Festival as process
art, territory, assemblage and mobility in
North East England 2003-2012

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Abstract

This thesis examines the geographies of a new festival of contemporary art, film and music in North East England between 2003 and 2012. As a hybrid process of cultural production, renewal and consumption, the arts festival offers an important site to examine how cultural encounters are produced and performed through a set of entwined place based imaginaries. Using the curatorial practice of AV Festival as a case study, the thesis assembles histories of art, curating, cultural policy and regional geography to evaluate how the organisation sought to advocate a progressive sense of place. The thesis addresses how AV Festival was situated within its locality in three ways.

Firstly, analysing the ecology of relations that created AV Festival demonstrates how the artistic ethos of a new cultural organisation was shaped to mediate the perceived demands of the regional cultural economy of North East England. In doing so, the thesis makes an important contribution to regional cultural history with a particular emphasis on how festival was deployed as a strategy towards economic and social regeneration, a subject that is underrepresented in scholarly work.

Secondly, two significant artwork commissions are examined in order to show how AV Festival developed a particular practice of situated artistic commissioning. Drawing on the concepts of territorialisation and mediation, analysis of the YoHa project, Coal Fired Computers (2010) shows how curatorial and artistic practice can intervene in ideas of locational identity. Building on this, the discussion of the recreation of John Cage’s 1966 performance, Variations VII in 2008 in Gateshead demonstrates how the hybridity of AV Festival was performed as an assemblage of proximate and distant social, material and cultural relationships, the scale of which did not necessarily converge neatly around territories or temporalities.

Finally, the thesis emphasises mobility as a critical concept for understanding the arts festival. Examining AV Festival as a mobility system shows how festivals privilege corporeal and material co-presence. Through tracing the movements of people and objects in AV Festival, the thesis explores the concepts of slowness and friction and demonstrates how the process of festival can intervene and disrupt normative spatial rhythms.

Set against the pluralisation of arts festivals, including visual art biennials, in Europe and beyond, over recent decades and a broader festivalisation of cultural institutions, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the field in offering a reconceptualisation of festival. The thesis reimagines festival as a relational process, showing how festival necessitates a continual assembly and dispersal within the production, renewal and consumption of public culture. The study provides theoretical support to those interested in the intersections between art, festival and place in the twenty-first century.
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Abbreviations

AVANE         Audio Visual Arts North East
AVF           AV Festival
AVF03         AV Festival (8 – 22 November 2003)
AVF06         AV Festival Life Like (2 – 12 March 2006)
AVF08         AV Festival Broadcast (28 February – 8 March 2008)
AVF10         AV Festival Energy (5 – 14 March 2010)
AVF12         AV Festival As Slow As Possible (1 – 31 March 2012)
ACE           Arts Council England
BCCA          BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead
CFC           Coal Fired Computers, YoHa, 2010
C10           Culture10
ECC           European Capital of Culture
MIMA          Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art
NGCA          Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland
SG            Sage Gateshead
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I Introduction

In Newcastle-upon-Tyne at around half past three on the opening Saturday of AV Festival 12, the audience arrived at the Tyneside Cinema to watch a film of the sun setting through the trees of a Californian forest. Across the city, an automated hammer hit a large piece of sheet metal sending sounds reverberating around a great hall and in a darkened room, fake snow fell to the floor covering a self-playing piano. A hydraulic piston moving at 7mm per hour was crushing a white Volkswagen Golf. One man and one woman were reading aloud from two books, each containing the record of the date of every year for a million years into the future and a million years into the past. Drone tones echoed through the concave ceiling chamber of the entrance to the Newcastle Civic Centre. Volunteer tour leaders were nervous about the questions the public might ask. Musicians and poets were rehearsing; guest lists were being finalised. Earworms, songs that are stuck in your head, play on an internet radio station dedicated to boredom. In Middlesbrough, two films screen in adjoining rooms: one a digitally drawn Cuban school, the other a 35mm projection of smoke clouds expanding in an unknown romantic landscape. Two teenagers were bored in Sunderland and found their way into a gallery to watch a series of floor-to-ceiling video projections of the landscape of Milwaukee’s industrial valley.

These momentary associations, situations, actions and encounters assembled and threaded together to produce the first day of the fifth edition of AV Festival titled, As Slow As Possible, in 2012. They all belong to the same story. AV Festival took place five times between 2003 and 2012 at numerous sites scattered across North East England. AVF was born in the club scene of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and grew over a decade into a biennial of contemporary visual art, music and film. Over this period, AVF developed into an independent organisation producing a distinct and hybrid event, presenting commissioned artworks, as well as hundreds of films, exhibitions, concerts, club nights, discussions and performances. AVF had

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1 At the time of writing this thesis AVF has just presented the sixth edition in 2014, with funding secured for two more editions in 2016 and 2018.

2 In business and marketing plans over a number of year AVF has considered itself in relation to many international festivals including: Artefact Festival, Leuven, Belgium; Courtisane, Gent. The AV of the title of the festival refers to the term Audio Visual, although the Festival is very rarely referred to, either within the organisation or externally in an un-abbreviated form.
a specific and determined relationship with the cities, towns and wider region of North East England from which it has emerged and in which it sought to contextualise its activities. Initially this manifested by bringing together the recent popular imaginaries of Newcastle as both a party city and a culture city, and later through the development of a thematic, situated, contemporary art programme. The curators of AVF consistently placed themselves in relation to dominant cultural regional and urban discourses.

The relationship AVF had with place, between arts festival and locale, was never static, it constantly evolved over each edition, characterised by enquiry and by unease. On the one hand, AVF can be seen as an assertive celebration of contemporary artistic practice, cosmopolitan, intellectual, urban and interconnected, showcasing new artistic engagements with the visual, with film, sound, site and media. An embellishment of the future of North East England as culturally confident, AVF as an ambitious, large-scale event had a desire to become nationally and internationally significant. On the other hand, AVF emerged as a new, fragile and unstable, sometimes incoherent, arts organisation situated within a period of rapid local institutional cultural change in a de-industrialising North East, seeking to find legitimacy, resources, relevance and an audience across multiple scales. In the creation and maintenance of this new contemporary arts festival between 2003 and 2012 there was a contestation at the intersection of place, festival and art.

Consequently, this thesis responds to three broad research questions that are individually addressed through a case study of AVF in North East England. Firstly, it asks how the contemporary arts festival is situated, culturally, economically and socially. Building on this, the thesis asks how the relationship between the arts festival and place can be theorised, taking into account the contingency between movement and stasis within a progressive sense of place. Finally, the thesis enquires into the process of artwork commissioning within arts festivals that specifically seek to intervene in conceptions of place.

AVF is not unique as a new festival in North East England created since the end of the twentieth century. Between 2003 and 2010, £45 million was spent in Newcastle and Gateshead on the creation of new festivals and large-scale cultural events, with the aim of developing the tourist economy and changing regional image perceptions. This thesis was, in part, driven by the need to critically assess this period of regional cultural development; a need advanced by the way festival
Figure 1 AVF06 Life Like and AVF08 Broadcast Programme Cover Images
processes have been uncritically adopted by many local authorities as a strategy of civic boosterism and place promotion across Europe. After this period by 2010, AVF emerged as one of the only new events to become an independent organisation and continue to commission new artworks as well as create a biennial festival. This is the first study of its kind to examine recent festival processes in North East England, taking account of the assemblage of art, festival and place by presenting a critical cultural geography of AVF.

As a consequence of recent developments in European arts festival practice, and AVF’s new and hybrid practice, the central objective of this thesis is to address how a twenty-first century urban festival of contemporary art is situated and theorised in relation to its particular geographic context, accounting for its space-time frame and its institutional ecology. The subject of this thesis is not specific art practices, such as ‘media art’, ‘electronic art’, ‘sound art’ or ‘moving image’ that have a historic association with AVF, but rather the arts festival as a mode of organisation that produces encounters with these practices more generally. As a result of the prominent emphasis placed on cultural consumption as a mode of economic and social reinvention in North East England, it is necessary to consider how the festival as a process has been deployed within this context. The festival as a concept and device or apparatus has been relatively ignored in this field. The re-invention of Newcastle and Gateshead as an art-tourist destination is characteristic of contemporary capitalism more generally and not distinct to Tyneside, where festival becomes a process producing post-fordist, immaterial labour and economies of experience.

It is important to understand the inter-relationship between new cultural organisations such as AVF and these wider processes. Within this are a set of interrelated research questions and concerns including the role of cultural policy and regional economic agendas in shaping the practices of AVF and how new cultural organisations gain legitimacy, develop authority and permanence. It is fundamental to this thesis to move beyond the policy rhetoric of festival and place promotion, to understand more effectively the new process of festival as it has emerged and been maintained in the context of North East England. There has been a significant rise in the number of arts festivals across Europe in the last three decades, but the specifics of this within the North East has never been examined. Therefore, at the root of this thesis is a need to reassess the relationship between art, festival and place, to fill a gap in the scholarly work while
acknowledging that although this relationship is significant, it has yet to be examined in any critical detail. AVF based in Newcastle makes a valuable case study to do this because it is the only recurrent cultural event established during the last 15 years in the North East to have to have grown in audience and reputation. It may seem obvious to say this, but AVF is a product of its time and place. Studying AVF’s creation and endurance allows for wider insights into Newcastle and the North East during this period, and also into an understanding of the contemporary arts festival in general. Building on recent scholarship in cultural sociology, human geography and art history, this thesis shows how a contemporary arts festival is situated, how it is spatially constituted and negotiates its relationship with locale.

1.1 Locating

The thesis does not seek to provide a comprehensive chronological history of AVF’s activity, but rather seeks to draw out key features, commissions and modes of practice in order to elaborate the overall argument. In order to provide a coherent account of AVF, it is first necessary to position the research within its appropriate social, economic, geographic and theoretical context. As the snapshot of AVF12 at the start of this chapter shows, AVF’s engagement with place, its sensations, representation, experiences and encounters are multiple and disparate. The following section introduces the geography of AVF.

Begun in November 2003, AVF was initially a festival of ‘digital culture’, based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne but taking place across the urban centres of North East England, in Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough (see Figure. 3). AVF emerged out of a relationship between a group of underground club promoters, DJs and VJs in Newcastle, led by Jeff Cleverley and the Tyneside Cinema, an old newsreel cinema that was at the centre of Newcastle’s established, independent film and art scene since the 1960s. This collaboration brought together the cinema’s desire to engage a new, younger, more ‘creative’ audience with the desire of a loose collective of like-minded club promoters, technicians, musicians, designers, DJs and VJs to establish themselves with greater cultural status and professional capacity than the club scenes of Newcastle provided. Formatively, this meeting occurred at the height of regional optimism about a cultural renaissance in North East England and a particular political and cultural regionalist agenda. AVF was founded on a belief that the Festival could challenge dominant
Figure 2 AVF10 Energy and AVF12 As Slow As Possible Programme Cover Images
notions of regional identity by creating an event that articulated a new narrative about artistic expression in North East England.

Over AVF’s first decade, it worked with many of the existing and new cultural venues in the region. This included BCCA, MIMA, Hatton Gallery, NGCA and the Laing Art Gallery; as well as other cultural venues such as cinemas, concert halls, night clubs and a range of other sites including bars, cafes, bus shelters, marketplaces, tropical glass houses, castles, towers, swimming pools, bridges, and various disused buildings and shop fronts. Each edition of AVF has sought to occupy multiple sites, temporarily, across the urban spectrum of public spaces.

AVF has something of a unique regional geography. Unusually for a festival, it has never been concentrated within one site; rather it has privileged a scattered topology, presenting multiple exhibitions simultaneously in different sites. This dispersed and entangled geography has seen AVF work primarily across four urban territories: Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland; usually led by partnerships with existing arts or civic organisations in those cities and towns. Here is the 2006 AVF programme introduction (Harger, 2006):

You will see the very stuff of our existence portrayed, remixed and even made from scratch by some of the finest international artists in the world and by some of the talented artists that we have right here in the North East of England.

The text offers the sentiment of the event as celebratory, novel, extra-ordinary, and directed towards a regional audience. Most importantly it gives the impression of a coming together of the different scales, insides and outsides; a desire to transcend an apparent, local and global dichotomy. This was an ethos continued in later editions of the festival. Rebecca Shatwell (2012a), AVF Director since 2008, articulates the ambition of the festival as a process of building on local ‘rootedness’ while simultaneously developing international excellence creating artworks and encounters that are attached to the North East as a place. Such a dual mandate is not uncommon among arts organisations operating outside the conceived centres of cultural practice, such as London. This sees organisations seeking to attain a position within or the attention of the international, networked and mobile art world, but simultaneously requiring local justification for public investment. AVF’s regional geography has been a consistent argument the festival has used with funders when seeking investment.
Figure 3 AVF06 Programme Guide: Map Images (Harger, 2006)
Instead of asserting control over a single specific territory, as many festivals do, such as a venue, park or field for example, AVF controlled flows of artists, artworks and ideas into new relationships in a process that constitutes imaginaries of place, such as a region. This is to think of the festival conceptually as a process of motion itself, rather than as a static territory to be entered into. AVF in this sense is part of ongoing and unresolved territorial questions, questions of edges and inclusion, of who and what constitutes place. Rather than thinking about the region as a bounded entity within which AVF operates, this thesis seeks to develop an approach that sees AVF as a controlling agent that manages flows that enter and depart this imagined space.

Through the five editions between 2003 and 2012, AVF sought explicitly to operate in and against conceived notions of place and an understanding of the materiality, topology and history of North East England. As a starting point for this research, the desire of AVF’s engagement with ‘place’ needs examination. In this period AVF defined itself geographically as a festival that takes place in the ‘urban centres’ of Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland. In the process of each festival AVF has enacted various modes of performative engagement with place and framed existing practices spatially.

These individual artworks and practices include attempts to represent place in an ethnographic mode such as the film commission for AVF03, the Chimera Project by the Light Surgeons, that sought present an ‘authentic’ Middlesbrough. Whereas other projects aimed at a more dialogical engagement with place produced through participatory, discursive practices such as the Amateur Radio Rally in AVF08 or the Feral Trade Café of AVF10. Other projects have privileged creating phenomenological or experiential encounters with specific sites such as Hamish Fulton’s Slowalk in an empty car park on the banks of the Tyne or Attila Csihar’s A Scrying: First and Second Action (NCL) in the hollow north tower of the iconic Tyne Bridge, both for AVF12 (see Figure. 4). Furthermore, AVF presented virtual encounters across mediated space via radio and online broadcasting, such as the three analogue FM radio stations created for AVF06 or the continuous online broadcast, Radio Boreedcast for AVF10. An important mode of engagement with place was also the discursive and curatorial articulation of particular imaginaries of place in AVF’s thematic choice of festival subjects, Life Like, Broadcast, Energy and As Slow As Possible. On the surface, these are seemingly broad and universal
concepts, but each are evoked with a specific relationship to ‘local’ cultural and economic history in mind.

