Dancing through Transformational Music Festivals:
Playing with Leisure and Art

by

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Abstract

This exploratory work investigates the "transformational festival," a contemporary form of celebratory leisure that revolves around music, the arts, community, and co-creativity. By integrating interpretative phenomenological analysis with methods from arts-based research, critical ethnography, and storytelling, I seek to understand how life-changing processes may be enabled or supported through the construction of three particular festival timespaces: Shambhala, Astral Harvest, and Intention Alberta. The research is focused on a group of festival goers who consider these kinds of events important for their leisure lives and their greater (trans)personal development. This work queries how transformational festivals are perceived, experienced, and why they might be meaningful for this group. It affirms that people are seeking community, ecstatic rituals, and spiritual elements within festivals, and suggests the importance of adding transpersonal considerations to current leisure discourses that focus on individual social-psychological interactions. The interdisciplinary and creative nature of the project challenges dominant metanarratives by adding alternative accounts of how people are enriching their lives through leisure experiences on the margins of awareness in academia and normative society.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Kelci Mohr. No part of this thesis has been previously published. The research projects, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Transformational electronic music festivals: Making space for leisure and art", No. Pro00057226, 2015, and Project Name "Imagining alternative leisure spaces", No. Pro00040832, 2013 (Mohr, 2013).

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the journey

The present work is in part a manifestation of my journey into the "transformational" festival scene. Friends brought me to my first festival in 2010, and I arrived with very little knowledge of the culture, music scene, or underlying values. I was fascinated to discover insights and experience shifts to aspects of my self-concept (that I considered stable) in as little as four days. Since that time, I continue to participate in several events each year. My life continues to change as a result of my involvement with festivals and the community of people who consider them "home." Since they became meaningful for me, I was puzzled when my undergraduate education in recreation and leisure studies only briefly mentioned festivals, music, and art. The initial excitement for the research arose from conversations with fellow festivalgoers about the transformational role of festivals in their own lives. I realized our experiences were important, academically relevant, and could enhance the diversity of leisure scholarship.

The present work builds upon insights from a study of transformational music festivals I conducted at the University of Alberta under the Roger S. Smith Undergraduate Student Research Award (Mohr, 2013). This exploratory study used interview methods combined with ethnographic and autoethnographic methods to investigate transformational experiences at festivals, and how they were personally meaningful for participants. The project examined how festivals encourage imagining and embodying alternative worldviews. During interviews, people discussed the life-changing significance of encountering and connecting with others in festival spaces that stretch normative boundaries of everyday life. Participants struggled to describe experiences that might be considered ecstatic, embodied, transpersonal, or transformational. Therefore, for the present work I sought to expand beyond interview methods. I sought to get beyond verbal discourse and to utilize a research methodology that would allow me to include ineffable, lived, and affective festival experiences. In line with this strategy, I make use of photographs portraying transformational festivals throughout this work. Using visual imagery is an evocative way to expand upon text-based descriptions and help bring the reader into the festival world.

Transformational festivals emphasize connection as opposed to separation, and participation as opposed to spectatorship. At the beginning of her anthropological book on the Burning Man festival, Gilmore (2010) notes the "clear advantage" and "wealth of data" that her prior intimate, immersive experience attending the festival as participant provided her research (p. 9). My involvement in transformational festivals provides a parallel abundance of connections, knowledge, and intuition for the present work. There is wildness and richness within interconnected communities where everyone participates, and "become[s] something, together" (MacDonald, 2010, p. 287). In the process of researching festivals, I was personally transformed along with the people I played, co-created, celebrated, and danced with. The current work traces a small part of our journey through festivals, and details the challenges of approaching and analyzing these wildly eclectic and syncretic environments in ways that integrate with academic research. More specifically, the process of exploring transformational festivals enriches leisure research by engaging with community celebrations, music, art, and transpersonal elements that have not yet been substantially queried in the field. By experimenting with interdisciplinary methods and presenting alternative perspectives, the present work raises important questions for future areas of research in leisure.

1.1: Research questions

The research focuses on a specific community of people that attend transformational festivals, of which I am a part. These participants attend because they enjoy the celebration of music, dancing, art, creativity, and self-expression. We consider connection, inclusivity, community, and deepening relationships to be important aspects of the experience. We seek to explore personal growth, consciousness expansion[1], and spirituality at festivals, at times with the intentional use of altering substances. We enjoy pushing boundaries, learning, and experimenting with different ways of being in the world. Although people arrive at transformational festivals with different intentions and seek a variety of experiences, my research interests for the present work lie at the intersection of

[1] I use "consciousness expansion" as a term used within the community under research. The nature of consciousness itself is not the main focus of this work, although it is an important and relevant topic for future research.

celebration, creativity, community, and spirituality. I am interested in how transformation emerges from these crossroads, in these timespaces, for people who approach festivals in these ways.

This work is primarily interested in mapping several specific transformational festivals, and investigating how they may be involved in catalyzing processes that this group considers life changing. *What festival qualities, structures or supports may help to potentiate the experience of transformation? Further, what is the lived experience at festivals that may be related to transformation?* The current work explores these questions using interpretative phenomenological analysis to investigate lived experiences considered meaningful that occur as a result of liminal festival environments. Festival "qualities" refer to the immersive "vibe," experience, or atmosphere that is co-created by distinctive attributes of the timespace, environment, and other participants at the festival. As conceptualized by Lefebvre (1991), these elements refer to conceived and lived festival spaces. "Structures" refer to physical elements and organization that changes the way participants experience and encounter in the festival timespace. "Supports" refer to a variety of assistance provided by the festival to mitigate harm and ensure participants are safe, healthy, and happy. As conceptualized by Lefebvre (1991), these elements refer to perceived space.

Transformative learning theory defines "transformation" as a process that causes lasting change in an individual's perspectives and assumptions about the world, and affects their subsequent behavior and actions (Martin & Griffiths, 2014). Transformative learning is a form of coming-into-being that raises awareness of habitual patterns and opens an integrated understanding of sociocultural and historical contexts shaping patterns of self-concept. In the process, transformative learning is life changing and self-actualizing because it frees people to make their own interpretations of themselves and the world in relation to others. In addition, transformative learning is communicative and relational, as it occurs through experience and subsequent reflection or dialogue with others about the experience (Martin & Griffiths, 2014). Through the research questions, the current work engages in an embodied exploration of festival timespaces self-described as

transformational and includes detailed descriptions of experiences that participants consider transformative.

Although the concept of transformation is of central interest in this work, it is worth noting that I chose not to engage with theoreticians that directly address the moment of transformation or consciousness itself. This might have taken the research into areas of psychology, religion, or neuroscience, among others. As this work explores, the dynamic process of doing research in festivals caused me to spiral away from a psychological, religious, or scientific exploration of transformation. Instead, I was drawn towards the intricacies of the lived experience at festivals that might be related to transformation. As a result, I made methodological and theoretical choices that I thought would bring me closer to the phenomena of interest, and to an essence of what was meaningful about festivals.

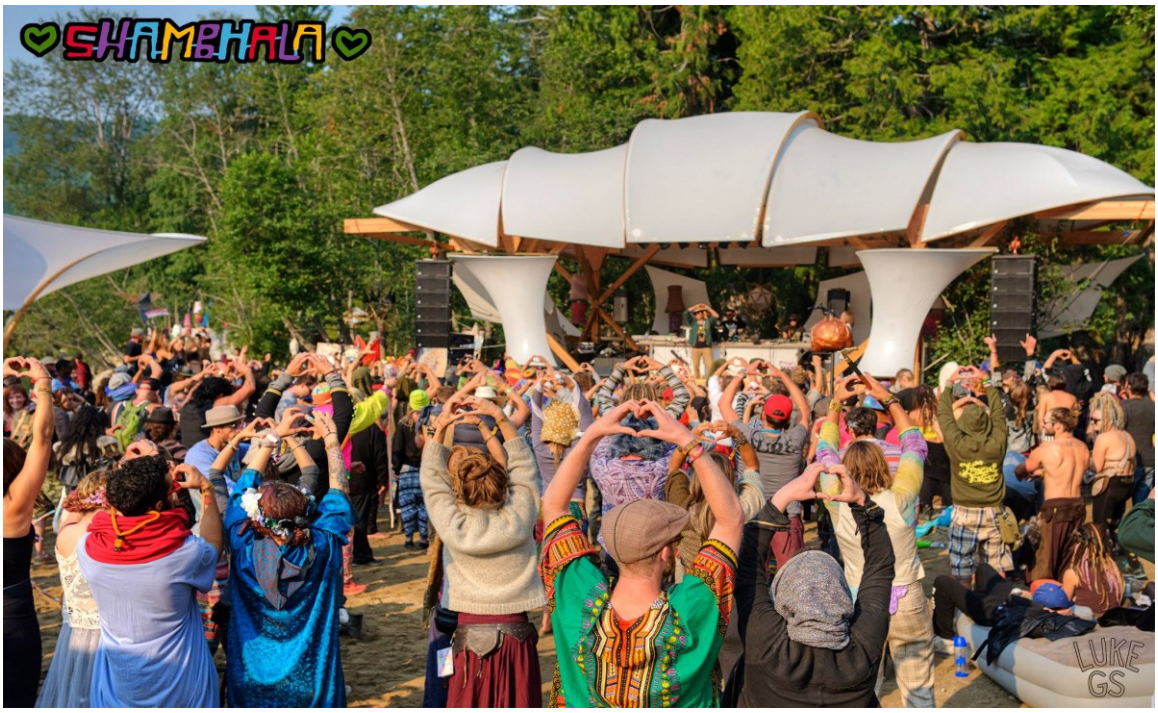
1.2: Research relevance

My research into transformational festivals responds to the call for a re-mixing and re-focusing on alternative forms of leisure on the edge of current knowledge (Fox, Klaiber, Ryan & Lashua, 2006; Rojek, 1999). The margins are sites of diversity, innovation, and creativity through the resistance and transgression of normative ideals (Fox, Riches & Dubnewick, 2011). Although transformational festivals are growing in popularity, they are still on the margins of general societal awareness, understanding, and approval. The media represents events associated with electronic dance music as sites of drug use and illegal activity (Guilbert, 2016; Jenkins, 2013; Knopper, 2013). This perspective is partial and overlooks how festivals may be important catalysts for change in participant's lives. Encountering and engaging within liminal leisure spaces transforms how people think, act, and see the world (Fox, Riches & Dubnewick, 2011). The current work addresses gaps in knowledge by adding a perspective from leisure that queries how festival timespaces may contribute meaningful experiences.

Collective experiences that are creative and transgressive are full of meaning, critique, freedom, and excitement (Riches, 2011). Leisure forms are "sites of possibility and renewal where relationships of structure and agency, alternatives, relationships, identity and power are negotiated and re-negotiated" (Fox & Klaiber, 2006, p. 421). Quests for

meaning and spirituality in festivals may be self-created responses by people seeking to negotiate power structures or to address mental, emotional, and physical health issues. The current work facilitates a better understanding of how transformational festival timespaces are constructed and how they enhance people's lives. As a result, the present work speaks to how to better support the positive processes and outcomes of leisure forms outside of normative societal awareness and acceptance.

Historical and current conceptions of leisure focus mainly on social psychological interpretations and perspectives from Western ideologies (Dubnewick, 2013; Fox & Klaiber, 2006; Rojek, 2005). Fox and Klaiber (2006) critique the partiality of leisure scholarship and call for a scholarly jam session or "remixing" of theory in the field. They challenge scholars to engage with the edge of their comfort zones and to query the polythetic and dynamic metanarrative of leisure. Furthermore, Fox, Humberstone and Dubnewick (2014) identify a need to engage with the senses in leisure scholarship, as well as to pay attention to the rhythms present in lived experiences. The current work takes up these challenges by experimenting with an embodied, process-focused, and arts-based orientation to leisure research. Leisures are tools or processes that humans employ to make sense of the world and give meaning to behavior (Fox & Klaiber, 2006). Leisure research has an obligation to explore alternative narratives and make sense of how diverse communities are using leisure to successfully navigate their lives. My work contributes a descriptive exploratory journey into transformational festivals that illuminates alternative leisure practices and engages with dominant metanarratives of leisure research.



1. The Living Room stage during DJ Pumpkin's set, Shambhala Music Festival (2014)
Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

1.3: What are transformational festivals?

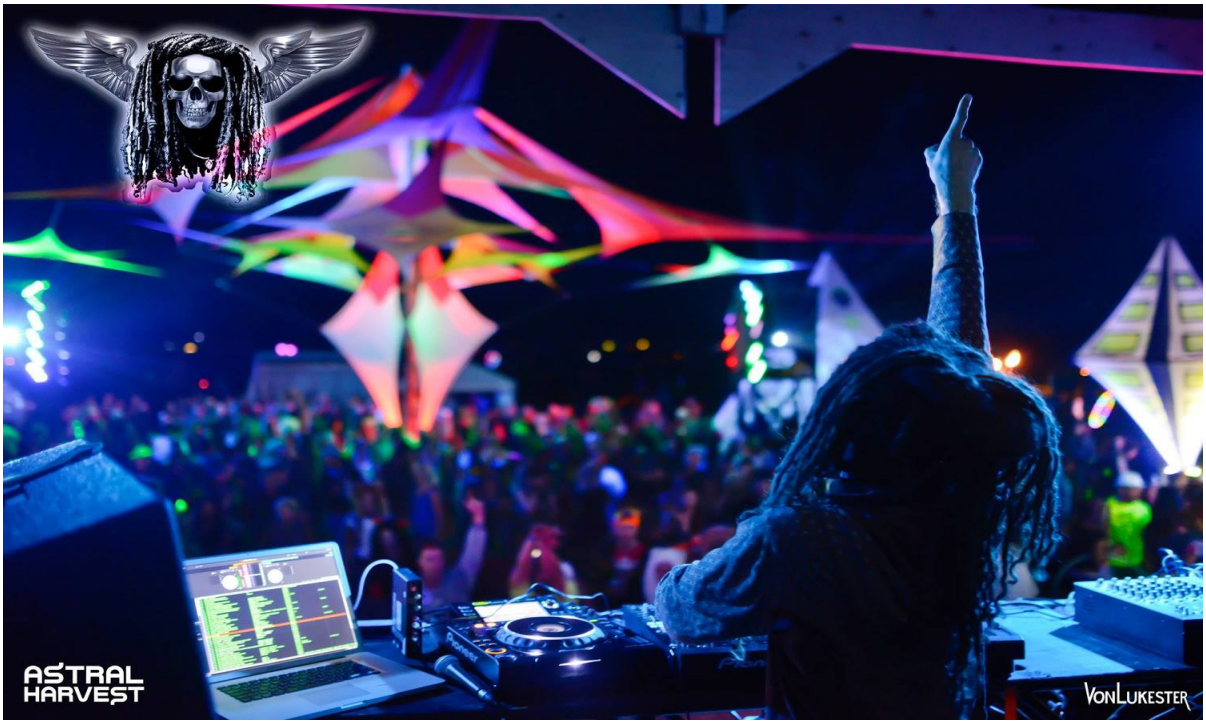
Approaching the transformational festival phenomenon necessitates an understanding of what is meant by "transformation." According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, to transform is to make "a thorough or dramatic change in form, appearance, or character," and can also reference a metamorphosis in the life cycle of an animal. However, the concept of transformation is interdisciplinary with relevance across mathematics, logic, physics, linguistics, biology, and others. The broad usage of the term indicates its flexibility and challenges in using it clearly. Splitting up the word into the roots of "trans" and "formation" reveals additional details: the Canadian Oxford Dictionary describes the prefix "trans-" as a relationship across, beyond, or through one state or place into another. "Formation" describes the action or process of being formed, with synonyms such as "emergence," "genesis," "evolution," "creation," or "coming into being." Considering all of these definitions together points to a sense of changing and forming in a relational context that pushes beyond an initial and individual state of being. In the context of contemporary festivals, the transformational designation references a type of event that seeks to nurture

life-changing experiences by cultivating a specific ethos and aesthetic. The current work seeks to describe the specifics and significance of this ethos and aesthetic.

Transformational festival organizers intentionally structure the festival timespace to allow opportunities for participants to encounter, connect, play, celebrate, experiment, learn, and ultimately "transform" together. As Perry (2013) asserts, "to tangibly transform its participants into more conscious, connected beings and to *support* them in their transformation is a unified goal that each festival shares" (p. 4, emphasis in original). Consistent with the breadth of transformation itself, how this process might be occurring and why it is meaningful for people is presently unclear. The current work seeks to shed light on the experience of transformation involved with these environments.

"The Bloom Series" reflects the work of a team of artists, musicians, writers, photographers and videographers who aim to map transformational festival culture through a four-part documentary web series, filmed at 35 events worldwide. They sum up transformational festivals as "immersive participatory realities that are having profound life-changing effects on hundreds of thousands of lives" (Bloom Series, 2013). This group outlines 13 criteria that make up transformational festivals, and their analysis is typically applied to festivals that "hold as a core ritual the ecstatic experience provided by Electronic Dance Music" (Bloom Series, 2013). Important elements include the co-creation of an immersive, participant driven reality, "tribal" music-dance experiences, visionary art and performance, workshop curriculum, sacred space and ceremony, a social economy of artisans and vendors, and the conscious intention to support transformation, sustainability, diversity, and healing processes. Typically, artistry is infused into every facet of the festival, thereby transforming natural landscapes into magical and interactive realms. Finally, this group identifies that it is essential for the events to take place in remote outdoor settings, and over multiple days. More important than the list of requirements, they claim:

> "What feels more central to creating the transformational container is the resonance of all these elements combining into the lived experience of an immersive reality that is "The Future Now." It is a lived reality that so shifts our expectations of normative possibility that it catalyzes a sense of revelation, inspiration, and activation that it becomes fundamentally life-altering." [sic] (Bloom Series, 2013)



2. Artist performance at Interstellevator main stage, Astral Harvest (2013)

Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

"The Future Now" alludes to synchronous time, which merges past-present-future together into a rich co-occurrence of meaning (Lipari, 2014a). Festivals endeavor to provide an opportunity to step outside of the boundaries of everyday life and envision potentials for the future occurring simultaneously in the present moment. The Bloom Series creates coherence by outlining common elements of these events. In the absence of scholarly sources to define "transformational festivals," the current work uses this popular definition. It may be particularly fitting that a group of artists, who consider themselves participants and co-creators of the transformational festival phenomenon, are beginning to self-define their own culture through the artistic medium of film.

Interviews with festival organizers gesture to broad guiding principles for these events. Directors describe the importance of creating an experience tuned in to transpersonal and spiritual elements that revolve around connection (Perry, 2013). Rasenick, co-producer of Beloved festival (California, USA), shares: "My hope for the event is that as participants, we see through the illusions of separation between each other, from

the earth, and from Spirit. We want for all of us to leave having experienced at least a brief moment of real connection" (Perry, 2013, p. 4). Similarly, Sean Hoess, co-founder of Wanderlust festival (multiple locations worldwide), asserts: "Transcendence is not something that can be reduced to a formula or series of steps. It happens in the places between, by the random interactions of the many wonderful people who attend, so the best you can hope is that you create the right conditions" (Perry, 2013, p. 2). Rasenick and Hoess gesture to how transformational festivals try to open space for people to connect with each other, the earth, and a sense of something larger than themselves. Although their comments are somewhat vague, perhaps it is because concepts like connection, transcendence, and transformation are nebulous and multidimensional. Regardless, organizers gesture to centrally meaningful elements of transformational festival timespaces that the present work seeks to investigate and elaborate upon.

3. The Yoga of Bass workshop at Interstellevator main stage, Astral Harvest (2013) Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Chapter 2: Reviewing the literature; Mapping the territory

2.1: Context and background on festivals

Transformational festivals are not "new," but a modern-day incarnation of a long, rich history of celebratory carnivals and festivals. They are events where people rejoice ecstatically and find community with one another (Johner, 2012). The following section will gesture briefly to a constellation of historical forces that have helped to shape the transformational festival scene. Due to the extensive breadth of forces that have coalesced into this particular iteration of festival culture, it is impossible for this work to exhaustively detail each one. The following discussion is intended to be a brief introduction to various forms of ecstatic celebrations that have played a role in forming the mosaic of contemporary transformational festivals.

In *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Ehrenreich (2006) discusses ecstatic group celebrations from ancient history to the modern day. Writing mostly from a Western perspective that includes insights from Indigenous traditions, Ehrenreich provides a rich historical account of the dynamics between control and ecstasy over time. Although Ehrenreich's work is only one story, her book is helpful to understand how the threads of Dionysian carnival and collective ecstasy are woven into the modern-day festivals that this work explores. She details the wildness of mystery cults and Dionysian rites in Greece, where everyday social boundaries were dissolved, revellers stepped into spaces outside of the norm, and experienced ecstasy as an important part of their lives. Worshipping Dionysus represented a temporary rejection of rationality and reminded people of the embodied, sensory experience of life (Higgins, 1992). Ecstasy is derived from the Greek word 'ekstasis' that signifies standing 'outside of oneself.' 'Ekstasis' implies transcendence of the boundaries of the individual self and the experience of communal bliss. In 15th century France, one out of every four days was an official holiday where people would eat, drink, celebrate, and play together. These events were not seen as secondary aspects of existence; at the time, they were felt to be "what men and women lived for" (Ehrenreich, 2006, p. 92). As time progressed, Dionysus and his associated celebratory rituals were demonized and the "mind-preserving, lifesaving techniques of ecstasy" were rejected by some religious doctrines (Ehrenreich, 2006, p. 153). Schools of

thought born from 18th century Enlightenment thinkers saw wildness and loss of control as inferior, sinful states to be denied in favour of self-control, rationality, and reason. As a result, Dionysian rituals were moved underground and transformed into different expressions throughout history. For example, in the 20th century, rock and roll struck with force as "a participatory experience, rooted in an ecstatic religious tradition" that summoned the body to action and shook up the cool veneer of guardedness that defined the Western ideal (Ehrenreich, 2006, p. 218).

By the mid-1960s, rock was the rallying point of an alternative counterculture that reacted against alienating authoritarian structures of society, and revived ancient Dionysian elements of carnival. In *Back to the Garden,* Fornatale (2009) tells the story of the iconic 1969 Woodstock festival in the USA. That August weekend, an unexpected and unprecedented 400,000 people gathered to celebrate rock 'n' roll. The festival was an epic manifestation of the generational shift of the 60s, symbolizing peace, love, and a desire to live and be in the world differently (Fornatale, 2009). At the root of Woodstock and other countercultural "happenings" was a desire to come together and connect over music. The spirit, ideals, ethics and aesthetics of 60s and 70s 'hippie' rock counterculture evolved and seeded themselves into the rave and psychedelic festival culture of the 80s, 90s, and beyond (see St. John, 2004a, 2004b, 2009). As a European example, Partridge (2006) traces the history of free festivals in Britain. Free festivals were non-profit events rooted in spirituality that emerged to protest the commercialization of large popular festivals. Spatially, they were gatherings focused on the experience of music and art. Socially, they were utopian models for an alternative society. At these happenings, members contributed freely to an economy based on mutual aid as opposed to capital (Partridge, 2006). People sought to explore, connect, and express creative visions for themselves, their communities, and the world – just as they continue to do now in different celebratory forms.

In 1986, the first Burning Man wood effigy is erected and torched illegally on the beach in San Francisco, USA, as a symbol of revelry, community, and free expression. The Burning Man festival is now a participatory cultural juggernaut, with 70,000 people attending in 2016 (burning man project, 2016). Burning Man is a bricolage, a polyphonic creation, and a grand experiment in community (Gilmore, 2010, p. 5). People from different

walks of life continue to share space, create art, celebrate, and play in the Nevada desert for one week in late August. The ten main principles of the event are radical inclusion, self-reliance and self-expression, participation, immediacy, a gifting economy, decommodification, community cooperation, and environmental responsibility. Despite the large amount of organization required to manage an event of its size, Burning Man continues to exist as a cashless society and boasts a massive amount of interactive art and music, the vast majority of which is freely created and donated by participants. Burning Man aims to inspire people to create alternative, artful visions of social life.

The rave scene of the 80s and 90s were an iteration of ecstatic rituals and celebratory modes with electronic music played in urban settings. This is significant because transformational festivals as defined by the Bloom Series are also rooted in the ecstatic ritual of dancing to electronic music. Music is important for social bonding and transmits cultural knowledge through the synchronization of bodies in shared spaces (Winkelman & Cardeña, 2011). Bodies and brains physically react to musical information in ways that can produce trance states, or non-ordinary states of knowing and being. Winkelman & Cardeña (2011) describe how trance music contains distinct frequencies, repetitive elements, and specific tempos designed to precipitate non-ordinary states of consciousness. Further, the activation pattern of brain regions while listening to certain music resembles patterns produced by drugs that cause euphoric effects (Winkelman & Cardeña, 2011). Rill (2010) suggests that trance consciousness from electronic dance music allows people to re-imagine their bodily selves as interactions and as sites of encounter rather than simply physical containers. This opens space for the possibility of radical self-change as people are immersed in embodied, sensual experiences with others on a rhythmic dance floor (Rill, 2010). Raves were secretive music-dance events held in underground clubs, private properties, and abandoned industrial warehouses. They were usually free, all-ages events and existed partly as a creative form of resistance to commodified musicultures (Van Veen, 2012). Events were publicized by word of mouth and existed on the margins due to their association with illegal activities such as drug use. Partially as a result of the scene's marginality, dancers felt they were participating in a transformational, revolutionary culture (Johner, 2012). Many felt they found a family,

community, or tribe united around the experience of music-dance (Johner, 2012). Significantly, the mantra of rave culture is "Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect" (P.L.U.R.). P.L.U.R. provides basic principles for interaction that prioritize relationships and connection.

