#nätverket
etnologisk tidskrift

Densities. A key to (late) modern cultural production

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ABSTRACT This paper proposes density/densities as a key to understanding, describing and measuring cultural complexity and late modern cultural production. Based on the observation that increased density is a notable tendency in much contemporary cultural production, and building on the author's previous work on rituals, heritage politics, revival, festivalisation and cultural complexity, the paper discusses aspects on increased density as an empirical phenomenon, and as an analytical tool in cultural studies, especially in relation to cultural complexity.

After an introduction to the meaning and use of density in physics and in contemporary social and cultural studies follows a discussion of density as an analytical tool in studies of cultural complexity. The next section looks at aspects of density in music festivals. The concluding section proposes a number of ways in which density can be approached and used as a key to understand contemporary cultural production.

FOUR OBSERVATIONS TO BEGIN WITH

Big is big and more is more in so many different contexts nowadays. "Now we have broken every record!" boasts Glassmagasinet in Visby harbor. 319 varieties of ice cream are available, the largest stock of ice cream varieties in Europe according to the company.[1] Prices are high, but customers willingly pay. The attraction of ice cream during hot summers is understandable. But what is the attraction behind offering so many varieties in such a small shop? Is there a special attraction for the customers to choose from so many exotic flavors?

Stockholm Marathon is Sweden's largest marathon race. Around 20,000 participants run along crammed streets in Stockholm's inner city. What is it that attracts so many to throng during six hours or more in narrow inner city streets? The organizers' answer:

> Achievement. Tears. Laughter. Endorphins. The feelings are many when you conquer the streets of Stockholm together with runners from almost 100 different countries, all of them as determined as you. Stockholm Marathon takes place right in the heart of Sweden's capital to the sounds of thousands of running feet, dazzling music and the cheers from the audience.[2]

Strong feelings, caused not only by the event and the competition, but also by the sheer number of people in a limited area. Density appears to be an essential part of the race's attractiveness, and of its visibility and attention. Is it perhaps the essence of what makes it significant and meaningful?

The Hermitage in St. Petersburg is one of the world's most important art museums. It accommodates over 3 million exquisite art works exhibited in more than a thousand marvelously decorated halls.[3] Spend just 30 seconds on each piece of art, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and it will take you over three years to see them all. What is the logic behind squeezing together so much of the world's finest art in just one place? How is the reception and experience of the 4,2 million annual visitors affected by this extreme density? And, more generally, how does it affect the meaning and importance of the exhibited art? Or art in general?

In August the annual cultural night, *Menningarnott*, takes place in central Reykjavik, Iceland.[4] The official program lists several hundred entries from early morning to midnight. To that come a wide range of other activities, some of which end only early next morning. Somewhere around a hundred thousand Icelanders, near a third of the country's population, participate in this huge event. The Cultural Night is a popular event, praised by many, but also criticized by some for consuming within just one day and night a major part of Reykjavik's, and indeed the whole of Iceland's annual cultural budget. What makes such a wide range of events in such a limited time and area so appealing to so many?

[1] https://www.facebook.com/glassmagasinet/
[2] https://www.stockholmmarathon.se/lopare/
[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermitage_Museum
[4] http://culturenight.is/, Ronström 2016.

DENSITY?

In the Guinness book of records examples like these multiply, hundreds of pages of the largest, longest, most often, fastest and, of course, the densest. As easily guessed, the number of records of the last, least, shortest or most outspread are significantly less. A core of most of the records, as in the examples above, is the bringing together of the largest possible amount of something in a limited place, time or context. With such raised density seems to follow a certain agency that affects pleasure, laughter and endorphins, economy, visibility and attention, and, more generally, social and cultural importance and meaning.

In this article I will discuss density, or perhaps better, densities, as a key to understanding, describing and measuring cultural complexity and late modern cultural production. Based on the observation that increased density is a notable tendency in much contemporary cultural production, and building on my previous work on rituals, heritage politics, revival, festivalisation and cultural complexity, my intention here is to discuss aspects on increased density as an empirical phenomenon, and as an analytical tool in cultural studies, especially in relation to cultural complexity.

After a short introduction to what density is and how it is used in contemporary social and cultural studies, I will turn to density as an analytical tool in studies of cultural complexity. Thereafter I will bring up some aspects of density in music festivals, and in the last section propose ways in which density can be approached and used as a key to understand contemporary cultural production.