Some of these projects are relatively straightforward to theorise and they present conventional cultural encounters in established forms: film screenings, talks and exhibitions of clearly defined artworks in coherent and well-defined spaces. Yet other AVF artworks and projects have a less well-defined sense of place or time, such as Variations VII (2008) for AVF08 or YoHa’s Coal Fired Computers for AVF10. These projects complicate AVF’s relationship with its locale. AVF developed the legitimacy of its cultural practice by deploying both agitating and celebratory images of place. This approach fits within an existing identifiable trend within the presentation of contemporary art practice (see Kwon, 2004; Stallabrass, 2001), where the articulation of the distinction and necessity of a cultural organisation is provided by an expression of the uniqueness of its practice within a specific territory. How and why AVF engaged with conceptions of place is central to the enquiry of this thesis.

1.2 Producing

Now we turn to consider the production of AVF and the key forces that brought the organisation into being. Each edition of AVF involved a development or transition from the previous event, building on or neglecting what had gone before, retaining and re-performing selected elements and styles. Emphasis shifted over editions, moving from a focus on club night events to visual art exhibitions, from conceptions of digital, electronic and media art, to a wider field of contemporary arts encompassing film, music and visual art. With limited resources, those orchestrating the first Festival built relationships with many regional and national partners. The primary financial support for the event came from Arts Council England and the Northern Rock Foundation. Partnerships created by Tyneside Cinema with Sunderland Council, Middlesbrough Council and Teesside University placed the first AVF in a regional frame. AVF03 was produced on a modest budget of less than £100K. The first edition presented a broad programme of ‘digital culture’ encompassing films, music, live performances, workshops, video and animation, developed in collaboration with the London based moving image festival, onedotzero. Holding events in Tyneside Cinema, club spaces and the disused Odeon Cinema on Pilgrim Street in Newcastle, AVF03 showcased existing and touring performances such as The Cinematic Orchestra’s
score for the *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) (see Figure. 7), a retrospective of North East born filmmaker Mike Figgis and a screening of Matthew Barney’s complete *Cremaster Cycle*. The success of these collected events, in terms of ticket sales and audience numbers, as well as the energy and enthusiasm of those involved, created a desire to build a regular festival and stage a second edition.

In 2004 Tyneside Cinema appointed Honor Harger to direct the second festival. Inspired by European events such as Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria and Transmediale in Berlin, there was sense after AVF03 that the UK lacked an equivalent or similar event and AVF could be developed to align with these international media art festivals. North East England was viewed by Honor Harger as a particularly rich place to do this because of the existing artists, curators and organisations operating with knowledge of technology and art in the region. These included CRUMB at Sunderland University, Culture Lab (newly launched by Sally-Jane Norman in 2006) at Newcastle University and BCCA (Cook, 2012; Harger, 2012; Vincentelli, 2012).

The second AVF significantly departed from the first. Harger curated AVF06 (see Figure. 1) in response to the theme of the life sciences, an important area of regional scientific research and economic activity, and the programme included exhibitions as well as performances, concerts and film screenings and worked additionally in Gateshead. *Culture*¹⁰, an initiative setup to capitalise on the momentum created during Newcastle and Gateshead’s failed bid to become European Capital of Culture, primarily supported the 2006 programme. The investment of C10 significantly increased the budget of the AVF06 to around £400K, and subsequently each festival edition operated on a budget of between £350K and £500K. AVF benefitted significantly from the C10 programme of investment, but unlike many of the other events created or supported between

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¹ In business and marketing plans over a number of year AVF has considered itself in relation to many international festivals including: Artefact Festival, Leuven, Belgium; Courtisane, Gent, Belgium; ISEA (International Symposium on Electronic Art); Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria; Transmediale, Berlin, Germany; Sonar, Barcelona, Spain; DEAF (Dutch Electronic Arts Festival), Rotterdam; Elektra, Montreal, Canada; Pixelache, Helsinki, Finland; Sonic Acts, Amsterdam; TodaysArt, The Hague.

² Over the first five editions AVF was funded by a range of public sources and trusts including: Arts Council England, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, One North East, Middlesbrough Council, Sunderland City Council, Northern Film & Media, UK Film Council, European Regional Development Fund, V, Wellcome Trust, Gulbenkian Foundation, Big Lottery Fund, Codeworks, PRS for Music Foundation, Office of Contemporary Art Norway, Sasakawa Foundation, Sir James Knott Trust.

³ For the scale of AVF this is a fairly modest, mid-range budget. For comparators see British Arts Festivals Association, (2008) or Jerome and Giorgi, (2009).
2003 and 2010, AVF also established itself as an independent organisation, which secured the Festival's future beyond the end of C10 and after the closure of the Regional Development Agency, One North East, following the 2010 parliamentary election.

AVF06 worked in the same urban areas of North East England as AVF03 but with the addition of Gateshead. The Festival brought together new commissions by Ryoji Ikeda and Michael Nyman at the newly built Sage Gateshead, as well as works by Gina Czarnecki (see Figure. 13), Anthony McCall and Critical Art Ensemble over a ten-day programme that also included symposia and discussions exploring life from social, scientific, technological, ethical and artistic perspectives.

This second edition set the form and mode of practice for future events in 2008, 2010 and 2012, as a biennial event working regionally with multiple partners and working thematically across disciplines. To sustain the future of the AVF, a charity called Audio Visual Arts North East (AVANE) was established in 2007-8 with the remit of promoting the public understanding of ‘electronic art’ in North East England.

The third edition AVF08 was again directed by Harger and titled Broadcast. It was curated thematically to showcase artistic and social responses to changes in broadcast technology. Continuing collaborations with many regional partners, the festival commissioned new artworks and showed work by artists, filmmakers and musicians including Harun Farocki, Chris Watson, Marko Peljhan, Sonia Boyce and Joyce Hinterding. In addition, the AVF08 ran three FM radio stations across the region. It also produced its largest scale project to date, a recreation of the John Cage’s 1966 work Variations VII at BCCA. Following AVF08, the organisation became an Arts Council England Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO), securing the organisation’s finances with annual funding for a three-year period. Harger departed after AVF08 and Rebecca Shatwell became director in October 2008. As a result of the ACE funding, for the first time the organisation had a full time director and permanent office based at Tyneside Cinema.

For AVF10, Shatwell continued the model of a ten-day thematic regional programme, curating the festival around the subject of Energy, a thematic with a specific resonance to the economy in North East England, past and present (see Figure. 2). The exhibition programme gained further prominence, alongside sound, music, moving image and film while the parties and club nights with DJs and VJs of AVF03 were phased out. The film programme included Kenneth Anger, Craig
Baldwin and Rick Prelinger and projects, performances and talks by Liliane Lijn, Gustav Metzger, Charlemagne Palestine and Graham Harwood. AVF10 was the final festival supported by C10 after the closure of the Regional Development Agency, One North East in 2011 following the election of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010.

Two years later the fifth edition AVF12 explored the subject of slowness, titled, As Slow As Possible (see Figure. 2). The festival expanded from its previous ten-day format to encompass thirty-one days through March 2012. AVF12 featured new commissions by Yoshi Wada, Susan Stenger, Phill Niblock, Jonathan Schipper, Torsten Lauschmann, Hamish Fulton and Kenneth Goldsmith. The film programme showed James Benning and Lav Diaz and the music programme included a special tribute to Peter Christopherson.

Defined by its mixed art form focus, its many regional partnerships and its thematic curatorial approach, over a nine-year period AVF grew in scale and audience. However, the festival budget between AVF06 and AVF12 stayed relatively consistent and never exceeding £500K. Likewise, the number of staff and volunteers needed to produce each edition did not dramatically change either. What did change from the first eight-day festival in 2003 to the month long event in 2012 was the homogeneity and independence of the organisation producing it, as it moved from an event produced by Tyneside Cinema to an independent charity with dedicated staff.

Despite its relative youth, AVF is the longest running contemporary arts festival in North East England. Numerous new festivals were set up and have ceased to operate or transformed into different modes of organisation. With the exception of Lumiere in Durham, the North East region does not have any large-scale (£1m plus budget) international arts festivals. Unlike many other northern cities and urban areas, Tyneside and the North East have no large-scale festivals with the name of the city in the title, unlike, for example, Liverpool Biennial (founded in 1999), Manchester International Festival (founded in 2007), Sheffield Doc Fest (started in 1994) or Edinburgh’s many festivals (developed after world war two). This is in spite of significant investment in cultural infrastructure and events within North East England in the last three decades. Very few festivals created after 2000 received regular funding from Arts Council England. Within North East England only Berwick Film & Media Art Festival, and the arts festivals
in Durham managed by the local authority: Durham Brass Festival, Durham Book
Festival and Lumiere became part of the ACE portfolio.⁵

AVF is distinctive because it was neither created as a top-down policy or
tourist-aimed, instrumental festival. Nor was it entirely a grass-roots event
emergent from local culture. Rather it was an assemblage of many, sometimes at
odds, artistic, cultural, regional and personal agendas. The evolution of AVF traced
shifting regional cultural dynamics. Created at a time of abundance in public
investment in new cultural organisations, AVF persisted beyond the end of this
after 2010 into more difficult periods through the tenacity of those leading it.

AVF is also associated within the longer history of the North East region’s
relationship with modern, contemporary, avant-garde and experimental arts
existing as a pocket within the wider vernacular culture. From the modernist
poets of Morden Tower led by Basil Bunting to Richard Hamilton and Victor
Passmore at King’s College (part of Durham University until 1963, when it
became part of University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and then, Newcastle

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⁵ There were numerous arts festivals created and operating in North East England since 2000,
some of them still continue:
- The Late Shows is an annual weekend event where museums, galleries and venues open to
  the public in the evenings, begun in 2007, it is part of international Museums at Night initiative.
- Great North Run Culture is an annual series of artist commissions inspired by the world’s
  largest half-marathon that started in 2005.
- The SummerTyne Americana Festival initiated in 2005 and produced by Sage Gateshead.
- JUICE is a festival for children and young people initiated in 2008, managed by Newcastle
  Gateshead Initiative (NGI), a council funded touristic marketing organisation.
- Also run by NGI the Winter Festival including the Enchanted Parks events in Saltwell Park,
  Gateshead is an annual light display.
- The EAT! Festival produced by NGI is a celebration of regional food culture.
- Stockton Riverside Festival is an annual street arts festival, including work from circus,
  comedy, music, dance and street theatre, initiated in 1987 and supported by ACE.
- The International Print Biennial, has been run by Northern Print since 2009 focused on
  contemporary printmaking.
- Tusk Festival was setup in 2011 and has run annually in Newcastle and Gateshead, a weekend
  festival showcasing international and local experimental music performance.

Other festivals continue but in different forms, including:
- The Wunderbar Festival, a biennial event of live art and performance, ran for two editions in
  2009 and 2011 before becoming a non-festival, art commissioning agency called Wunderbar.
- Initiated in 2005 Design Event was an annual festival of design that ran until 2013. It became
  the Northern Design Festival in 2015.

Many other festivals have ceased to operate or were only one off events:
- Newcastle Science Festival ran between 2009 and 2013.
- Evolution was an outdoor popular music festival, initiated in 2002 taking place annually on the
  Newcastle and Gateshead Quayside until 2013.
- A similar event in Sunderland, Split Festival, initiated by the Wearside band The Futureheads
  and ran between 2009 and 2014. However, lacking the necessary public investment, it
  became financially unviable.
- Newcastle Gateshead Bridges Festival produced by NGI took place in 2011.
- The Festival of the North East took place in 2013.
University), through to the Basement Group, Locus+, and the Amber Collective. However, AVF cannot be separated from the other developments in regional cultural history directed at economic development and cultural tourism such as Gateshead Garden Festival, C10, and the redevelopment of the Quayside. The monuments to ‘regeneration’ standout along the banks of the Tyne, the familiar trio of the SG, BCCA and the Millennium Bridge, often pictured together at night, glowing against the backdrop of the arch of the Tyne Bridge, itself a symbol of a previous industrial age and the North East as a powerful industrial centre. A central concern of this thesis is to understand the relationship between these seemingly at-odds positions.

This thesis does not seek to reinforce a dichotomy between vernacular or popular and cosmopolitan or high culture. Rather it seeks to show how these flows of activity are interrelated, or at least how culture is a relational process creating scales and territories. A concern to understand the interconnections between scales is central to conceptualising AVF within this thesis. It asks questions of how a simultaneity of scales, territories and temporalities plays out in the experience of those moving through different festival sites.

1.3 Encountering

A shift has taken place in Britain since the second world war, where the central distinction between cultural consumption is no longer between high art and low culture but between engagement and disengagement in the arts at all (Hewison, 2014). This section introduces the audiences of AVF – those who actively took part in AVF events, who attended film screenings or concerts or visited exhibitions. Over AVF's first five editions the organisation created encounters with artworks at many multi-sited events, simultaneously showing exhibitions, films, performances and hosting events co-produced or hosted by many different cultural, civic and academic partners. Looking at the demographics of the AVF audience gives an insight into the constitution of AVF and those for whom it is constituted.

An understanding of AVF’s audiences between 2003 and 2012 was a particular concern for AVF’s funders. In order to better substantiate this audience, AVF commissioned social science research to give an impression of the geography and demography of the audience. Research into AVF took place in the form of evaluation reports designed to quantify the organisations ‘economic impact’ as
Figure 4: Attila Csihar, *A Scrying: First and Second Action* (NCL), 2012. Photo: Colin Davison. Courtesy of AV Festival
well as report on audience numbers, audience demography and perceptions of artistic excellence, brand image and quality of experience.6

The rationale for AVF to commission such research was to create advocacy documents for existing and potential funders and to advance a ‘business case’ for AVF. Having a credible report produced by an academic body such as Teesside University or a respected cultural consultancy firm such as BOP Consulting, provided a valuable level of credibility for AVF when advocating for funding from public investors such as C10, One North East and ACE.

Demonstrating the economic benefits of festival events was a central condition of the funding provided by C10 and this steered the approach and language of AVF as it sought to expand after the first edition in 2003. What is consistent across the evaluation reports commissioned between 2003 and 2012 is a narrative of ‘success’ in some form or another. However, they offer very little in the way of critical insight into the practice or form of AVF. The narrative the reports present focuses on continual growth in scale, particularly in terms of visitor numbers, with an emphasis on the importance of increasing incoming visitors from outside the region (in turn, increasing the ‘economic impact’ of AVF). By showing economic impact as a research objective, incoming audiences are privileged over local audiences because they spend more money travelling and staying within the region.

It is not clear from the reports produced during this period what an appropriate or target scale of AVF should be, but the underpinning logic of these reports is that AVF should focus continually on increasing in scale. The reports provide a picture of how AVF wanted to be portrayed to funders and as such should be treated as subjective accounts.