Similar to raves in spirit and orientation, free underground parties were held in remote outdoor locations away from cities and represented a precursor to the contemporary transformational festival scene. However, outdoor dance parties have an extremely long history and the current work does not intend to suggest they were reinvented with the inclusion of modern sound system technology. St. John (2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2009) examines raves, free parties, and other electronic music cultures within the context of the spirituality and religion of a countercultural "tribe." At their heart, these cultures come together to celebrate and enjoy music while simultaneously resisting the alienation and commodification of modern society. For instance, the "Spiral Tribe" music collective (United Kingdom) was fuelled by disillusionment with the growing commercialization of raves and sought to share communal experiences of unrestricted creativity, psychedelia, and "radical" earth-based spirituality (St. John, 2009). Their events sought to reconnect people with ecstatic rhythms of community, nature, and the cosmos by dancing and celebrating outside. In California, the MoonTribe Collective (USA) continues to host all-night music-dance events outdoors in celebration of the lunar cycle (Johner, 2012). Newcomers are initiated with a ritual conveying information on consciousness, how to "properly" party, and the importance of respecting self, others, and the land (Ebner, 2014). Artists play with the intent of taking dancers on a journey and providing an experience of "Oneness" for their tribe (St. John, 2009). MoonTribe considers the ecstatic dance ritual as a kind of spiritual ceremony that engenders a "collective consciousness" (Johner, 2012). MoonTribe may have been influenced by Wiccan events in California popularized by the Reclaiming Collective and writer-activist Starhawk (1999).

People continue to seek places of freedom where they can challenge boundaries, experiment with the alternative and the transpersonal, experience ecstatic music-dance rituals, and connect with like-minded communities. Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard and Morgan (2010) conceptualize the journey to festivals as a pilgrimage that touches liminal spaces,

illuminates rites of passage, and acts as a source of spiritual fulfilment for participants. Contemporary scholars working more closely with art and drama have conceptualized the festival as a state of encounter (O'Grady & Kill, 2013), performance art (Van Veen, 2012), a space for play (O'Grady, 2012, 2013b) and a site of radical openness (O'Grady, 2013a). Bottorff (2015) draws parallels between the structures of radical acceptance and mutual support at transformational festivals, and the safe container created in the therapeutic context of interdisciplinary and transpersonal psychology.

Cross-culturally, Hutson (2000) compares raves to spiritual healing rites in both American subcultures and Indigenous societies. He uses the Huichol people of Mexico as one example. The Huichol make a yearly pilgrimage to the sacred site of Wirikuta, fasting and collecting peyote[2] along the way. When they arrive, they engage in a ritual ceremony using the cactus to commune directly with their ancestors and spiritual deities. Through the pilgrimage, the Huichol hope to achieve unity, community, and spiritual transformations (Hutson, 2000). The festival is also a spatiotemporal process, or a journey, that is outside of everyday life and allows people to connect with one another in ways that can be spiritually rejuvenating. In particular, Hutson (2000) conceptualizes dancing as a "technique of ecstasy" that binds communities together and can become "a portal to transformation" (Hutson, 2000, p. 44). However, the long-standing ritual of the Huichol pilgrimage is grounded in an Indigenous worldview with a cosmology of spiritual forces actualized in the world. Comparing this journey to the one undertaken by participants at raves or transformational festivals has limitations. Attendees arrive at events from a diversity of backgrounds, and they are connected differently to the land, to spiritual forces, and to music-dance rituals. In contrast, Huichol people are interconnected culturally and genealogically to the meaning of their sacred pilgrimage in ways that are distant from the participation of Westerners in music-dance events. Despite these important limitations, the comparison made by Hutson (2000) is a discussion of the power of music-dance and ritual across cultures to create transformational opportunities for healing and community building.

[2] A small, hallucinogenic cactus that is considered a spiritual sacrament in some Indigenous communities of the western Sierra mountains of Mexico (Cavnar and Labate, 2016). It contains psychoactive alkaloids such as mescaline and grows in the deserts of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States.

Schmidt (2015) acknowledges the myriad of creative activities at festivals and examines how art creates different ways of interacting that are perceived to be meaningful by participants. He discusses art as a relational aesthetic that builds social interstices by facilitating social interactions along the journey through festival communities. However, it is important to consider what kinds of social interactions are being facilitated, to the potential ignorance of, or detriment to, others. Schmidt (2015) critiques transformational festivals for their appropriation of Indigenous cultures, lack of participant diversity, and repurposing of a capitalist business model despite their desired claims of building a new world (Schmidt, 2015). Schmidt's aim is to encourage reflexivity among participants, organizers, and scholars when thinking through the ethics of festivals that call themselves "transformational." Festivals are not automatically progressive if they have an ethical event model and operate by relational aesthetics. Equally, the rhetoric and imagery surrounding transformational festivals produce a substantial amount of claims about what they are and what they do that are hard to substantiate. These tensions and questions are revealed through the process of taking a look at the experience of three different transformational festivals, and will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

2.2: Ecstasy, drugs, and art in festival cultures

Celebratory rituals involving ekstasis are engaged by a majority of human societies in some form, now and throughout history (Ehrenreich, 2006). Ecstatic rituals often involve art, music-dance, culture, and spiritual elements (Dissanayake, 1990). Laski (1968) determined the three circumstances most likely to engender ecstatic experiences are nature, art forms (of these, music was overwhelmingly the most common form), and love or sex. These are common elements of festivals. Dissanayake (1990) describes ritual ecstasy as "a new consciousness," "a higher degree of awareness," and "a new self more extensive than the first" (p. 139). Equally, Laski (1968) describes ecstasy as a "deeply felt, transitory, transfiguring, and indescribable [state] of feeling" that is joyful, unexpected, rare, and extraordinary (p. 5). The relevance of these descriptions for the current work is evident, as they are similar to words people use to describe powerful experiences at festivals: "pure joy," "euphoria," "rare," "flowing," "expansive," "awestruck" (Mohr, 2013).

Significantly, the term "ecstasy" in common parlance now typically refers to an illegal substance associated with electronic dance music cultures. The third definition of "ecstasy" in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary reveals that it is synonymous with the drug MDMA[3]. This has telling implications for modern cultures that associate the ecstatic state solely with the consumption of a synthetic chemical. Ecstasy, as both a drug and an experience, challenges the conventions of an individualistic society that values rationality and control above other states of consciousness. The experience of ecstasy is a type of freedom that necessitates a letting go of self-control and the boundaries of the individual self. Transformational festivals provide an opportunity to experience the ecstatic (as discussed by Laski, 1968, and Dissanayake, 1990) that may be difficult to find in contemporary Western cultures.

Rouget (1985) equates ecstasy with trance, and uses the terms interchangeably. He describes how dancing to trance music (characterized by rhythmic breaks, complex rhythms and irregularities, accelerated tempo, and the breakdown or "drop") can cause physiological and psychological changes in the body leading to trance states (Rouget, 1985). Although some trance experiences could be described as disorienting or difficult rather than ecstatic, it is worth noting that Rouget (1985) and others associate trance states with ekstasis. In the book *Trance formation*, Sylvan (2005) suggests that an immersion in the constant rhythm and motion of electronic music can induce hypnotic trances and transpersonal experiences. At events with large surround-sound speakers, the music is designed to have a physical energy and presence that can bring dancers into peak ecstatic states (Sylvan, 2005). Further, Becker-Blease (2004) describes the goal of the electronic genre of trance music to bring dancers into non-ordinary states of consciousness. I use the term "non-ordinary" in place of "altered" in line with Grof & Grof's (2010) assertion that the term "altered" suggests an inappropriate emphasis on the "distortion or impairment of the 'correct way' of experiencing oneself and the world" (p. 8). Further, they suggest the word "holotropic" to refer to states of consciousness that are

[3] MDMA refers to the chemical 3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine, a compound that has been used in therapeutic contexts to treat conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder by increasing interpersonal trust (Amoroso & Workman, 2016). Its recreational use was popularized in the club and rave scene under the term "E" or "ecstasy."

"oriented toward wholeness" in the sense that they help to precipitate transpersonal and transcendent realizations of a spiritual self nested within the cosmos (Grof & Grof, 2010, p. 10). This is more closely aligned with the ecstatic states discussed by participants as part of the lived experience of transformational festivals. Grof & Grof (2010) assert that holotropic states of consciousness may be precipitated by a variety of therapeutic techniques including breathwork, ritual practices involving spirituality, and psychedelic substances. Along similar lines, Winkelman (2015) characterizes all night music-dance events as collective rituals and modern manifestations of shamanic practices. He argues that both raves and shamanism employ music-dance for social bonding and emotional communication, and aim to change consciousness for self-exploration and healing (Winkelman, 2015). However, it is problematic to abstract insights about modern-day music-dance rituals away from the interconnected context of Indigenous worldviews that practice shamanism as a way of life. The deeply complex spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples warrants more discussion than the focus of the present work allows. For the purposes of this work, these examples and connections are used to indicate the potential role of ekstasis and trance states to transformation within modern-day festivals structured around music-dance.

Throughout history, humans have used technologies such as rhythmic drumming in shamanism (Rock, 2012) and psychoactive plants to modify or stimulate perceptions, emotions, and cognition in both ritual and recreational settings (Cavnar & Labate, 2016; Grof & Grof, 2010). With prolonged exposure to powerful sonic frequencies, the brain releases endorphins that may help to precipitate non-ordinary states of consciousness (Jasen, 2009). Some shamanic practices include the ritual consumption of consciousness altering plant preparations, such as tobacco and ayahuasca[4] by the *shinipiboconibo* group of the Peruvian Amazon (Sarasola, 2015). In the *shinipiboconibo* tradition, ayahuasca and tobacco are considered sacred medicines, healers, and teachers. When used in a traditional context, a trained shaman (or group of shamans) with extensive knowledge and experience

[4] Ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic plant brew made from the banisteriopsis caapi vine and the psychotria viridis leaf. It is a traditional spiritual medicine used in shamanic ceremonies by certain South American Indigenous groups (Labate & Cavnar, 2014).

sets up a carefully constructed ritual timespace and administers the medicines for the purposes of healing. The medicines then work with the person consuming them to impart wisdoms and lessons of self, the natural world, and the cosmos. Consciousness altering plants produce a range of physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences, and not all of them are necessarily enjoyable. Working with challenging sensations and integrating wisdoms received into the community are considered essential for healing, growth, and change in many Indigenous cultures (Sarasola, 2015).

As discussed, the shamanic use of consciousness-altering preparations occurs in a deliberate, structured environment for specific purposes and is overseen by experienced practitioners. Thus, shamanic practices and technologies differ substantially from drug-taking behaviours at festivals, and the current work does not intend to suggest that they are the same. The comparison is made with the intention to demonstrate certain attitudes and elements of appropriation surrounding the ritual use of substances at these events. Although the approach diverges considerably from ritualized Indigenous traditions, intentionally modulating one's consciousness at festivals may be a modern-day form of searching for healing, transpersonal, and spiritual experiences. Refocusing on the healing potential of transpersonal experiences also connects and aligns with Grof & Grof's (2010) work on holotropic states of consciousness that do not necessarily involve drugs. However, entheogenic plants and their analogues may catalyze profound shifts in consciousness and awakening of spiritual awareness (Strassman, 2001). A renewed research interest in the therapeutic potential of psychedelic compounds used in supported settings shows promising results in treating a range of mental health issues (Labate & Cavnar, 2014; Letheby, 2015; Tupper, Wood, Yensen, & Johnson, 2015). The use of psychoactive plants and other drugs at transformational festivals is a normalized and accepted part of the culture. Common festival discourses frame drugs as tools for assisting personal evolution and consciousness expansion, if used safely and appropriately (Ruane, 2015). However, psychedelic experiences have the potential to be disturbing and difficult as participants experience dissolution of self in a stimulating environment. Transformational festival culture highly values the opportunity for catharsis, healing, reintegration, and growth that can emerge as a result (Ruane, 2015). Most festivals respond to this aspect of the culture by

providing support spaces designed to educate participants about safety, and to assist people experiencing difficulties. These support spaces are staffed by trained experts in crisis care and may be conceptualized as the festival equivalent to the shamanic support network of Indigenous traditions. This is not to say they are the same, but to indicate the importance of a supportive presence for people undergoing intense experiences. Festivals might contribute to the emergence of transformational experiences by assisting those who choose to experiment with non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Within the context of drug cultures, it is notable that the type of artwork typically present at transformational festivals is considered "visionary."[5] In the same way that electronic music is associated with trance states (Till, 2009), visionary art has psychedelic themes and may be inspired by, or work synergistically with, substances that modify consciousness. For example, notable visionary artist duo Allyson and Alex Grey's work is common to see in transformational festival timespaces, and they continue to participate in a number of these events by giving lectures and hosting workshops. Allyson and Alex Grey (2015) openly discuss the role of entheogens as sacraments that play an important role in their creative process. They go so far as to suggest the historical origin of human art creation is linked to the consumption of entheogenic plants (Grey & Grey, 2015). Ekstasis is related to an embodied aesthetic response to powerful art, and to transcendence of self (Laski, 1968). Visionary artwork is associated with a practice of "making inner truths visible," and is linked to imaginary spaces and transcendental spirituality (Grey, n.d.). It is worth mentioning the similarities and interconnectedness between some Indigenous art traditions with contemporary visionary art. For example, Huichol art has also been conceptualized as a "visionary" expression of shamanic experiences during ceremonies, many of which involve the use of consciousness-altering plants (see MacLean, 2012). In addition, a recent art exhibition at St. Lawrence University entitled "Inner Visions: Sacred Plants, Art, and Spirituality" brought together the visionary work of contemporary artists such as Alex Grey, as well as Indigenous artists such as Pablo Amaringo (Watertown Daily Times, 2016). Visionary artists envision the world (or how it could be), bring these

[5] Due to copyright infringement concerns, the current work is unable to reproduce exemplars here. Examples of this artwork can be seen at www.alexgrey.com and www.threyda.com/pages/artists.

imaginings to life, and may inspire others to consider different perspectives by stepping into other realities. There may be therapeutic benefits to be found in the passive viewing of visual art forms, as explored by De Botton and Armstrong's (2013) work in museum galleries. Engaging with art may be considered a form of therapy that could provide relief to viewers (De Botton & Armstrong, 2013). As festivals are intentionally filled with a variety of creative art media, De Botton and Armstrong's (2013) perspective on the potential benefits of encountering art forms is instructive to the current work's focus on festival experiences perceived as life changing.

2.3: Leisure studies and festivals

There is an opportunity for leisure studies to contribute significantly to the exploration of festivals beyond existing perspectives. Getz (2010) reviewed the field of festival studies and identified a need for leisure theory to make a bigger contribution to a field that overemphasizes consumer behavior theory and methods. Research on music festivals from the leisure and tourism field primarily uses quantitative, survey-based techniques to measure the economic impact of festivals (see Andersson, Armbrecht & Lundberg, 2012; Ma & Lew, 2011; Ali-Knight & Chambers, 2006; Robinson, Picard & Long, 2003), or discuss how to improve event organization (Gordon & Erkut, 2004). Some studies pay closer attention to the motivations and experiences of music festivalgoers (Ballantyne, Ballantyne & Packer, 2014; Bower & Daniels, 2005), but they are conducted from an event management perspective and do not explore personal meanings. Packer and Ballantyne (2011) conducted a study on the social and psychological impact of music festival attendance on young people's wellbeing, and found festivals provided an important time and space to experience personal growth and self-discovery. Their work reaffirms the central importance of music to the festival experience, because it provides a foundation for people to come together and experience belonging to a like-minded community. Their participants also identified the social aspect of their experience as highly important. Music festivals were found to connect people in unprecedented ways, build relationships, and help people develop an appreciation for diversity. In addition, Packer and Ballantyne (2011) describe the festival as a cyclical process of preparing, anticipating, experiencing,

remembering, and preparing again. Elements of community and cyclical experiencing may support transformation as they provide continuity from the festival into participants' everyday lives. Although Packer and Ballantyne's (2011) work is revealing, it is not focused on any specific type of music festival. The current work seeks to describe how music festivals described as "transformational" may differ through their particular focus, ethos, and aesthetic.

The field of leisure studies has not significantly engaged with the meanings of communal music-dance rituals or ecstatic, transpersonal experiences. Other disciplines such as anthropology, ethnomusicology, psychology, and theological studies grapple with ecstatic and spiritual aspects of festivals or music-dance cultures (see Gilmore, 2010; St. John, 2004b; Bottorff, 2015; and Trammacchi, 2000), but there is little exploration within leisure studies. In particular, the leisure field is currently grounded within social psychological theories that highlight individual experiences in social networks. Some scholars see leisure as an opportunity to experience a different level of consciousness, and to pursue, synthesize and harmonize "the essence of self" (Howe & Rancourt, 1990, p. 403). Although this view is consistent with festivals that intentionally aim to support transformations through self-discovery, it does not reveal the full picture. Leisure's continued focus on the psychological lineage may be inadvertently overlooking other dimensions that tap into something greater than the interactions of individual selves, such as communal ecstatic rituals or transpersonal elements.

Taking up Abraham Maslow's (1962) "peak experiences" may be the closest the leisure field has come to addressing the ecstatic and transpersonal. In *Toward a psychology of being*, Maslow (1962) conceptualizes peak experiences as highly meaningful and valued moments of intense joy, happiness, and fulfillment. They are accompanied by a sense of profound significance and deep emotional feelings that stand distinctly apart from everyday life. These experiences arise spontaneously and without effort in a graceful process of "letting-be" (Privette, 1983, p. 1366), as if they were brought into being from elsewhere. In this way, peak experiences gesture to transpersonal and ecstatic elements of experience. Despite this gesture, these definitions still largely focus on the individual internal experience and effects of a more-or-less defined moment in time. There has been

less attention paid to how experiences such as those labeled as "peak" might be part of transformatory processes in synchronous timespaces, how the stage might be set for these processes to play out, and their importance in the context of celebratory festivals.

Returning to the philosophical work of theologian Josef Pieper (1952) on *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* is revealing for understanding directions or orientations that have largely been forgotten or overlooked by current scholarship. Pieper (1952) conceives leisure as a mental and spiritual attitude involving contemplation, celebration, and wholeness, a perspective that has not been taken up by the contemporary leisure field. He discusses the history of worshipping Greek gods, Dionysian rites, and the importance of ecstatic festivities to support society and culture continuing well. For Pieper (1952), leisure is deeply involved with "a receptive state of mind" (p. 41), "letting things happen" (p. 40), and "the basic meaningfulness of the universe and a sense of oneness with it" (p. 43). He considers the soul of leisure to lie in contemplative celebration. It is through festivals that human beings affirm the fundamental meaning of their lives and their place within the universe (Pieper, 1952). Then and now, festivals provide a vibrant synchrony of music-dance, art, and play that help to reconnect people with the mysteries of life and the cosmos. Re-centering leisure within a focus on process and wholeness provides an enlightening lens to explore ecstatic and transformational experiences at festivals. Fox (In Press) pushes towards embodied, multidimensional, cyclical, and holistic perspectives that are beginning to occur in some areas of leisure scholarship. By using insights from Indigenous perspectives, Fox (In Press) suggests a polymodal concept of leisure that attunes to human embodiment and interconnection. Exploring ways of knowing grounded in dynamic process may be particularly revealing and transformative for leisure and for festival studies.

Chapter 3: Methodological & theoretical foundations

3.1: Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The current project utilizes interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived experience of transformational festivals. IPA is a qualitative research method best suited to the task of discerning how active agents make "sense" of lived

experience, and particularly those experiences considered meaningful or significant (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Because festival research occurs in liminal spaces, and because transformative festivals seem to apply the liminal aspects of festival, this approach is well suited for investigating how agents interpret life-changing experiences. IPA synthesizes three major influences: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. This section will introduce the main theorists and concepts that converge to form the foundations of this method. I rely heavily on Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) comprehensive outline put forth in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. I then turn to a brief overview of the present academic focus of work using IPA, and detail how it is an instructive methodology for the current work.

Phenomenology is a philosophical "study of experience" concerned with describing and understanding lived experience as a process (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). It is an approach shaped primarily by the work of phenomenological philosophers Edmund Husserl (1982), Martin Heidegger (1962/1927), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1956/1943). Husserl asserted that consciousness is experiential, and experience could be studied in the same way that it occurs – as a first-order, personal experience. He also discussed the importance of bracketing, or isolating one's assumptions and preconceived notions, in order to focus on perceiving a clear experience of being in the world. Bracketing is conceptualized as a way to reduce distraction and misdirection in service of achieving an "essence" of experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 14). In other words, bracketing is an important technique used in the process of eidetic reduction. Eidetic reduction aims to establish the practical and emotional meanings of phenomena in lived experience. Ultimately, Husserl wanted to examine the nature of consciousness itself by moving towards a transcendental bracketing of the content of experience. Turning away slightly from these lofty philosophical heights, Heidegger moved towards rooting his view of phenomenology within a physically grounded context. Heidegger's concept of "Dasein" ("there-being" or "being-with") refers to a unique, situated quality of being human (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009, p. 16). In Heidegger's philosophy, people are "always already thrown" into a worldly context of objects, language, and relationships that cannot be separated from experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 17). Intersubjectivity refers

to our experience of the world as inherently shared and relational. Heidegger asserts the importance of intersubjectivity to the process of making sense of the world, and communicating with others. As a result, our being-in-the-world is always in-relation-to and perspectival, as well as being practically grounded and multi-modal. Importantly, Merleau-Ponty adds to phenomenology by diverging somewhat from Heidegger's worldliness and instead emphasizing embodiment. His work focuses on how embodiment creates an individually situated perspective as a body-subject, because it directly references our experience of being a body *in* the world. Finally, Sartre adds a temporal, processed-focused conception of experience. He asserts that humans are always in a process of *becoming*, instead of simply being. This process occurs in relation to a worldly context, and especially in relationship to the presence or absence of others (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Hermeneutics has a separate, older philosophical lineage from phenomenology, but the two merge with the work of hermeneutic phenomenologists such as Heidegger. Hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation, and it is shaped primarily by the work of Martin Heidegger (1962/1927), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1998), and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1990/1960). Heidegger discusses interpretation as a method of accessing the lived experience of engagement with the world. The Greek root of the word 'phenomenon' can be translated to 'show' or 'appear,' which suggests a kind of spontaneous emergence of our experiences with objects and relationships. Heidegger adds to phenomenology by adding complexity to the concept of 'appearance,' therefore becoming directly involved with the process of understanding phenomena as it appears. The appearance of phenomena may contain unseen meanings or connections that require analysis to uncover and understand. This is a process of interpretation. In addition, through engagement with the object of interpretation, context (in the form of preconceptions and assumptions) is revealed. Thus, Heidegger offers a more refined conceptualization of bracketing as a reflexive, cyclical process that can only be partially achieved in trying to make sense of lived experience.

Schleiermacher discusses interpretation as a holistic art form that involves a variety of skills, and incorporates the importance of intuition (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In his view, interpretation involves a dual attention to the explicit meaning of texts

(grammaticality), as well as the psychological individuality of the person creating the text (the author or speaker). The person interpreting may offer additional perspectives on the text that might not have been considered by the original creator, but only as deeply as the analyst is sensitive and receptive to perceiving the common ground between them. Finally, Gadamer's work focuses on the analysis of historical texts as a dance between past, present, and future. Ultimately, he conceives interpretation as a dialogue that aims to learn from the past to gain insights for the present. The interpretive act requires a spirit of openness and a willingness to set aside preconceptions as they arise during the cyclical process of engaging with texts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Ideography is the study of the particular. This manifests in an attention to details and depth of analysis, as well as situating understandings of phenomena within specific contexts and from the perspective of specific people (or groups of people). Lived experience straddles a place of being inherently embodied and perspectival, as well as worldly and intersubjective. Ideography offers a detailed, thorough, and systematic look at a particular experiential phenomenon in order to illuminate it (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

In reviewing the existing literature, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a method is currently dominated by the social-psychological and health fields. There is a burgeoning area of scholarship using IPA to focus on the experience of living with (and attempting to address) mental or physical health issues (Gough, 2016; Hunt, Nikopoulou-Smyrni & Reynolds, 2014; Kenny, 2016; Lawson et al., 2014; Major, 2016; McDermott, 2016; Minney & Ranzijn, 2016; Nunnerley, Hay-Smith & Dean, 2013; Piškur et al., 2016; Robinson, 2016; Turner, Barlow & Ilbery, 2002). There is also substantive effort directed towards using IPA to further understandings of human relationships in psychology (Allen, 2013; Eskandari, 2016; Godeanu, 2015; Joseph & Southcott, 2015; McLean, 2016). The use of IPA in the leisure field is limited, but it is starting to be used in an interdisciplinary manner. For example, scholars have investigated the sensory experience of outdoor exercise (Allen-Collinson & Leledaki, 2015), how people unwind from work during leisure (Cropley & Millward, 2009), the association between pole fitness and positive body image (Dimler, 2015), how women with arthritis have adapted their leisure to maintain identity

through art-making (Reynolds & Prior, 2011), and how cancer patients have used arts-based leisure to cope with their diagnosis (Reynolds & Lim, 2007).