WHAT IS DENSITY?

In encyclopaedias a common definition of density is "mass per unit volume".[5] Logically, the density of an object is thus closely related to its weight. As is implicit from the examples above this may be valid also for density as an aspect of culture: the mass per unit volume of cultural phenomena such as these seem to correlate well with their cultural "weight", in terms of impact, status or meaning.

In more general terms density is about concentrations, agglomerations and accumulations, and thereby also about the opposites, absences, diffusions and dispersals. There are many ways to describe such conditions. Among synonyms to "dense" in English we find tight, impenetrable, opaque, solid, close, close-knit, compact, condensed, crammed, crowded, heaped, jam-packed, jammed, massed, packed, packed like sardines, piled, substantial, and, perhaps more colloquially, stupid, silly, dumb, foolish. Among antonyms we find words like loose, empty, unstable, weak, slack, unimportant, divided, fluid, gaseous, insubstantial, vaporous.

Also in Swedish we find much of the same. Among synonymes to "tät" (dense) are massiv, fast, hård, kompakt, tjock, koncentrerad; tryckande, intensiv, ogenomtränglig, utan mellanrum, tättslutande, sprickfri, dragfri, hermetisk, svårgenomtränglig, lummig, buskig, snårig. Among antonyms are gles, spridd, utspridd, otät, tunn, tunnsådd, lucker, luftig, porös, sparsam, fåtalig, lös, mjuk.

The words related to density in these (and I guess also in many other) languages are plenty, a fact that could perhaps in itself indicate a certain cultural "weight" of the phenomenon.[6] The words point in various directions, but what many have in common is that they imply a relation to certain underlying values. When presented as here, as standalones, out of context, many carry negative connotations. However, when words for high and low density are paired together, the tendency is that words for high or raised density come with more positive connotations than their antonyms.

In their much read study *Metaphors we live by*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) discuss a class of metaphors that "organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another". Lakoff and Johnson call these orientational metaphors, "since most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:14). They argue that such orientational metaphors give abstract concepts a concrete spatial orientation, as in "more is up – less is down", "good is up – bad is down" and "rational is up – emotional is down".[7]

[5] See e.g. https://www.britannica.com/science/density; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Density

[6] Cf. the reasoning in Royle 2007, Ronström 2009.

[7] Lakoff and Johnson go on to suggest that "most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors"; that "spatialization metaphors are rooted in physical and cultural experience" and therefore not randomly assigned; that the concepts that occur in metaphorical definitions are those that correspond to natural kinds of experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:118); and that there is "an internal systematicity to each spatialization metaphor" (*ibid.* 1980:17f). They also suggest that, in some cases "spatialization is so essential a part of a concept that it is difficult for us to imagine any alternative metaphor that might structure the concept" (*ibid.* 1980:17f). Since their structure emerges from our constant interaction with the physical environment, they

I suggest that 'density' is one of those abstract concepts that are given a concrete spatial orientation by being positioned in accordance with a whole system of spatial metaphors, to the effect that high or raised density is more positively valued by being connected to the "more is up, up is good"-type, while low or decreased density becomes more negatively valued by being connected to the "less is down, down is bad"-type.

DENSITY AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

Not surprisingly, density as an analytical concept is firmly grounded in the natural sciences, especially physics. However, it is not hard to find examples also in the social sciences and the humanities where density is used in relation to social structure or culture. A frequently applied measure in human geography is "population density", for the number of people per unit area, and similarly in other disciplines for the number of artefacts, events, businesses, networks or other socio-cultural units per unit area. In the works of Richard Florida (2002) and his followers density is frequently used, explicitly or implicitly, as an analytical tool for measuring and comparing the creative class, the number of artists, "bohemians" and cultural workers in cities and regions in the US.

In a similar vein a Norwegian study uses density for the number of cultural forms identified as "cultural heritage" available for individuals in their neighbourhood:

> We also show that there is a greater willingness to pay to live in neighbourhoods where there is a high density of cultural heritage than in neighbourhoods with lower density of cultural heritage. The value of living in neighbourhoods with a high density of cultural heritage is higher than the value of living in a house with cultural heritage characteristics. (Wang Gierløff et al. 2017)

By in this way being explicitly connected to a spatial metaphor (high-low), density can be used not only to measure and compare, but also in effect to evaluate (good-bad). Implicit in this and many other discussions of density in relation to social and/or cultural phenomena is an assumption that raised/high density is positive and desirable.