However, drawing from these reports gives us at least a partial picture of whom AVF engaged between 2003 and 2012. AVF rarely gathered more than 200 people in one place, at one time. Over the month long edition in 2012, it was estimated 43,333 people visited AVF12 exhibitions or events (BOP 2012), this is the highest figure AVF achieved, in 2010 it was estimated at 38,161. According to the 2012 report, each audience member on average attended between two and four individual festival events or exhibitions. The 2012 report concludes that the geography of the audience is predominantly local to the North East and the UK more widely, attributing 76% of the audience as living in the North East region,

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6 In AVF03 and AVF06 the University of Teesside was commissioned to produce an evaluation of AVF (Moore et al., 2004; Abbas and Ferrier, 2006) in AVF08 it was produced by Audiences North East (2008), and for AVF10 and AVF12 by BOP Consulting (BOP, 2010 and 2012).
mostly drawn from urban areas. This report also points to a small international audience who specially travel to AVF, 4% of the AVF total audience. We also learn that AVF audiences generally reflect the ethnic make-up of the North East (90% White or White British), with a fairly even split between male and female audiences (53% male to 47% female) and that AVF attracts a relatively young audience, although the age profile of those who attend is evenly spread, the largest share was 29% of the audience, who were aged between 25 and 34.

What is striking from the 2012 report however is that 89% of the AVF audience consider themselves to “regularly engage with the arts”. This is a high figure when compared with separate ACE research that shows the national average is only 63% and the North East region has the lowest level in England, at only 54% (ACE, 2012). As the ACE Taking Part (2012:5) survey outlines, “people in the North East in 2011/12 were significantly less likely to both attend events and participate in the arts than those across England as a whole. Findings show that they were also significantly more likely to not take part in the arts at all.” This is despite the North East having the highest per-head spend of ACE grants outside of London (ACE, 2012). It is also worth noting that in all the categories of art form AVF has consistently worked in, the North East has a lower level of engagement than the rest of England. The activities of AVF were justified in this regard by ACE. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to assert that clearly AVF provided for well-educated, mobile, urban, cultural groups within the region. AVF defined this in a communications strategy report as a ‘specialist’ audience (Barnes, 2010). This is important to consider because AVF was constituted by this relationship, in promoting cultural practice that is in some way in opposition to both the traditional or vernacular cultures of the region, and national or global culture industries. The audience of AVF is therefore part of the small minority in North East England who regularly access the publicly funded arts, known to ACE as ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘voracious’ arts attenders (see Bunting et al. 2008). Class is acknowledged as a central factor (Bennett, 2009) in cultural participation.

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7 Arts Council England (2012) research shows the North East has a consistently lower level of engagement in the following art forms associated with AVF:
- Culturally-specific festival - North East: 3% / England: 5%
- Art/photography/sculpture exhibition - North East: 12% / England: 19%
- A public art display or installation - North East: 10% / England: 14%
- Other live music event - North East: 26% / England: 30%
- Event with video or electronic art - North East: 4% / England: 5%
However, education is most commonly seen as the key to greater engagement with the arts. Robert Hewison (2014), while examining the publicly funded arts in England cites Bunting (et al. 2008:67) to reinforce the conclusion that, “even if we were able to eliminate all the inequalities in arts attendances associated with education, social status, ethnicity, poor health and so on, a large proportion of the population would still choose not to engage with the arts.” As we will see in later discussions, AVF positioned itself in relation to a specific conception of the public, and an audience, centrally defined by geography, mobility and taste.

This section has shown how we can conceive of AVF as a mobilisation of subjects. Who a festival mobilises, who is willing or merely interested to participate, is central to a festival’s continued permanence, relevance and significance. The subjectivities of those who encountered AVF were generally conceived by the organisation as an ‘audience’. Questioning this form of public participation and the language of this subjectivation is a necessary research concern of this thesis to better understand how AVF conceived its public role and relationship with place.

### 1.4 Place as protagonist: neglected areas of festival studies

What follows is a review of the scholarly work that has addressed the spatiality of the contemporary arts festival in order to situate the thesis in context and demonstrate the necessity and originality of the approach. This positions the practice of AVF in relation to the relevant academic literature. There has been no published scholarly work on AVF directly. It has appeared in many articles of journalism and critics’ reviews (some of which are drawn on in the course of this thesis) and it is referenced in the study of new media curating by Cook and Graham (2010) and a history of Tyneside Cinema (Chaplin, 2011). This thesis is the first to consider AVF with any historical depth.

This thesis rests on the possibility of using conceptions of place and the geographies of space as a lens to work towards an understanding of the contemporary festival. Festival processes assert the significance of place.

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8 The phrase “place as protagonist” is taken from an interview with the curator Peter Gorschlüter (2011), in relation to the exhibition he curated in a disused airport terminal in Cork, Ireland, titled *Terminal Convention* and produced by Static Gallery, Liverpool.

9 In AVF03 and AVF06 the University of Teesside was commissioned to produce an evaluation of AVF (Moore et al., 2004; Abbas and Ferrier, 2006) in AVF08 it was produced by Audiences North East (2008), and for AVF10 and AVF12 by BOP Consulting (BOP, 2010 and 2012).
Nevertheless, arts festivals also assert the significance of networks, of connections to other places, of movement and travel. This thesis addresses this tension, taking an approach to analysing AVF that is fundamentally spatial, where the process of festival creation controls and organises people, artworks, objects and experiences within a specific space-time frame towards the production of new cultural encounters.

In seeking to offer a progressive sense of place, AVF sought to create relations within North East England that were unhindered by deindustrialised decline. Yet, at the same time, the organisation was entwined within the regional political economy of regeneration and emergent service sector. The history of AVF is also part of a regional cultural history dominated by contested narratives of regional cultural identity, between low art and high art, between vernacular fringes and cosmopolitan centres, culture that is emergent from the region and that brought into the region from the ‘outside’, between that which is seemingly static and that which is mobile. The tensions in this process, in the first decade of activity undertaken by AVF, needs to be placed within the debates that tend to dominate the discourse around ‘culture’ in North East England. Essentially these debates are concerned with the degree to which practices fit between the polarities of a territorialised vernacular culture or a de-territorialised cosmopolitan elite culture (see Vall, 2011; Miles, 2005a).

Part-public art producer, part-contemporary art biennial, part-music festival, part-film festival, sometimes commissioner, sometimes opportunist programme umbrella: because of AVF’s diversity across art form and regional geography, there is no single typology of event that it sits easily within. The transversal form of the organisation and its hybrid relation to artistic practice means that it is not useful to begin by placing it within a specific area of study (for example the history of music, film, or new media art festivals). Rather, it is necessary to begin by considering the contemporary festival as a mode of cultural production in its own right, and specifically how the spatiality of the contemporary festival has been theorised.

In straight economic terms, the arts festival is part of the increasingly significant creative, cultural, entertainment and tourist industries (Zukin, 1995;). However, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm (2013:35) observes, festivals are “not basically rational enterprises in economic terms”. Seldom can they operate on earned income from ticket sales, and thus require public or private subsidies in
order to function. Following Hobsbawm (2013), this thesis articulates the need to adopt a geographic approach and examines how arts festivals today are ‘placed’. There are usually only three signifying terms employed in the titles of an arts festival: a place, a medium, and the mobilising process of festival, for example, the Festival of Britain (1951), Edinburgh International Festival (1947) or Cannes Film Festival (1946). The typological structure of medium and place are commonly used identifiers with which arts festivals seek to define themselves, as opposed to religious festivals that are defined by the calendar, ritual, remembrance and re-enactment.

While arguing it is necessary to consider the spatiality of arts festival, this is not at the expense of its specific temporalities; rather this thesis asserts the entangled and inseparable relations of space and time in order to consider the specific space-time frame of the arts festival. It is difficult to speak of the festival; as a mode of cultural practice it is ubiquitous in many forms. As sociologist Monica Sassatelli (2011:18) writes “Festivals are place specific, as they are performance based (even those that concern non-performative arts), and have a concentrated space–time frame: they create the sense of unique, one-off experiences, for which it is important to say ‘I was there’.” Therefore, as a starting point, it is necessary to consider how a festival such as AVF is both spatially and temporally constituted, how the process of festival creates specific spatial and temporal frames.

A central argument of this thesis is that the geographies of any particular arts festival are one of its defining features, yet while it is often alluded to in the literature it is very rarely examined in detail. There is little written about the festival as an entity or process and its relationship with site, space and place, in its own right. Most of the scholarly work either considers individual artworks within events or is based on quantitative studies designed to bolster or evaluate public subsidy.

Within the existing literature, there are a number of key texts that introduce the interrelationship of place, festival, art and cultural politics. Waterman (1998:60) provides a critical take on the cultural politics of arts festivals, asserting the significance of place where, “arts festivals have as much to do with place as with art, and this concerns not just where they are held but why, and it refers to how they contribute to and assimilate from the characters of the places.” Building on this, Quinn (2005a, 2005b, 2006) offers empirical work on urban festivals and new insights were provided by Sassatelli (2008) and Delanty (2011) examining
festivals as agents within a European cultural public sphere and ideas of cosmopolitanism.

The primary purpose here is to challenge the terrain of the existing approaches to the spatiality of the arts festival. Tensions within the dichotomies of the universal and the particular, the global and the local, are central to how arts festivals have been imagined. This discussion necessarily goes beyond an opposition between, on the one hand, a bounded, static sense of festival that emphasises rootedness, eternity and singularity and on the other, an open, mobile sense of festival that focuses exclusively on fleeting, fluid, flows, disparate connections and is seemingly ‘placeless’ (see Macleod, 2006; Aalst and Melik, 2012). What this thesis does is move the frame beyond individual artworks to examine how movement and mobile forces shape how the arts festival is situated. The implications of thinking in mobilities challenges the exiting understanding of the arts festival and shows how greater interconnectivity of cultural actors, artworks and ideas materialise within place.

The development of arts festivals in Europe after the second world war has been roughly delineated into three stages by Bianchini (in Sassatelli, 2008:30) as the age of reconstruction from 1945 (e.g. The Festival of Britain of 1951 as a “tonic for the nation” see Atkinson, 2012), the age of participation in the Free Festivals of 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. Glastonbury Festival, see McKay, 1996) and the age of city marketing from the mid-1980s to present with the rise of events such as ECC. While there is not a specific field of festival studies, there is a small and growing interest in the arts festival as a subject of academic research, primarily considering the growing number of arts festivals within Europe since 1945 (see Getz, 2010; Klaic, 2014). As a result, there is only a limited volume of literature on the urban contemporary arts festival, in contrast to the considerable literature on traditional, often rural festivals developed particularly by anthropologists, some of which will be examined in Chapter Two. There are three main areas of relevant literature for this study, each intertwined but with its own spatial inflection and relevance for the study of AVF.

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10 There is an extensive literature on relationships between space and cultural practices, institutions, histories and engagements, much of which considers globalising processes of de-territorialisation and the changing significance of place through new mobilities across space; from Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to Lucy Lippard’s *The Lure of the Local* (1998) to Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991a) through to Miwon Kwon’s *One Place and Another* (2004) and her dismantling of the concept of the site-specific in art history.
The first reflects upon the dynamics of de-territorialisation aligned with processes of economic globalisation and the differential mobilities, attachments and sense of belonging this questions. The second is urban transformation, particularly policy-led post-industrial regeneration, where economic development is directed from above, often through neo-liberal policies that espouse intercity competition, urban branding, and the appeal of the so-called creative classes. Such a focus is sometimes called the process of ‘festivalisation’ related to discourses on tourism and the developments in service and knowledge economies. The third is the application of the language of ‘place’ within artistic practice and the institutions of contemporary art; public funders, local authorities, policy makers, festivals, museums, galleries, biennials, in the sites of production and consumption of contemporary art practice.  

Taking the first area, studies of arts festivals have often focused on the expression or performance of particular identities within the public sphere, (Bres and Davis, 2001; Valck, 2007; Delanty et al., 2011; Merkel, 2015), imagined community or regionalism (Moscardo, 2007; Devismes, 2014). Turning again to Hobsbawm (2013:36), "the genealogy of today's festivals begins with the discovery of the stage as the cultural-political and social expression of a new elite.” Here the festival is an effective scenario that offers cultural expression and control for specific communities of interest, or groups who seek the advancement or preservation of its form. Performative desire borne of a need for the articulation of particular cultural sensibilities promotes the festival as a means of claiming ‘territory’ for social groups, to create a space for new relations through forms of expression. From this reading, we can ask what subjectivities and ideas are constructed and conveyed through the events. This is framed within the politics of mobility and flows of materials, subjects and capital drawing on discourses of the cosmopolitan, transnational and globalised subjectivities. For Picard and Robinson, (2006) the festival offers a tool for communities seeking to assert their identity against a background of cultural dislocation brought about by a perceived loss of an authentic relationship with place through various senses of ‘dislocation’, resulting from economic globalisation. Festivals, for diasporic communities or

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11 It is worth noting that there is also a substantial body of literature that examines festival operations, within management and event studies. However, this tends to focus on human resources, risks and logistics without a significant critical engagement. It is primarily directed towards those professionally associated with festival management (see for example Caust, 2004; Finkel, 2010; Williams and Bowdin, 2007; Mossberg and Getz, 2006; Andersson and Getz, 2009).
‘displaced’ groups, are thus a scenario to enable and perform visibility, to celebrate a sense of identity within a new location (Fjell, 2007).

Problematically, such studies tend to rely on a dichotomy between the ill-defined spheres of the local and the global, which are sometimes unquestioningly articulated as separate homogeneous entities. For example, Waterman (1998:58) writes, “successful festivals create a powerful but curious sense of place, which is local, as the festival takes place in a locality or region, but which often makes an appeal to a global culture in order to attract both participants and audiences.” Rather than maintaining this distinction there is a need to examine the spatiality of the arts festival in a way that attests to the rather less stable and more relational understanding of identity and place as an event in process and always under (re)production (Massey, 2005). This points to the need to articulate a better understanding of what Waterman (1998:62) hints at but does not elaborate in detail, when he states that the successful arts festival is an “active processing of culture”.

The second main body of relevant literature is associated with the symbolic value of the arts festival. Emphasising neoliberal economic policies, research on tourism and urban renewal has contributed significantly to spatial analyses of arts festivals. This places the arts festival within the ‘festivalisation’ of the urban public sphere (Belghazi, 2006; Jakob, 2013) aligned with city branding (Quinn, 2005a), place-making (Quinn, 2003; Haines, 2011), creative cities (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Florida, 2005; Waitt and Gibson, 2009; Comunian, 2011; Kong, 2014;) and the experience economy (Lorentzen, 2009; Park, 2010; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011; Jakob, 2013). Waterman (1998:60) again provides the clearest statement of the interdependence of festivals and a wider ecology of economic relationships:

Place promotion has become an important actor on the stage of local and regional economic regeneration over the years. At present, the cultural facets of festivals cannot be divorced from the commercial interests of tourism, regional and local economy and place promotion. Selling the place to the wider world or selling the festival as an inseparable part of the place rapidly becomes a significant facet of most festivals. If the selling is successful, then the festival becomes an important image-maker in its own right. This highlights the latent tensions between festival as art and festival as economics,
which are perhaps the most prominent issue of all in the organization of contemporary large-scale arts festivals.

