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The Festivalisation of Contemporary Life

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Introduction

Driving home from work a few days ago, I passed through a sequence of villages, all with fluorescent roadside posters. The first was for a flower festival on the following Saturday in the church hall. The second promoted a steam festival at a local stately home. The third was for a festival of local food in a nearby gastro pub. It started me thinking about the increasing number of things that are being labelled and defined as festivals; things that don't fit neatly into Négrier's conception of festivalisation as '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' (2015: 18). Whilst accepting this as one dimension – part of a wider festivalisation of the ways in which culture is produced, distributed and consumed – this chapter seeks to understand the wider festivalisation of contemporary life by identifying key principles associated with festival production. In addition to the changes to the cultural sector presentation practices noted by Négrier and discussed later, festivalisation processes can increasingly be seen in brand and city marketing strategies.

This chapter will argue that the festivalisation of contemporary life can be considered to be the instrumental use of techniques found in the production dimensions of festivals to achieve cultural and non-cultural outcomes within social, economic and policy fields.

The five key dimensions of festivalisation proposed in this analysis are:

- ◆ **Festivity:** a time and space for celebration and play that is distinct from everyday life.
- ◆ **Experimentation:** opportunities for audiences, producers and artists to try out new personas or artistic approaches.
- ◆ **Spectacularisation:** highly visual or sensual, surprising and often large-scale art works and performances.
- ◆ **Theming:** a method for establishing an intelligible identity for disparate activities.
- ◆ **Participation:** experiences that are immersive or co-created by audiences.