DENSITY AND COMPLEXITY

There are examples of uses of density as an analytical tool also in research of more abstract cultural phenomena, such as ideas, values and norms. In a study of how place and culture support and obstruct educational aims, Sue Waite, researcher of education in Plymouth, England, develops a concept of cultural density:

> as an explanatory tool to theorise how place and culture intersect to support some educational aims and interfere with others (…). Cultural density refers to the nature, thickness and dominance of habitus and norms of practice in places. (Waite 2013)

In his book "Cultural Complexity" (1992) social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz discusses cultural diversity and complexity along a similar line of thinking.[8] He argues that the analysis of modern complex societies has to take into account the relationship between three dimensions of culture: the ideas and ways of thinking; the forms through which ideas can be externalized and made accessible to others; and what is more important here, the social distribution, ie how and to what extent the ideas and forms are distributed over a population.

"Complexity", Hannerz notes, is itself a complex notion. It can refer to concepts: the more meanings a concept has, the greater its complexity: the more concepts in a culture, the greater its complexity. It can also refer to the number of culturally meaningful units in the wider sense, "memes", "wits" "chunks" and whatnot they have been called: the more such units, the greater the complexity. In addition, complexity can refer to the tools with which such units are arranged, sorted and connected, "themes", "key symbols", "deep structures", etc. The more such tools, and the more complex they are, the greater the complexity. The intellectual appeal of such a complex concept is hardly greater than "messy", writes Hannerz, but what still makes it useful is "its sober insistence that we should think twice before accepting any simple characterization of the cultures in question in terms of some single essence" (Hannerz 1992:6). After all, it is hardly questionable that some cultures have larger inventories of differentiated meaning than others and more ways to handle meaning. The complexity of ideas, he finds, is largely a consequence of the complexity of the forms and their social distribution.

What Hannerz pleads for is a view of culture as the organization of meaning, because this links culture to social structure. The social structure of a society is largely based on culturally meaningful differences and how such differences are distributed across society: "in a complex culture (…) some common sense is for everybody, but

are "concepts that we live by in the most fundamental way" (*ibid.* 1980:57).

[8] The following section is based on Ronström 1994.

much is most definitely not that common" (Hannerz 1992:128). By using variations of the formula "I know that you know that I know" such differences can be comprehensively summarized. The most massive form of intersubjectivity can be written: "I know and I know that everybody else knows, and I know everyone knows that everyone else knows." Other formulas express what some but not all share, the doubtful, the questioned, the controversial etc: "He knows more about this than me." "I know and I think you know, but I also think they do not know that we know." "People should not know that they do not know, because if they know that they do not know they may want to find out." "I do not believe this, but you do it and think I'll do it", Hannerz summarizes:

> As a social organization of meaning, culture can be seen as made up of an extremely complex interlinkage of such formulae; a network of perspectives, with continuous production of overt cultural forms between them. In this manner, the perspectivation of meaning is a powerful engine in creating a diversity of culture within the complex society. Call the network a polyphony, as the perspectives are at the same time voices; term it a conversation, if it appears fairly low-keyed and consensual; refer to it as a debate, if you wish to emphasize contestation; or describe it as a cacophony, if you find mostly disorder. (Hannerz 1992:68)

Although density has been an important notion in Hannerz' work on cultural complexity and the distribution of culture at least since the early 80's (e.g.Hannerz 1983), it is not an explicit part of his analytical repertoire. Still, it is evident how his main point can be re-formulated in terms of density: The denser inventories of differentiated meaning, the more complex or diverse society; in terms of concepts, of meaningful entities, memes, chunks, bits, etc., and in terms of conceptual tools available to organize such entities, such as structures, key symbols, themes and master narratives. Density can thus be seen as an aspect of complexity, or the other way around.