Put another way, unless a festival is privately endowed, freeing the organizers to follow their artistic inclinations, it is likely to become caught up in the politics and economics of currying favour with government subsidizers or commercial sponsors.

Waterman underlines a dichotomy between art and economy in the festival process. The festival used as an economic policy instrument, as catalyst for urban regeneration, is seen as a device to change city images and attract capital and tourists, where the festival can display the productive ability of a place or economy (Richards, 2007b; Moscardo, 2007). This has also led to a large body of work examining the economic impact of arts festivals, essentially to discern if, as a public economic investment, it makes a significant return for a local economy, not just in direct tourism but also in brand image (Vrettos, 2006; Williams and Bowdin, 2007; Sullivan and Jackson, 2002). Policy makers seeking to promote place and develop tourism have deployed the arts festival as a means to present an ‘authentic’ expression of place. This is often the case where festivals have been used to bolster place identity for the gain of destination marketing, where policy makers have used the sense of celebration and participation associated with festival processes as a device to promote a ‘deeper’ more ‘authentic’ sense of place to attract tourism (Quinn, 2005a and 2006; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011). As Quinn (2005a: 932) argues, “many cities have seen in festivals a sort of ‘quick fix’ solution to their image problems”, drawing on the generally positive moral and ethical framing of the arts festival, as a site of affirmative self-expression, where the act of holding a festival is generally perceived as a social good. When a place suffers from an image problem, it is generally related to long-term, historical structural issues, that the arts festival is unlikely on its own to rectify. Arts festivals in this context have been denounced as a ‘carnival mask’, hiding the problems of economic restructuring as a result of post-industrial decline, rather than directly addressing them (Harvey, 1988; Harcup, 2000; Garcia, 2005). This has become known as ‘festivalisation’, a specific process of the commodification of festival processes exploited by tourism and place marketers (Quinn, 2006; Richards, 2007a). The specifics of this process within the context of Newcastle and Gateshead through the C10 programme are addressed in Chapter Three. The problem with approaches that aim to promote urban heterogeneity and the
‘unique’ characteristic of the city is that often the festivals themselves offer nothing more than the same homogenised experiences of many other city festivals (Waitt, 2008). Ironically, in such a case, using culture as a tool to achieve wider economic goals can have the effect of displacing local distinctiveness, which in turn weakens the ties between cultural production and consumption (Griffiths, 2006). Chang and Mahadevan (2013) reiterate the point, arguing that the instrumentalisation of both the festival and its use as a purported engine of symbolic value for cities and regions can amount to nothing other than a “fad or fetish”.

As this discussion illustrates, there is a tendency to treat the festival as an abstract container and negate its content, experiences or encounters and any specific relations the festival may realise in situ (see Aalst and Melik, 2012; or Macleod, 2006). The problem with such accounts is that they rely on a rather fixed, abstract and determined definition of place, where festival and place are seen as separate entities, one happening inside the other. In other words, they fail to take account of the understandings of place by Doreen Massey and others that see place as relational, contingent and always in a process of becoming. This could be, perhaps, because much of the social science research into festivals has focused on various attempts to empirically evidence economic ‘impact’ of festivals as a means of justifying or evaluating public subsidy. There has been little scholarly consideration of the effect of this kind of festival creation on the type and content of events, what forms festivals take as a result and how this affects the programme and artists supported. Chapter Three of this thesis addresses this in detail by looking at the plethora of new festivals created in North East England over the last fifteen years.

The final area of literature clusters around the deployment of the language of place, place-making, or the rhetoric of place within institutions of cultural production. Over recent decades, an articulation of the relationship with place has been established within the discourses of policy, production and presentation. This is evident within the history and development of AVF. The lexicon of contemporary art production and practice to which AVF seeks to engage draws on spatially determined or spatially inflective parlances, emerging from the expanding fields of artistic practice and conceptual art since the 1960s, theorised
by Rosalind Krauss (1979) and others. These can be summed up by the three paradigms of site-specific art identified by Miwon Kwon (2002), as modes of encounter with site in the form of phenomenological, social/institutional and discursive artistic responses. The modes of artistic practice move from physical location, as bounded and static, actual and yet to be experienced, to a more virtual, fluid discursive vector. Of course, as Kwon (2002:30) acknowledges, this is not a “neat linear trajectory of historical development. Rather, they are competing definitions, overlapping with one another and operating simultaneously in various cultural practices today (or even within a single artist’s single project).” There are multiple competing and contested terminology for these varied practices ranging across the ‘site-specific’ or ‘site-response’ (Kwon, 2004; Foster, 1996) to ‘relational aesthetics’ (Bourriaud, 1998; Bishop, 2004), the ‘situation’ (Doherty, 2004a) and ‘participation’ (Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2011, 2005) that all have a spatial dimension. Most generally there is an articulation of a shift of artistic process from addressing a phenomenological encounter with site and place, to engaging a social or discursive encounter. Also, geographers have also picked up the work of art historians in this field and are increasingly turning their attention so visual art practices, see Hawkins (2013) and Cant and Morris (2006).

This also leads to a specific examination of the spatiality of specific forms of artistic practice, such as the presentation of artists’ film (Connolly, 2009) or sound (Ehrlich, 2003). In addition, there is also a growing literature on the contemporary art biennial with a specific consideration of its relationship to discourses of place (Dutton and Griffin, 2007; Seijdel, 2009; Filipovic et al., 2010; Filipovic and Vanderlinden, 2005), where the biennial is generally understood as a reoccurring international exhibition of contemporary art occurring once every two years in a festival mode. It is in relation to these artistic and institutional practices that AVF finds itself and seeks to operate within.

As demonstrated by much of the scholarly literature on the arts festival, it is a phenomenon that creates and defines space and place both physically (abstractly) but also symbolically. However, very little consideration has been given to how it is also constituted relationally. Sassatelli (2011) identifies a dominant trend of failure the in research on contemporary urban festivals to unravel their specific form of authenticity and address the complex relation to place and the urban in

12 See Hawkins, (2012) for an overview of the recent geographers’ interactions with visual arts practice and discourse.
particular. If the arts festival is a concentration of sensations, of moments of 
encounter, of multiple stimuli, then examining the relational spatiality and the 
movements creating this concentration needs to be addressed in a way that has 
not been significantly examined to date. As a result, this thesis takes the spatial 
and mobility as the central organising principle of AVF, where the arts festival is a 
collection of events of possible encounter built around the enduring 
sociability of the festival, characterised by concentrated stimuli and effervescence, 
lived experience and aesthetic encounter. Place, art and the festival are co-
functioning; they are part of a matrix of relations that constitute the possibility of 
what is called the festival. If, following Massey (2004), place is imagined as a 
simultaneity of stories-so-far, where space is the complex product of 
interrelations, festivals do not just happen in pre-existing space; they constitute 
their own space-time frame. It is here where politics and power reside, power to 
reinforce and power to disrupt existing or dominant narratives. Arts festivals offer 
a vision of place with a particular moral and ethical framing, a reading that 
provides a connection between people and people and people and place, perhaps 
even a good place. Therefore, when AVF seeks to ‘engage’ with place it is within 
this theoretical framework of the symbolic, imaginary and relational that this 
thesis resides. Moreover it takes up the challenge from Massey (2004:5) of 
“thinking space relationally” and critically considers the implications of this for our 
understanding of the contemporary arts festival.

Massey’s (1993) provocation of a “progressive sense of place” is important for 
a consideration of the practice of AVF. A progressive sense of place creates 
relations, movements and encounters with other places and it is in itself shaped by 
these relations. This relational politics of place questions place and the festival as 
homogeneously bounded, and redraws them both as on-going processes that 
question simplistic distinctions between the inside and outside, or the global and 
the local. Place is considered to be a meaningful subsection of space, a significant 
area of space, an assemblage of location, locale, and sense of place (Cresswell, 
2013). Where, following Massey, (2005:59) space emerges as the product of 
interrelations and an expression of the political, “as open, multiple and relational, 
unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus 
a prerequisite too, for the possibility of politics”. It is essential to consider the 
economic structures and institutions in which the contemporary arts festival is 
embedded. The ecology of relations which form AVF as a whole, is determined by
the workings of these parts, where every element co-produces what AVF has become from the materiality of artworks to audience encounters (De Landa, 1997).

Much of the literature on festival and place is determined by an idea of place and the sites of festival as static, bounded and a pre-emptive object of inquiry, often presenting the art works, events and encounters created as revelatory with respect to hidden mechanisms or assumptions about those sites. The disciplinary perspectives outlined here in their singularity do not account for the complexity and interwoven flows that constitute the relationship between the festival and place. The following chapters will each account for theoretical perspectives that seek to address this. This thesis aims to trace the trajectory of the relationship between art, festival and place, embedded within a trans-disciplinary curiosity. In order to do this it is necessary to use a conceptualisation of spatiality that applies to an understanding of the contemporary festival, one that attests to the heterogeneity and relationality of place.

1.5 Methods and thesis structure

This thesis is about constructing an account of something; therefore, the methodology of the thesis is grounded in practice and narrative explanation with the use of performative ideas from post-structural theory. With this in mind, the aim here is to describe a methodology through a chronological description detailing how the methodological and theoretical concerns of this thesis co-evolved (Law, 2007). The origin of the research project is a historic partnership relationship between AVF and Fine Art department at Newcastle University. This association led to the creation of a Collaborative Doctoral Award between these two partners supported by the AHRC. This thesis is a result of that collaboration. The direction of the research project built on a series of conversations between Rebecca Shatwell, the AVF Director and myself, developed through an engagement with practice of AVF over a number of years between 2008 and 2012. As a researcher my relationship with AVF defined the purpose and direction of the research and how the objects of enquiry were identified and advanced. This focused on the particularities of AVF as an arts organisation and its relation to process and knowledge, from contemporary art discourse, theoretical and empirical constructs and artistic practice. The aim of this was not to produce a theoretical manifesto or a practical strategy but to present a detailed case study,
presenting insights into the production of cultural encounters, situating this new contemporary arts festival, AVF and its locale in a wider geopolitical context.

The process of this research has sought to embrace a trans-disciplinary curiosity, seeking neither exclusively to embrace a methodological framework from social science or the humanities. Where a humanities approach might generally question the various ‘meanings’ of a festival read as a text within its specific cultural context, and a socio-scientific approach might employ empirical research and social theory to question the political, economic and social effects, often privileging individual agency, this research sought to build on both methodologies. This strategy enables a view of the world that is heterogeneous, somewhat spontaneous and dynamic, where the emergent consequence of interactions are only tentatively ordered, or controlled.

As such, the work is influenced by the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour and the materialist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, which both blur the distinctions between these two frameworks in an attempt to study questions of language, technology, culture, materiality, politics and space (Kember and Zylinska, 2012). The work also picks up on Nathalie Heinich’s critique of a Bourdiuian sociology of art (in Gielen, 2010), which, while examining in detail those encountering art in various forms, neglects the artwork itself, and the experience of this encounter. This thesis pays particular attention to the processes through which new artwork commissions come into being but also the framing of the public encounters with these events.

This process shows from an open disciplinary perspective how an event such as AVF is situated through complex and interwoven flows. Central to the discussion is the need to think of AVF as a cultural event that is part of the lived background of urban experience, not as a separated, conditioned, clearly bounded entity. It is to think of it as a temporary remediation of the everyday urban infrastructures, mobilities, encounters, events and actions. AVF relies on the city, with its existing transport network, its hotel rooms, its bars and restaurants, as well as the cultural spaces it occupies to present the festival programme. For AVF’s primary audience, attending cultural events is not a novelty: going to the cinema, visiting exhibitions and watching live music are part of this audience’s lived encounters within the urban environment. The events that constitute the festival intervene in urban rhythms and the daily patterns of those who attend or encounter the festival, yet it does not primarily take place outside of everyday
spaces of cultural consumption, but within these. It is an amplification or
intervention, a marked temporary change of course. It is important to account
for this consideration within the method.

The research does not attempt to classify or characterise the research subject
into a pre-existing system of neo-liberalism or globalisation, such that the
central related elements of this system can be identified and represented. Rather,
it is concerned with the “live surface”; the sensations, intensities and textures
through which life is experienced (Stewart: 2007:4).\textsuperscript{13} Kathleen Stewart (2007, 1-2) suggests that “the ordinary is a shifting assemblage” of “things that happen” and
are felt, “in impulses, sensation, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits
of relating”. Similar sensations of the ordinary and everyday are found and perhaps
intensified in festival spaces, but are not entirely separate from them. Here a
festival such as AVF is a process that is part of the everyday cultural background
of the urban, part of the process of this coming into being; AVF is situated in
relation to it. Therefore, this research does not seek to take a view from the
‘outside’; but to present AVF, and the process of festival more generally as a
platform for the lived spaces of interaction, for assembling and renewing social ties
and as a sphere of social enactment as much as it is about ‘showing’ art.

The process of this research is both descriptive and explanatory, seeking
inductive conclusions through qualitative research methodologies encompassing a
detailed case study and contextual and historical research. This is a necessary
approach because, as already outlined, there are few scholarly accounts that
examine organisations such as AVF in detail and without a specific agenda to
qualify their public subsidy. In addition, it is important to note that quantitative
accounts of cultural activity tend to privilege an instrumental reading, which
negates the rich and complex levels of cultural practice (Calhoun and Sennett,
2007). Historically focused on textual modes of analysis, there is a wider shift in
social science, which indicates the need for methodologies capable of attending to
the social and cultural world as mobile, messy, creative, changing and open-ended,
sensory and affective. This accounts for the performativity of method where social
sciences not only describe the worlds they observe but also (at least in part) are
involved in the invention or creation of the world (Law, 2004).

\textsuperscript{13} See Coleman & Ringrose (2013) for an elaboration on the Deleuzian thinking behind this
approach.
Research such as this, which asks how the social, sensation, symbolic and imaginary is constructed, performed and ordered, tends to privilege developing and documenting encounters with key actors, objects and documents through interviews, archives, images, policy as well as ethnographic observation. Such research is then commonly analysed through the assembly of narrative, where emphasis focuses on extracting and representing edges, moments and events of defined significance. This construction of narrative is an attempt to order the ‘mess’ of the social world (Law, 2004; Latour, 2005). Following a post-modern critique, the generation of knowledge of the social world needs to be built on a reflective awareness and acknowledgement of the implications of a researcher’s methods, values, biases and decisions. The researcher themselves is implicated in the construction of the knowledge they undertake in relation to the observations they are making and the ways in which an account is transmitted in the form of a text. This is an essential component of the collaborative activity of research. Law (2004) explains how methods need to be reinvented in order to deal with the fluidity, multiplicity and vagueness of reality. For Law reality is messy, and methodologies that seek to convert this mess into something smooth, coherent and precise both miss out the particular texture of life and tend to make a mess of what it seeks to understand because it fails to account for complexity.