Despite the resonance of IPA for the current work, it is necessary to disclose that it is a methodological import. I discovered it during the course of reviews, after the research process was complete. Although IPA was added retroactively, the philosophy and approach help to structure the bricolaged methods that I initially used to approach the experience of festivals. During the editing stages of this project, reviewers drew my attention to the resonance found between my bricolage and the interdisciplinary IPA approach. While not a perfect fit, I found that IPA brought together in a better and more precise way what I was struggling to articulate. I therefore rewrote this methodology section and reviewed the entire thesis. IPA provided a theoretical language that helps me communicate my findings and my challenges more precisely and economically. IPA helps to answer the research questions by providing a framework for better understanding the lived embodiment of transformation. By creating a detailed map of the aesthetic and social construction of spacetime at several specific festivals, and by attending to the experiences of a particular group of individuals, my work adds a multi-modal account of the festival phenomenon. Further, my contribution broadens IPA with an addition of arts-based and ethnographic research methods. IPA is currently limited by its reliance on textual analysis of semi-structured interviews for interpretation and communication of overarching themes. This work pushes beyond text by using conventions from cultural studies to read artworks, bodies, and events in spacetime as text.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) discuss the problematic historical tendency of the West to prefer monomodal forms of cultural transmission separated, delimited, and autonomous from all others. They discuss multimodality as increasingly common, and it is migrating into a place of central importance for communicative action in the contemporary age (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Additionally, the theory of articulation in cultural studies provides another way to shift the focus from encoding/decoding written text towards an examination of cultural context. Articulation is a creative, engaged, and active process of creating connections by “trying out” different ways of theorizing culture (Slack, 1996, p. 114). It is theorized as a method of characterizing social formation that avoids

both reductionism and essentialism. Identities, practices, and experiences make up the context that scholars in cultural studies seek to map in great detail. Examining, analyzing, and communicating phenomena are seen as ongoing processes of re-articulating the shifting collection of forces that create and maintain concepts of identity (Slack, 1996, p. 125). The field of cultural studies aims to approach method as a form of practice that is designed to engage with the lived experience of the world. This resonates with the current work, and is particularly instructive for future directions in IPA beyond the current focus on social-psychological concepts.

My research suggests the need to conceptualize a *hermeneutic spiral* within cultural studies of social and personal transformation, as proposed initially by theologian and biblical hermeneutician Osborne (2006). The hermeneutic circle describes an iterative process of analysis within IPA, as well as the dynamic relationship between part and whole (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It has been criticized for its inherent circularity of logic, but it provides a nonlinear way of thinking about how to make sense of evolving data sets. A spiral is more complex than a two dimensional circular form that simply completes a revolution back to the same point in spacetime. Using insights from cultural topology as discussed by Shields (2012), a hermeneutic spiral may be seen as a four dimensional form that encompasses the element of time. As past-present-future converge and illuminate our understanding and interpretation of phenomena, we are able to spiral outwards from the original circle to explore new relevant territory, or spiral inwards towards a specific point. Regardless of the spiraling direction, movement remains centered on a distinct field of interest and circumambulates specific people, or parameters, depending on the focus. Spiraling makes room for the process of learning and adapting over time as new information or tools become available to better investigate the phenomena of interest. The spiral symbolically represents transformation and spirituality (Eason, 2004; Starhawk, 1999), as well as dynamic change (Beck & Cowan, 1996). Thus, although the present work spirals away from some of the conventional methods used by IPA scholars, it represents a spiraling towards interdisciplinarity that is best suited for investigating the transformational festival phenomenon.

3.2: RhizomEthnography

In line with an interpretative phenomenological approach, MacDonald (2016) proposes "RhizomEthnography" as an integration of reflexive ethnography with the Deleuzian rhizome and critical constructivism (p. xii). The practice of connecting with people in lived experience, linking together subject and object, and thinking complexly through multiple dimensions of life are main elements of MacDonald's (2016) ethnographic method that builds upon IPA to inform the present work. This method moves across time and place to explore how selves and subjectivities are produced through the confluence of complex psychological, social, and environmental ecologies (MacDonald, 2016). The concept of the rhizome represents connections, multiplicities, and endless possibilities in creative processes. A rhizomatic orientation helps to explore meaningful transformations that occur in lived experience, because it confronts multi-sensory, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual levels simultaneously. Thinking complexly about the process of becoming that occurs in transformative processes is informed by the wildness and wholeness of the rhizome (MacDonald, 2010). Recognizing multitudes and confronting multiple flows challenges the dominance of linear and individualistic orientations to the production of knowledge and meaning. These flows are shared and individual histories, the complexity of life embodied in the present, as well as imagined, desired, and feared futures. In response, the methodology of this work sought to engage with creative, connected, and process-based ways of knowing festivals.

In order to theorize RhizomEthnography, I use primarily the structuring framework of Lefebvre's (1991, 2004) production of space and rhythmanalysis, complimented by Shields' (2013) work on cultural topology to map transformational festivals. Second, I use Lipari's (2014a, 2014b) concept of interlistening and Henriques' (2010) vibrational model of affect to further explore the lived experience of festival timespaces that may be related to transformation.

3.3: Theoretical dimensions

Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the production of space suggests that spaces emerge from a set of interacting elements that vary spatially and temporally. He proposes a

spatial triad for how timespaces are perceived, conceived, and lived (Lefebvre, 1991). Spatial practices (perceived spaces) refer to everyday routines, conventions, and physical spaces themselves. Representations of space (conceived spaces) are the abstracted theories and philosophies, conceptual representations, and hidden forms of knowledge that underlie how people conceive space. Finally, spaces of representation (lived spaces) are the embodied experiences of the social imaginary, involving creative and transgressive experimentations (see also Shields, 1999, for discussion). Lefebvrean theories are well suited to map festivals and explore the nuances of how these timespaces are constructed to enable transformative experiences. In Lefebvre's (1991) words, a "social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space" (p. 54). His recognition of the importance of creativity and social interactions to transformational processes resonates with the co-creative roots of festivals. Lefebvre (1991) saw space as social morphology, or sets of social relations. He considers the idea of space as an empty container of 'reality' is a fictive abstraction and an ideology created by power. Space is always social, because it is a materialization of social being. Therefore, "the form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 101). Festivals are temporary re-creations of urban spaces, because like cities, they create potentialities by centralizing interactions (Merrifield, 2012). Festival cities are a kind of urban Celtic knot where people encounter one another in an interconnected web of social relations.

Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis places primacy on the sensory experience of the body moving in and through space, and proposes ways to analyze the rhythms of urban (or festival) environments. Rhythms emerge at the intersection of place, time, and energy (Lefebvre, 2004). As such, the festival experience is a type of rhythm that emerges from a confluence of flows. Lefebvre (2004) stresses the particular importance of paying attention to sounds and other aspects of the senses to understand everyday lived experience. "[The rhythmanalyst] thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 21). This theory makes space for a richly textured, sensory exploration of festivals that engages with the presence of the now moment. As humans are intrinsically rhythmic, sociospatial beings, Lefebvre's theories have the potential to enlighten how to

conceive, perceive, and engage with leisure spaces (Watkins, 2005). Recreation and leisure scholarship in particular has begun to take up Lefebvrean theories (Dubnewick, 2013; Glover, Fox, Humberstone & Dubnewick, 2014; Fox, Riches & Dubnewick, 2011; Hall, Lashua & Coffey, 2008), yet there is still potential for expansion.

Rob Shields' (2013) proposes cultural topology as a conceptual framework to space, and critiques Lefebvre's linear analysis of social spatialization. Cultural topology privileges simultaneity, multiplicity, transformation, and relationality: it is "a study of becoming" (Shields, 2013, p. 139). As a result, it naturally connects to interpretative phenomenological analysis and RhizomEthnography. Cultural topology provides a frame of reference for analyzing abstract landscapes of experience and knotting changeable social understandings within cyclical timespaces (Shields, 2012). The lens of cultural topology allows a better understanding of how spaces and experiences change dynamically over time as they are folded into new relationships with one another (Shields, 2012). Experiences at transformational festivals are embodied and internalized by participants, only to become knotted with everyday life in multifaceted ways. These experiences are entangled with the past, present, and future simultaneously, as participants reflect the totality of their lives through how they express themselves and interact with others. An understanding of how spatializations are not static, but multidimensional and in a dynamic relationship with one another, helps to ground nebulous, changeable experiences at festivals. Shields (2013) advocates for situated, site-specific analysis and thick descriptions of the local to ground explorations of space.

Lisbeth Lipari (2014b) echoes Shields' dynamic simultaneity in her critique of linear time: "the spatial view of time as an insistent river flowing eternally from past to present to future obscures the many ways the lives of our minds are a tangle of braided melodies, leitmotifs, refrains, and ostinatos, of memory and anticipation which sparkle with occasional visits to the present moment" (p. 510). The concept of interlistening emphasizes the importance of becoming attuned to others through multiple perspectives (polyphonic), within multiple embodied sensory modalities (polymodal), and across multiple timespaces (polychronic) (Lipari, 2014b, p. 512). Listening and speaking are recast as a single

integrated process that challenges dualist distinctions. She links the word “communication” to the linguistic cognates of “communal” and “community” to illustrate how humans require social interaction in order to make sense of the world and their place within it (Lipari, 2014b, p. 506). Lipari (2014a) also critiques the dominance of linear dialogue, and argues for a more complete understanding of how human consciousness engages with multiple layers of meaning, both sensory and intangible. She describes relational selves and language as “moving symphonic waves of past, present, and future meaning possibilities, always vibrating with traces or echoes of the resonance of other meanings and dialogic relations” (Lipari, 2014b, p. 518). Lipari’s work provides a framework for how to *listen* and attune to transformational experiences in ways that resonate with the music-centric nature of the festival timespace.

Lipari’s (2014a) use of sonic metaphors such as vibration and resonance connects to Henriques’ (2011, 2010) vibrational model of affect transmission. Due to the interpenetration of movement and affect, Henriques (2010) suggests: “affect is expressed rhythmically – through relationships, reciprocations, resonances, syncopations and harmonies” (p. 58). He proposes that affect may be transmitted in the same way that wave dynamics of music are experienced corporeally, culturally, materially, and socially. Relationships themselves are patterned as rhythmic waves in a constant process of becoming (and becoming different). Henriques’ (2011, 2010) work challenges the concept of a rational, individual self by proposing a relational subject that is embedded in the collective rhythms of life. People on a dance floor are both singular and plural subjects simultaneously; they are the "one-who-is-many" and the "many-who-are-one" (Henriques, 2010, p. 67). This concept provides insight on the nebulous ‘vibe’ of transformational festivals and uncovers a way of thinking about meaningful experiences that occur collectively. The present work responds to Henriques’ call for scholars to pay attention to dimensions of experience beyond linear forms of language and text. Approaching the multidimensional nature of experiences at festivals requires a diversity of tactics. Using theoretical frameworks that engage with spacetime, rhythm, interlistening, and vibration negotiates a multiplicity of elements that exist in relation to leisure, music, and festival timespaces. This theoretical foundation situates IPA and RhizomEthnography within a

bricolaged arts-based and critical ethnographic methodology to allow a playful exploration on the margins of existing knowledge.

3.4: Bricolage

I brought together RhizomEthnography with IPA and arts-based research using bricolage. Bricolage is originally a French word that represents a construction, creation, or assemblage from a range of available materials. Lévi Strauss discusses bricolage as a "science of the concrete" that prioritizes focusing on the material world as the source of knowledge (Dezeuze, 2008). Lévi Strauss first popularized the term "bricolage" as a theoretical concept that referenced a creative, intellectual labour separated from its working class roots. A bricoleur is defined as someone with a diverse, heterogeneous repertoire who works to solve problems and communicate meaning with the best available tools (Lévi Strauss, 1962). Bricolage also references a process of mythical thought that patches together events, or the remains of events, in order to make sense of worldly structures (Lévi Strauss, 1962). Bricolage respects the complexity of life and experience, synergizes multiple perspectives, and combines ideally suited tools to explore interdisciplinary topics (Kincheloe, 2005). Drawing together different forms of research sparks creativity, expands interpretive horizons, and results in insights that do not emerge as readily from unidisciplinary approaches (Kincheloe, 2001).

Transformational festivals are bricolaged timespaces evolved from the confluence of multiple historical and cultural flows. By weaving the threads of their experience with others, participants add to the evolving tapestry of festival histories and express creative visions for life, leisure, and community. St. John (2013), scholar of electronic dance music culture, advocates for a creative, sensuous, and bricolaged approach to engaging in the remixed 'vibe' of these events. Bricolage recognizes the margins between disciplines and the edge of knowledge are where insights emerge, making it well suited to explore the liminal dimensions of transformational festivals. It also makes sense of complex phenomena by considering multivocality and reflecting on the intersections of experience. This assists in exploring the transformational aspects of festivals by opening space for process-focused and relationship-based inquiry. Kincheloe (2005) proposes researchers

must actively construct methods as they negotiate the complicated and unpredictable research landscape. Bricolage thus requires a high level of researcher responsiveness, creativity, and involvement that is also necessary to approach festival timespaces. The methodological orientation of this work combines creative strategies to find ways of interpreting that expands the boundaries of conventional knowledge production. By balancing philosophical questions with critical constructivism, bricoleurs attempt to connect the process of research with the heart of lived experience (Kincheloe, 2005).

My history attending transformational festivals and my prior research project on the same topic helped to inform my understanding that a bricolaged methodology integrating art and critical ethnography would help to answer the research questions. For researchers seeking duplication, consider a longer period of integration and ethnography as familiarity is developed with, and in, transformational festival timespaces.

3.5: Arts-based research

Orienting to the concerns of art (such as through beauty, expression, aesthetic experience, emotional response, and creativity) is one way to engage collective understandings of human life (Williams, 2004, p. 234). Art is a subjective experience of artist and viewer that opens to a deeper significance of feeling and meaning (Williams, 2004). Creative arts are an essential part of transformational festivals, and an important reason why people attend. The relationship between music/arts and transformational processes at festivals is yet to be fully mapped or understood from a scholarly perspective, although efforts are beginning to emerge. For example, Schmidt (2015) proposes relational aesthetics as the social interstice (or technology) used by transformational festivals to enable meaningful encounters between participants. The philosophy and techniques of arts-based research (Barone, 2011; Eaves, 2014) are thus well suited to engage with the co-creative, embodied, and participatory nature of transformational festivals. This project seeks to bricolage different ways of knowing and anchors the research inquiries in approaches that resonate with festival timespaces.

Arts-based research seeks to privilege the lens of the participant as the starting point, and recognizes their existing knowledge and experience (Barndt, 2006). Art makes

space for the wisdom of multiplicities that are present in sensuous festival environments. In the words of Steven Feld (1996), "as place is sensed, senses are placed; as place makes sense, senses make place" (p. 91). Festivals engage participants in a multi-sensory timespace designed to stimulate, surprise, and transform participants through art forms. In this context, art provides a way of knowing the lived experience of transformation, how it might look or feel, and how it is personally meaningful. As discussed previously, "visionary" art is related to transpersonal and transformational processes due to its association with imagined realms and transcendent spirituality. Through artworks, artists share their personal visions with festival participants. As people interact with imagery, with each other and with the artist(s), visions may become shared and propagate as a form of group meaning-making. Festivals often feature live painting beside the stages during musical performances, and vendors exhibit or sell their work. Participants have opportunities to interact with artists and discuss their inspirations or visions for their creative work.

Barndt (2006) likens some kinds of arts-based research to playing with wild fire, for its potential to empower people and build community. "Playing with wild fire is part of a transformative process, an openness to change and to being changed" (Barndt, 2006, p. 18). In part by using artwork, transformational festivals claim to empower people, build community, and stimulate change, both within and outside of the festival timespace. Engaging in the co-creation of art with participants at festivals mirrors what is said to be meaningful about these spaces, and also reflects how people participate in embodied and sensory ways. Transformational festivals artfully design their physical timespaces to deliberately facilitate interactions and cultivate communal meanings. Most transformational festivals contain spaces with intricate art installations that double as meeting places for people to gather, relax, and chat. For example, the PoeTree at Shambhala's 2015 Grove stage is a tree house featuring hanging pieces of poetry, soft lighting, and decorative installations alongside areas to sit and interact with others. The 2015 Grove stage also contained a flowing waterfall feature with an altar of crystals, plants, animal bones, inspirational quotes, and seating for participants. Artwork draws people to explore the festival space, and connects participants through wondering and discovering. Due to the importance and ubiquity of art in the transformational festival experience, arts-

based research is well suited as a methodological strategy for exploring how these environments may catalyze life-changing processes.

Barone (2011) discusses arts-based research as a way to give insight on and express ineffable meanings inherent in powerful experiences. A work of art is both a process of making and an arousing or evocative final product that "produces a disequilibrium" in the person who creates or encounters it (Barone, 2011, p. 52). Eaves (2014) conceptualizes arts-based research as a process that expresses meaning through form, or in other words, as a way of knowing. This focus helps to answer the research queries by providing insight on experiences that are difficult to describe with words alone. As Bo Graslund said, "thinking is not grounded in language" (quoted in Haslam, 2011, p. 12). Orienting to artistic expression is a way to listen for shared meaning and resonances in lived experience.

In the presentation of results, this work uses artistic ethnographic fictions to portray transformational festival experiences through stories. Methodologically, ethnographic fiction aims to bricolage insights collected by ethnography into literary narratives that are engaging and affective (Jacobsen & Larsen, 2014). In line with arts-based research, ethnographic fiction is rooted in creative processes, values evocative portrayals of lived experiences, and touches the heart by moving through the body (Inckle, 2010). This strategy recognizes that all representations are performative and aims to make academic research more accessible (Jacobsen & Larsen, 2014). In this work, ethnographic fiction is used as a creative way to integrate insights from prior interview participants, ethnography, and autoethnographic data (Mohr, 2013). In combination with arts-based research methods, the use of ethnographic fictions brings the reader closer to the sensory and embodied experience of transformational festival timespaces. The stories assist in answering the research questions by describing in detail specific festival qualities, conditions, and structures that helped to catalyze transformations for participants. Rich description portrays how it looks and feels to experience transformation through the festival experience, and thus provides details that assist with further analysis.

Chapter 4: Research methods

4.1: Festival destinations

The research focused initially on two transformational music festivals that I attended in the summer of 2015: the Astral Harvest Music & Arts Festival (July 3 to 5 near Driftpile, AB) and the Shambhala Music Festival (August 7 to 10 near Salmo, B.C.). These events emerged from my previous work as significant to the festival journeys and transformational experiences of my participants (Mohr, 2013). Due to my prior experience attending both festivals as a participant and researcher, I hypothesized they would contrast in revealing ways for the current research questions. They were chosen for their differing perceived and conceived spatial qualities, such as size, location, focus, and offerings that will be discussed in detail in proceeding chapters.

The primary reasoning behind the selection of these particular festivals for the current work emerged from my 2013 interview participants. For context, my original interview sample was a group of five white Canadians between 20 and 30 years of age: two women, and three men. They all previously attended at least one electronic music festival, and I knew them personally as friends and acquaintances prior to the interviews. Thus, the sample was small and spoke to a limited part of the festival population and the Canadian population in general. However, the interviews contained thick descriptions of personally meaningful festival experiences and emotional narratives about how festivals transformed their lives. In the process, Shambhala was identified as the first festival all of my 2013 interview participants attended. As a result, it contained substantial personal meaning and significance for their journey through festival cultures. Shambhala furthermore represents an internationally known, larger-scale expression of transformational festival culture. Astral Harvest also emerged as a significant festival among my interviewees, because it was a local event that many friends attended and it was perceived as a different qualitative experience than Shambhala. I included this festival to explore a newer, smaller, community-focused festival that would contrast with Shambhala and represent another iteration of transformational festival culture. Exploring the different qualities, conditions, structures, and supports of both festivals assists with understanding the kinds of

transformational processes that are catalyzed in timespaces constructed by organizers with different foci.

The nature of this selection strategy has several limitations. Due to time constraints, limited resources, and the scope of the project, I was only able to plan for attending two festivals in summer 2015. As a result, the research has a narrow focus on the experiences of a specific, interconnected festival community, rather than a wide spread of information on larger number of festivals or festivalgoers. Focusing on a specific population generated a rich depth of data, but resulted in a limited diversity of experiences. Future research might aim to investigate a more diverse group, broadly map more festival timespaces, or to replicate the project with different festivals to explore if similar insights emerge.

4.2: Description of art process

The present work facilitated the co-creation of large art canvases with groups of participants at each festival. Co-creating artworks mirrored and played with lived experiences at transformational festivals. Engaging in collective processes allowed an embodied exploration and physical manifestation of the "now" moment. The artistic process offered a multidimensional sensory experience, and the resulting artworks portrayed qualities of the event timespace. This method assists in answering the research questions by embodying and reflecting the festival conditions, structures, and timespaces involved with transformation. Through their aesthetic, the artworks express and represent differences in the festival timespaces and resulting experiences.

I hosted one co-created art gathering on the Saturday of each festival. The initial process was designed to involve a group of approximately ten people collaborating on a large canvas for approximately one to two hours. Subsequently, I encouraged further evolution of the canvas throughout the festival by hanging it up in an accessible area within or near the group camping space. I did this in order to engage my immediate festival community, as well as others passing by. I documented the evolution of the canvases by photographic methods at least every six hours, starting from the close of the initial art process and continuing throughout the weekend.

At the event, I provided a variety of materials including the large canvas (approximately 7 by 10 feet), washable acrylic and tempera paints, paintbrushes, markers, glue, mixed-media fabrics, beads, feathers, and other tactile art supplies. These materials were chosen in order to provide a wide range of textures, colors, and media for experimentation and expression of the experience. Participants were led into an arts process that used low-skill artistic activities to explore a wide range of experiences with high sensitivity, consistent with methods in arts-based research (Eaves, 2014). To frame the activity and provide loose guidance, participants were asked to explore their festival experience as it was emerging, and to express what was alive for them in the present moment. They were encouraged to follow their flow, regardless of guiding instructions.

The process began by painting a background of colors, shapes, and textures that aimed to cover the white space of the canvas. Participants were invited to select colors that were attractive or expressed how they were feeling. This encouraged people to start experimenting in an abstract way and heightened comfort levels with the available materials. Once the group felt the background was completed, artists were invited to continue adding details. They were invited to draw an outline of a physical or symbolic body part or whole onto the canvas. This body-centered approach was one way to begin to translate embodied, lived experiences into an artistic medium. Following techniques used in expressive arts, space was opened for authentic expression and left as open-ended as possible. This aimed to allow people to explore what might be emerging without judgment or leading. During the process, emphasis was put on having fun and exploring together rather than creating a "high quality" artwork. When the process came to a close, the canvas was hung up with a short explanatory sign for people who encountered the canvas without prior knowledge of the project. People were welcomed to add further dimensions throughout the weekend as we moved through the rhythms of the festival timespace.

During analysis of the art process, I collected responses to the canvases from two people familiar with transformational festivals, and two outsiders to the culture. Without naming or explaining the associated festival, I showed each canvas individually and collected thoughts, impressions, and emotions that arose. This occurred mostly in my home, as the canvases were large and difficult to transport. The aesthetic responses

provided further evidence for how the artwork reflects insights into festival timespaces, and assisted with independently validating the arts-based method.

4.3: Participants

I notified those who I knew were attending the festivals about my intentions to host co-created art gatherings. The notification process was completed through Facebook messaging, as this online platform hosts "events" where I could publically see which people in my social network had declared their attendance at the 2015 festivals. This enhanced the likelihood that enough people would participate in the art process. Increased familiarity and pre-existing friendships enhanced the co-created artistic gathering at Astral Harvest, because people were able to begin from a place of comfort. Due to the in-depth and exploratory aims of the research, the sample did not need to be representative of the entire festival population. Additional demographic descriptions of the participants are described in the "travel report" of each festival, as each art process included different individuals.

Although I raised awareness in my festival community to cultivate familiarity, any interested party could participate in the research process. When other festivalgoers happened upon the art gathering, they were welcomed to join. This occurred at Shambhala, where many participants I did not know encountered and added to the canvas. A notable element of festival timespaces is spontaneously stumbling upon or encountering different people, groups, art, music, and other happenings. Involving participants spontaneously as well as inviting my community was both appropriate and representative for the lived experience of transformational festivals.

4.4: Astral Harvest festival – Travel report

Astral Harvest was the first festival that I attended in 2015 (July 3 to 5). I set up camp with a large group of (approximately 40) people from the Edmonton community who organized the location of their gathering on Facebook beforehand. This increased the likelihood the people I notified ahead of time would be able to find my camp, but also meant I had to work around the group to decide where the art canvas would be set up. The changeable context meant I had to be flexible in my implementation of the method.

I spent the majority of Saturday setting up the space underneath a large, protected tent awning within our group camping area. Initially, eight people showed up to do art at 2 PM: three men, three women, and two children. I knew four of the adults well, and the remainder of the participants I met the previous day because we were part of the same camp. The art activity took about two hours, and it rained the entire time. Planning for variable weather conditions was crucial to the process. Afterwards, I hung the piece upright underneath my awning space and left out the materials for further additions. I also left out signage on the ground near the art materials that encouraged people to add more art, but very little was added over the remaining days of the festival. It was unclear whether this occurred because the canvas was located within the group camping space, the signage was not visible enough, or people were unsure whether it was appropriate to paint over other's work.

4.5: Shambhala festival – Travel report

Shambhala was the second festival I attended in 2015 (August 7 to 10). I brought a larger, separate gazebo awning to shield the canvas against weather. The art process at Shambhala unfolded in a very different manner. Firstly, my camping location arose spontaneously upon arrival at the festival. I acquired a campsite directly along the main thoroughfare, making the canvas more visible to passers-by than at Astral Harvest. Secondly, I attached signage on sticks that I pounded into the ground a few steps before the awning. Both strategies increased the visibility of the project, indicated more clearly that people were welcome to contribute, and made the consent form accessible. Thirdly, none of the community members I contacted ahead of time came to the process. Instead, I had a steady stream of other interested festivalgoers stop by for varying lengths of time over the course of a three hour period. They would stay for anywhere from around five minutes to half an hour, paint a small section of canvas, and move on. These participants were diverse in age, gender, and cultural origin, but I did not collect specific demographic data. After I hung up the artwork underneath the awning for the duration of the festival, it was continuously being added to and changed dramatically over the course of the weekend. This may be in part due to my improved setup, signage, and accessibility to the artwork. I

did not collect consent forms from people who added art at this stage, but all information about the project was posted clearly at the gazebo. There was also a form for people to write down their name and contact information if they wanted further communication from the researcher or updates about the project, but no participants utilized it.

