploring how dance events exist both in reality and in the media as places and spaces that are imbued with a range of unique attributes and features. In terms of the social construction of events it has demonstrated and investigated how dance events are constructed through signs, symbols, and references as the focal points of dance culture, where participants come together to pay homage and dance to their favorite DJs and immerse themselves in these liminal transgressive spaces. In portraying dance events as alternative, nonjudgmental worlds, havens of hedonism, and youthful expression the media emphasize the centrality of these events to the vibrancy of dance culture and the participants that make them. Simultaneously the media emphasize, especially in terms of the major events, how attendance is essential in the generation and maintenance of subcultural capital and status.

The manner in which events are socially constructed and their existence communicated through the dance music media demonstrates the central role of niche media in the creation, development, and perpetuation of cultural discourses surrounding events. Events constitute the focal points of many cultures being the sites where the myriad of cultural texts and components converge to create the experiential consumption opportunities that motivate participants. To the media emphasizing the cultural significance of events is a key priority with references to the spectacle, crowd attendances, the cultural standing of organizers, the unique attributes of performers, and their corresponding influence on crowds. The visual spectacle and the role of crowds is a common feature of dance music magazines, with various terms used to highlight the unique experiences they provide which are closely associated with their ephemeral nature. Entwined with their ephemeral existence and heavily emphasized by the media is the importance of living for the moment (common to many youth cultures), which again emphasizes the liminal nature of such events. Such are the points and terms of reference used that dance events are constructed as other worlds, distanced from the rules and pressures created by wider social norms and values, which give way as participants immerse themselves in these liminal zones.

Other features that have emerged in this research, but are beyond the scope of this article, are issues

such as the role of DJs in attracting people to events and the need for more sustained research surrounding the media portrayal of DJs within the dance music media. While this research has thrown up some interesting findings, there is a lot more to the discourses surrounding DJs. The role of dress and identity and how these contribute to event experiences and the nature of roles performed at them also emerged as an interesting issue that merits further research to add to the body of knowledge surrounding dance music events. In terms of events management and leisure studies this article has demonstrated the role of discourse analysis in understanding the social construction of events and to this end this methodology could also be applied to a range of other events and leisure activities. Discourse analysis is a widely used research methodology within other spheres of academia and this article has demonstrated its potentially valuable contribution to events management. These findings are also significant in terms of understanding how event organizers can utilize the power of discourse in the marketing of events and how essential it is for event organizers to maintain positive media relations—for the media also play a pivotal role in constructing events, especially in terms of their perceptual positioning in the eyes of consumers. It also reminds us that we must not take things at face value, but seek to dissect and look deep into the combinations of symbols and signs used in the cultural texts surrounding events to further enhance our understanding of them (Storey, 2001).

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