Law (2004) proposes method in an extended manner, a method assemblage, which is a tentative, hesitant unfolding. At most, this is only very partially under any form of deliberate control where method needs to be understood as a verb as well as a noun. Here method is the crafting of the boundaries between what is present, what is manifestly absent and what is Othered. It is rooted in a potential shift from ‘knowing’ to ‘relating to’ the world, the possible role of methods is not only ‘catching’ the multiple realities, but also making them. The idea is that methods are not only descriptive and generative but also performative. As such, methods perform. Methods enact realities where social reality is a relational effect produced in arrangements generated in social science. The festival itself is a messy process of creation, with agents and actions vulnerable to processes of time and narrative formation. It is also a process that is potentially contested by those who
constitute its being as audience, artists and staff, where these subjective lenses transfigure different stories (Berger, 2005).\(^\text{14}\)

In this way there is a sense of a double working of meaning-making out of this perceived order and disorder within the research project, initially presented through experience and practice in research and then through language in representation. Therefore it is necessary to be mindful of developments in research methods that critically engage theory and practice from participatory and action research to performative and non-representational thinking, acknowledging non-human agencies, and importantly for this project, interdisciplinary and collaborative practices working beyond the academy (Lury and Wakeford, 2012).

AVF as a site of research was taken to be a social and material assemblage within a specific culture and history, where an assemblage is a coming together of things, actors, institutions and processes to form a temporary stabilisation of contingent relationships and capacities, or a symbiosis of co-functioning parts.\(^\text{15}\) This stresses a view of culture as a system of meaning that is always more than individual intentionality. This is not to deny or neglect the meaningful actions of social actors. As this research shows and others have done (Quinn, 2005a; Delanty, 2011) arts festivals are often created, developed and maintained by exceptional, singular people, who are highly successful leaders. This study was designed specially to account for key actors such as the festival director whose influence has undoubtedly shaped the processes under examination. However, doing this did not seek to malign the position of the contemporary festival as a cultural arbiter of particular tastes and values by defining it as an expression of the individual, but rather as a polyvocal cultural expression.

The anthropologist Michael Fischer (2003:7) provides a useful definition of culture as it is considered within the thesis:

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culture is not a variable; culture is relational, it is elsewhere, it is in passage, it is where meaning is woven and renewed, often through gaps and silences, and forces beyond the conscious control of individuals, and yet the space
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\(^{14}\) See John Berger’s (2005 [1984]: 30) rumination on the process of recounting, “those who read or listen to our stories see everything as though through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration, and it is ground anew in every story, ground between the temporal and the timeless”.

\(^{15}\) This matrix for Coleman & Ringrose (2013), following Deleuze, can be called a multiplicity, a designated set of transversal lines, dimensions that are irreducible to each other, where every ‘thing’ is made up of these formations. In a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what there is “between”, the between, a set of relations which are not separable from each other.
where individual and institutional social responsibility and ethical struggle take place.

In practical terms this presented the need to investigate the festival process AVF undertakes by, as sociologist Howard Becker (2006:3) puts it “paying attention to all those details - to the struggle with recalcitrant physical, social, and economic realities, the attention to organisational constraints, collegial pressures, and career interests”. Thus, it was necessary to approach AVF within a matrix of distributed agencies and to consider the multiplicity of possible agencies within the field of research and within the methodological process (Preziosi and Farago, 2012). This position is picked up by Calhoun and Sennett (2007:5), who argue “culture is practice” in that it is “embodied, engaged, interactive, creative and contested”. They expand any notion of the production and reproduction of culture away from a demarcated realm of fixed artifacts to a vital aspect of all social life. If in this way culture is understood to be a creator of meaning, it can never be fixed completely even if it is stabilised and enforced through a variety of authorities and institutions. From this perspective, a key goal of cultural research is to pay attention to the conventions and power relations that maintain and stabilise this meaning and try to, in Calhoun and Sennett’s (2007:5) words, “liberate” meaning from those constraints.

I want to place the research within the social, but a social that acknowledges the possibility of a more than human centred account. Ash Amin (2007) defines the social field as both temporary and hybrid, as a more or less coherent composition of strings of associations. For Amin, following Bruno Latour (2005), the social is considered to exist as an arena of enactment involving varied human and non-human inputs. In this sense, an engagement with the social seeks to do more than just liberate meaning as abstract rules, hidden essences from humanised structures, but seeks to engage with life, meaning and purpose through processes of enrolment and alignment with both the human and non-human. This follows what Stengers (2008: 109 in Anderson et al 2012: 176) calls “a practice of active, open, demanding attention… to the experience as we experience it”. For example, there are very different experiential positions of AVF, depending on the type of festival event and the participants’ roles within it; a tourist visiting Newcastle from an unknown city by chance, will experience a different festival from that of an invited professional artist attending an opening gala. The festival is constantly in a state of becoming, through these myriad of encounters.
out AVF as an assemblage shows it as a mess of intersections, of values and histories, of beliefs and worldviews, of economic and political agendas, response and retort to change on all geographical scales manifested in an urban environment and through the experience of the urban condition. Personal authorship and desire, boredom and excitement, the narratives that run through the story of the festival can be directed through art, economics, urbanism, culture and the interrelation and dependence between them all as a triangulation or map of the festival in space and time. The approach undertaken is therefore rooted in an attempt to not impoverish the experience and account provided of AVF but enhance it (Latour, 2005). This is not to argue for the autonomy of art. Nor does it see the practice of its creation as something beyond or outside of social relations, to dismantle it into nothing but a network of social explanation. Social determinism does not provide a useful engagement with the subject, or the role of aesthetics. A primary focus of the research is to examine in-detail specific commissions AVF has produced, the rationales, and discursive framing of their production.

Out of necessity, qualitative research of this kind begins in a relatively open-ended way and entails the gradual narrowing-down of research themes or problems. While AVF as the research subject was well defined as the starting point, the particular disciplinary field within which I placed myself as researcher was less so. To a certain extent, this has remained undetermined throughout the project but has pertaining towards critical theory within visual culture, across human geography, art history and cultural sociology. This has allowed me to assume a relatively open attempt at a trans-disciplinary approach, at least in the first instance when examining the possible range of responses to the research subject. The product of this qualitative research does not pertain to the representative or generalisable but the specific and contextual.

A guiding part of this research project was the collaborative relationship with AVF established as part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award. The defining role of the collaborative relationship within the research project was threefold. Firstly, it sought to address, as openly and reflexively as possible, the construction of the research subject, to critically outline and define the boundaries, forces and specifies of practice that make the research subject come into being. Secondly, the aim was to unpack these ideas, to explore and analyse operation, activity, agency and action in relation to relevant cultural and critical theory. This also entailed
moving away from a linguistic practice tied to the production of arts festivals from my own experience, to unlearn this and reassess it within the limits of academic and theoretical discourse. The final stage was to fold these insights, knowledge and analysis into the thesis in a practical and meaningful manner. The collaborative research was conducted through a mixed methodology, that worked towards a detailed case study of AVF. Rather than directed towards presenting a chronological historical account of the organisation, this methodology sort to specifically transect the processes AVF enacted and entered into from cultural policy through to artwork commissioning.

Initially, a period of scoping was undertaken to explore and define the questions, priorities and boundaries of the research project. From this process, a series of concerns was identified which were used as a guide to developing the research further, the methods and a research schedule. The preliminary research reflected on AVF but also the wider context of its relationship with other national and international festivals. This sought to trace the artistic, curatorial and organisational connections to develop and understand the affinities, influences and ethos of AVF. This initial scoping also took into account the pragmatics of festival research and what resources and materials were available to conduct the project. For example, one of the limitations of the research schedule was that it had to fit within the biennial cycle of AVF, where the 2012 edition of AVF took place shortly after the beginning of the research project, and then again in 2014, two years into the research. The research design therefore had to account sensitively to the active production of the festival that was on-going throughout the project. However, the limitations of scheduling aside, the collaborative beginnings of the research, where AVF was defined as a partner in the project from the start, significantly enhanced access within the organisation in a way that would have potentially proved highly problematic had the organisation been approached as a research subject within a predefined research project. As a result, the research design was a response to the levels of access and engagement allowed by the collaborative relationship. Following the initial scoping and practical planning, the research design was developed across two main co-functioning processes. Firstly,

16 In discussing recent scholarly work on contemporary curating Stallabrass (2013:71) notes a potential problem for such reflexive work by those engaged practically in the subject is that, “any analysis that too readily adopts the technical language of its subject may stand accused of drawing into itself not just a vocabulary but an ideology.”
to gather materials concerned with the history and practice of AVF as well as examining the on-going processes of festival curating, planning and production as the organisation produced AVF12 and worked towards AVF14. Secondly, complimentary research on the wider field of contemporary arts festival practice with which AVF has a relationship was conducted. This included research trips to relevant festivals and a series of contextual in-depth interviews with festival directors, artistic directors and curators from a range of institutional backgrounds and professional practices.

This second strand of research was directed towards gaining an insight into the field of contemporary arts festivals within which AVF seeks to align itself and is situated by those external to the organisation (funders, for example). The parameters of these organisations included their location, media or art form, funding, history and status. Festivals were sought that operated in an urban context, presenting new work within the realm of contemporary arts practice including film, video, sound, music, performance and visual art. Further parameters included only festivals with a primarily public audience (i.e. a non-professional nor academic audience) and whose primary source of income was public funds. These limitations were placed on the choices of festival in order to maximise the potential engagement with the research themes but also make the research realistic and practicable.

Research visits were enacted in the form of a series of ethnographic encounters with particular festivals; this included attending exhibitions, screenings, workshops and paying attention to the range of experiences open to those involved in these festival spaces as tourist or professional visitors. These formal and informal encounters and conversations with audiences, artists, festival staff and volunteers formed a series of annotated notes and observations from each

festival. These observations covered aspects of the audience, reception of the performance and the discussions that followed. This also included the collection of photographic material. This was in a sense to enact the professional mobility of those on the ‘festival circuit’, where art industry professionals move between events as a process of their own research and to develop and maintain professional networks. The experiences within this are to different degrees at different festivals formal or informal processes.

Alongside these visits, a series of expert interviews were undertaken with festival directors and curators. The role of the director was chosen for their expert knowledge and unique overview of how festival organisations operate and their perspective as a spokesperson for the organisations. The scale of most festival organisations with a relationship to AVF have a relatively small full-time staff, so the festival director is central to all aspects of how they operate, and the values and practices they promote. In general, they are required to be entrepreneurial, networked, knowledgeable and passionate leaders. Successful directors are able to develop new professional collaborations by transforming their informal networks and social capital into new funding and projects (Giorgi, 2010). Elite, self-assured, often at the height of their professional practice, in most cases they were very comfortable being interviewed and retelling an established narrative of their organisations. Interview subjects were approached by email and where possible interviews were conducted in person, when this was not logistically possibly they were conducted via skype or telephone. Given the geographic spread of the festivals engaged, it was more advantageous to interview subjects from European festival via Skype and UK festivals in person. In each case, a semi-structured interview process was used with an interview guide developed in response to the research themes and questions and their relation to the interview subject. Interviewees had the freedom to respond in their own way to questions from the thematic guidelines. Follow up questions and discursive tangents were developed, in order to allow space for the interviewees to develop coherent responses, thereby not building in preconceptions or values into the questioning. Where necessary, specific questions were also designed to find out key factual information about organisations. Interviews were recorded and where applicable transcribed (see Appendix 1 for details of these contextual expert interviews).
This contextual research informs each chapter of the thesis. Sometimes it is drawn on directly where a respondent refers to the topic under discussion, or more broadly, it is used to introduce and outline certain concerns. It provided valuable terms and ideas that led to further research as well as narrowing and defining the topics of later research and the thinking that led to specific theoretical discussions in the thesis.

As a holistic method of material collection and critical analysis the case study was theoretically and practically the most appropriate social research method to investigate the festival given the research objectives of this project. It is generally agreed that when executed rigorously, the case study is a comprehensive research methodology that covers strategy, material collection and critical analysis (Yin, 2009). The basic case study entails a detailed analysis of a single case, featuring an extensive examination of the setting, with defined boundaries. Given the case study’s broad interpretation and application by social researchers, it is initially of value to consider where the case study sits within a wider understanding of social research, and work towards a definition or framework that can be applied to the research design of this project.

From a positivist perspective, the case study according to Yin (2009:22) is an “empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomena within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident.” From this position, the case study is like an experiment and as such, the case study is a form of social research that is an organised process that develops testable propositions. The examination of the phenomena can be drawn to represent the operation of some general principle that can be more widely applied (May, 2011). These positivist approaches focus on the application of the case study to theory and the necessity to draw generalisations from social research. As Mjøset (2009) describes, there is as a result, an emphasis on rigour, objectivity, and theoretical legitimacy. However, these approaches have been critiqued as defending a ‘totalising’ view based on the assumption that we can know the social world though case studies, which mirror the procedures and assumptions of those that study the physical world (May, 2011). There is the potential for a misreading of complex social cultural systems such as festivals, as the case study is always only a snapshot and the reading will always contain a selection of information chosen by a particular researcher with vested or partial interests in a specific subject area.
The alternative view, as deployed in this thesis, places an emphasis on description, explanation and understanding; in this form, the case study is a valuable tool for social research through a focus on particularisation. The aim is not to make wider claims pertaining to theories of the social world but to inform the understanding of the social world. The focus of the case study is then to present a comprehensive, detailed and rich representation of a social phenomenon, which can establish the value of its content and develop and grow the knowledge in its field (Simons, 2009). From this point of view the development of knowledge can be achieved without formal generalisation (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Broadly seen as an interpretivist perspective, the value and strength of taking this position in relation to developing a single case is that by focusing on the particularities, an understanding can come about of the complexities within which it operates. Wider context, reflexiveness and interrelatedness become of greater value here, and are themes running through the processes of explanation and description that are central to this approach of case study research (Stake, 1995). Ultimately, as May (2011:225) outlines, “it is precisely a viewpoint from within that provides for the intimate knowledge through which definitions are established or meanings understood”.

The approach to case study practice that this research project undertook was built on a particularising, interpretivist approach. It sought to draw on an intersubjective perspective, where the researcher was located within the research with the aim of discerning through the meanings and actions of AVF connections to larger social structures and discourses. Here the materials gathered were viewed as constructed through this process and not just simply out there to be discovered for the purpose of developing interpreted findings, rather than an objective report (Silverman, 2011; Crang and Cook, 1995). This approach engages AVF as an entity that is always in a process of invention, re-creation, communication and preservation in different forms. The case study of AVF was primarily approached from what could be called the view from above, or from the perspective of production, in contrast to a focus on reception or the audience. This study was conducted from above, and therefore it privileged the accounts of actors involved in the production of AVF - directors, artists, curators and funders. It was not within the remit of the study to research in detail AVF’s audience, as this would have duplicated research already carried out in a series of reports commissioned by AVF to evaluate each festival edition. Therefore the case study
drew on a range of materials to examine production including ethnographic approaches such as qualitative interviewing, participant observation and focus groups as well as archive and document research.18

The interview is a widely established and employed qualitative research method; in-depth interviews provide a meaningful opportunity to study and theorise the social world. The interview provides insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of experiences and their social world. It offers a means of identifying culturally embedded normative explanations of events and behaviours, because they represent ways in which people organise views of themselves, of others and of their social worlds. As the major focus of the research was the processes of creating AVF and the actions and creations of those within it, the interview provided a key means to gain access to the views, perspectives and beliefs of those who primarily constitute it.