It is worth noting that it struck potential participants as strange that I had to ask them to sign an ethics consent form to be part of a research study in order to participate in creating art. This was not an issue at Astral Harvest: I was able to explain the form, people had time to read it, and generally everyone who was involved had some understanding of who I was and what I was doing. In the transient atmosphere of the Shambhala process, my request for a name and signature put some people on edge, and contributed to the early departure of some who were interested in contributing. They might have been confused or uneasy with the form, unwilling to process reading a document, and/or uninterested in listening to an explanation at that time. Most people who signed the form did not read it, and relied on my verbal explanation. This experience might speak to the incompatibility of certain university ethics requirements for research processes in festival timespaces, and suggests a need for a better way to obtain informed consent for future projects.

4.6: Additional data wellsprings

In order to paint a full picture of transformational festival culture and spaces, I collected additional information on each festival using autoethnographic and ethnographic methodology. Ethnography is a way to conduct embodied, affective, and sensory research that emphasizes the importance of the encounters between ethnographer, participants, and practices as key to understanding (Harrop & Njaradi, 2013). This project used a language and art-based journal to capture festival rhythms and experiences. This included taking photographs of timespaces and happenings. I engaged with the journal at least once a day for one hour over the course of the events. This complimented the artistic process by providing context and background that situated the festivals in lived experience.

Expression may be inhibited by structures that drive towards an agenda and trap the circulation of nomadic thoughts (Kim-Cho, 2006). In response, the present work uses Kim-Cho's (2006) method of wild chatting or jamming to transcend a structuralist culture that

tames our thinking and reduces complexity into specific, organized formats. Wild chatting suggests engaging in informal dialogue and conversations that circumambulate related areas and topics of interest. When nomadic thoughts are given free rein, concepts spiral around and new connections or understandings may be forged (Kim-Cho, 2006). Wild chatting was employed throughout my ethnography in order to explore how participants were trying to make sense of meaningful experiences around transformation. I recorded insights from conversations in my ethnographic journal.

Olszanowski (2011) uses similar concepts in employing the feminist "friendship-as-method" (p. 15). She discusses engaging in active dialogue, building trust, and pursuing rambling storytelling as ways to overcome hierarchical relationships of participant and researcher. This cultivates a collaborative research approach that engages both parties in topics of mutual interest (Olszanowski, 2011). Friendship-as-method assisted in answering the research questions by allowing personally meaningful and intimate experiences to be exchanged from a place of mutual trust and comfort. Both wild chatting and friendship-as-method were appropriate to festival timespaces, because encountering, engaging, and connecting with others are central features of the experience. Additionally, these methods linked subject-object by allowing interpenetration of researcher-participant experiences.

Several other sources of data emerged organically as the research process was bricolaged together. A friend (and experienced festival attendee, or "veteran") offered to send me several written stories he compiled after his transformational experiences at festivals. He also sent me several audio voice recordings detailing a more complete story of his journey into and through festival culture, including extensive background about his life. These stories inspired elements in the creative narrative excerpts, and provided further support for the main themes and findings of this project.

4.6.1: Intention Alberta festival

At the end of 2015, the opportunity arose to participate in another transformational festival. I attended the Intention Alberta gathering (December 29, 2015 to January 2, 2016 in Sylvan Lake, AB). Due to my familiarity setting up space for co-created art gatherings, I offered a similar experience at Intention. My name and a description of the playshop were

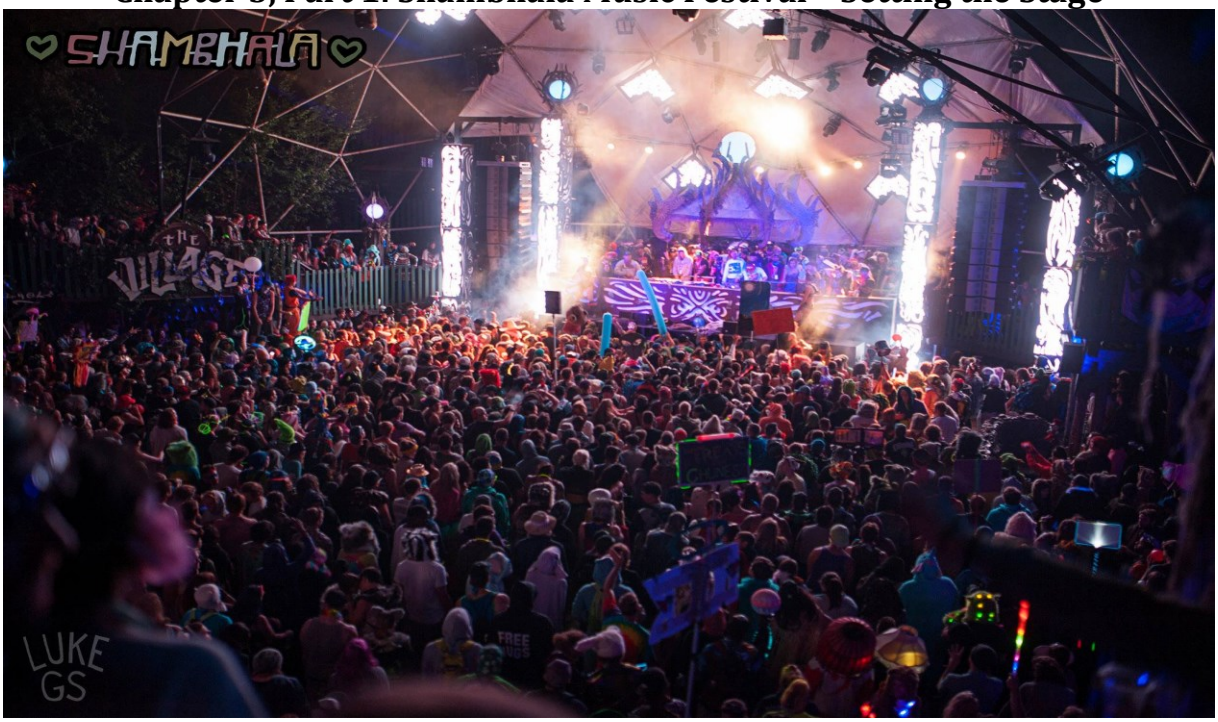
included in the daily schedule, and announced during group lunch. The canvas was located inside in the main dining hall, beside the kid's play area. Children and adults of various ages stopped by to collaborate over the span of about three hours. At the end of the process, the piece was hung up in the main dining area. Materials were placed alongside signage indicating it was appropriate to add further artwork, and people continued to add throughout the festival. As Intention was not initially part of the research or ethics board application, I did not collect consent forms for the art process. The data I use around this festival comes from auto/ethnographic methods or is publically available online.

The decision to include Intention in the present work emerged spontaneously. Although I attended because I was personally interested in the event, Intention became a revealing counterpoint for the research. The festival's very small size and entirely volunteer-based organization created different opportunities for transformation than both Astral Harvest and Shambhala. Concurrent with ethnography, exploring my own lived experience in festivals opens space for embodied, affective research and transcends the researcher/researched binary. Although unplanned, bricolaging an additional festival ultimately provided more data for analysis, broadened the research reach and contributed to a richer understanding of transformational timespaces.

Chapters 5, 6, & 7: The festivals – Setting the stage

The following sections describe the spatial practices of the Shambhala Music Festival, Astral Harvest Music and Arts Festival, and Intention Alberta festival in greater detail. As the majority of the data comes from online promotional materials, the descriptions address the representations of space conceived by organizers and encountered by potential participants. Following the festival descriptions are creative vignettes of ethnographic fiction that aim to evoke a cultural experience of the timespace (Jacobson & Larsen, 2014). These stories were synthesized from interviews, my friend's narratives, wild chatting, art gatherings, participant observation, and autoethnographic journal entries. Finally, all collected data is bricolaged into an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the transformational qualities, structures, and supports of each festival timespace. Although the festivals contain the same basic elements of transformational events as outlined by the Bloom Series, they construct or support these elements differently based on their foci. Using theoretical frameworks, the analysis discusses the lived experience of transformation through the contrasting iterations of festival timespaces.

Chapter 5, Part 1: Shambhala Music Festival – Setting the Stage



4. Village stage, Shambhala Music Festival (2014)

Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

The Shambhala Music Festival is the largest and most well known transformational festival in Western Canada. In a recent article entitled "7 Wildest Transformational Festivals," Rolling Stone included Shambhala among the likes of Burning Man and other international events (Doucette, 2016). Shambhala describes itself as "Canada's premiere Electronic Music Festival," featuring "[c]utting edge Talent, Lights and Sound com[ing] together in Paradise" (Shambhala Facebook Page, 2016). Shambhala is currently in its 19th year of production and draws upwards of 15,000 people to the Kootenay interior region of British Columbia in early August. Hosted on the private Salmo River Ranch property (a 500-acre working farm), the festival "transforms [the ranch] into the biggest city in the West Kootenays" for the duration of the event (Shambhala website, 2016).

Despite international acclaims and growing popularity, promotional materials underscore their "grassroots," "community," or "underground" origins and continued inspirations (Shambhala website, 2016). Similar to Astral Harvest, the festival cultivates rhetoric around "home" by referring to participants as the "farmily" who share

"Shambhalove" during their time on the ranch (Shambhala website, 2016). Shambhala continues to position itself as a boutique event that does not accept any corporate sponsorship. A description from the festival's public Facebook group in 2016 suggests that the event straddles diverse spectrums of experience:

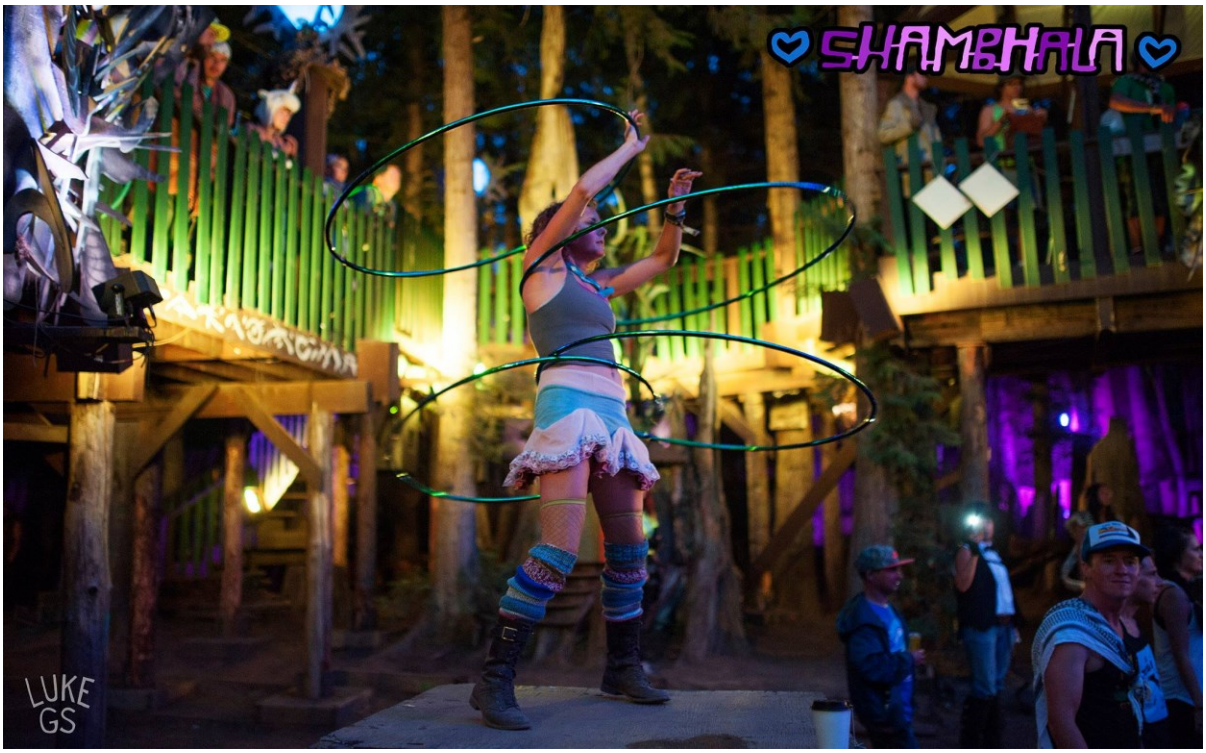
> Arcadian pastures evolve into a futuresque setting on an epic scale. Encircled by nature, a community rises, sharing a common goal, celebrating a collective love and respect for music, art and humanity. For five days and four nights time ceases to exist. This is the crucible of artistry and musical mayhem. This is the zenith of modern underground entertainment. This is Shambhala…

As evidenced by the prominence of international headlining DJs on their online promotional materials, this event focuses most strongly on music-dance and entertainment as central draws. To support the scale of the event and celebratory atmosphere that this focus encourages, Shambhala has a large array of supportive infrastructure and an aggressive harm reduction strategy. The festival also contains a substantial visual art presence in the form of several art galleries, artworks spread throughout the grounds, live artwork by visionary artists, and the infusion of artistic design into stage construction. However, Shambhala has a limited number of workshops, conferences, and ceremonial components in relation to its size when compared to other festivals. Finally, unlike the smaller festivals, Shambhala does not have a family element as all attendees must be 19 years of age or older. These foundations combine to create a festival experience that sets the stage for transformation in different ways than Intention or Astral Harvest. In a larger-sized, adult-oriented festival environment such as Shambhala, people are largely left to choose their own adventure through the timespace. Due to the limited number of daytime workshops and offerings, the main focus for attendee interaction is centralized on the party rhythms of an extensive musical line-up.

5.1.1: Music-dance rhythms

Shambhala hosts six unique stages, each contracted out by a separate company with their own artistic director and stage crew (Shambhala Facebook page, 2016). Each stage has complete artistic control over the construction, decoration, and talent featured. While space constraints prevent an in-depth discussion of each stage, they are all distinctively

decorated and evolve each year with new music, performances, art installations, and interactive offerings that compose the bulk of the festival experience. Smaller festivals such as Astral Harvest create their line-ups from artists and musicians who apply to attend, but Shambhala does not accept talent submissions. This results in a more curated talent selection process, but it may be less accessible for local, community, novice, or less well-known artists. This strategy begs the question whether Shambhala's promotional emphasis on "community" roots is simply a rhetorical or aesthetic strategy that taps into the "transformational" festival ethos.



5. Hoop dancer at Village stage, Shambhala Music Festival (2014)
Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Across all stages, there are well over 300 musical acts that perform during the festival, as well as numerous performance artists and troupes. With little variation, the vast majority of music at Shambhala is electronic. Within the genre, each stage usually features a loosely organized style of subgenres that are more likely to be heard there. Listed by name, the stages are Pagoda, Fractal Forest, Living Room, Amphitheater, The Village, and The Grove. For example, the Fractal Forest often features funk, breaks, hip hop, and glitch

hop, while the Living Room typically hosts more "chill out" or downtempo grooves (Shambhala website, 2016). Shambhala's size adds a larger number of well-known artists to their line-up, and multiple stages with separate curation of performances ensures diversity. This contributes to a sense of the event being international and urban, as attendees are likely to encounter a range of artists playing distinctive styles. The emphasis on the music-dance element also creates an atmosphere (and transformational opportunities therein) where celebrating with others on the dance floor is central.

5.1.2: Supportive infrastructure

In order to support the issues that may arise from a large number of festival attendees celebrating outside, Shambhala hosts an assertive array of harm reduction aids. Their strategy contains several services that are open 24 hours a day: Medical Services, the Women's Safe Space, and the Sanctuary. Medical Services hosts at least one doctor on shift at all times, while the Women's Safe Space provides support of all kinds by women, for women. Finally, the Sanctuary is a non-judgmental crisis-support space run by trained volunteers where anyone can go if they are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, isolated, too intoxicated, hot, cold, wet, or just needing a quiet place away from the festival. At the ANKORS drug testing and information services, participants can test the chemical composition of their drugs. This is a progressive attempt to acknowledge the prevalence of drug cultures at electronic music events, empower people through education, and keep people as safe as possible, even if they choose to use substances (Posadzki, 2014). Other services include the Outreach team sharing information about safe partying and harm prevention, and the Options for Sexual Health team providing sexual education and free safe sex supplies (Shambhala website, 2016). These elements help to reduce risks and mitigate harm, thus creating a safer and more enjoyable festival experience. Further, support systems are critical at larger festivals because the community in attendance may be more tenuous than at smaller events where the community is typically more tight-knit.

Supportive infrastructure also includes a variety of options and comfort levels for camping. The majority of attendees set up tents or campers in a large open field with varied amounts of tree cover. Shambhala offers a VIP "Shambhalodging" option where attendees

pay extra for a reserved campsite that can be set up with tents before arrival, or RV site hook-ups near the main festival grounds. These offerings may be an attempt to alleviate high costs associated with producing a festival with no corporate sponsorship. However, they also create a more stratified festival environment where participants can pay for luxurious accommodations in more desirable locations. The festival attempts to remain balanced by providing camping supports for people with disabilities, and a designated sober camping area called Camp Clean Beats (Shambhala website, 2016).

Finally, Shambhala hosts over 18 food vendors, showers, beverage kiosks and water refill stations, ATMs, a baggage shuttle, a cell phone tower, vehicle towing, and locksmith services. The BASScamp downtown provides an information desk, lost and found, and art gallery within. Finally, the Artisan Market features over 40 vendors selling handcrafted goods (Shambhala website, 2016). Extensive infrastructure ensures a smooth, convenient experience for attendees, in comparison to other festivals where participants are expected to prepare and provide for themselves more extensively. This affects the atmosphere of the event and may attract different kinds of people that are seeking a more developed, structured, or urban festival experience.

5.1.3: Art, workshops, and ceremony

Artwork is infused throughout the festival with creative décor, artful infrastructure, vendors, exhibitions, and performances that change from year to year. Shambhala is hosted on the same private property as at its inception, and this allows artful development of the surrounding environment to an unprecedented degree. For example, this ranges from the large stage infrastructures that remain on the grounds and may be improved each year, to artistic landscaping of wildflowers and gardens throughout, to artistically carved wood fences and streetlamps that help people navigate the grounds. As a result, Shambhala's landscape is particularly stunning, and some describe the resulting stimulatory effect as "Disneyland for adults" (BettyandKora, 2014). Curated gallery spaces featuring local artwork for viewing and sale are located at BASScamp and the Grove stage. There are typically several artists painting at the Grove, areas full of visionary art and tapestries, and a collaborative art space for participants. In previous years, this co-creative initiative has

been a large, circular, enclosed canvas manned by volunteers encouraging contributions and maintaining the supplies.

6. Morning group yoga class, Shambhala Music Festival (2014)

Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Excluding the large group yoga class in the morning, the Grove organizes the majority of Shambhala's ceremonies and workshops (Shambhala website, 2016). The Grove also hosts an elaborate opening and closing ceremony each year. In their words, "the Opening Ceremony is an intentional journey to harmoniously unify and align ourselves to open the gateway of conscious celebration. We gather in this space to engage our hearts and minds in diverse expressions of spirit and transformation" (Shambhala website, 2016). Soul Fire Dance, the local Nelson artist collective that typically runs the opening ceremonies, develops the performance with the consultation of local elders and ancestors. "All are invited to join in this ceremony where we collectively cultivate unification through intention, ritual, song, rhythm and dance" (Shambhala website, 2016). The Grove attempts to cultivate a spiritually inspired space that connects to and honours Indigenous and ancestral elements. Although these practices may be critiqued for problematic appropriation, they are nonetheless part of the tapestry of the experience. For some, it might be a first exposure to spiritually themed discourses through music-dance-art. This

landscape helps to initiate festivalgoers into a celebratory journey and to connect them with others in ways that may not be commonly encountered in everyday life.

7. The Grove stage during opening ceremonies, Shambhala Music Festival (2014)
Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Chapter 5, Part 2: Tales from Shambhala Festival

The air is electric with excitement. It feels like we are in a big city on New Year's Eve, but instead we are in the forest, celebrating our annual trip "home" to freedom. All around me, my campmates animatedly discuss plans for the weekend – friends that are arriving soon, shows they are most looking forward to seeing, new offerings on the festival grounds this year. Suddenly, several camps over, someone yells "SHAMBHALAAAAAAAA-AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH" at the top of their lungs. Those around him immediately return his excitement with feverish yelling and yipping. The sonic wave of joy for these people and this place quickly spreads outwards from the source to overwhelm nearby camps. When the hooting and hollering reaches us, it is my turn to pass on the energy. I let it wash through me; I throw back my head and howl at the sky as loud as I can. "AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!" A tingle of exhilaration rushes through my body as I merge my voice with the surrounding sonic pandemonium. As the wave passes, we return to our conversations.

"Incredible, isn't it? Raises the hair on the back of my neck every time," remarks my friend Jake. I nod and smile in agreement.

"Yep, pretty magical. People are so happy to be at Shamb that they regularly scream at the sky. Where else does that happen?"

Grinning, Jake finishes rolling a marijuana cigarette and sets it on his lip. He sparks up a lighter and puffs out a cloud of fragrant smoke.

"Hey, nice booty shorts!" He yells at a group of men passing by who are wearing sparkling underwear. "Looking magnificent. Wanna smoke a joint?"
Heads turn, smiling, towards the compliment.

"Hell yeah!" The invitation is well received by the group.

"You guys are our neighbours, right? Nice to meet you." He passes the joint to the nearest comrade and the groups introduce themselves to each other. Along with the joint, hugs are passed around in lieu of handshakes – a common festival custom representing a more personal connection. As we settle in to hang out, I notice the man beside me is wearing only a white speedo bathing suit and costume rabbit ears. I respect his confidence, because I am unsure if I could publically expose myself like that. I strike up a conversation:

"Nice outfit, man. Festive. How's your Shamb?"

He smiles, exhales a sweet smelling herbaceous cloud, and replies: "Ahh, it's REALLY GOOD. This place is heaven on earth and I hardly believe it exists. Everybody is so friendly."

"You're a virgin? First timer?" I respond.

"Yep. It's great, I'm totally blown away with this festival so far. I'm constantly getting lost in the forest and meeting the weirdest, most excellent people along the way," he remarks.

"Yeah man, Shambha-love. It's what unites us on the dance floor. And getting lost is all part of the ride – enjoy the journey, make new friends, go with the flow, you know?" I press further: "So what are you most excited for this weekend?"

"Honestly, I'm most stoked just to hang with my crew," he replies. "My friends are my family and I'm so glad they brought me here. I had no idea what to expect when I bought my ticket, I just heard some of their stories of a mythical place where total freedom reigns, and I had to check it out for myself," he shrugs and grins.

"Wicked. Well, welcome home, friend." I grin in return and give him a friendly slap on the back. As the joint is complete, the group starts moving on to their next destination: the beach. The midday sun is hot, and the icy river beckons their skimpily spandexed attire. Our neighbours thank us, bid us farewell, and promise to hang out again tonight to share some of their festival "party supplies" in return.

In the fog of a cannabis-induced haze, I lay back in my camp chair and wistfully gaze at the stream of funky people in various states of costume or undress filtering by. After this encounter, I find myself reminiscing about my first Shambhala, my first festival ever. I too got lost innumerable times in the labyrinthine forest trails, encountering friendly folks on hallucinogens and finding unexpected truths in the journey. For me, Shambs has come to represent pure freedom – freedom to play, celebrate, connect, experiment, take risks. Also, freedom from: social conventions, judgments, expectations, restrictions. Before festivals, I had not encountered any other place where I felt completely safe and welcomed (and excited, even) to talk to strangers, explore recreational drug use, wear weird things in public, and share my own personal creativity. I yearned for that feeling of acceptance and "live and let live" attitude in my day-to day life, and at that moment I realized a lot of other people feel the same.

My reverie is broken as one of my camp mates rouses the group for a mission "downtown" (the main festival grounds) to get some munchies and refreshments. A few of us set out in a meandering, unhurried fashion. My friend Riley remarks:

"Thanks for coming on a walk with me. I just couldn't sit still. A bunch of my favourite DJs are playing tonight and I can't wait to dance! I'm so excited."

I reply: "Oh, for sure. The love that is poured into the music here really shows. Truth be told, I first came to Shamb for the line-up – but I discovered my people. I got to share that excitement and experience with a bunch of awesome, weird folks who love the music just as much as I do. Common passions create good vibes."

Riley nods in agreement: "I hear that. It's strange to me now that I didn't think I liked to dance before I came to festivals. Our good friend Molly helped to crack my head and my heart wide open," she winks at me. "I realized I was afraid to express myself, afraid of judgment. It feels great to be moving past that. I mean, always in process…"

"Yeah, same. It's wild how letting all that go has changed me. Getting out of my head and moving in the pure flow of the moment is seriously profound."

"And you've got great flow, too!" We share a smile, link arms, and continue to stride lopsidedly towards the refreshment station. Before we get there, we encounter a man in a plain t-shirt and shorts wearing a "Free Hugs" sign on his chest. In an instant, Riley disengages from me and moves fluidly towards him, reaching her arms upwards for his shoulders. As he spots her, his eyes light up and a big smile breaks across his face, shining with the radiance of the sun in summer. He reaches down and effortlessly scoops her up, spinning her around in a circle. Riley giggles as she is swept off her feet into his affectionate embrace. As she comes back down to earth, I decide to escalate the moment to a group hug. I move towards them with outstretched arms shouting, "GROUP HUG!!! GROUP HUG!!!" to all the passers-by. Immediately, we are swarmed by at least 10 other people who run in to attach themselves to the now tight ball of humans. We gently sway as one, some of us laughing, some with eyes closed, enjoying a small moment of connection. Someone starts an "OM" and others join in, vibrating the entire group with sound resonating through bodies. Eventually the circle disperses, and people go their separate ways with smiles ignited and spirits lifted.