MUSIC FESTIVALS AND FIVE LEVELS OF MUSICAL BEHAVIOUR

My ambition here is to take this cultural theoretical discussion a step further by applying density to a number of aspects of culture and cultural production. What seems fruitful is the possibility to describe, measure and compare cultural processes in terms of density, and in terms of the asymmetries and symmetries that differences in density produce. As Hannerz underlines, complex cultures are characterized by asymmetries of the cultural flow, asymmetries that establish a long series of center-peripheral relationships in all dimensions and aspects of culture. Thus, it will also be possible to describe subcultures, class cultures, ethnic groups, etc. as clusters of perspectives created by more or less temporarily emerging symmetries in the cultural processes. And such clusters can be described, measured and compared in terms of density, which is precisely what the introductory examples above are intended to point at.

Hence, I propose density not only as a notion to think with in culture research in general, but also and more concretely, to describe, measure and compare specific types of cultural production. As an example I will make use of my earlier work on music and music festivals, and start by pointing at five levels or aspects of music or musical behaviour that can be measured in terms of density:

1. Density of the presented matter, in this case the music, the sounding matter, the expressive forms: tones, chords, parts, fill-ins, licks etc.
2. Density of the musical interaction and the performance: tightness, attack, movements, solos, orchestration etc.
3. Density of the stage production; props, light effects, volume, use of time, space etc.
4. Density of the event: size, number and length of acts, performances, audiences, venues etc.
5. Density as a factor of culture at large.

FESTIVALS

It is evident that, especially since the 1990s, festivals have become a major form for cultural production over the Western world.[9] Today "festival" is used in various languages for a wide array of celebrations, that include a suspension of ordinary life and a focus on expressive forms such as food, drink, special clothes, drama, music, dance and also often with a distinct spiritual component. This development has been named "festivalisation", a term pertaining not only to music but to society at large, including food, sports, tourism, city development, product marketing as well as all kinds of artistic and identity expression.

A first factor behind this current festivalisation is the trend to rename as "festivals" all kinds of traditional forms of gatherings, celebrations and festivities, from calendar to historical events, religious to secular rituals, markets, fairs, commemorations and anniversaries. In addition to that, due to a growing competition for media

[9] The following paragraphs is based on Ronström 2001, 2014a, 2016.

and/or for audience, the buzzword "festival" is used for a growing number of public events typically dedicated to display and promote a region, a village or a town, a minority group, be it cultural, ethnic or defined by sexual orientation, peculiar types of food, drink, costume, dance, music, cinema, literature, etc. Within about two decades, this general "festivalisation of events" (Jæger, Kvidal & Viken 2012:17) has turned "festival" into an all-inclusive, generic label that can be used at will.

An obvious result of this "festivalisation of events" is an unprecedented increase of festivals over the world in the last decades.[10] But not only are there more festivals in number, they also tend to become longer and bigger, attract more people and include a larger variety of performances, all of which concern levels three and four in the list above. Beside music, dance, street performances, food courts and bars, new activities such as workshops, cooking lessons, film programs, exhibitions, sport competitions, seminars, and debates have become common and the palette seems always to increase. This inflating trend has been termed "festivalisation of festivals" (Jæger, Kvidal & Viken 2012:17).

With such growth, music festivals have become increasingly important in cultural policies, as arenas for marketing, brand building and image enhancement. Music festivals have gone through a process of institutionalisation and professionalisation, supported by EU funding, new university programmes in festival management and a common trend to invest in festivals as vehicles for local and regional development in order to raise visibility and attention (Ludvigsson 2008).

This development has led to a strengthened instrumentalisation of expressive culture in many north European countries. As music has long turned into business, festivals have moved from leisure, art and social criticism to the domain of economy, serving most notably as marketplaces and as touristic destinations. Today festivals are an integral part of the growing tourist industry. Tourism is dependent on destinations, attractions, something to see and experience. While festivals provide the attractive experiences, the tourist industry provides the audiences.

The result is an impressive transnational music festival geography or "festivalscape", a dense, intricate network spreading from large cities to small remote villages, interconnected by national and international branch organisations and a set of routes, tangible and intangible, from simple paths to elaborate highways. Along these routes circulate artists, audiences, technicians, goods and services, but also ideas, economic models, forms of social behaviour (such as how to behave as artists and audience), representations (artefacts, images, props etc.), visibility, attention and recognition.