There were three sets of semi-structured interviews that focused on different areas of AVF: a serial set of interviews with Rebecca Shatwell that took place regularly over the research project; a set of historic interviews with those who had been involved in AVF03, AVF06 and AVF08; and a group of interviews with festival staff, artists and partners associated with AVF12. The interviews were organised within the subsequent months after AVF12 and were structured around a reflection on the participants’ experience and engagement with this festival. The serial interviews with Shatwell were timed before and after AVF12 and in the run up to AVF14. The advantage of developing serial interviews was that it allowed the development of a more nuanced discussion, as a number of the contextual interview subjects tended towards giving relatively standardised responses. It also allowed for a reflection on the aspiration and achievements of the events over time. The overall split approach to interviewing allowed for a detailed context of AVF’s origins and practice to be built up (see Appendix 2).

All the interviews had a similar approach, where the interviewees were asked to respond to a series of questions based on a set of thematic guidelines and a discussion was developed. Specific questions were also asked to find out significant factual information where relevant, this was particularly the case for interviews that examined the first AVF from 2003. The majority of the interviews were all conducted in person, with exceptions taking place on Skype or via

18 See O’Connor (2010) for a valuable overview of the different approaches that examine the production of culture, through cultural studies and the political economy.
telephone. They were recorded and where applicable transcribed. One of the advantages of the collaborative model of research is that access to organisational material can be granted with relative ease. However, when working within the territory of one of the festival’s partner institutions for the collection of audience interviews, further permissions and processes of authorisation had to be undertaken. The legitimacy of the collaborative relationship with AVF made the facilitation of this relatively simple.

Focus groups explored the recent festival culture of the North East from the perspective of those who had worked within it. The focus group is a valuable tool for gaining an intersubjective perspective: looking at groups make sense of a phenomenon and construct meaning around it (Crang and Cook, 1995). There were two focus groups, each made up of 6 to 8 members. The participants all had some existing relationship with AVF, as artists, partner staff and curators, audience members or producers. The groups were composed of a mixed range of age, gender and experience, but with similar backgrounds all working professionally in the arts in some form or another within the North East. The focus groups took place after AVF12 in a neutral location not associated with the festival. The discussion was audio recorded and transcribed. The thesis draws on the discussions on a number of occasions, as they provided a valuable insight into how regional actors constructed their views of festival events locally.

Excluding interviews and focus groups, a desk-review collected available documentation and materials, with missing information sought directly from the AVF staff. These documents provided an insight into how the organisation represents itself to itself and to others. Documents examined here tended to fall into two categories: those with a public-facing intention and those with a more practical organisational utility. These practical, non-public, materials included policy documents, business plans, production schedules, accounts and ticket sales data.

The primary public materials drawn on were those that functioned as either ‘promotion’ or ‘documentation’ for each festival. A key task that AVF performs is documenting and presenting its own actions, particularly artwork commissions. Exhibitions, concerts, talks, performances and even opening receptions are all photographed and video recorded by AVF. The organisation produces considerable volumes of video, photography and text from each edition of the festival, to archive and record the projects it produces. The festival publicly
displays the edited contents of this on-going archive through various media channels online. This process archives projects and events as they are produced, and has become a central concern of organisers given the ephemeral temporality of the festival itself and a need for some form of ‘presence’ outside of the event. Outside of the period of the festival itself, the materiality of the organisation is little more than this archive of texts, images and video. Carefully managed, directed and selected by festival staff, the ‘documentation’ of each festival formed a central insight into how the organisation worked towards its own self-representation. Here the materials were approached from the point of view of their intended function and used by AVF as documents that represent the organisation, the artworks and events they commissioned (Silverman, 2011). Documents such as the festival’s evaluation reports can be seen as relatively stage-managed attempts to market the ‘success’ of each festival to existing and potential stakeholders and funders. Of course, what the festival chooses to document and how this is made public can offer a great insight into how it seeks to be viewed. These public documents, whether they are images of smiling guests at opening receptions or exhibition artwork documentation, are part of the process of AVF visually telling its own story, producing its self-articulation. This material was drawn on considerably in the engagement with specific festival commissions that are examined in Chapters Three and Four.

Through the collaborative relationship with AVF, it was possible to spend substantial amounts of time working ‘within’ the organisation. Situated in the festival office at different stages during the research process allowed for a valuable engagement with the organisation’s staff and operations. In total six months was spent working in the festival office. This kind of immersion within the everyday rhythms of the organisation, and the relationships it allowed me to develop with those involved in the festival’s creation yielded considerable insights that would not otherwise have been possible. It provided me access to documents, conversations and festival events, recorded in field notes and photographs. It was possible to ‘participate’ as both an audience member attending all of the festival’s events and as a ‘volunteer’ supporting event production.

These experiences shaped how the research progressed, for example, accompanying the festival director on visiting artist ‘site visits’ around the region to possible places of interest for the artist to make new commissions. Traveling with Akio Suzuki and Aki Onda to the Kielder Forest in Northumberland and
Marsden Rock in South Shields provided a valuable insight into how the organisation interpreted and explained the regional context, landscape and history to new artists from ‘outside’ (see Figure 5).

Similar encounters took place while assisting field recordist Chris Watson undertake sound recordings in Durham Cathedral, as well as travelling to Lindisfarne with Attila Csihar to gather film footage for a newly commissioned performance for AVF12, A Scrying: First and Second Action (NCL). This embedded process also allowed for performative encounters in the festival, such as being invited to participate within the special event, an improvised performance group called Hang Tal, created by Susan Stenger for a one off performance as an introduction to the evening work, Wishful Thinking: In Remembrance of Peter Christopherson (1957–2010) at the Tyneside Cinema for AVF12. These encounters and experiences facilitated an ongoing relationship with the organisation and provided valuable insights into the process of festival creation and artwork commissioning. These processes of participant observation were not aimed at detached 'subject' and 'object' observations but were rather directed towards developing an inter-subjective understandings between researcher and researched (Crang and Cook, 1995).

This introduction has identified and positioned the central questions that this thesis addresses. Firstly, the need to understand how AVF is placed, how it is situated within the ecology of relations that created it and that maintain it and are re-performed to different degrees with each edition. Secondly, it explores how arts festivals are theorised. Thirdly, it looks at the need to account for artwork commissioning within the context of AVF as a particular process acting across spatial and temporal scales and the creation of new cultural encounters in place. Fourthly, this introduction sets out the need to understand better how an arts festival such as AVF is situated within the urban ecology of the city, specifically how differential mobilities significantly constitute the contemporary arts festival. The following four chapters respond to these issues and draw on the AVF case study as an empirical means of elaborating upon the theoretical positions offered. Within each chapter is an overview of relevant literature introducing concepts utilised for the discussion.

Chapter Two responds to the conceptual challenges posed in this introduction by showing how the contemporary festival has been theorised, introducing the concept of the post-traditional festival and seeks to position the AVF case study in
Figure 5 Research site visit to Kielder and Marsden Rock with Akio Suzuki, Aki Onda and Rebecca Shatwell (10 July 2013).
light of this. From this review of the sociologically grounded literature on the traditional and post-traditional festival, a new conceptualisation is presented that separates a notion of the festive, as affective atmosphere away from the post-traditional festival. This approach shows that there is a need for a necessary distinction to be emphasised between the festive and its associations with an attachment and belonging, and the organisation of post-traditional festival as a process of cyclical gathering and dispersal. Chapter Three builds on this specific organisational focus and shows how the first AVF came into being through a myriad of institutional and personal dynamics, and particular regional cultural deficits and positions. In order to do this, it examines the history of arts festivals in the North East, drawing out the changing institutional relationships within cultural production in the region. This pays particular attention to the discourses of cultural policy and economic regeneration and how these have shaped the form and content of festival events in the region, especially in response to the failed bid of Newcastle and Gateshead to become the ECC in 2003, the same year AVF began.

Some projects AVF has undertaken do not fit so neatly within art form or event categories. Two ambitious projects AVF has commissioned problematise AVF’s relationship with its locale. The recreation of John Cage’s Variations VII for AVF08 and YoHa’s Coal Fired Computers in AVF10 both complicate any sense that there is a possible notion of a static or bounded sense or time or place that can be associated with a festival such as AVF. Chapters Four and Five focus on these two artworks individually, tracing the creation of them through AVF’s archive. Discussing these artworks addresses questions of temporality, territory and identity through the lens of the concepts of assemblage, territorialisation and mediation. These two works were chosen because they both stand as a clear articulation of a new commissions created by AVF, as events indicative of AVF’s practice. They are both expressive of AVF’s ethos more widely. This shows how AVF envisions a mobilisation of the near and far social, economic, cultural and political relationships with porous boundaries. The final chapter builds on recent work on mobilities within social and cultural geography and beyond to show how the contemporary festival acts as a mobilising process, privileging relations of copresence, both bodily and materially. This again challenges the view that the festival acts as a homogenous container and seeks to redraw a festival such as AVF within a more fluid and open conceptualisation of space and time. To do this,
the chapter focuses on the different paces and frictions that were associated with AVF12 that thematically sought to address how artists have responded to differing speeds of mobility and temporality.
2 Festival as process

Oh, is this the way they say the future’s meant to feel? Or just 20,000 people standing in a field.


2.1 Introduction

Since the end of the second world war there has been a significant rise in the number of arts festivals in Europe, including biennials and large-scale temporary cultural events (Boissevain, 1992; Quinn, 2005a; Gursoy et al., 2004; Delanty et al., 2011). The number of festivals has grown from under five hundred to over thirty thousand and since 1989 there has been a further acceleration made up of an increasingly mobile and interconnected global industry of arts festivals (Yeoman, 2004; Fjell, 2007).

In the UK, Rolfe (1992) identifies a clear proliferation of arts festivals of all kinds since 1945, estimating there were over five hundred in 1991, roughly one for every 125,000 of the population. By 2010 there were over seven hundred music festivals in the UK alone (O’Grady and Kill, 2013). While there are no specific records of the number of post-war arts festivals in the North East, the region has the lowest festival membership within the British Art Festival Association (2008), although this reflects the North East as the region with the lowest population in England.19

19 British Art Festival Association’s research (2008) draws on statistics from 21 festivals in the North East. Although incomplete and highly selective, its definition of the region is very broad
This chapter will begin by discussing how the traditional festival has been conceived within sociological and anthropological discourse and how a contemporary 'post-traditional' festival framework assists with the analysis of AVF. Through this a distinction is made between an organised festival and the festive as an affective atmosphere that is dispersed through public and private domains, questioning the relationship of the festival to notions of identity, place, community and belonging. Central to the imaginary of the contemporary festival is the relationship between spectator and performer, and the power relations of who constitutes the subject of public celebration. This tension runs through the discussion in this chapter. In the following discussion, the festive refers to a structure of feeling or affective atmosphere emergent in events or encounters, and the post-traditional festival to a process of organising cultural and social encounters.20

The most recent phase of festival growth over the last two decades, is sometimes characterised as a process of 'festivalisation'. This process is explained in relation to an economic restructuring of cities, inter-city competitiveness, and the drive to develop cities as large-scale platforms for the creation and consumption of cultural experiences (AEA Consulting, 2006). The rationale for this festivalisation, particularly of urban space, has been explained as the result of neo-liberal economic policies, where policy-led urban culture is increasingly dominated by a series of organised spectacular events under the logics of tourist industry expansion, enabling the 'experience economy' (Pine, 1999, also see Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011). It is evident that arts festivals have become a stable component of the economically important industry of cultural tourism (Hobsbawm, 2013), within the experience economy but that they also play an including areas that are not generally associated with the region, such as Yorkshire and Derbyshire. The 21 festivals includes: Alnwick International Music Festival, Bridlington Arts Festival, Derbyshire Literature Festival, Durham Literature Festival, Glendale Festival, Hexham Abbey Festival, Newcastle Comedy Festival, Sedbergh Festival of Books and Drama, Stockton International Riverside Festival, Take Off Festival, Ulverston International Music Festival, Brinkburn Music Festival, Carlisle International Summer Festival, Durham International Brass Festival, Farnworth Arts Festival, Gateshead International Jazz Festival, Mary Wakefield Westmorland Festival, Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering, Tri-Town Festival, Weekend Book Festival, Whitley Bay International Jazz Festival.

20 The festive has also been deployed with a direct political resonance and can be traced through a number of significant thinkers. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986) employs the term festive to express aesthetic experience as a communal activity. Against a Kantian form of solitary personal response, he sees the artwork itself as standing in for the festival, and those spectators or participants who encounter the artwork become the community.
increasing role in the articulation of place within the development of urban knowledge economies.\textsuperscript{21}

The festival as a concept in contemporary society is now so broadly applied across culture and commerce that it might seem a vague and futile task to consider its general properties. However, it is crucial to reflect ontologically if we are to understand how the logic of festival was embraced and deployed in the creation of AVF. A seemingly simple question to address is: why produce a festival? Why did those who setup AVF and those that have maintained it since, deploy the cultural medium of the festival as a primary mode of organising?

Festival is commonly understood as a celebration through the marking of a space of exception or special time, when attention is directed towards a particular subject. Festivals are often described in terms of their carnivalesque potential to “challenge, re-order, subvert and disrupt” (Quinn, 2005a: 934).\textsuperscript{22} This chapter questions the extent to which much contemporary festival can be thought of as extra-ordinary, suggesting instead that the post-traditional festival is a process of organisation directed towards the creation cultural encounters and arguing that the festive, as an affective atmosphere and form of sociability, is of enduring significance. This discussion highlights the importance of making a distinction between the post-traditional festival as a process of cultural production and consumption, in the form of various cultural events, exhibitions and performances and the festive as an affective atmosphere. While they are not mutually inclusive, they are often the victim of conflation by policy makers, local authorities and city promoters.

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\textsuperscript{21} This is not to say that the relationship between the festival, commerce and trade is a new one, particularly in an urban context, see Stallybrass and White (1986) on marketplaces, drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

\textsuperscript{22} Carnival is a frantic, temporary version of utopia, and a particular manifestation of the festive affect. Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin is the originator of much of the contemporary engagement with the carnivalesque as concept and from of cultural analysis. Baktin writes (1984:10): “As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.” This view of the world upside down or inside out draws on notions of the transcendence and transgression, however, Taylor (2007) notes this temporal reversion of structures in the carnival was not necessarily associated with dissent but could be seen as social safety valves, moments of expression that were silently sanctioned rather than feared by ruling elites, as they allowed group to vent anger, temporarily before returning to the status quo. Yet it does show that the festival or carnival itself can be directed at dissent or change through the embodied notion of some longing, or challenge to the prevailing order embedded in affective relations.
The study of festivals grew at the start of the twentieth century through developments in anthropological and sociological examinations of ritual, behaviour, and community as well as historical studies on ceremony and religion. The origins of the festive are often drawn from traditional carnivals, festivals and feasts positioned in the historical context of the Saturnalia in ancient Rome or Dionysia in ancient Athens, from which associated notions of renewal and escape persisted through to medieval carnival (see Bakhtin, 1984). However, care needs to be taken when making such grand historical linkages. As philosopher Charles Taylor (2007) argues there are no good grounds to trace a historical connection to Roman saturnalia in any study of the contemporary festive.