The original hugger who started it all unravels himself from the last of us and exclaims, "Wow, thanks! That was epic. I'm Eddie, by the way."

"Thanks, Eddie," counters Riley. "That was fantastic. Keep doing what you do!"

"I will," he replies. "I've got a lot to share. When I wear this sign, I feel like I am expressing my truest self. I recently realized that hugs are an energy exchange between two beings made of love, at their essence. To me, hugs are one of the best feelings ever."

"That's pretty deep, man," I say. "When did you realize that?"

"It's been an evolution of the journey. I'm continuously being blown away by all the love in this community. When I first did free hugs with a friend a few years ago, it was honestly a major turning point. It helped to break down some of my barriers and opened me up to relating with others in a much different way than I would have considered beforehand. I'm a pretty different person now."

"Wow, just from sharing hugs?" Riley probes.

"Yeah. When I give out free hugs, I feel that I am giving and receiving all the love I could not access or accept when I was younger, isolated and angry at the world. To make a long story short, I was pretty depressed before I discovered the festival scene, and I can confidently say that Shamb saved my life. Check this out…" Eddie pulls down his shirt to reveal the signature Shambhala logo, tattooed on his chest. I am suddenly struck by the resonances of his story with my own. I am almost left speechless, but I manage to say,

"Beautiful. Thanks for sharing, brother. Happy Shambs!" My eyes water as I reach out my arms for a final goodbye squeeze. We embrace, and depart. I am touched by this encounter in ways I'm not sure I can articulate properly in words. Festivals are powerful places of mysterious synchronicities.

8. Group hug, Astral Harvest festival (2014)

Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Later on, night has fallen, and my crew and I are making our way through the forest to the Village stage. The speaker system at this stage is extremely powerful, and we are about to get our minds blown. I am armed with only my earplugs, a backpack full of sangria, and a head full of acid. We dropped LSD with the neighbours about three hours ago, and the effects are coming on strongly now. Morphing colors and rippling visuals disorient my vision, and I cannot wipe away the silly grin that has colonized my face. Nor do I want to, for that matter. The flashing light show and mighty lasers of the giant geodesic dome over the stage shoot vibrant kaleidoscopes across my field of vision, making it hard to focus on our mission of getting a good spot to check out the show. Thankfully, I'm not the only one. As a unit, our group slowly snakes through the crowd and filters up the stairs to the second level viewing area. I can feel the bass and hammering feet of hundreds of dancing people shaking the deck beneath us. Zapped by a crescendo of sound, a seething mass of gorgeous humanity throbbing,

pulsing, beating the ground with sacred soles and souls. The air crackles with intense excitement as bodies resonate together, intimately synced with the baseline beat. Celebratory joints, hugs, smiles, and laughs are passed through the crowd as the merriment of festival time reaches its peak. It's Saturday night at Shambhala, a time many of us have waited for all year.

We take over a small area with a good view of the stage and I close my eyes for a moment, receptive, listening, sensing. I can feel the tiniest of hairs shivering in unison as a multitude of pulsing frequencies ripple through and around my tingling body. The lower the bass, the deeper the effervescent tickle. The speakers produce a wall of sound, and its sheer vibrational force enraptures me. My mind's eye envisions the modal phenomena of sign-wave cymatics that are currently quivering every particle of my body with a specific sonic symphony. Manipulating this energy in the air, I swim through a liquid sea of vibrational frequencies. With eyes still closed, I feel my body begin to translate the music into a corporeal form. I tangibly push the resonances around, contain them for a while, channel them, release them, and catch another flow. During a really great DJ set, the music takes me on a rollercoaster ride of rhythm. Dancing in flow is a state of consciousness far above and beyond the ordinary.

Hours go by. I am soaked in sweat and my feet are sore from pounding the earth, but our crew feeds off the endless energy of the crowd. Amidst all of this euphoric chaos, I am struck by a moment of clarity. The bassline echoes my heartbeat, echoes the rhythm of the cosmos, and beyond –wow-wow-wowmp– over and over, we drop. Together. It hits me that we are all connected through the beat of the music, the blood rushing through our veins, and the rhythm of life on this rock of a planet that is miraculously hurtling through space. Connected through love. We are one, here, now, always. A cloaked gentleman is praying at the DJ altar, eyes closed, head thrown back, arms outstretched, as the sound washes over his forehead and trickles down the back of his neck. He is peaceful serenity amidst the crazed energy of the dance floor, and I intuitively know he is experiencing the same feeling. We share this moment.

When I return to life as usual after this festival, exhausted, blissed out and strung out, I know that I'll have blown off enough steam to get me through my next lap around the sun. The festival represents diving into new experiences, connecting, learning, playing, transforming my preconceptions of what is possible – who I am, what I can do, who I surround

myself with, what is most important in life. It's about getting my metaphorical watermelon noggin split open, feasting on the juicy fruit inside, and sharing it with others – like a child's picnic on a hot summer day. Pleasurable, refreshing, nourishing. When my face is fully in the melon, fully in the moment, I slurp up the delicious fruit nectar that dribbles all over myself and wonder at the simple delights of being alive, here, now. I spark up a joint on the dance floor and share it with my fellow legends around me in celebration of life, love, and Shambhala, the most fantastical adult wonderland I have ever known.

Chapter 5, Part 3: Discussion of Shambhala Festival

> "Just as alienation reflected an *absence*, a moment empty of critical content, the Lefebvrean moment signified a *presence*, a fullness, alive and connected." (emphasis in original, Merrifield, 2008, p. 182)

> "This is the perfect moment, and the best part about it is that you're in it. And you're aware of it. And it's not just passing you by, like most of the rest of life does." (Interview excerpt, Mohr, 2013)

The Lefebvrean moment of embodied presence, connectedness, and celebration emerge as central themes at Shambhala. The journey into this particular festival reveals the importance of encountering. The main findings from my 2013 exploratory study established transformational experiences were directly related to how attendees encountered strangers, re-encountered friends and family, and encountered themselves in ways that felt special and distinct from everyday life (Mohr, 2013). Self-encounter was related to how participants gained awareness of self-concepts and structural patterns that they conceived as limiting their everyday lives. In other words, encounters assisted participants with the process of becoming or emerging associated with transformation. The narrative amalgamates these insights together with thick ethnographic descriptions collected from the present work. The participants are constantly connecting: with their neighbours, with their friends, with self-realizations, with random people on the dance floor and as they move through the festival timespace. In social space, bodies (or "selves") are more than physical entities: they are fluid energies constantly being altered and altering others through encountering and interacting (Shields, 1991).

Experiencing embodied connection disrupted normal routines or self-concepts, provoked consideration of alternative perspectives, and revealed insights on everyday life that participants had not previously imagined. For instance, describing their first experience at Shambhala, a participant was surprised that "people were looking me in the eye and smiling at me and talking to me... like, genuinely *talking* to me and were interested in what I had to say" (Interview excerpt, Mohr, 2013). This person perceived these moments to be transformational for how they viewed other people, because they felt they

had not authentically connected with strangers in everyday life before the festival. This mirrors the narrative of the man who experienced transformation by giving out free hugs. He overcame personal barriers and stepped into a different expression of himself through sharing moments of connection at festivals. Several first-time participants noted their surprise at how friendly other people were at the festival, and found these brief but heart-felt interactions to be refreshing and full of meaning (Mohr, 2013). In concrete ways, encountering at festivals opened people up to a greater awareness of how interacting with others could produce moments perceived to be revelational to their outlook on life or self. In Lefebvrean terms, the rhythms of encountering at the festival contrasted with the conceived notions of how participants encountered strangers in their everyday lives. Through their embodied interactions in lived space, participants gained awareness of difference and considered alternative possibilities for their lives outside of the festival.

Nadal-Melsio (2008) argues that Lefebvre's city is an *oeuvre* because it "brings philosophy closer to concrete social reality" (p. 166). She asks what other forms may be capable of "reconciling presence and representation, empirical reality and utopian desire" (Nadal-Melsio, 2008, p. 174). Festival timespaces might be one such form. For example, the characters in the narrative describe Shambhala as "heaven on earth" and a "fantastical adult wonderland." In other words, they are describing the festival as a kind of utopia. Just as oeuvres reflect an artist's journey and vision for life, transformational festivals creatively play with alternative ways of being in concrete social realities. This is reflected throughout the narrative as the characters greet each other with hugs instead of handshakes, openly share experiences of non-ordinary states of consciousness through communal drug use, and connect with other participants in ways that are perceived to be meaningful and different from everyday modes. By bringing people together to co-create experiences, the festival reveals insights while uncovering tensions. In co-creating an artwork at Shambhala and through subsequent aesthetic responses to the piece, I encountered frictions that revealed additional details. The art process unfolded irregularly with interested strangers stopping by for short periods of time before moving on. The way that people engaged in the art reflected general qualities of encountering at Shambhala that were explored in the

narrative. Encounters were brief, exploratory, and happened by chance, but they were layered with potential meaning for participants. The art piece evolved significantly from the beginning of the festival to the end as more and more people inscribed themselves on the canvas. The following pages demonstrate the artwork's aesthetic evolution over time.

9. Initial co-created canvas at the beginning of Shambhala (2015)

10. Co-created canvas midway through Shambhala (2015)

11. Co-created canvas at the end of Shambhala (2015)

Strikingly, responses to the artwork outside of the festival context described the piece as “frantic,” “agitating,” “aggressive,” “provocative,” “trickster,” “not cohesive,” and even “disturbing.” Other more neutral adjectives included “active,” “bright,” and “linear” to describe the paint splatters across the canvas. There was a sense that the “urban” aesthetic recalled “graffiti” or “vandalism” with the appearance of many symbols, names, and words superimposed on top of others. Although many of the visible symbols and words expressed themes of peace and love, it was as though the aggressive form of the work did not fit the denoted content. In parallel fashion, interview participants conceived the festival to be a cohesive community (Mohr, 2013), but the lived space of the festival suggested different topologies were also present. The large peace sign in the final piece may demonstrate an act of striving for some kind of unified cohesiveness, even though it was painted directly over the work of others. It may also symbolize avoidance to the difficult work that can be associated with working through difference in community, or the struggle of some transformational processes. The artwork revealed underlying energetic currents at Shambhala that were not entirely harmonious, but nonetheless contributed to the particular flavour of the festival experience available there. This is significant because it was a dimension that did not surface from interviews or discussions, but emerged through the current work’s embodied, communal, artistic engagement in the festival timespace.

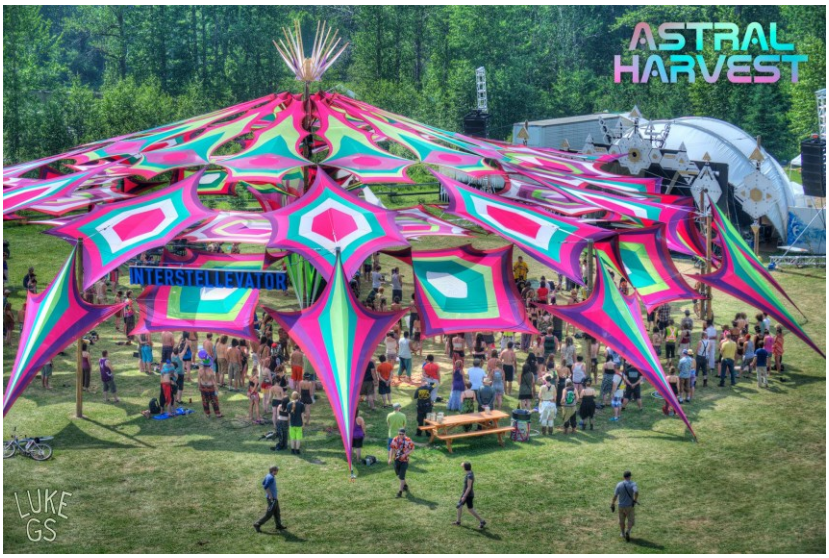
Seen through the lens of cultural topology (Shields, 2013), Shambhala is a dynamic place of ‘becoming’ that entangles individual threads of experience in a dense knot of potentialities. Given the aesthetic of the artwork, Shambhala could be conceptualized as a chaotic knot of entangled restrictions that points to potential difficulties associated with being and becoming in urban communities. The canvas demonstrated Shambhala’s large size, urban rhythms, and wild qualities of space that create greater anonymity and freedom of experimentation than at smaller community festivals. This is evidenced visually where participants intermingled colorful additions with the work of others, or riotously splattered paint on top of everything. The aesthetic also revealed an element of harm through dismissing or ignoring others that may be present in large, free-floating communities with many newcomers. As a result, these urban qualities of the timespace potentiated different kinds of transformations.

At Shambhala, life-changing experiences were associated with encountering a wide diversity of other attendees, engaging in vibrant music-dance, getting lost spatially or losing friends, and ways of celebrating or otherwise engaging in the festival as illustrated in the creative excerpt. For example, as discussed earlier, Shambhala is an adults-only festival with a progressive approach to mitigating harm from drug use through education and supportive environments. Shambhala has a more overt drug culture than at smaller, all-ages events such as Astral Harvest or Intention that do not have the same resources to devote to harm reduction. This festival quality and vibe propagated by participants leads to a greater likelihood of experimentation with drugs, and thus can result in transformations precipitated by non-ordinary states of consciousness. As one interview participant noted: "I realized I'm not okay with drugs in everyday life. If this was reality, I wouldn't be okay with it. The conclusion I came to was that since this is a safe space, and these things are going to occur, what better utopia to create to keep people safe and expanding themselves and growing themselves, than at a music festival" (Mohr, 2013). This participant felt the festival supported the potential for drugs to contribute to transformational experiences, because participants were able to experiment in relative safety. Due to the large size of the festival and resulting extensive harm reduction model, this may be the case. Although non-ordinary states of mind are experienced by festivalgoers through avenues other than those facilitated by substances, such as music-dance rhythms, insights from the Shambhala festival were particularly oriented towards the role of drugs. This does not mean to imply that the only avenues of transformation available at festivals are through drugs, but for this festival, the drug culture played a significant role. For example, the participants in the narrative felt loosened to dance expressively and let go of their self-conscious inhibitions while they were in non-ordinary states. Similarly, bonds were strengthened within their group, and with the neighboring camp, by sharing drugs (and the resulting experience) with one another.

More generally, transformational festivals are places that people seek out and encounter supported spaces to explore personal growth and consciousness expansion. This seeking may be in part because participants are coming from backgrounds where alternative ways of experimenting with the expansion of consciousness are not considered

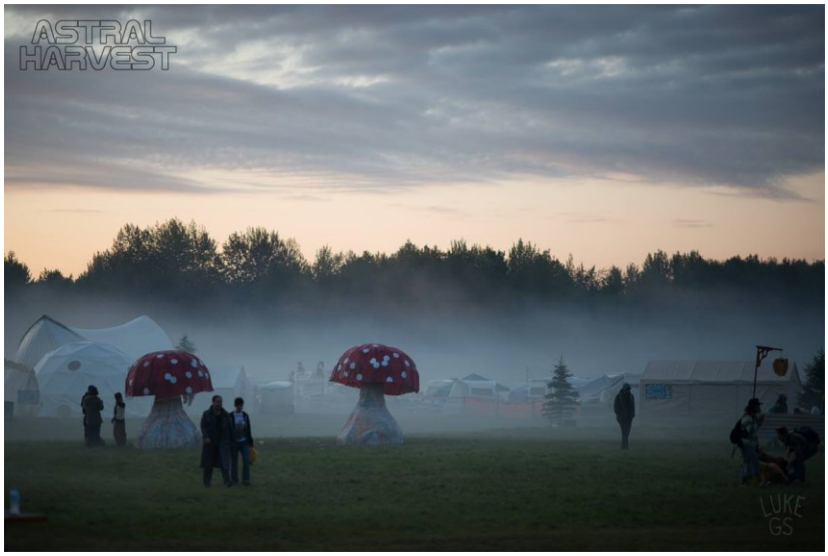
acceptable to explore. In the case of Shambhala, many of these processes occur with the aid of mind-modifying substances. My prior interview participant thought there were overarching societal misconceptions around the use of drugs, and in particular that outsiders to festival cultures erroneously view substances as an escape or a way to attain artificial happiness: "[Drugs] don't make you happy, if you're not happy. You have to be at peace to have a good trip. It doesn't change you, it just amplifies you" (Mohr, 2013). Although this comment is an individual opinion, it gestures indirectly to cultural topology's process of "becoming" in and through festivals. People arrive at festivals with existing life experiences, in varying phases of being, and hold different intentions for their journey. These existing states are amplified by non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as those experienced through taking drugs at festivals. This comment also indirectly suggests transformations require an existing precursor within the person, and that changes do not occur without a prior context. Festivals are catalysts for transformational processes in part due to their qualities, structures, and supports, but these processes have the potential to occur in everyday life as well. They are already within us, awaiting amplification through rhythmic resonance and relational encounters.

Chapter 6, Part 1: Astral Harvest Music and Arts Festival – Setting the Stage



12. Interstellevator main stage, Astral Harvest festival (2014)

Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)



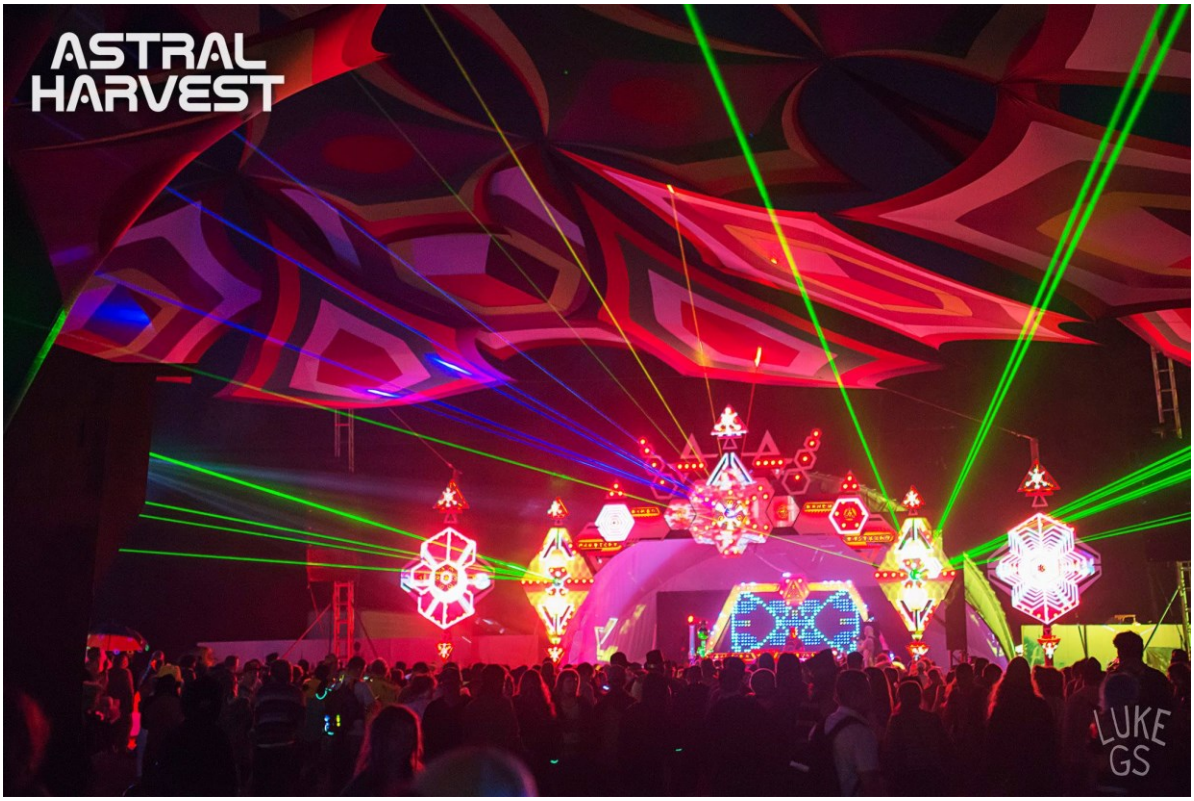
13. Mist across the festival grounds at sunrise, Astral Harvest festival (2015)

Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

The Astral Harvest Music and Arts Festival is a growing attraction for festivalgoers to explore the boreal landscape of Northern Alberta in late June or early July. It recently completed its 9th season, so it has a shorter history than Shambhala. The festival is located a three and a half hour north westerly drive from Edmonton in the Slave Lake area, near the Driftpile Cree Nation. Participants camp in a large field with sparsely wooded edges and a small river at the far edge of the property. Astral Harvest describes itself as "a celebration of music, art, knowledge, community and the human experience" (Astral website, 2016). As evidenced by growing ticket sales and increasing number of offerings, Astral Harvest's

organizing core seeks to expand the event every year. However, in 2016 the festival announced a 4,000 cap on ticket sales to preserve a comfortable experience for attendees (Astral Facebook page, 2016).

Despite its substantial size, Astral Harvest's promotional materials imply that the event has a friendly familiarity similar to being "at home." Their website begins with the opening line: "Home is not a place, it's a feeling" (Astral website, 2016). In previous years, their tagline read: "Home is where the Harvest is" (Kiddo, 2015). The combination of this rhetoric with the large amount of scheduled offerings indicates an intention to create a diverse, well-balanced, and community-integrated experience. This is accomplished through their focus on delivering exceptional music-dance experiences, diverse array of participatory activities such as workshops and ceremony, conscious intention to support families and children, and supporting infrastructure.



14. Interstellevator main stage, Astral Harvest festival (2014)

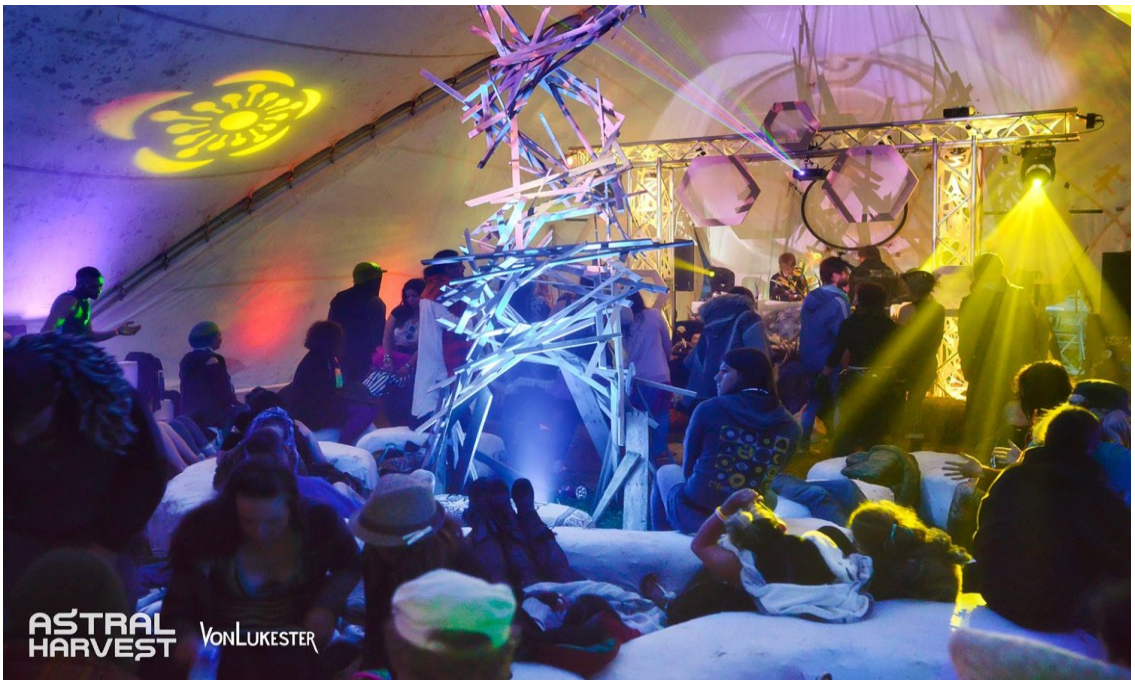
Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

6.1.1: Music-dance rhythms

The front and center prominence of the official line-up announcement (and accompanying high quality video) suggests that Astral Harvest leans towards emphasizing the music-dance element. Information available online for the 2016 event boasts 32 internationally sourced “headliners,” 88 “local support” artists, and 28 accompanying performance artists at five unique stages (Astral website, 2016). While the majority of the musical acts are Canadian DJs playing electronic music, there are a diversity of genres including folk and hip-hop.

The stages themselves are as much a work of art as the performances, and this enhances the music-dance experience for participants. Creative light shows, lasers, and visual projections are often synced to the music and create stunning effects. All five stages have a unique “theme” or “flavour” that differentiates them. The Interstellevator main stage holds most of the headliners and is described as representing “majesty, strength and power” as well as “joy, vitality, ego and jubilation.” At this stage, participants are invited to: “Become a passenger on the elevator of homoluminous consciousness as we harvest the stars and experience ourselves as One. Step through the gateway, get down and dancey and Let Love Lift you higher and higher!” (Astral website, 2016). Representing “Mother Earth,” the Wakah Chan stage is allegedly a counterpoint to the “Father Sky” symbolism of the Interstellevator (Harvest, 2014, p. 5). “Wakah Chan” is the Mayan “Galactic Tree” that shamans used to make contact with the spirit world and bring back godly knowledge. Dancers are invited to: “Embrace the rhythm of the music and travel to a place beyond this dimension. (…) In this home away from home, discover (…) what it means to celebrate with your brothers and sisters [in] the Mayan way: 'in lak'ech' (Mayan greeting meaning "you are another me")” (Astral website, 2016). These festival elements demonstrate how transformational festivals use mythology, imagery, and other elements from Indigenous cultures to impart spiritual and transpersonal themes. These themes are problematic as the festival actively engages in appropriating elements out of their original cultural context. However, their use may point to a search for the spiritual and the transpersonal through a cultural bricolage. Although this bricolage represents more of an aesthetic than a spiritual

practice, it is nonetheless a relational strategy that is employed to connect festivalgoers with one another, with spirituality, and the larger cosmos (see Schmidt, 2015).