COST EFFICIENCY

An explanation to the increase of music festivals is cost efficiency. No matter how expensive and resource demanding, festivals are nevertheless often cost-efficient for audiences, arrangers, and artists. There is a certain rationality in increased event density, to have it all at once instead of spreading it out over time and space. For relatively low investments of money, time and energy, audiences gain access to many different artists, to foods and goods from distant places, as well as to meeting old and making new friends. For the arrangers, cultural events are often risky, especially in northern Europe, where so many large events are held outdoors during short and rainy summers. But by presenting several kinds of artists, attractive to different types of audiences, it may be possible to manage risks more efficiently and at the same time reduce the total costs per performance. As PR, advertisement and media have become key factors to success, the possibility to concentrate communication efforts on a single and short event is also highly profitable. Such focused attention is in turn likely to attract more easily sponsors and commercial partners. To the artists, festivals are a means to reach larger audiences with the same investment, to concentrate activities to a limited period of time and thereby to avoid many of the hazards and inconveniences encountered in long solo tours. In this light, the increase in numbers of festivals can be understood as an answer to the growing demands of the market economy for maximisation of profit and continuous rationalisation and increased effectivity in the field of expressive culture.

FESTIVALISATION OF MUSICAL BEHAVIOUR: FORMATTING MUSICAL BEHAVIOUR

An interesting aspect of festivalisation is "mediaisation", the process of formatting musical repertoires and behaviours to the medium (Wallis & Malm 1984:278-281). While concerts are highly formalized and focused performances, festival audiences normally engage in parallel activities such as chatting, eating, smoking, using smart phones etc. For that reason, festivals have difficul-

[10] Percy M. Young writes that in the last century "there has been an unprecedented proliferation of music festivals of all kinds" (Young 2001:508), but a fair guess is that rock/pop festivals had the lion's share in this increase.

ties in maintaining the audience's attention over a longer period of time. This calls for more and stronger effects, which typically means a striving towards raised density of the musical matter, expressive forms, performances, and stage productions, all of which concern level one to three in the list above, covering such aspects as raised volume, flashier lights and raised focus on performers attack and tightness, as also costumes, moves, props etc.

To raised levels of expression and effect, festival audiences typically answer by "zapping" passing on to another stage or another activity. "Festivals fit young people's ways of zapping and searching for music" comments ethnologist and festival specialist Jonas Bjälesjö. "They are like a smorgasbord, if you get tired of a gig you pass on to the next" (*Sydsvenskan* 2012). The result is a spiral of more effects and raised density at levels one to four to renew attention. This inflation raises production costs, which in turn calls for larger venues and bigger audiences. With large scale performances follow more security investments and pricey techniques such as large PA systems and video displays to overcome the distance between performers and spectators. In a social perspective, such fortification of the stages also gives way to new, ritualised repertoire of border crossing activities, such as crowd surfing and stage diving.

FESTIVALISATION OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY AT LARGE

Yet another aspect of festivalisation is a tendency in present-day, western societies to arrange cultural production in a festival-like way, which at least partly may be seen as a consequence of festivalisation on the way people understand and organise time and space (Roche 2011:127f). This highlights a contemporary trend in urban and economic development policies to emphasize experience, to the effect that the production and consumption of products and places is transformed into theatre, stages, performances, audiences (Jakob 2012:1). "Spectacle-culture", "event-culture", "eventification"', "disneyfication", "cultural fireworks" are some of the expressions for this trend.

Such raised event density has a number of consequences for performances and expressive culture at large (Ronström 2008; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Concentration in time produces a ketchup-like effect: first nothing, then nothing, and suddenly everything at once. Musical life becomes split up between a long production period, with big investments but small revenues, limited resources and audiences, low intensity, visibility and attention; and a short period of distribution, sale and consumption, with high intensity, visibility and attention, large resources and audiences (Lundberg & Malm & Ronström 2000:337).

PRODUCING THE LOCAL FOR GLOBAL CONSUMPTION

Visibility at a distance, through representations, symbols, images and narratives, is a core issue. Raised visibility can be profitable in terms of money, but it is more often attention and recognition that is the attractive resource that the production is organised to maximise (Goldhaber 1997a, 1997b) Since attention will always be in short supply, access to attention has become an increasingly important factor, which has led to a dramatic increase of the costs to attract people, flows of money, social and cultural capital. A consequence of this development is raised density of the messages, as in the infamous "15 minutes of fame" phenomenon.