Delanty et al., (2011) label the contemporary construct of the arts festival as the ‘post-traditional festival’. Defining this term is an attempt to delineate the historical narrative of festival through explaining the contemporary festival against an earlier form of festive culture associated with so-called traditional societies. The post-traditional festival is a process of cultural organisation, of mobilisation and display with particular emphasis on transnational relations, grounded in increasing mobility. This break allows the analysis of the traditional festival to be framed and brought to bear on the contemporary festival as a way that acknowledges the theoretical and social developments that have previously gone unacknowledged in the limited literature on the contemporary festival as social phenomena. The post-traditional festival emerged as a mode of cultural organising in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but it rapidly increased in popularity after world war two as the arts became ever more professionalised and institutionalised. The post-traditional festival is generally associated as a form coming into being alongside late modernity. The emergence of this mode of cultural organising is sometimes traced to events such as the Venice Biennale that began in 1895 (see Di Martino, 2005), Carnegie International from 1896 or Wagner’s Bayreuth Festival from 1876 (see Smith, 2007) in recurrent forms or the Great Exhibition (1851) as a singular event. The form of the post-traditional

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23 In the Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche (1999) uses the concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian within Greek philosophy to examine modern culture, where the Apollonian is associated with moderation, restraint and pleasure and the Dionysian with excess, discomfort and contradiction. The Apollonian celebrates the human artist as hero, the Dionysian celebrates the individual artist’s dissolution into nature. The Apollonian is the field of appearance, image and illusions while the Dionysian consists in the perpetual creation and destruction of appearances. Here we see a different dichotomy or paradox between the festival as either essentially a safe space to gather, experience, contemplate, reflect and reinforce or as a challenge or space of discontent, of rupture.
festival has as much of its roots in exhibition practice as it does in the performing arts and music.

### 2.2 Post-traditional festival

In order to establish the morphogenesis of the post-traditional festival, and how this might be applicable to AVF and cultural presentation in North East England, it is valuable to consider the traditional festival, as this is significant in the popular imaginary of the festive as it is constructed today. The traditional festival is typically envisioned as an expression of community with association towards the non-hierarchical, collectivist, embodied and affective.\(^{24}\) Centred on celebration and mythology rooted in religion and ritual tradition, festivals were performed through individual and collective action, often through the embellishment of what are called invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

The enabling of co-presence, assembling and coming-together are central to any consideration of festival processes. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who studied festival culture in the second half of the eighteenth century, defined the primary value of the festival as social cohesion, unity and the potential for individual and group expression, rooted in localised community action. Rousseau writes (in Friedrich, 2000:3):

> Plant a pike in the middle of a market place and crown it with some flower, assemble the people and you have a festival. Even better: give the spectacle an audience, turn the spectators into actors, and make them discover themselves in each other and love each other, so they will be even more united.

Here, Rousseau correlates festive emotion, in this case love, and the unification of people in community.\(^{25}\) It is at this root that we can identify the binding relation of festival, community and affect, and how it has been articulated since. In other words, the popular traditional festival offers an opportunity for collective moral

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\(^{24}\) An exploration of the English traditional festival, through the Pagan and Christian calendar, can be found in older works such as Whistler (1947).

\(^{25}\) See Derrida (1976:262) for an elaboration of Rousseau's meaning of festival and its relation to representation and play, he writes, "the origin of this society is not a contract, it does not happen through treaties, conventions, laws, diplomats, and representatives. It is a festival [fête]. It consumes itself in presence."
re-grounding, serving to sustain the principles of a community by reaffirming les sentiments de sociabilité (Thomas, 1997).

More contemporaneously, Solnit (2010:165) describes a similar invocation of love and social enchantment within the festive as moments when society, “falls in love with itself or celebrates anniversaries…memory of such event becomes a resource to tap into through recollection and innovation, and celebrating those moments revives and reaffirms the emotions”. In a post-traditional festival this can be just as important. The former director of Transmediale, Andreas Broeckmann (2004) writes with a similar sentiment and aspiration, “a festival is a place, a moment, an occasion of hopes and projections, an in-between space in which something can arise that cannot arise in everyday life. It is a secret, a surprise, a carnival – when it goes well.”

In Rousseau’s festival, actors do not present themselves before an audience; rather everyone is both performer and spectator. Writing from a sociological perspective, the traditional festival is defined by Métraux (1976:7) as constituting “symbolically, a renewal of the past in the present, a way of recalling the origins – whether mythical or historical of a community.” This privileging of the mythological affirmation of community sits uncomfortably with any post-modern cultural reading, and yet the majority of festival research has been driven by this kind of enquiry, steered towards elements of the phenomena that Émile Durkheim (1912) called “collective effervescence”.

At the point of departure of the majority of sociological enquiries into the festival is Durkheim’s pioneering work that defines the festival as an intensification of communal being, as an expressive solidarity. Here, the festival is seen as a cohesive form of collective consciousness that acts in both an expressive and consolidatory manner.26 Festivals are seen as space and time distanced and excluded from the profane aspects of everyday life with the potential to actualise the sacred. It is time and moments of exaltation and ‘loss of control’, time devoted to the extra-ordinary, time that is dream-like, where possibilities and freedoms are evoked, made possible through this social effervescence. Transcendence steers from its religious meaning into a position of abasement of

26 Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu (2004:603), endorse this view and write of the significance of visual media in the festival process: ”If one accepts, with Durkheim (1995), that the function of festivals is to revivify the group, one understands why photography should be associated with them, since it provides the means of eternizing and solemnizing these climactic moments of social life wherein the group reasserts its unity.”
the rules and contracts of everyday life as a defining feature of the understanding of the traditional festival. Alessandro Falassi (1987:2) does not see this mode of transcendence as the central feature of festival but the expression of unified community. Here festival is:

a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview… both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognises as essential to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity, its historical continuity, and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what festival celebrates.

In these terms, festival is a process of recognition, validation and affirmation; it is a claim to a set of values and beliefs. As Waterman (1998:59) asserts “the arts festival… is a ‘cultural framework’ reflecting the world view of a distinct socioeconomic section of modern society.” It is a process through which these values and beliefs are articulated, as an abstract territorial claim as well as symbolic exaltation, but problematically it does not take account of the possibility of divergent voices, or alterative expressions from within.

Festivals as potential sites of change, freedom and articulation of new values, are explored in Mona Ozouf’s work (1988) which looks at festivals to provide an insight into the French Revolution. Ozouf again draws on Durkheim’s vision of the festival as sur-réalité and extra-ordinary, where the festival is the world turned ‘upside-down’, as an interruption of everyday life and as a celebration, suspension or inversion of the well-known social, political and hierarchical order of community. Ozouf describes the first wild festivals of 1789 and 1790 as starting to contain more and more cultural aspects that worked towards a common feeling of belonging (Babcock, 1978).

For Ozouf (1988) as for Falassi (1987), most festivals involve the whole community in the preparation of the event which itself becomes a basic asset of the festival and in turn, this influences identities, shapes intentions, sharpens

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27 Friedrich (2000:xi) offers a similar definition where transcendence is a means of reaffirming identity and control, festival is “a manifestation through which a society or group makes plain its consciousness of its own identity and its determination to preserve that identity”.

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conflicts, but also resolves existing tensions. Again, the appeal of the festival is in the dissolution of the spectator into performer, although the distinction remains sharp. Ozouf talks in terms of healing and processes of purging as a means of strengthening the community through rituals, reconciliation, renunciation, and exoticism. However, this shared sense of authority over the creation of an event can be precariously sentimentalised. Festivals as logistical creations, involving administration, finance, and planning are generally organised by individuals or small groups from which participation is then offered. Ozouf (1988:5) offers a warning, “the threat, however, that festivals can have a destructive rather than a conciliatory effect on society is ubiquitous; for laughter, cheering, popular religious piety, the triumph of peace and civic values over disorder and chaos can easily be inverted”. Placing historic symbolism on a grand stage has been done from early modern patriotic displays to nationalist expression and the Gesamtkunstwerk of Nazi parades and communist rallies. Aligning historical mythology with national or patriotic content, such festivals do not just intend to recreate or ‘invent’ traditions, but express a moral imperative: they show the virtues a nation had in the past and articulate for the future.

In this sense, the festival becomes closely related to bounded territory, a nation, a region, a place and the ‘imagined community’ therein. It becomes a powerful visioning tool for those authors wishing to generate or reaffirm a narrative of a group or place. As Zygmunt Bauman (1992: xix) reminds us, “communities are imagined: belief in their presence is their only bricks and mortar, and imputation of importance their only source of authority.” The construction of such narratives of territory and place are examined in the next two chapters where the discursive framing of AVF is brought into a discussion around how the regional identity of the North East was imagined and expressed over the last two decades.

Along with the need to create co-presence, the traditional and post-traditional festival both have an ephemeral duration, a peristaltic movement and temporality where repetition or invocation can become a political source to utilise. The meaning of events such as festivals and biennials relies upon their recurrence (Biggs, 2013). The ‘founding myth’ of any festival is central to how it is imagined and the authority it can hold as something that can be retold over time. A principal temporal feature of the festival process is, as Gilles Deleuze (2004:1)
calls it, a paradox, that they “repeat an ‘unrepeatable’”. This makes an important ontological point about how a conception of festival can be perceived:

[They do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the ‘nth’ power…With respect to this power, repetition interiorizes and thereby reverses itself: as Peguy says, it is not Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in advance all the Federation Days.

This complicates a sense of festival temporarily; it blurs any festivals particular boundaries beyond the specificity of its calendar dates.

It is important to make a distinction between pre-modern societies and the nature of work within them compared to modern capitalist societies, for the festival’s relationship with work and time is significant. The rhythms of time and the calendar through productive labour were, in pre-modern times, organically connected to daily life, to the cycles of the ‘natural’ world. As Henri Lefebvre, (1991a: 30-1) writes, in the Critique of everyday life: “the imperatives of the peasant community (the village) regulated not only the way work and domestic life were organized, but festivals as well”. The notion of a divide between everyday space-time and the festival space-time is at the heart of much of the anthropological discourse on festivals and potential transcendence seems to be the basis of the sociological underpinning its enquiry.28 This is evident in discussions around the festival’s relationship with time and calendars and it cuts across ideas of ‘renewal’ and ‘reaffirmation’ that are also core themes. The break in sacred and profane space-time that this reading of the traditional festival provides has privileged a reading of the festival that focuses on these as high-attained values of traditional festivals presenting them in opposition to the post-traditional festival.

Writing from a different perspective than Lefebvre, anthropologist Victor Turner’s (1982:7) work on celebration provides an insightful grounding, as he defines the festival as time when “a common humanity in us all sets aside the work and worry of everyday life and blossoms into festivity, sometimes even in the face of cultural domination and economic deprivation”. Turner (1982:11) describes the festival moment as ‘high tides’ and ‘peak experiences’ in social life, the mark of an occasion or an event with ceremony, ritual, or festivity. He defines

28 See Crang (2012) for a commentary on thinking space and time together in this sense.
the time that these events become associated with as “expectable culturally shared events”, such as life experiences, birth, marriage, work, seasons of the year, religious beliefs, growth in social status and shared community celebrations.

Changes to the temporal framing have been brought about through industrialisation and modernity, where technological devices and associated organising tools such as railways and public clocks and planning technologies such as timetables and schedules, have dramatically altered the experience of time (Crang, 2012). The replacement of qualitative, sacred time by the mechanised rhythms of clock time amounted to “a revolution in the culture of the senses” (Schivelbusch, 1988:75 in Hubbard and Lilley, 2004). Further developments of new media such as photography and cinema introduced modes of recording and circulating time that remediated the rhythms of modern life (Thrift, 1996; Hubbard and Lilley, 2004). These processes created new temporalities, new frames and meaning of controlling and commodifying time, where festival time was also liberated from purely religious or rural calendrical rhythms.

Turner (1982) provides an explanation for the changing nature of the festival through the last 150 years in relation to the waning of the relationship between festival, the calendar and agricultural year and our ever-lessening economic and psychological relationship with the passing of the year. He argues that this does not mean we have devalued seasonal festivals but in fact that there has been a transition in the language of festival celebrations to festivals of the arts, one which has shifted our attention to the arts.

Through modernity, a different model of festival emerged in which the arts were themselves the subject of the festival and the act of celebration was directed towards the arts. Here questions of institutional organisation and power, the setting and control of boundaries, and management of perception-space becomes ever more prevalent. As Jonathan Crary (1999: 4) notes, “what is important to institutional power, since the late nineteenth century, is simply that perception functions in a way that insures a subject is productive, manageable, and predictable, and is able to be socially integrated and adaptive”. This can be seen in the creation of productive, manageable and disciplined perception-spaces in the development of institutionalised cultural spaces over the last century - the gallery, the theatre and the cinema, all of which offer their cultural encounters in specific temporal frames, though schedules, timetables and seasons.
While a recurrent and planned presentation of festival moves through the calendar, it is also necessary to consider festive moments that occur in novel, seemingly spontaneous ways. Moving on from this ordered sense of festival space and time, readings of the festive also often draw on notions of the carnivalesque. This is prevalent where the festival has been deployed as a mode of dissent and resistance from the latter half of the twentieth century, often existing on the fringes of art and activism with associations with anarchism (See Grindon 2010, 2013). Taking inspiration from work such as Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* (1984), the Situationist International or the Italian autonomist movement, the festive can be traced through politically charged spectacular events such as the Occupy Movement (Tancons, 2011b) or the free festivals movement (McKay, 1996) through to the spatiality of riot and protest as collective action. Here the festive has offered a form of social action that is oppositional to hegemonic power built on forms of solidarity and collective action.

Again, the work of Lefebvre is a useful point of departure. Lefebvre (1991a) developed a vision of the festival as the counterpoint and rupture in the all-consuming capitalist alienation of everyday life. Lefebvre wished to put forward a programme for radical change, for a revolution of everyday life, to end alienation under capitalism. He saw the effect of the festive as a means to this end. With the increasing ubiquity of consumer society, active participation in forms of leisure and entertainment are squeezed out. In their place, sounds and images as well as material objects are passively consumed, in a manner Lefebvre compares to the witnessing of a ‘spectacle’ in Debord’s terms (1983). For Debord (1983), the spectacle is a ‘pseudofestival’, a usurpation and redirection of creative energies and utopian desires into commodified and alienated forms. Here the space of leisure in capitalism “is no longer a festival, the reward of labour, and it is not yet a freely chosen activity pursued for itself, it is a generalized display: television, cinema, tourism” (Lefebvre in Gardiner, 2000:90). Lefebvre evoked the festive as

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29 It is interesting to note as Grindon (2013: 213) outlines that for Lefebvre, “festival marked a division of cultural labour, between folk-culture’s relatively open and collective participation in cultural production and urban capitalism’s increasing specialization of roles within cultural production and its separation of cultural labour from other forms of production.” Drawing on an analysis of French peasant celebrations and the 1871 Paris Commune, Lefebvre sought to champion the festival neither as an abstract category nor just a way to “rethink agency and political participation vis-à-vis culture, but as a specific re-imagination of the culture of social movements.”