15. Angelica's Basket stage, Astral Harvest festival (2013)

Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

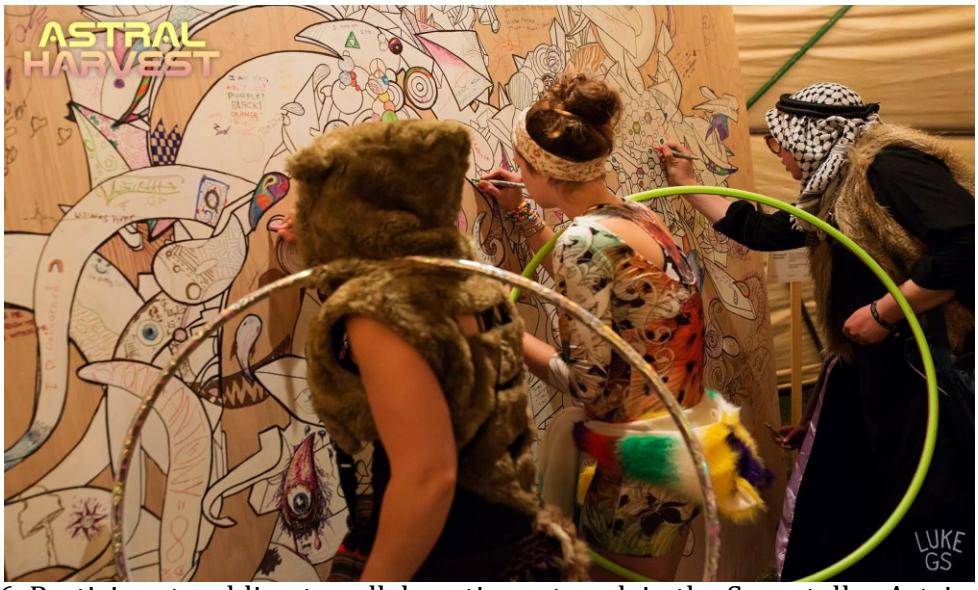
Angelica's Basket is Astral Harvest's smaller downtempo stage, and it is named after an indigenous plant that grows on the festival grounds. The stage is a covered geodesic dome described as "an enchanted cave of light projections and chillout tunes" (Astral website, 2016). Designers channel elements of earth-based spirituality as evidenced by the large altar constructed from natural crystals, plants, wood, and animal bones. The Market stage is a mid-way point along the main thoroughfare and provides eclectic sounds for festivalgoers as they browse the vendor's offerings. As a new offering for 2016, the Manor stage "exudes elegance and class" with a "mysterious, rustic, and raw style" (Astral website, 2016). By offering diverse stage spaces, the festival aims to provide a wide range of music, experiences, and atmospheres.

6.1.2: Workshops, art, and ceremony

Despite the high visibility of music in promotions, Astral Harvest strives to "[go] beyond the music scene" by encouraging and supporting a large number of daytime activities in different modalities (Astral Facebook event page, 2016). There are almost 100

unique offerings listed in the "experience" section of the website for the 2016 season. The breadth of topics is vast and depends on community members who submit proposals to share their skills and talents. The website and program guide is loosely organized into art workshops, movement workshops, yoga, conferences, visual art, and family fun. The "Astral Harvard" conferences are aimed at inspiring new ideas, connectivity, and creativity. Visual art offerings are organized through the Synestellar Artrium and include a curated gallery space, live painting by established artists and artistic festival lightscaping. The Marketplace also hosts a wide variety of artists and crafters plying skilled trades. Participants are encouraged to co-create art at the Imagination Station, where materials are provided.

Ceremony is present at Astral Harvest in the form of community-sourced offerings. The festival supports an opening and closing ceremony led by different people every year. In 2014, the opening was a participatory music-making ceremony entitled "Rhythm and Connection" (Astral program, 2014, p. 38), while the closing was a "Medicine of Community" intentional sharing circle (p. 36). Conferences also bring ceremony into the festival: Examples include "Sacred Fire Ceremony," "Shamanic Sound Medicine Journey," and "Journey to the Medicine Wheel" (Astral program, 2014, p. 37-38). As evidenced here, ceremonies at transformational festivals are often grounded in Western interpretations and appropriation of shamanic rituals and Indigenous cultural practices.



16. Participants adding to collaborative artwork in the Synestellar Artrium, Astral Harvest festival (2014) Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

6.1.3: Families and children

Astral Harvest considers families "very important" to the "community vibe" of the festival and makes a concerted effort to welcome them (Astral Facebook page, 2016). This is in contrast to Shambhala, where all attendees must be 19 years of age or older. Near the Marketplace, there is a large playground with interactive equipment where kids can spend time playing with others. At the 2016 event, the playground space hosted 13 workshops designed for "little Harvesters" of all ages (Astral website, 2016). There is also a designated family camping area near amenities to make the experience easier for parents. Intentionally supporting families to participate in the festival demonstrates an attempt to cultivate diversity in community and create a welcoming "home-like" atmosphere. Kids are seen as powerful agents of play and a reminder for adults to let loose and be inspired: "We hope the kid spirit ignites the flame within us all!" (Astral program, 2014, p. 25)

6.1.4: Supportive infrastructure

Infrastructure is present in the form of physical spaces and people helping to ensure the event runs smoothly and all participants are well cared for. This includes everything from organizing food vendors, selling ice and supplies, making showers available, and staffing the "Info Booth" to help answer questions and provide information. Astral Harvest also offers a controlled "Fire Jam" area for experienced "fire spinners"[6] to play in safety. Harm reduction at Astral Harvest is provided by 24-hour access to emergency medical services and security, and includes several supportive "safe spaces." "The Haven: Sanctuary" is a quiet area manned by volunteers trained in crisis support, and is designed to care for people experiencing distress or difficulty. "The Fallow" offers a "sacred space" for participants to relax, meditate, or experience personal healing work from practitioners in a range of modalities, including reiki, herbalism, nutrition, sound healing, shamanic healing, chakra balancing, acupressure, and others (Astral website, 2016). Festivalgoers are invited to "be still and open your heart to healing from within" (Astral website, 2016). This array of infrastructure helps to ensure that people can receive support when it is needed.

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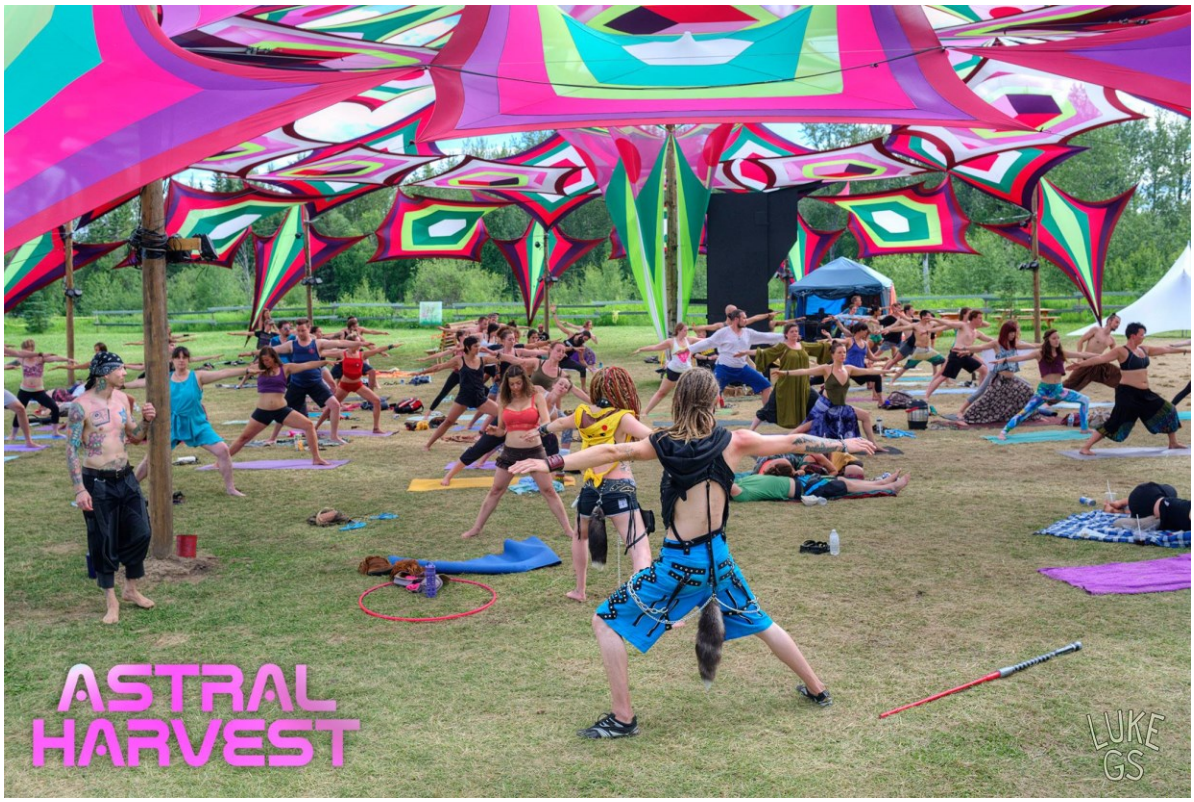
[6] Fire spinners are people who enjoy spinning objects (such as hula hoops, poi, staffs, or fans) that are designed with special wicks capable of holding large flames. Dancing with flaming objects at night creates impressive visual effects, but this practice has obvious risks. As a result, most festivals do not allow any participant-driven fire activities.

When people feel safe, they are more likely to feel at home. They are also more likely to feel empowered to explore more freely and confidently, and this may contribute to the potential for transformational processes to unfold.



17. Yoga class at Interstellevator stage, Astral Harvest festival (2014)
Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Chapter 6, Part 2: Tales from Astral Harvest Festival

After the relative chaos of packing, running around to gather supplies, rallying friends, and leaving the city in rush hour traffic, the change of pace upon arrival at the festival is palpably noticeable. As we reach our much-awaited destination, we are greeted by smiling volunteers at the main gate and roll into a patch of grass that will be our home for the weekend. It feels great to be here – we are finally home! One journey was complete when we arrived at the festival space, and another is about to begin. Festival time begins to synchronize my friends and I with the wandering, unhurried rhythms that I love about camping. A few people from our crew join me in my camper van and a smoking blend of various medicinal herbs is passed around – blue lotus, mugwort, damiana, coltsfoot, yerba santa, a pinch of cannabis – the aroma is fragrant, the group ritual relaxing. I am reminded of the shamanic ceremony I had the honour of participating in last month, where the shaman blessed and cleansed us with the smoke of sacred plants.

I'm feeling peaceful and ready for sleep, but a couple of friends convince me to take a quick evening gander around the grounds. I throw on my comfortable tiger onesie with little thought, because I don't plan to be out very long. I love onesies: They are easy to put on, and they envelop the wearer with a sense of safety while still being festive and playful. For the uninitiated, onesies are fuzzy, baggy, blanket-like one-piece pajamas with hoods that are fashioned to look like an array of animal and cartoon characters. They are a common sight at festivals because they allow people to keep warm and preserve a wide range of movement while still wearing a "costume" (and expressing a little of who they are with their chosen animal or cartoon avatar). As we make for the forest stage, I feel a refreshing sense of freedom – freedom from the deadlines and obligations of my regular life; freedom from the heavy school backpack I usually have strapped to my back, laden with books; freedom from the judgments of conventional "fashion sense," as I traipse around in an objectively ridiculous-looking animal blanket. For the weekend, the free-flowing vibes of the festival allow me to let go of the doldrums of my everyday life and step into a less burdened version of myself.

When we arrive at the stage, the music pumping out of the DJ booth is incredible! We aren't sure who is playing, but the bouncing rhythms throw us into an unexpectedly epic dance session. The crowd is swaying to and from, jumping up and down, bumping into one

another, and experiencing the energizing vibrations of the massive speakers before us. The dance floor is our common ground. It feels good to move. I am struck with a sudden awareness of how I needed to shake out some tension that I was holding in my body – tension from the long drive up, from the rat race of city life, from the everyday stresses of school and work. We are speaking the language of bass, capturing the pulse and translating it into a gyrating flail of feeling. The music itself ebbs and flows; it brings the crowd into frenzy, then down for a reprieve. A great DJ understands the dancing body – it needs variation. Anticipating the drop, people eagerly put their arms up in the air; the energy is physically electric. The frequencies resonate inside my center and rattle around in my skull like a hit that takes me higher.

But, joyful play soon turns to physical unease. A cozy onesie quickly becomes a sweaty blanket. I am hot and uncomfortable, but stopping the dancing is not an option. The music is amazing. The best course of action would be to remove half the onesie and tie it around my waist. However, there is one issue: I'm naked underneath. I have been fully naked at festivals before, but never around people that I know (and have to see again later). I struggle for a few moments with this new awkward boundary, but I'm stifling. I remember the quote on the sticker I was given by the volunteers at the main gate when I arrived: "Your fear of looking bad is holding you back." I whip off the top half of my outfit and experience immediate relief. As those around gradually notice, I receive a few understanding grins and head nods, but largely the reactions convey that my exposure is "no big deal." I am relieved to dismiss the awkward horror story that my mind initially conjured. Even though it really is "no big deal," I still feel empowered and fearless.

Before long, I spot my co-worker and friend making her way through the crowd towards our general area. My initial anxiety returns as I realize she will very quickly see me bare-chested, adding a new dimension to our relationship. My fears are largely unfounded. She greets me with a big smile and a wave, so I grin and stick my arms out towards her for a hug (as I would do normally). She comes into my hug with a little giggle, and we sway into the embrace. The dance floor is loud, but she gets close to my ear and asks,

"What did you take tonight, hun?"

"Oh, nothing," I reply.

"You're sober?" she retorts, with a touch of surprise.

"Yep," I nod and smile.

Her words strike me – her tone implies this is brave gesture for a sober person. I am amused and happy I have achieved this level of uninhibited freedom without the assistance of a consciousness-modifying substance. Tonight, my container was stretched into new dimensions of possibility, purely from celebrating with great music and supportive community. What was initially going to be a relaxed evening spontaneously evolved into a revealing expansion of self-confidence. I continue to be surprised by the lessons I receive and the transformations of self-concept that can emerge from unexpected places.

18. Collaborative art piece at Astral Harvest festival (2015)

"When we paint, we are dancing" (McNiff, 2004, p. 156).

The following afternoon, I gaze upon our masterpiece as I watch my friend hang up the collaborative art we made together. Created during a midday downpour of intense proportions, infused into the artwork is the beauty of lotus flowers emerging from muddiness. Huddled under our makeshift tarp shelter, our tribe waited out the rain with communal

creation. A spectrum of big kids and small kids freely slapped paint on canvas, talking quietly as they played together, letting their bodies dance across the painting; self-expression without judgment. A friend strummed his guitar and sang serenely, set against the soundtrack of the pounding storm above. His music serenaded a silky sliding of shades, wet with fat droplets of rain. A beautiful disaster emerged from the experience; messy splendour at once colorful and cohesive; primal and futuristic. The presence of humans belied by footprints, like fluorescent animal tracks. Space-like organisms playfully swirl into curving complexity and completeness. Boundaries are permeable, merging synchronistically with neighbouring artworks to create a sense of wholeness and oneness. The piece radiates a calm chaos, an emotional map of a day at this festival.

19. TransFlowmation fire show at Interstellevator, Astral Harvest festival (2015)

When we dance, we are painting too.

The world is thrown into sharp relief when the sun begins its descent into evening. Colors are intensely highlighted by gilded light and elongated shadows. Clouds roll quickly by; the wind teases the leaves of the trembling aspens into a shimmering dance of greens, yellows

and golds. I am entranced by the feeling of wind on my skin; birds sing somewhere in the distance, beautiful warbling songs that lilt overtop a low background of thumping bass. The massive speakers of the main stage grow insistently louder as the sun passes over the horizon. Reverberating back to our campsite, whoops of joy from nearby revellers indicate a mounting excitement. Tonight will be the climax of the festival, a monumental release of energy. In preparation, members of our camping crew are engaging in the usual pre-show rituals: consulting the music schedule, hanging out, preparing food, trying on costumes, and painting each other's faces. We are getting ready for a big party night, and especially because some of us have decided to indulge in some MDMA. A certain special bonding occurs between people who have "tripped" together. There is something about the deep love felt during a hug between friends on MDMA, or a wild fit of laughter shared between those coming up on LSD or psychedelic mushrooms, that fuses people and groups together. Before we drop, we gather together and a friend says a few words to set a communal intention for the experience:

"Thank you all for being here and sharing this journey with me. May our trip tonight be filled with joy, love, and gratitude for ourselves, each other, and this place. Let's dance!"

A buzz of agreement echoes through the group. We "cheers" our capsules together and consume them. Supplements are passed around to ward off harmful toxicity and negative side effects during and after the experience. I feel grounded by this ritual and ready to head out on the night's journey. Soon after, we make a B-line towards the main stage to see Desert Dwellers, who have just begun their set. We collectively decide that these DJs are a great way to start the evening, as their music is a more chilled-out, downtempo style of electronic music. They are versatile artists who have spun for yoga classes, so their sound has the potential to be both relaxing and energizing. Nature sounds (bird song, insect noises, flowing water) interweave with samples of instruments from far-away places (singing bowls[7], gongs, didgeridoos[8], traditional flutes). These elements are remixed with lilting vocals, percussive bass, and psychedelic samples to create a multi-layered, complex soundscape.

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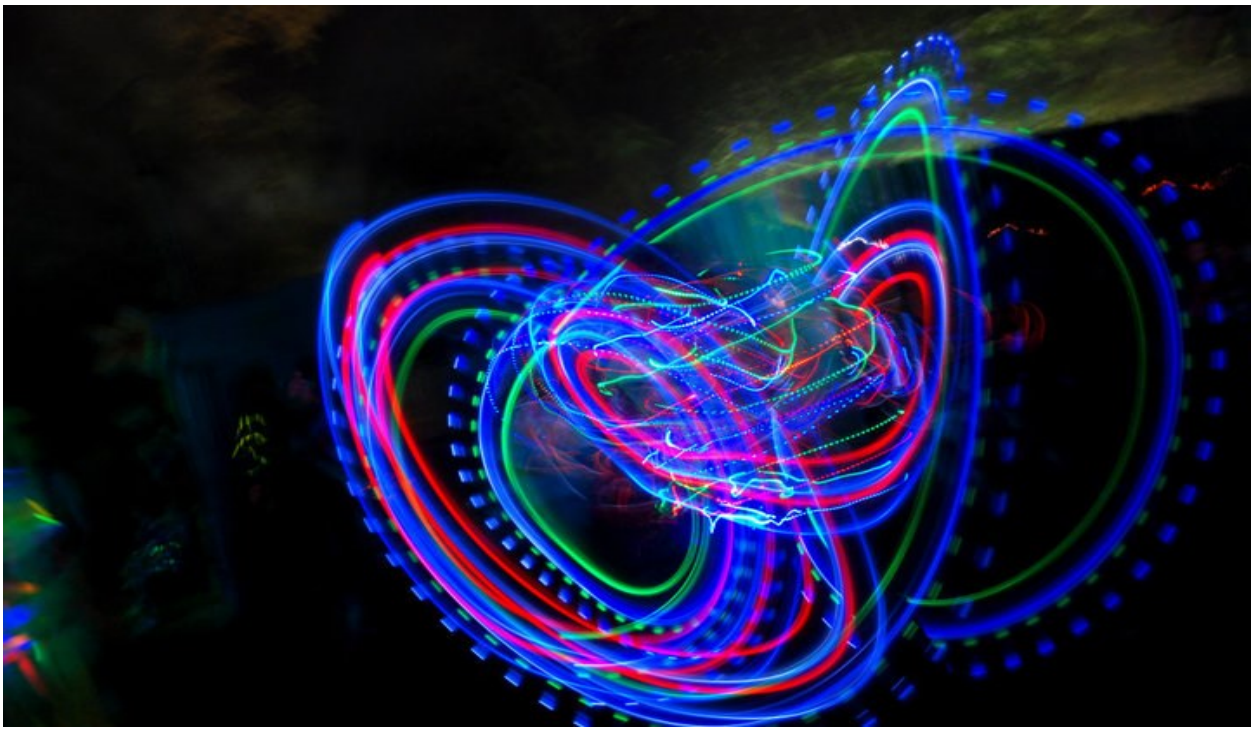
[7] A type of bowl historically made throughout Asia for various purposes such as music, meditation, and applied in spiritual contexts. The bowl is commonly fashioned from metal and vibrates to produce a tone when struck or stroked.

[8] A wind instrument developed by Indigenous Australians in northern Australia.

Other partiers are also drawn from afar by the carnivalesque light projections of the main stage's powerful lasers. As night takes hold, people start spinning mesmerizing LED flow toys nearby – hula hoops, staffs and poi[9] emit stunningly beautiful light shows when their owners lose themselves in flow, synced to the music. This art form visually demonstrates how when we dance, we are painting.

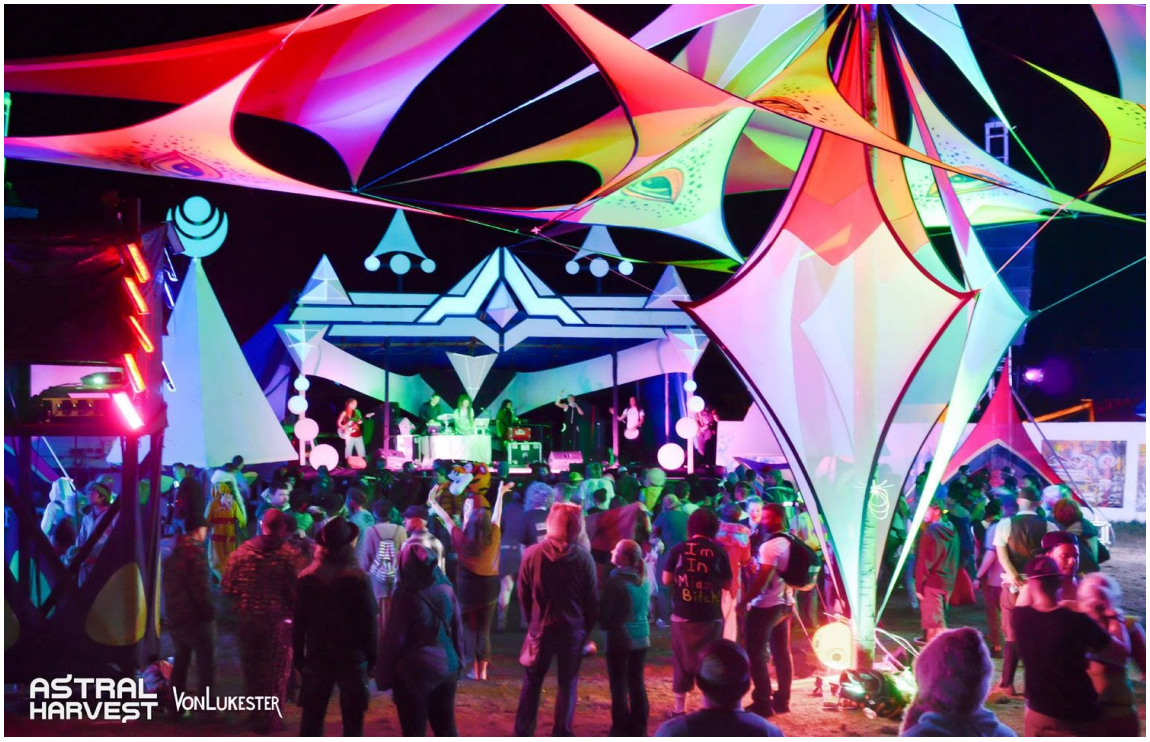


20. LED flow artist, Astral Harvest festival (2015)

We bob and weave further into the main stage, aiming for a spot centered in front of the sound system. Along the way, we pass someone wearing a mascot costume cavorting with another reveller in a full bear suit, and a couple of girls with neon fuzzy legwarmers that look like hairy alien caterpillars. These will not be the most elaborate costumes we will see tonight. The creativity that many people infuse into their festival outfits and signage to find their friends in the crowd is all part of the experience. Around us, revellers on the dance floor are radiant; many exude blissful smiles, lost in rhythm and movement. Others clutch each other, laughing hysterically at some unheard joke. Jubilation bubbles up sporadically as people

[9] Poi refers to a performance art that originated in New Zealand with the Maori people. It involves swinging a weighted (often spherical) object from a tether in cyclical patterns that create geometric forms and sync with music-dance rhythms.

reunite with their friends in the crowd. Above us, a mind-bending array of visual artistry plays off fabric stretched into multi-dimensional sail-like forms, and there are several visual artists doing live painting alongside the DJs. These sensory delights draw us in like moths to a flame. We sway beneath a beneath a purple, green, orange, and yellow painted eye that shimmers and changes color with the music. It scrutinizes no one in particular, yet perhaps symbolizes some omnipresent higher power. The air is thick with different smells – the fresh breeze carries a hint of the heavy, wooded smoke of the South American "holy wood"[10] intermingled with the sweetness of marijuana and the pungent odour of perspiring bodies. I inhale deeply, absorbing the energy and sensory information all around me.