Tourism is today one of the world's largest industries. What makes it different from other globalized businesses is that its products, the destinations, cannot be moved: consumers have to be brought to the products instead of the other way round. This makes visibility at a distance, through images or narratives, a core issue. To obtain and to raise such visibility is thus one of the most important driving forces behind the production and the competition of tourist destinations.

Festivals fit into this economy by offering an efficient means to process the local for global export (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:153). They function as a "disembedding mechanism" (Giddens 1990) that uncouple chosen local elements from their original contexts, pack and wrap them up to make them fit the basic requirements of tourism. This makes them interesting as "a new way of relating to space that focuses more on sites and networks than on a purely territorial approach" (Segal 2009:27).

Music festivals have to work their distinctiveness in order to stand a chance on the global market, where a large number of similar events already compete. This drives them to become simultaneously "differently similar" and "similarly different", often by staging local acts tied to specific times, places and cultural identities, but at the same time presenting them as freed from precisely these ties. The local features, whether keyed as traditions, roots or heritage, appear as a mere resource for producing a globalised, uniform genre (Taylor 2014; Lundberg & Malm & Ronström 2000:392). One step

beyond, Greg Richards and Julie Wilson point out, the strategy by many cities to use certain kinds of festivals in order to develop a distinctively different image of themselves also "tend[s] to end up striving for similar urban and cultural landscapes (serial reproduction, or serial monotony)" (Richards & Wilson 2004:1932f).

Successful branding of music festivals is as much about creating new, attractive stories for visitors, as it is about overwriting and replacing older local narratives about people, place, history and culture. Large festivals are good news for media, as is media good news for festivals. With the increasing festivalisation follows an increase in importance of festivals as sources of new messages, symbols and signs, new narratives, memories and myths, individually and collectively. The effect of the stories take an important role: articles, interviews, portrays and images displayed in newspapers, radio and television; videos, pictures, comments exchanged by visitors on You Tube, Instagram or Twitter – all these new layers of meaning make up disembedding mechanisms that enforce the uncoupling of the festival from its local surrounding. It is through such active retelling that places, inhabitants and ways of life can be transformed into complex and culturally dense destinations that can be visited, consumed and enjoyed by masses with no previous local knowledge.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Festival is an old form of cultural production that through an unprecedented festivalisation has taken on radically new functions and meanings in recent decades. As a result there are now more festivals, of more types, in more places, used in more ways, and for more reasons. Both as a conceptual framework and as an empirical phenomenon, music festivals seem to generate a certain cultural energy attractive to growing numbers of managers, producers, artists, local volunteers, audiences and, to some extent, also to scholars. Festivals are increasingly important as exchange offices, where economic capital can be changed to cultural and vice versa. Festivals can produce desirable visibility and attention capital but at the same time contribute to rapid devaluation and consumption of such capital. Festivals are instruments for control of musical and cultural resources, as well as of the aesthetics, ethics, values, symbols, and representations of the presented expressive forms. Festival organisers thereby become controllers of political and ideological power.

Perhaps the f-word can best be described as a "vessel of meaning" (Barth 1969), that could be filled with many kinds of contents and used in many ways. This turns festivals into tools for both social control and cultural change, which in turn helps to explain the festivalisation of the semantic and conceptual terrain of festivities, the increase in numbers of festivals, the adaptation of cultural forms to the festival format, and the current trend of festivalisation of society and culture at large.

I have used music festivals as the example here, because music festivals provide an unusually clear example of raised density at least at five levels, the matter or expressive forms, performances, stage productions, events and culture at large. To that comes that music festivals also provide a good example of a cultural production that both produce and express, present and represent many of the tendencies that in current academic prose have been summarised as cultural complexity, globalisation and postmodernity: on the one hand a stress on diversities - mixing, bricolage, eclecticism, crossover, blurring of genres and categories; on the other hand a stress on homogeneity, a purification and reification of expressive forms and styles, in order to produce fast and clear-cut messages.

As a phenomenon of the late modern, hyper-capitalistic world, music festivals have become an arena, or interface, where the global and the local are negotiated and processed in new ways. And as so many other late-modern phenomena, music festivals are caught up in a dichotomous structure, at once uniting and separating. On the one hand, a limited number of festival formats have spread over of the world, promoted by people with similar interests and backgrounds, caught in similar institutional logics, staged and perhaps also consumed in similar ways. On the other hand, as these globalised festival formats are downloaded and applied locally, they will inevitably be exposed to unpredictable adaptations and changes. In addition to that, the renaming and reformatting of older established gatherings and celebrations as "festivals" should also lead to increased diversification.