21. Interstellevator main stage, Astral Harvest festival (2015)

Credit: Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Across the dance floor, I see one of the families that we are camped with, dancing with their little boy. He wears gigantic protective earmuffs to block out the powerful speakers, and he is laughing and dancing happily. The energy is infectious. Camping with kids this year is a

[10] The burning smoke of the *bursera graveolens* tree, also known as *palo santo* ("holy wood") is used for spiritual and medicinal cleansing purposes by Indigenous peoples in Central and South America (Pennacchio, Jefferson & Havens, 2010). It is appropriated and used by non-Indigenous persons at transformational festivals for similar purposes of spiritual cleansing and renewal.

constant reminder of how important it is to keep playing throughout life. It is an inner knowing that kids seem to naturally have and express with a disarming lack of self-consciousness. I try to imagine what it would have been like to participate in these kinds of openhearted and unapologetically creative environments when I was small.

Our journey to the stage complete, we let the bass roll off the crowns of our heads and pound deeply into the center of our chests. It feels primal – the music grabs hold of something visceral within me. Clad in a woolly animal hat, I am reborn as a forest creature with my bare feet in the mud. This place is our playground, where we can let loose and swing from the jungle gym of life, together. I look over and one of my friends is dancing like a jubilant chimpanzee, flailing his limbs this way and that. His head lolls backwards and forwards, his outlandish sombrero bobbing to the rhythm. It is his first festival, and I am remembering mine. There, my mind was blown apart and fused back together into a beautiful symbiosis of new awareness and possibility. I can only hope to share those freeing, expansive feelings with my friends, my community, and the world. I reach out and give my friend a big hug; we sway to the music in each other's embrace, surrounded by members of my community. I feel a deep appreciation for all those who have supported, indulged, and frolicked with me along my journey. Gratitude washes over me to be able to share my life with such fine people.

**Unless stated otherwise, all photos are taken by the author.*

Chapter 6, Part 3: Discussion of Astral Harvest Festival

As Lefebvre (1991) discusses, connecting people with creative possibilities for their lives awakens the potential for revolutionary social transformations. Astral Harvest's main transformational themes spiral around rhythms of co-creation and expression embedded in the outdoor timespace. Community-rooted transformational festivals (such as Astral Harvest and Intention) provide multiple opportunities for participants to explore creative expression both as a producer and experiencer of art. This opens doors for people who perhaps had not previously considered the role of art in their lives or do not usually have the opportunity to play with art in a nonjudgmental space. Co-creating art at festivals can be a powerful method of liberating creative potential by breaking down conceptual barriers around who can do art in a community environment. Lipari's (2014a) call for the importance of attuning to others within multiple sensory modalities also resonates with engaging in communal art processes and points to how they may be transformational. She proposes "listening [as] a shared gathering" that gives rise to social communities, "[f]or it is in listening that we become, together" (Lipari, 2014a, p. 102). Lipari argues for an embodied, engaged listening that links self and other by dissolving boundaries between people, and sharing a third space of being together. In this co-created intersubjectivity, listeners become a generative whole that is more than the sum of their individual selves. Further, intersubjectivity is a place of potentiality where people encounter alterity and generate new possibilities for being with others (Lipari, 2014a).

With those foundations, I turn to a discussion of the art canvas created collaboratively at Astral Harvest. The process and resulting piece had an exceptionally different vibration than the Shambhala festival. Several friends made a special effort to arrive at my camp at the designated time, immediately affecting the relational quality of the art process. The remaining participants were composed mainly of people I was camped beside. A significant detail about the participants lies in their relationship to me, and their desire to physically contribute to my work. Due to increased familiarity, the group appeared to be intuitively more aware of dialoguing respectfully with one another in the artwork. This element was evident in the aesthetic of the piece, with outsiders describing the final canvas as "collaborative," "cohesive," "social," "complete," "interconnected," and "full of presence."

Although I did not instruct them to do so, participating artists did not significantly paint over anyone else's contribution. Different people interpenetrated and added details to one another's work, but there was no significant alteration or covering of existing expressions. For this group, collaboration involved being with each other, hanging out, and occasionally carrying on subdued conversations while playing casually with the materials. Materials were freely shared amongst the group and the participants appeared to practice mindfulness through how they interacted in a kind and respectful manner. For example, different members of the group assisted with passing over materials to the other side of the canvas as needed, and generously helped the children use the art supplies.

22. Collaborative art canvas from Astral Harvest festival (2016)

This process was consistent with attunement, as people "listened" and danced with one another during the art process to create a coherent whole. As Lipari (2014a) explores, listening is less about an auditory perception and more about an outward focus on others.

Listening is an embodied, multisensory process that allows people to step outside everyday order and settle into *being* in the present moment (Lipari, 2014a). The group at Astral Harvest made and deepened connections while they co-created in a space of intersubjectivity and interlistening. By sharing timespace and interacting during an extended period of embodied play, participants occupied a place of *being with* the materials, the weather, one another, and themselves. This was in contrast to the sporadic and disconnected nature of the process that occurred at the Shambhala festival, where participants did not "listen" to the creation of others and instead created densely layered, disconnected individual expressions. The participants at Shambhala were not connected to one another or with me in the same way as the group at Astral Harvest. This reveals larger themes of how people might experience transformation differently across festivals of varying size and focus. An important medium of transformation at Shambhala stemmed from the urban qualities of encountering a wide array of strangers and different ideas from oftentimes geographically distant places, while Astral Harvest represented a smaller concentration of more local community members and families. Participants encountered the same people repeatedly and had the opportunity to *be with* them, and to deepen relationships in ways not possible at Shambhala. These different elements of community and encountering were reflected in the aesthetic of the respective art pieces.

Due to the presence of children and an interconnected group, the art journey at Astral Harvest had carefree, comfortable rhythms. The participation of children added an enthusiasm and playfulness to the gathering that was not present at Shambhala. Adults may have more easily accessed a creative spirit through the childlike affect in the timespace. From the resulting bright colors and high energy, aesthetic responders described "the spirit of play," "joy," "lightness," "full expression," and "free flowing" rhythms of the piece. Lipari (2014) discusses how rhythms can precipitate meditative states and produce understandings outside of cognitive mind frames. She also plays with the notion of knowing as a form of being, because "knowing is something we do when we are existing in the world" (p. 86). One participant who had prior experience with painting remarked she could not recall such a flowing experience free of self-judgment than during the collaboration, and it had been profound for her to approach art as a playful process.

Through *being* in the festival timespace with the art, and with others, this participant uncovered a new realization of "knowing" about her relationship to art. Creative opportunities allowing people to let go of control and lose themselves in play may be transformational as additional possibilities for life and leisure are encountered. The art process exemplifies how transformational moments may occur in contemplative spaces between times of high energy and celebration. Pieper's (1952) philosophy of leisure suggests meditative contemplation is equally important as celebration to transformation, as both connect people to different forms of embodied presence. This balance was represented at Astral Harvest, as organizers made a significant effort to offer a large variety of daytime workshops that provided opportunities to learn new skills and be creative. Connecting with others during more relaxed daytime rhythms made space for reflection, meditation, and integration of new insights and awareness.

In Chapter 4 of *Playing for Change*, MacDonald (2016) looks at how music festivals allow people to be creative and support certain arrangements of social relationships through architecture. His work affirms the central importance of creativity to the emotional impact of the festival, and connects with Schmidt's (2015) work on the relational aesthetic of transformational festivals. Transformational festivals build social interstices by keeping art forms central in the construction of the timespace. In the narrative, the participants encounter the artistic design of the main stage as an anchoring place to gather with friends and dance during the festival. The art canvas created at Astral Harvest reflects these festival elements. Aesthetic responses saw an "organic" quality of "evolution," "cave drawings," "birthing," "new beginnings," and a "creation story" that was both "space-like" and "primitive." Transformational festivals have been described as "technoprimitive" in the way they merge the spirit of ancient celebratory music-dance rituals with modern technologies (Bloom Series, 2013). The emergence of both "celestial" and "primitive" aesthetic impressions in the current work points to the significance of this thematic confluence. MacDonald (2016) explores the interconnectedness of past and future through the present confluence of "social flows of becoming" (p. 55). The "remix" of social becoming at transformational festivals is produced from the flows of ancient festival roots, present desires and technologies, and imagined future utopias. At Astral Harvest, the inspiration for

the stage decorations and other artworks reflects this remix as it appropriates elements from Indigenous cultures and earth-based spiritual influences. In channelling and expressing a flow of becoming, creative architecture supports encountering between people and allows participants to experiment with different ways of being, and being with others. Transformational festivals may set the stage for meaningful experiences by merging past-present-future possibilities and presenting opportunities for relational selves to encounter and dialogue.

Aesthetically, the canvas from Astral Harvest is in stark contrast to the canvas from Shambhala. This suggests significant variation between the festival experience (or 'vibe') and resulting transformational potential of these two timespaces. In part, transformation at Astral Harvest came through embodied experiences of self-expression that occurred in an environment of supportive community. The energy of the festival timespace affected the co-creative process, as participants entered into flowing states of consciousness and shared nonverbal experiences of communication. For instance, the footprints on the artwork demonstrate an embodied presence, similar to animal tracks left in soft ground. They also indicate ways of engaging with artwork that are playful, sensory, and leisurely. In the narrative, the participant discovers untapped realms of self-confidence when she is immersed in the embodied presence and rhythms of music-dance. As she partially removed her onesie amongst her friends and others on the dance floor, their actions nonverbally communicated her exposure was no cause for shame. In the process, they validated her decision and empowered her to experience the moment as revelational to her self-concept. This likely would not have occurred in the same way at Shambhala, because the higher volume of participants combined with less connectivity between them affords greater anonymity. In other ways, the onesie is a metaphor for a security blanket of the individual self. In revealing her physical body, she was also revealing herself socially and emotionally. Her vulnerability was supported through the social flows of becoming channelled by the community. In the "now" moment of Lipari's (2014a) listening being, space is opened for the interruption of habitual conceptual systems and for people to step outside everyday knowledge and self-concept. In the festival "now," the participant in the narrative interlistened with others and received support enabling her to be herself. Her friends and

acquaintances were integral to her transformation as they shared the rhythms, vibrations, and frequencies of the music-dance timespace. Through relational dialogue, participants at transformational festivals imagine themselves differently and experiment – with art, costumes, nudity, and ways of being in social life.

Transformational festivals also provide an opportunity for people to celebrate and contemplate outdoors, in an immersive experience of nature. The co-creative art process at Astral Harvest was significantly affected by heavy rainfall, because it created an atmospheric container. People were somewhat confined underneath the shelter for the duration of the deluge, producing a more insular group and a sense of waiting out the storm together. Throughout the art process, one corner of the canvas stuck out slightly from underneath the tarp and became a muddied lake of coloured tempera paint. Droplets of water spattered intermittently into the rest of the piece, encapsulating the aesthetic with the day's soggy and turbulent atmosphere. A late-coming participant started attaching plastic flowers overtop the muddied section of the piece, as if to say that flowering blooms and beauty may emerge from rain showers. This experience was significant because transformational festivals are deliberately held in outdoor settings. As a result, the weather considerably affects the festival experience as participants are immersed in unpredictable and uncontrollable forces of nature. In contrast, the architecture of urban settings functions to separate people from the elements. At festivals, participants physically connect their feet to the earth while they dance under the sun, moon, stars, clouds, or rain. They also dance in rhythm with one another, surrounded by open fields, trees, plants, insects, and wildlife. As explored by Tagore (2007), Henriques (2010), Lipari (2014), Lefebvre (2004), and others, humans make sense of their lives and the world through rhythms.

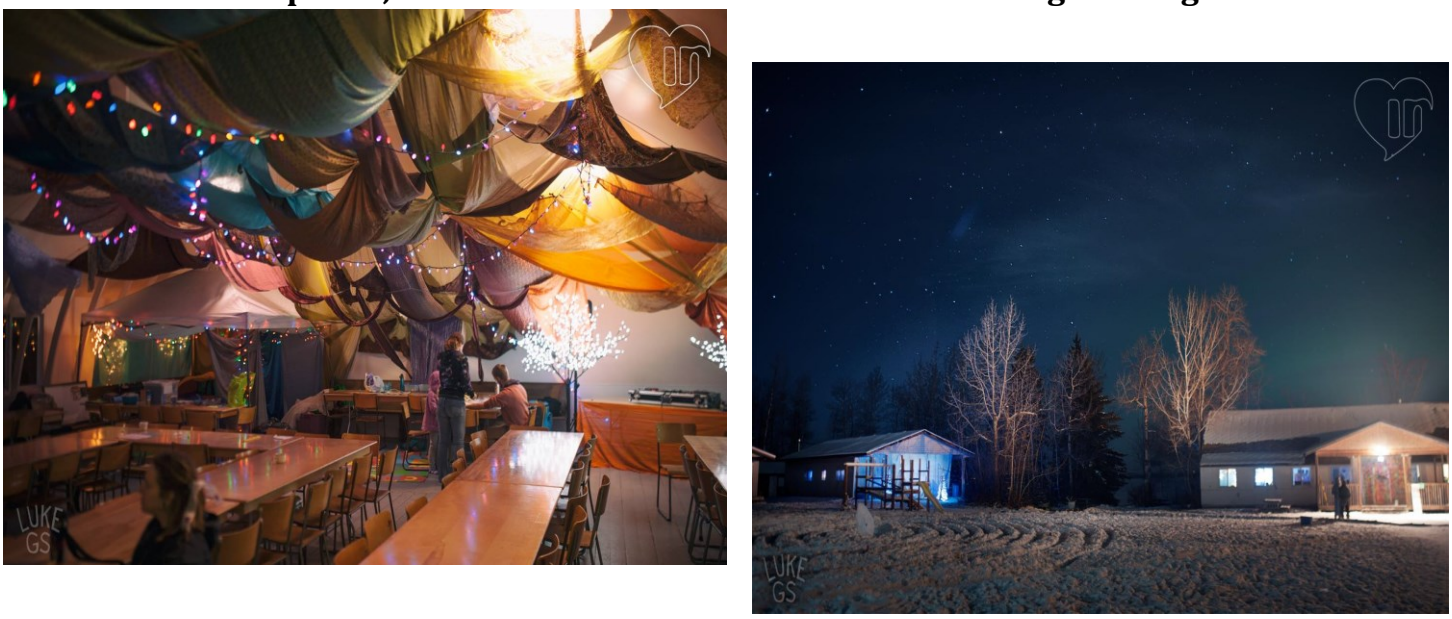
> The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.
> It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.
> It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.
> I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment. (Tagore, 2007, p. 38)

Synchronized to collective tempos, festival goers dance through an embodied exploration of inner and outer nature in the same spirit that Tagore explores. Immersion in the rhythms of synchrony and nature may be particularly meaningful for members of urbanized Western cultures that are spiritually disconnected from the natural world. Many may not have many opportunities to spend multiple days outside celebrating with others. One participant commented on a festival experience at the river: "Sticking my feet in the water, I got a really weird feeling. I felt very connected to the earth, in a way. It was so energizing, but also felt like pure tranquility at the same time" (Mohr, 2013). Interestingly, the participant felt both invigorated and calmed by this experience, and suggests connecting to natural elements of the timespace can provide experiences that are both meditative and energizing. Festivals provide opportunities for people to reconnect with the earth and their place within the larger universe. Quite literally, festivals are removed from the light pollution of cities, making the stars shine brighter than in most participant's everyday lives. Reconnection may be potentiated through simple moments such as being humbled by the constellations of the universe on a cloudless night, or relaxing with one's feet in the river. These experiences made possible through the festival timespace may be involved with transformational realizations as participants resynchronize with the rhythms of the natural world and their place within it.

Astral Harvest is a summer Solstice festival, celebrating the cyclical rhythm of the sun reaching its highest point of the year. As most participants travel to the festival from cities, stepping into a space outside the urgency of chronological, diachronic, urban time regulation is experienced as liberating and meaningful. Although the festival has a schedule of events and must still operate within the bounds of linear time, participants speak of "festival time" as a sense of time flowing differently. Time is fluid and open for people to move through the festival as they wish, attuned to their personal desires. In synchronous time, everything happens at once in a vibrant merging of past-present-future (Lipari, 2014a). At transformational festivals, participants interweave their experiences with the human history of communal celebrations that stretch back through time and space. As they seek to connect with the spirit of ancient ecstatic rituals, they also seek to explore imagined potentialities blurring together into an expression of the present. Transformational

festivals welcome people to be present with inner and outer nature, and to imagine being with others in the world differently. These flows of becoming coalesce in synchronous festival timespaces and catalyze transformations that help bring people into alignment with their visions for themselves and their lives.

Chapter 7, Part 1: Intention Alberta Festival – Setting the Stage

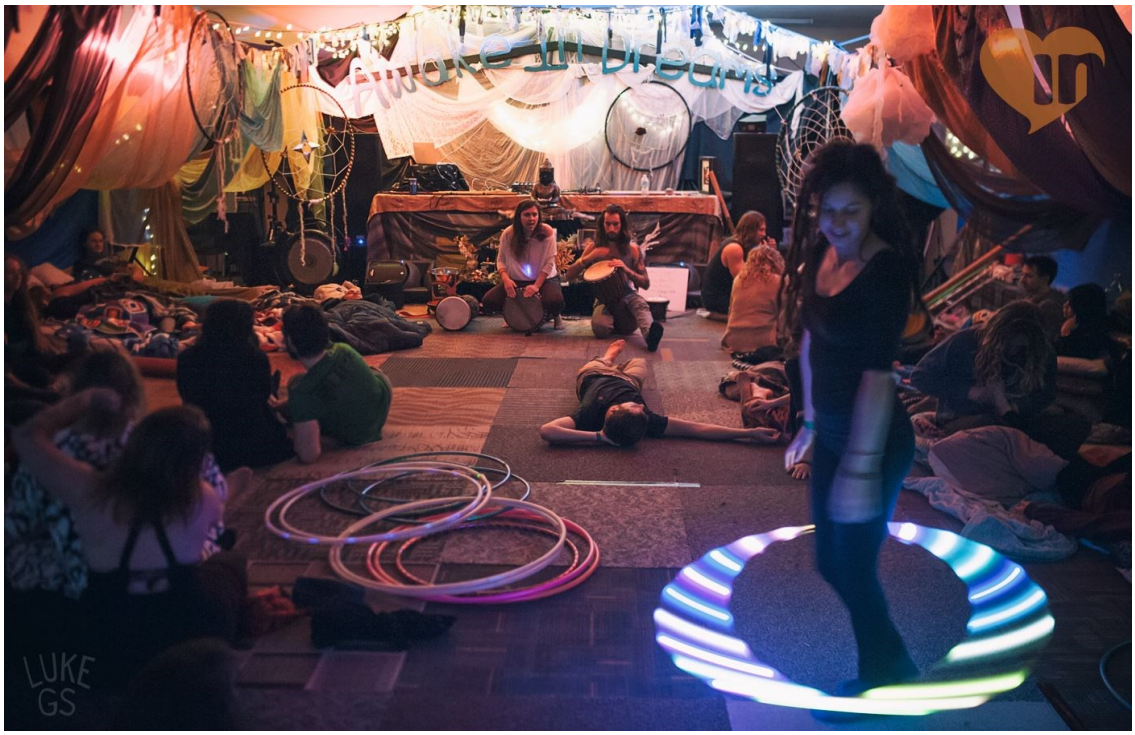


23. Left: Dining hall and kid's play area; Right: Exterior view of dance hall and dining hall; Intention Alberta 9: Awake in Dreams (2016)

Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Intention Alberta is an annual participant-driven winter festival that takes place over 5 days during the New Year's holiday period. The event is held in central Alberta (approximately equidistant from Edmonton and Calgary) at a summer-camp site on Sylvan Lake. It hosts a maximum of 138 people (constrained by the number of bunks at the site) and for the last nine years is organized entirely by dedicated community volunteers. Intention Alberta describes itself as "a place for interconnectedness, inspiration and incredulous amazing [sic] opportunities for learning, sharing and expanding consciousness" (Intention Facebook group, 2016). As evidenced by their self-description, the main focus of the festival spirals around building relationships and celebrating community in ways that inspire and expand. Participants are linked to the event through their social networks and/or word of mouth, and this method of publicity further emphasizes the community focus. "Intention Alberta Tribe is what happens when a group of people combine their collective talents, desires and light to activate through celebration" (Intention Facebook group, 2016). The "transformational" intentions behind Intention are internally focused on safely connecting the festival community in a celebratory

atmosphere. This is accomplished in a number of ways, notably through the inclusion of families and children, empowering community participation in workshops and art, enabling ecstatic music-dance experiences, organizing rituals and ceremonies, and providing supportive infrastructure.



24. Dance hall and workshop space, Intention Alberta 9: Awake in Dreams (2016)
Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

7.1.1: Families and children

Intention prides itself on being a family friendly event, similar to Astral Harvest but in contrast to Shambhala. There is a full schedule of children's playshops, special evening events like slumber parties, a family-only cabin, and a dedicated kid's play area supervised by volunteers. Organizers endeavor to instil a "village" ethic of shared childcare and role modeling in the entire community. The presence of children is associated with a sense of the community, the event, and the larger world continuing well: "The presence of families and children has always helped there be a healthier and more responsible atmosphere. Without children, there is no connection to the next generation, the ones who will inherit the intentions that we are manifesting into being at this wonderful event!" (Intention

website, 2016) Several parents shared gratitude on the Intention Alberta 2015-2016 public Facebook event page after the festival. They appreciated the welcoming atmosphere and felt they shared a special intergenerational experience of play and celebration with their kids.

7.1.2: Workshops and art

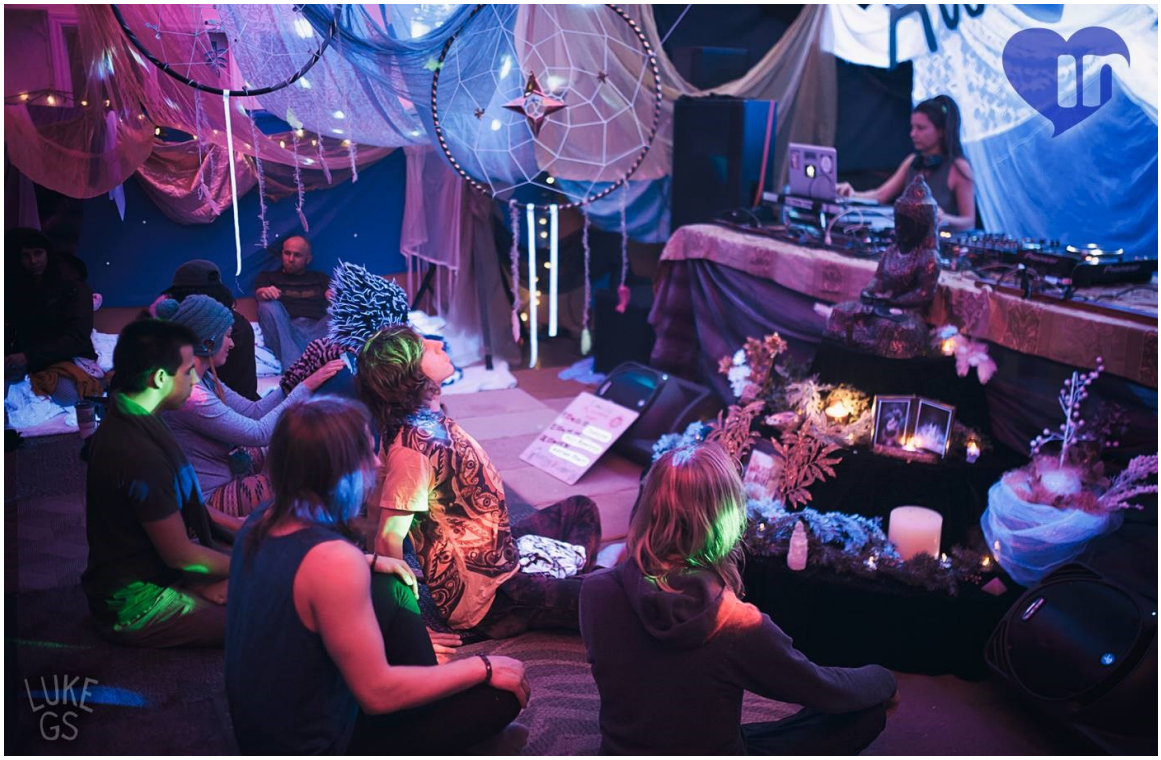
At Intention, everyone is encouraged to participate by offering the "love-centered service" of their "unique gifts, skills, and passions or other form[s] of self-expression" to the community (Intention website, 2016). Due to the community-sourced nature of the workshops and art offerings, what is present varies with the participants. The 2015-2016 event hosted more than 12 workshops for adults and children that encouraged learning, playing, and connecting. Sample workshop titles include: HeartWave Dance Journey, Alchemists in the Garden, Future Life Progression, Art is the Escape, Self Awakening, Infinite Spirals Hoop, Qi Energy and Calligraphy Yoga, Intentional Vision Board Creation, and The Divine Romance: When 2 Become 1 (Intention website, 2016). At Astral Harvest and Shambhala, facilitators and artists are given free or subsidized tickets to the event or awarded special privileges. Intention encourages participating without any expectation of extrinsic return, creating a community ethos to freely share one's skills and talents. Another method of participation is the "passion show," where people are encouraged to share what they are passionate about on stage for the community.

7.1.3: Music-dance rhythms, ritual, and ceremony

All DJs and musicians are community members at this event. While the DJs provide the majority of the evening music-dance entertainment, many other musicians contributed their talents as well, including singer-songwriters, didgeridoo players, hand drummers, and quartz crystal singing bowl artists. Since there is only one dance hall and DJ booth, musicians take turns providing the music. Unlike Shambhala and other festivals where music is a main draw, participants do not go to Intention specifically for headlining artists.

In contrast to larger festivals, significant attention is paid to incorporating ritual and ceremonial elements beyond music-dance as major and important elements of the experience. Intention begins with an opening ceremony that includes the majority of the

participants at the festival. There, people are introduced to the event ethos, logistics, organizing community members, and support systems. They are also invited to envision their intentions for the experience and to share them with others. To intentionally honour the transition into the New Year, a spiralling trench is typically dug in the snow in front of the main hall. Participants are instructed to start at the entrance and meditatively walk the spiral while reflecting on their year. When they reach the center, another spiral leads them to the exit in a different direction. While walking this new path, people are encouraged to visualize their upcoming year. For the closing ceremony, remaining participants form a circle and share their favourite or most memorable moment.



25. DJ booth and altar in main hall, Intention Alberta 9: Awake in Dreams (2016)
Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Rituals are also brought in throughout the festival in the form of facilitated events and spaces. The annual “tantric feast” and “steam pod” are intimacy building rituals led by the organizing core. At the feast, an introductory discussion introduces principles of inclusion and consent before participants are invited to feed each other from platters of fruit and chocolate fondue. This tantric process is designed to connect people with one

another and with the sensory pleasures of food in a way that challenges everyday social conventions. The "steam pod" is a small, clothing-optional sauna where people gather to meditate, share stories, sing songs, and swap massages. These elements are all constructed to enable participants to connect, play, and experiment with boundaries. Attention to organized rituals and ceremonies opens space for transformational processes in different ways than at festivals without this focus.

7.1.4: Supportive infrastructure

Similar to the rest of this festival's components, supportive infrastructure is sourced from people in the community stepping into organizational roles as needed. The most notable element of Intention that differs from most other festivals is the communal kitchen. Astral Harvest and Shambhala have communal kitchens to feed their volunteers and crew, but they do not provide meals for participants. Three meals per day plus snacks are included at Intention, and the kitchen serves a variety of healthy menu options. The daily practice of sharing food with the community is an important way that people can get to know each other better. Other supportive elements include community members that have first aid training identifying themselves to the group, and the "vibe pod." The vibe pod is a group of volunteers (and dedicated quiet space) with the main goal of supporting participants that are experiencing difficulty. These elements work together as preventative measures to help keep the community healthy and reduce the risk of problems.

26. Main dining hall during a meal, Intention Alberta (N.D.)

Credit: Luke GS Art & Photography (www.lukegs.com)

Chapter 7, Part 2: A Poem from Intention Festival

Conscious efforts create a container
Defining mindful boundaries, setting intentions:
Why are you here?
What do you desire?
What will you create?
Why am I here?
What do I desire?
What will I create?
Set and setting is Imagined,
Cultivated,
Supported, Respected,
Maintained,
with Continuity and Flow.
Welcoming. Accepting. Intimate. Safe.
Darkness probes the edges;
shadows skulk, shrink from the light.
Peeling back layers can reveal difficult truths.
What's holding me back?
In my dreams,
I am awake. I see and am seen to new depths
Through resonances and SHAREmonies:
heart rending transforms to mending.
Intimacy challenges my edges:
Less thinking, more feeling
Mind-FULL-ness
I am vulnerable
I am blossoming
Share, Receive, Relate, Give
Layers of a Life Lived.

In the festival dream,

We are awake, together:

We are love. I am love.

Profound connections.

Pure expressions. Uninhibited enthusiasms.

Shining radiance.

Unified elevation multiplies, grows,

Climaxes

A celebration of life, connection, community

I am sober; I am high.

Ecstasy is much more than a pill.

Channelling the Ecstatic, I am overflowing Effervescence.

Dancing, dancing, dancing, swaying, shaking, flailing, sweating

Closed eyes, moving to the music

with the music

I am the music

The rhythms are my body

Glowing Shining Radiating my SELF

I am beautiful, I am funky, I am joyful funny flailing

Jostling, stretching my container Outwards

Upwards

Sticky breathlessness, warm laughter,

Heartfelt hugs, smiles and compliments

Emotional currency for connection

Loving each other -- and Ourselves

When we listen, each experience teaches something new

Luminosity gives shape to Darkness

The journey spirals continuously inwards

and infinitely outwards

Birth, growth, expansion

This is commUNITY

Constantly in flux – I am new here.

Can it last?

Can I last?

My friend pulls me into a dance floor hug

"Thank you for bringing me here," I say.

"You belong here," she says.

I am held, I am supported

The door to my heart, blown open

I step through the portal

into heARTspace

Endorphins rrrrrrrush through

crrrrrrrrash upon my shore like a tidal wave

Droplets sprayed around the room,

Shared, In flow.

Darkness dances with light,

together, they are complete. One.

Yin and Yang;

Tantric merging, sensory force

There is only now.

One of the strongest forces on earth is also the softest,

the most yielding

Life giving

Be like the water, she said.

Chaos and coherency:

Vibrant

Swirling

Streams of color

A patchwork quilt of sensation, feeling,

intimately inter-related and inter-connected.

The wildly whirling canvases of our lives

collide and mix with the colors and textures of others.

My very being contains fragments of people

I have encountered,

loved,

admired,

laughed with

struggled with

along life's winding rivulet.

Made from the same stardust of far flung fantasies

How beauteous is our communal creation

as we add to and craft and inspire one another -- Ourselves

again and again, and again.

All rivers flow to the ocean.

27. Collaborative art canvas created at Intention Alberta festival (2016)

Chapter 7, Part 3: Discussion of Intention Festival

As explored by MacDonald (2016), a community with a sustainable ecosystem is local, wild, and holds participation as an essential element to its creation and maintenance. As a local festival where everyone is expected to participate and share in its creation, Intention actively cultivates a healthy "ecosystem." The main insights on transformation that emerged from Intention spiral around the sensory, spiritual, and healing experience of group ekstasis, and how it may be supported through an intimate community celebration. MacDonald (2016) discusses the carnivalesque as an ephemeral force of wildness that moves through the festival as people encounter and share the experience. It is a vibrational affect that is difficult to describe in language, and in fact "once named become[s] something else" (MacDonald, 2016, p. 89). Similarly, the poem attempts to describe an ineffable experience of contemplative celebration and ekstasis that emerged at Intention. I would add to MacDonald's (2016) concept of carnival by suggesting that ekstasis is central to the propagation of wild affect in the festival space. Equally central to the carnival (and the festival) vibe is music. Music is personal and social, celebratory and meditative, and connects people together in embodied, expressive experiences in festival timespaces (MacDonald, 2016). In the fluid process of co-creating in embodied community timespaces structured around music-dance, attuning to interlistening and synchronicity may be key to understanding transformations or healing processes. MacDonald's (2016) rhizome or Henriques' (2010) vibration of affect may be instructive in exploring how people may experience ekstasis, wholeness, and healing through encountering and connecting with others.

To some extent, all festivals involve the co-created participation and expression of participants through volunteering, artistic contributions, creative costuming and signage, theme camps, and so forth. The carnival represents the wildness and unpredictability of participants expressing themselves and encountering the expressions of others as they move through the festival timespace. However, the co-creative process happened differently in the lived experience of Intention's intimate timespace than at community festivals such as Astral Harvest and larger urban events such as Shambhala. By spending five days eating, sleeping, playing, dancing and living with the same 138 people, the

structure of the festival allowed familiarity to be developed on a first-name basis. MacDonald (2016) describes the importance of mobilizing a critical pedagogy of peace through everyday practices such as making and sharing bread with one's neighbours (p. 5). Inspired by Paulo Freire (1970; 1997), critical pedagogy refers to a philosophy and a social movement that challenges people to think critically about deeper meanings behind ideology and social context, and stresses the importance of moving beyond a capitalist system of production. It supports the liberation of affect, building relationships and communities around heart-centered interactions, and the reterritorialization of human life outside of capitalism (MacDonald, 2016). Creating community belonging comes down to simple actions such as eating, dancing, playing, learning, and sharing affect in spacetime with one another.

In the same spirit, Intention aims to step outside of capitalist-driven festival production to create a community-focused gathering that challenges normalized ways of being in urban social life. The festival is non-profit, and none of the organizers receive payment for their service to the community. The event strives to provide a timespace where participants have the opportunity to be with the community, and to participate in ways that build and deepen relationships. The festival accomplishes these aims by facilitating simple practices that create a social interstice for interaction. For example, Intention provided group meals to deliberately support affective production. They also relied on volunteers to help with dishes and cleaning after every meal. By being present and involved in the community mealtime ritual, participants created relationships around heart-centered service they may not have developed otherwise. Furthermore, rituals, ceremonies, and events were deliberately constructed as co-creative processes requiring the support of everyone to function, consistent with a healthy ecosystem where everyone participates. For example, for the "tantric feast" ritual to be a success, participants had to both show up for the event and mindfully engage with the rules of consent and communication laid out by organizers. Similarly, the "passion show" event required members of the community to step up and share their passions with the group. Comparatively, participants interacted within and contributed to the Shambhala festival's timespace more sporadically and anonymously. In contrast, transformation at Intention

was related to intimate participation and connection with others that was different from everyday life (and from other festivals).

As evidenced by its name and focused offerings, the Intention festival pays significant attention to crafting an intentional, mindful, and deliberately connected experience. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines the word "intention" as the "healing process of a wound" in medicine. MacDonald (2016) discusses the importance of "work[ing] together to build truly healing movements" in a practice of critical pedagogy (p. xiii). Autonomous, non-hierarchical communities play an important role in healing individual, social, and historical traumas and working towards sustainable cultures (MacDonald, 2016). From own experience and my discussions with other participants, I discovered Intention was considered cathartic or therapeutic because it allowed people to connect, build relationships, and express themselves in ways that were felt to be safe, supported, and genuine. This was evidenced by the way the social and physical architecture of the festival facilitated connection building between participants. As discussed earlier, the annual rituals of the opening ceremonies, "tantric feast," and "passion show" along with the physical spaces of the "steam pod" and communal dining hall brought people together in ways that were designed to develop connections and facilitate sharing. According to MacDonald (2016), healing can occur in local festivals where space is made for social autonomy and creativity of expression. Events like Intention may help to heal wounds of alienation and isolation that can arise from everyday urban environments oriented to capitalist modus operandi. MacDonald (2016) conceptualizes the predatory anthropocene as a complex, all-encompassing, machinic system of crises and exploitation that results from neoliberalism. In this system, people are cogs propelling a system of production, consumption, and destruction fundamentally disconnected from an integrated understanding of personal identity, local community, and the larger planetary ecosystem. Wounds and traumas are exploited by the predatory anthropocene to further alienate, subjugate, and enslave people to the neoliberal agenda. Events like Intention resist these isolating, fear-based modes of being by creating new social territories rooted around community and creativity.

The social structure of human life is rhizomatic (MacDonald, 2016). Although each individual human being is genetically distinct and separate from the whole of humanity, we are nonetheless all fundamentally connected in the flows of social, political, and biological life on this planet. The rhizome signifies wildness, connections, and wholeness. Mycelium is a connecting network underneath the forest floor that helps plants to communicate, share resources, and survive disease (Barto et al., 2012; Jung et al., 2012). As fruiting bodies, mushrooms emerge as genetically distinct expressions of the mycelial whole. Just as the individual trees in the forest have a symbiotic relationship with myecelium, the human organism needs symbiosis with other beings to thrive. The Intention festival reasserted and reawakened people to the importance of interconnection to a local community. In the process of interlistening and being with others, participants encountered alternative perspectives and insights on how to live well. Lipari (2014b) discusses dialogue as a place of "dual being" where the exchange between people interweaves them into a single tapestry: "selves are a kind of polyphonic chorale of everyone one has heard, said, and read throughout one's life" (p. 509). I am struck with the parallels of this conceptualization with the process of co-creating artworks, or remixes in music. Through the way Intention communally organizes the various event offerings, workshops, performances, and rituals, the festival provides a container for the communal process of becoming, or a loom for the co-creation of a human tapestry. Intention's co-created canvas is a re-mixing of paint that reveals the journey like a topographical map. A winding stream of white paint scrolls across the surface of a flowing pool, meandering through spiraling eddies and ecstatic staccatos of color. The wildness of the rhizome is alive and embodied in art and co-creation. The prints of many feet and hands float to the surface, revealing the joyful creativity and artistic splendour of paint squished between toes and fingers. It also reveals how the combined efforts of a community can come together to make something beautiful: a canvas, a dance party, a festival. If these elements are inspired by a radical love of being and becoming together, they may be transformational or revolutionary for social life.

Music is also conceptualized as a rhizome, connecting physical resonances with affective, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions in lived experience (MacDonald, 2016, p. 110). Higgins (2012) describes the "poetic suggestiveness" of music, and its ability to

"convey impressions of immediate sensuous experience" (p. 100-101). For these reasons, I chose to gesture to the ineffable sensory experience of Intention's rhizomatic social life through a poem. The narrative presents an autoethnographic account of my experience at the festival in a stream of consciousness style. Like the stream of white paint across the art canvas, the experience of connecting and feeling supported by others in the festival space flowed in a meandering manner. The poem represents elements of inner turmoil and personal blockages explored through energy exchange, connection, deepening awareness, awakening, catharsis, celebration, and ekstasis. Pieper's (1952) dialectic whole of contemplation and celebration affirming one's presence in the universe is represented in the poem. I experienced space to reflect on shadowed areas in my life, gained insights, and experienced release by connecting to others in ecstatic celebration. Poetry is meant to be spoken, for others, in the rhythmic cadences of a voice vibrating into spacetime. Equally, sound and music take shape in the way they vibrate matter, inspire physical movement of bodies through space, and propagate dynamic evolution of affect. In *The Music Between Us*, Higgins (2012) is convinced the dominance of language in meaning making processes conceals the centrality of music to human life. She suggests instead of thinking about music as a language, we might instead consider language a form of music. Poetry might be seen as a kind of musical language that affirms one's presence in the universe. The Intention festival is full of language as music in the form of people encountering, talking, and sharing. For example, participants were asked to share their intentions at the opening ceremonies, and their reflections at the closing ceremonies. By verbalizing their desires and their experiences into the communal timespace, participants impacted the vibrational affect of the festival and helped to co-create the event.

Higgins (2012) also discusses the potential for music to bridge across cultural barriers. Music has a fluidity to move between multiple layers of meaning, both between and within contexts. I am reminded of the diversity of ages that come together at the festival, ranging from toddlers to elders. Despite differing cultural barriers related to age, music is one of the bridges for this community to celebrate the New Year together. This is especially significant for parents of small children, who may not be able or welcome to participate at other music-dance events (such as Shambhala) that do not have supports for

young people. For the other participants, encountering families and a range of ages within the festival allows a broadening of awareness for different experiences and needs. A community without diversity is partial, and diversity is important in the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. Intention moves towards wholeness as it attempts to support and welcome diverse community members in the festival timespace. In making time and space for others, Intention creates vibrations of radical inclusion and belonging that are meaningful and transformational for participants.

As humans, our capability to think with and feel with others appears to be wrapped up in our ability to dance and sing in rhythm and in tune with each other (Erickson, 2009). Equally, music-dance experiences at Intention help to connect people on a deeper communicative level through the shared ekstasis of embodied rhythm. With only one sound system and dance hall, DJs and musicians at Intention take turns gifting their talents to provide the festival rhythm. In many cases, due to the tight-knit nature of the community, the artists have a personal relationship with the dancers. This allows them to curate a musical selection specific to the group and the timespace. Through music-dance, everyone synchronizes with the same rhythms. Thinking complexly through the musical rhizome also allows recognition of multitudes and endless possibilities that people confront as they navigate boundary-challenging elements of the festival. For example, participants are immersed in a gentle, flowing soundscape at the tantric feast, where they are challenged to mindfully feed, and be fed by, others. The volume is kept low so conversations may occur with ease, and the tempo is slow to synchronize participants with relaxing rhythms. Lilting vocals accompany calm instruments remixed seamlessly together with no disconnection between tracks. The musical element contributes an important audible quality to facilitate social encounters in a different way than the more driving rhythms cultivated during times of celebration. During the passion show, several singer-songwriters played a song for the crowd. In the process, they shared an expression of self that added to the communal remix of the group. In contrast, DJs sharing a set on New Year's Eve included faster tempos, funky breaks, unique remixes, and recognizable samples designed for an active experience of dancing and celebrating. Whether through ecstatic moments on the dance floor or more subdued experiences of connection, this multiplicity

of elements enhanced the attunement and attentiveness of participants to others as they synchronized with communal rhythms. Increased awareness of selves as plural and relational beings produced transformations in how people related to each other, and themselves, in everyday life.

28. Living Room stage seen from the back, Shambhala Music Festival (2015)

Chapter 8: Closing thoughts

> He wore his heart on his sleeve (…) as soon as he got back [from the festival]. Our entire years of existing together he has never hugged me… but the first thing he did when he got home was he went up to me and gave me the biggest hug and he said, "I love you. You're the best sister I could ever ask for." (Interview excerpt, Mohr, 2013)

> Dialogue cannot exist (…) in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (Freire, 1970)

In stitching together this colorful patchwork dialogue on transformational festivals, I find myself returning to the concept of love – as other scholars have. Lefebvre claims that all his life's writings were fundamentally about love (Shields, 1999). Freire (1997) challenges people to speak of love without fear of being labeled unscientific or ridiculous, in order to construct new paradigms of knowing and teaching that integrate body, heart, mind, and soul. Love is implied in Lipari's (2014a) discussion of how meaning originates from the rhythms and relationships between people. She explores compassion as a "*feeling together with*" that honors the other as other, and as a shared process that precedes deeper understandings (Lipari, 2014a, p. 179, emphasis in original). In thinking through how arts-based community learning can help to unite people in and with the world, MacDonald (2016) envisions Freirean radical love as a driving force. At festivals, people build solidarity through love that nourishes and replenishes their sense of identity and purpose. People reimagine and reaffirm visions for life through the process of co-creating and encountering in supportive environments. On the experience and active creation of human nature, Lefebvre conceived of the poetry (or *poësis,* meaning "to make") that emerged from self-realization and absolute love (Shields, 1999). Transformational festivals are timespaces where people experiment with love-centered ways of knowing, relating, and creating. At their heart, festivals may be seen as metanarratives about love.

The current work illuminates how people find meaning through experiences of love and leisure in transformational festivals. Leisures on the margins resist normative ideals

and can open space for creative processes that remix life into a colorful patchwork of potentiality. Lefebvre considered it possible to deliberately make life into a work of art by living philosophy (Shields, 1999). The present work explored a creative philosophical approach to leisure by employing arts-based research to play with an embodied experience of being and becoming. Festivals are timespaces where people can embody the artfulness of life and try on different philosophies just as fluidly as they may change costumes, paint their faces, move their bodies in rhythm to the music, and play with non-ordinary states of consciousness. Lefebvre considered people who are one with their desires to be unalienated, true to themselves, and on the path to becoming self-realized (Shields, 1999). Festivals open spaces for some participants to imagine alternative ways of being, discover and express inner desires, and play with the tensions that emerge in community as they explore them. The present work remixes interdisciplinary theories into a dynamic alternative metanarrative for leisure that orients to embodiment, process, and the arts. It enhances scholarship by engaging a sensuous exploration into the meanings of a leisure timespace on the edge of current knowledge and awareness. Leisure is associated with the freedom to enter different realities, transcend normative limitations, and "*play*—with ideas, with fantasies, with words, (…) with paint, (…) and with social relationships" (Turner, 1974, p. 68, emphasis in original). Transformational festivals are contemporary expressions of these leisures. They are playgrounds of relational freedom where people transcend the everyday and imagine themselves and their lives differently.

The current work expands upon findings from an earlier research project on transformational festivals completed in 2013. I was interested in life-altering experiences at festivals, and I interviewed festivalgoers about their experiences. I also conducted autoethnographic and ethnographic investigations of several transformational festivals. The research findings asserted the importance of encountering in the festival timespace, whether it was encountering others for the first time, re-encountering friends and family, or self encounters (Mohr, 2013). The current work remained curious about the "transformational" element of festivals. My research questions focused on how festivals might help to catalyze life changes by structuring and supporting participant experiences festival timespaces. I also explored the lived experience of festivals that may be related to

transformation. To investigate these questions, I focused the research on a specific community of regular festivalgoers with whom I already had existing relationships of friendship and trust. This group of participants attends festivals because we are interested in celebrating, expressing ourselves, expanding consciousness, pushing boundaries, learning new things, considering alternative perspectives, making connections with new people, and deepening existing relationships. Friendship-as-method was helpful in the festival timespace in order to build upon these relationships and discuss intimate details about meaningful festival experiences.

To approach the ineffable experience of "transformation" at festivals, the current work immersed the research into an embodied exploration of the festival timespace. I bricolaged interpretative phenomenological analysis, arts-based research, and critical ethnography to co-create art canvases with participants at three transformational festivals. I collected data and created canvases at the Astral Harvest Music & Arts Festival, the Shambhala Music Festival, and Intention Alberta in 2015. I engaged with a personal journal to record sensory experiences of the timespace, and chatted wildly with other festivalgoers about their experiences. I had one festival veteran share their transformational festival journey with me in narrative form. All ethnographic and narrative data was bricolaged into ethnofictive representations in order to give a vivid portrayal of sensory qualities and thematic confluences of lived festival timespaces. I took photographs and used the work of Luke GS Art and Photography (www.lukegs.com) to orient readers visually and give them a multimodal glimpse into the festival world. I wrote extensive descriptions of the perceived and conceived spaces of the festivals by using information published online and programs handed out at the events. Presented through Lefebvre's triadic structure, I aimed to provide rich descriptions to illuminate a small fragment of how participants encounter and experience transformational festivals as meaningful.

I unpacked elements revealed by co-created canvases and ethnofictive narratives in an analysis of the qualities and structures of each festival timespace. I used theoretical and methodological frameworks from Lefebvre (1991, 2004), Lipari (2014a, 2014b), Shields (1999, 2013), MacDonald (2016), Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), and others. In unifying and making overall sense of the constellation of insights I received, I return to

Pieper's (1952) conceptualization of leisure as particularly significant to integrate how transformation may have been occurring across all three festivals. Pieper's elements of contemplation, celebration, and wholeness are represented in varying degrees in all the festivals. These elements played a role in transformation because they invited participants to re-imagine and co-create themselves outside of everyday life, whether it was through ecstatic celebration or quiet contemplation. At Shambhala, I encountered a vibrantly urban celebration of freedom, excitement, and experimentation, with community tensions. At Astral Harvest, I encountered the relational importance of creativity, self-expression, and nature rhythms to wholeness in community. At Intention, I encountered a tight-knit local family that opened timespace for both celebration and contemplation by challenging boundaries, co-creating ecstatic rituals, and enabling healing processes. Although life-changing experiences are as unique as the people undergoing them, the current work details some commonalities in how festivals support these processes. Seen through Pieper's (1952) lens, all of the festivals were celebrations of life, love, and community. As immersive, multi-day events held in close relationship to nature, they all allowed space for "hanging out" and "playing with" different ways of living, being, and creating. Ecstatic celebrations are made significant through rest and relaxation, when people process and make sense of meaningful experiences. Celebration and contemplation are a dialectical whole. Sustained transformations ultimately require the processes of reflecting on life-changing realizations and integrating them into everyday life.

Transformational festivals are also an expression of Lefebvre's city as an oeuvre, crafted by love for creativity and celebration. Lefebvrean cities are totalities characterized by wholeness and simultaneity in how they assemble difference and potentiate encounters (Shields, 1999). Although the urban city is a site of interaction and multiplicity, it also has its roots in capitalist processes that isolate and divide for the sake of neoliberal business productivity and efficiency. Although transformational festivals are not outside of economic processes, capital gains are typically not the driving force. The manifestation of different intentions for these events creates different kinds of timespaces, full of potential for creative collusions and heartfelt encounters. When festivalgoers return to their everyday lives, they carry the reverberations of these experiences within them. The festival

as embodied by participants continues to ripple outwards and interrogates or interrupts the potentially alienating rhythms of urban cities. As one interview participant stated, festivals "opened my eyes to what people really are and how loving and caring they really can be. (…) [Festivals have] really opened up my life to trying to achieve unconditional love for everything" (Mohr, 2013). As this participant implies, transformational festivals are an expression and a practice of radical love that may help to heal the rifts between people, between communities, and between humans and the natural world. For some, they re-inspire and re-imagine the potentialities for life in dynamic relation, through an evolving process of embodied encounters. In journeying through heART-centered approaches to leisure research, I have attempted to leave an impression, however partial, of how transformational festivals may be experienced and how they are meaningful for my community.

The present work maps a small portion of the vast territory encompassing transformational festivals, and in the process reveals many paths for future research. The current work is limited by a small sample size of participants that is not representative of the entire transformational festival population. It is also limited by only including three festivals in Western Canada. Future projects may be enhanced by exploring the experiences of a larger and more diverse group of festivalgoers that approach the festival in different ways, or by mapping timespaces in more festivals across the world. The global nature of the transformational festival scene suggests cross-cultural research may reveal additional insights about how transformational experiences might unfold across festivals in different parts of the world. Finally, leisure research would be enhanced by further consideration and integration of interdisciplinary methods and theories. The field would gain valuable insights by paying more sustained attention to leisure practices involving music-dance, art, the ecstatic, and the transpersonal. As the current project begins to explore, re-mixing leisure theory with considerations to sensory embodiment, aesthetic response, and process-based ways of knowing may be particularly generative for enhancing scholarly knowledge on leisure practices rooted in the arts.

In closing, this work traces my own dynamic process of transformation. Through my involvement in researching transformational festivals, and over the course of my graduate

career at the University of Alberta, I discovered a compelling desire to devote more of my time to pursuing art in a variety of forms. I am inspired by the possibilities of using art forms as tools to explore experiences, as catalysts to inspire social interaction, as leisures to reveal insights about self and other, and as therapies for inspiring personal change. With this work, I have barely scratched the surface of the many exciting future directions that are available for scholars willing to experiment with creative media and interdisciplinary work. I hope you, dear reader, have enjoyed the journey.

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