Music festivals can thus be understood as a field of tension with globalising and homogenising forces at the one end, and localising and diversifying forces at the other. A striking feature of many music festivals is the complex interplay between such forces: a striving for diversity, bricolage and crossover can coexist with a tendency to essentialise cultural forms in the very same events. The hierarchy of values that organises and hold the field together is strengthened rather than threatened by what might seem at first destabilising agents: increasing complexity and diversity at one level is coun-

terbalanced by increasing homogeneity and standardisation at another and vice versa (Malm & Lundberg & Ronström 2000; Ronström 2008:223; Bjälesjö 2013)

To this I argue that music festivals (as perhaps also many other types of festivals) summarize a trend in contemporary society to produce the "greatest possible impression on shortest possible time", to use the words of Zygmunt Bauman (1994), or, to borrow words from Russian semiotician Boris Uspenskij , "to achieve the largest possible number of signs in the smallest possible space".[11] This brings us to the role of density in today's cultural production and also to theories about cultural complexity, representation and the agency of display.

There are at least three ways in which density, or densities, can be approached as a key to cultural production, and to analysing cultural at large.

1) As a descriptive and/or an analytical tool density can of course be applied to all aspects of human culture. [12] In general the density of ordinary everyday life tends to be low, or at least described as low, which should not be surprising since low "event density" is one of the central features of what we commonly understand as "ordinary" and "everyday". But when things are presented for display, or when marked as exhibited, such as in a concert, a festival, a museum, a film, a tourist brochure or a photo album, the density of exhibited items increases, as do the density of the performances, spaces and events as such. This is especially so if the items at display are meant to stand as symbolic representations of some abstract or in other ways absent phenomenon. Symbolic representation becomes possible and viable by means of condensation and typification, homogenisation and standardisation. Thus, in the same way as the density increases when a course of events is packaged as a story, a film, a book or an exhibition, a tribute or cover band's performance is generally denser in a number of ways than the original, especially at levels one to three of my list. Also the music of revival bands playing middle age music, folk music, art rock of the 70's or other kinds of heritagized music, is generally denser than the music of the "originals", else it would not be possible to recognize them as revival bands.

2) When certain instances are marked as different from the ordinary flow of life and named rituals, ceremonies, festivals, attractions, exhibitions, cultural centers, museums, theme parks or tourist destinations, the density of the expressive forms will raise as a consequence of the shift that is implied from one context to another: the more important the event, in terms of audiences, money, status, or cultural capital, the more dense the use of expressive forms, of props, performances and of time and space (levels one to four) (Ronström 2011, 2014b). In my study of heritage politics and the re-making of Visby, Gotland, Sweden, from a worn out small town to a Middle Age icon in the 1990's (Ronström 2008), I have shown how cultural heritage production, especially in the form of Unesco World Heritage, transforms its objects by exhibiting, historicizing and estheticizing, and by objectifying and homogenizing, all in order to increase the objects density and distinctive character and thereby its visibility, locally and globally.

3) Central to the experience industry of late modern societies is "staging", a process that requires putting something up at display. To put up things to display in turn requires a detachment that produces a problematic relationship between the displayed objects and the instruments of their display. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has shown in her studies of heritage production and the agency of display, such staging produces an "interface that mediates and thereby transforms what is shown" (1998:7). The result is something new. Raised density is then at once a mark of the successful transformation and a defining quality of the result.

[11] Lecture given at Gotland University, autumn 1999. With that said it is necessary to mention also that horror vaccui - "fear of empty space", the filling of the entire surface of a space or an artwork with detail, is a an old and common aesthetic principle in folk art, indigenous art, and a large number of other art forms, over the world, from ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, to renaissance map-making, and graffiti-paintings.

[12] Since density is a measure of quantity per unit, and since quantity is always a meaningful quality in the human world, in relation to cultural complexity and knowledge quantity and density can in practice become exchangeable: since culture and knowledge is always situated, there will always be a spatial unit of some kind implied, hence quantity of meaningful entities will always be possible to describe in terms of density.

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