30 Festival was associated by Debord with a prehistorical, pre-political era, but was seen as an aspirational mode of social relations, embedded in the desire of the Situations for a new society without capitalist alienation (See Bonnett, 2006).
Figure 6: Waygood’s Amateur Radio Rally in the Grainger Market, Newcastle, 29th February and 1st March 2008. Part of AVF08 Broadcast.
an example of a spontaneous, ecstatic and collective affirmation of transfigured social relationships, in a manner that both transcended and enriched everyday life.\textsuperscript{31} Employing a similar ethos, Hakim Bay proposed the idea of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) where to make fellowship, joy, and freedom work for a day or a week is seemingly more achievable than permanent transformations of society. Again, questions of authorship and participation run through how the festive is understood, where the festive appeals to non-hierarchical models of social organisation. Such approaches can also be traced through particular artists’ practice, that have often been subsumed into the post-traditional festival, or other cultural institutions working with artists seeking to develop situational, durational, relational practices often rooted in forms of performance.

This performed carnivalesque is both an artistic and curatorial strategy to play with these ideas, usually in a relatively structured manner. Here the festival sociability or the festive affective is created through the curating of particular artist’s practices or the creation of discursive platforms, along the lines that Pastergiadis and Martin (2011) outline in certain contemporary art biennials. This has a particular resonance within the discourse on relational aesthetics (see Bourriaud, 1998; Bishop, 2004, 2012; Kester, 2005; Martin, 2007) and the work of modern and contemporary artists. For example, the Gutia Group through Fluxus to Jeremy Deller’s Procession, (2009) and Thomas Hirshhorn’s Spinoza Festival, (2009) or the curatorial projects of Claire Tancons (2011a) who reproduces carnival within cultural organisations.

This is mirrored in some of the projects AVF has produced, which offer a temporary model of festive play. AVF has produced events that challenge the conceptions of spectator and participation. The Waygood Amateur Radio Rally, part of AVF08, was the first amateur radio club for artists. Artists gathered with radio enthusiasts from clubs across North East England, and worked to get their amateur radio licenses (see Figure. 6). During AVF10 Kate Rich’s Feral Trade Café imported its food groceries direct from suppliers by arranging transport in the excess baggage space of people travelling to the festival, using other artists,

\textsuperscript{31} As Gardiner (2000:99) writes: “In the events of May 1968 in Paris, Lefebvre claimed to detect a reinvention of the traditional festival. He felt the uprising was premised on a total rejection of hierarchy and specialization, of rampant consumerism. It represented a reinvigoration of the metaphorical richness of human speech and language and a desire to recapture urban space from the clutches of the bureaucrats and planners and invest this space with qualitative meanings and significances.”
curators, friends and relations as mules to supply the temporary café that operated out of the Tyneside Cinema.

2.3 The festive dispersed

It is important to note that the post-traditional festival tracks wider developments in cultural production and consumption, urbanisation, secularisation, globalisation and the commodification of contemporary culture. However, from this position it is necessary to critique what Sassatelli (2011: 11) calls the “common normative stance” of festival research, questioning the crude and discredited master narrative of modernisation lies at the foundation of the literature on festivals.

Charles Taylor’s (2007) reference to the festive in his exploration of secular society mirrors this position. For Taylor, the contemporary world is no longer defined by what Victor Turner calls, “structure” and “anti-structure”, where the dichotomies between the structuring institutions of work and religion on one side and carnival or festival on the other, no longer operate as they once did. Therefore, a framework needs to be found to address the contemporary festival that does not rely upon previous simplistic conceptual dualities, between oppositional states of feast and famine or labour and leisure. Sassatelli (in Giorgi, 2010: 226) frames this within how contemporary festivals are seen within a “narrative of lost grace from a culture debating to a culture consuming public sphere”. Here, a romanticism for spaces and affects of, perhaps, a mythical form of participation within the traditional festival denies the complexity of the relations of such phenomena and misinterprets the potential significance of certain post-traditional festivals. The sociability and the conviviality of the festive have not disappeared or even directly transformed into the post-traditional festival, rather the festive, as a central component of the traditional festival and carnival has been dispersed through modernity into many different forms of participation, performance and consumption.

A number of authors have expressed this in different ways. Jonathan Crary (1999:1) argues attention space was remade in the second half of the nineteenth century, into a “patchwork of…disconnected states” by a dense and powerful reworking of human subjectivity in the West that has continued over the last 150
years. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm (2013:36) argues that this reworking of subjectivity is central to the genealogy of contemporary festivals. In light of this, the festive has dissolved into difficult to trace moments, Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu (2004) sees festive behaviour subsumed into the urban patterns, and Charles Taylor (2007) traces the dissolution of festive play into private spheres. The festive, while often desired by post-traditional festival managers is not necessarily to be found there. It is dispersed within the private matrix of relations that define contemporary urbanism and tourism. As Taylor (2007: 715) writes:

Some moments of this kind are, indeed, the closest analogues to the Carnival of previous centuries. They can be powerful and moving, because they witness the birth of a new collective agent out of its formerly dispersed potential. They can be heady, exciting… They are often immensely riveting, but frequently also ‘wild’, up for grabs, capable of being taken over by a host of different moral vector, either utopian revolutionary, or xenophobic, or wildly destructive; or they can crystallise on some deeply, common cherished good….celebrating in an out-of-ordinary life the ordinary fragile pursuit of love and happiness… One has as much fear as hope in these ‘wild’ kairotic moments. But the potential for them, and their immense appeal, is perhaps implicit in the experience of modern secular time. The ‘festive’… is a crucial feature of modern life.

The festive moves through events like Guy Fawkes Night, through the atmospheres of club nights and raves, to football matches, protests and anniversary celebrations. It exists within elements of AVF; within specific practices, the organisation performs. Festive atmosphere ‘breaks out’; it is not necessarily planned, although the organisers desire it. Trying to trace these moments within AVF was a process of considering how people who had experienced such

32 Crary (1999:3-4) argues that the new form of spectacle culture were not founded on the necessity of making a subject see, but on struggles in which inhabit time as disempowered. These new forms of perception work to produce a subject who is productive and predictable, who is socially integrated and adaptive.
33 Taylor (2007: 52), like Lefebvre and Debord, makes a connection to festivals as reversal: "The public/private distinction, and the wide area of negative freedom, is the equivalent zone in these societies to the festivals of reversal in their predecessors. It is here, on our own, amongst friends and family, or in voluntary associations, that we can ‘drop out’, throw off our coded roles, think and feel with our whole being, and find various intense forms of community. Without this zone, life in modern society would be unliveable."
moments recounted them as narrative, often describing them through an appeal to authenticity and novelty as unique, special or rare moments - singular events, where ‘you had to be there’.

Such moments play into the founding myths and popular imaginary of AVF. One such event during the first festival is often discussed and recounted in how AVF is imaged by those who have attended it over many years - the Cinematic Orchestra’s live performance in the disused Odeon cinema building on Pilgrim Street in the city centre of Newcastle (see Figure. 7). A large-scale successful event, it sold over a thousand tickets. It was organised by, what was then, Music North, the organisation that was building the SG.

The Odeon, an art deco cinema from 1936, was to be used for two large-scale events for both the opening and closing of AVF03. It had been scheduled for redevelopment into a new branch of the luxury retail chain Selfridges but this plan eventually fell through and the building remains empty in 2015. The event was a live score, performed to Dziga Vertov’s silent Man with a Movie Camera (1929), followed by a party with local DJs in the cinema. It involved watching, listening, socialising and dancing. The project was touring around the UK to promote the release of the score on the Ninja Tune record label and was taking place in Glasgow and London. The live score was originally commissioned in 2000 as a launch event for the European Capital of Culture in Porto, Portugal, where it premiered at the Fantasporto Film Festival. The Ninja Tune record label, setup and run by the English electronic musicians Coldcut, were cited by those involved in AVF03 as an inspiration for the kind of practice they sought to promote in the region. They were also associated with work that crossed the audience / producer divide, narrowing the perceived gap between production and consumption and referenced by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002:40) in his book, Post-Production.³⁴ These moments of festive sociobility also emerge from the unexpected, and the unplanned. Towards the end of the after party, the building had to be closed down due to fears about the structural integrity caused by people dancing. These kinds of breaks, or disruptions, build the memorability of the events. Subsequently, the closing event of the festival had to be relocated to the Tyneside Cinema.

³⁴ Coldcut accompanied their album Let us play (1997) with a CD-ROM that encouraged listeners to remix the record themselves.
The event created the ethos of the popular imaginary of AVF as an organisation that worked outside of conventional cultural spaces, on the disciplinary boundary between live music and cinema. AVF03 represented a new kind of cultural experience that was not readily on offer in Newcastle. As one audience member commented and was later quoted in the AVF03 evaluation report (Moore et al., 2004: 41): “The Cinematic Orchestra event was superb...The event was truly glamorous, fun, and really showed the city what we could do, given half a chance”. Here it is possible to begin to draw out the relations between the festival and the city and how one acts upon the imaginary of the other. What this event also points to is the incoherence of authorship, lack of clear boundaries and dissipated agency and geography around the creation of a festival such as AVF. The partnerships between Music North, Tyneside Cinema and those involved in planning AVF03, alongside the pre-existing tour of the performance and its links with ECC, the buildings lack of structural integrity and the property speculation that brought its disuse into active being, all complicate how it is possible to think of the boundaries of coherent festival space.

Ten years after the event, it clearly lives on in the memory of those who attended (see Figure. 8). The ‘success’ of such an event also continues into how the festival thinks about the types of events it seeks to create, and in someway sets the agenda for some of the future programming decisions in later festivals. Where large-scale, seemingly unique one-off events are developed within the programme to mobilise large audiences, develop a sense of the ‘here and now’ and create an obligation to co-presence. Variations VII (2008) in AVF08, Big Water in AVF10, Steven Stapleton’s Sleep Concert or Wishful Thinking in AVF12 were built around the festivals desire to create ‘one-off’, memorable and meaningful events.

These unrepeatable events play into the mythology and imaginary of AVF and become what is sought out when new festival programmes are announced. Many conversations in the lead up to AVF12 with potential audience members were testament to this, as I was frequently asked what should ‘not be missed’ within the festival programme. The festive sociability is partly about the ability to generate narrative and memory that are reimagined and reaffirmed as each festival returns, particularly as people start to look for certain events within the programme that will achieve this.

These are collective and shared moments, away from the singular encounters that might take place between artworks and an individual audience member in a
Figure 7 The Cinematic Orchestra, *Man with a Movie Camera*, 8 November 2003, Odeon Cinema on Pilgrim Street, Newcastle. Part of AVF03. Image: AV Festival
gallery exhibition for example. This lived, felt dimension of the festive is difficult to capture, and conviviality in its atmospheric movement is momentary and subjective. Sassatelli (2011) offers an argument for the significance through what she calls festive “sociability”, drawing on the work of George Simmel that is useful here. It is similar to Victor Turner’s notion of communitas, also deployed by Taylor (2007), which is an association of collective acknowledgment and shared being amongst a group of people, an event that breaks out in moments of reversal or transgression, often emerging in exceptional moments of danger or bereavement.35

A possible explanation of the festive and how it operates is as an affective atmosphere. Affect runs in and through and out of these atmospheres, particularly in Felix Guattari’s (1996:158) sense of affect as something “hazy, atmospheric, and nevertheless perfectly apprehensible”. Atmospheres are things that are felt as Brennan (2004:1) writes “is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere’”. If we take affect to be a pre-cognitive sensation resulting from an encounter with a person or thing, that is translated in retrospect, and articulated as a feeling or emotion then the festive affect is directed towards celebration, happiness, conviviality, expression, liveliness and shared enjoyment. Festive is an adjective that describes this collective of emotions. Likewise, it is an atmosphere, the description of a collective sense of buoyancy, brightness, light, affable and joyous aura that has a specific set of spatial relations. What Anderson (2009) calls the ‘affective atmospheres’ generated in place and the myriad social, material, and discursive resources such atmospheres support.

These encounters are sought out by those entering post-traditional festival spaces – for example, recent research has demonstrated that motivations for attending music festivals are complex and extend beyond the desire to listen to live music (O’Grady and Kill, 2013). These atmospheres and the sociability, participation and excitement they entail draw audiences to these events, on top of the emotions and memories activated from the encounters with artworks or music performances directly.

Festive atmospheres are important because they provide strong affective forms that shape emotional responses to territory and time, as can been seen in the way the opening event of AVF03 was aligned with a particular imaginary of how a city such as Newcastle should be presenting itself culturally. These

moments of enchantment can create obligations to place, attachments and memories that can build towards a sense of belonging. They work toward the creation from a phenomenological perspective of what Edward Casey (2001) might call ‘thick’ places, as events that broaden the lived experience of place, where affect is central (see Duffy et al., 2011). It is not that post-traditional festivals are placeless or they lack a connection with place, they are part of the process of place, but it is the thin-ness and the seeming lack of specificity and authenticity that those places created offer that is problematic. It is from this that AVF has sought to move away, through the process of commissioning new artistic work, with a thematic and ‘local’ connection.

Relating this back to the placing of post-traditional festivals, they are often sited away from perceived cultural ‘centres’ where a relational geography of being on the periphery or outside informs their practice. This follows an observation made by a number of authors that many leading arts festivals take place outside of dominant urban centres, areas where there are particular concentrations of national arts organisations for example in London or New York, working outside the centres of late capitalist production with national capitals at the core. Hobsbawn (2013) attributes this to the complexity and heterogeneity of such urban centres, which only in exceptional circumstances allow for collective self-expressions such as arts festivals to flourish. This is comparable to a number of small scale leading arts festivals that have an association with AVF, such as Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (started in 1978, see Voase 2009 or Steinitz 2011) or Oberhausen Short Film Festival (started in 1955). Both have a long, significant reputation and lineage within their art forms, but exist in peripheral regions and cities outside of the centres of cultural production in late capitalism. This is a significant feature of the post-traditional festival, festival here can be imagined as island or an archipelago, something that is visited for a short time, somewhere you are dropped into – but then return – this is also why the post-traditional festival needs to be thought of in the frame of the tourist subject.

The example of Bayreuth Festival (Spotts, 1994:7) offers a particular insight into the appeal of distance within the post-traditional festival:

One of Wager’s shrewdest decisions was insisting that the Festival should be held in relative isolation. ‘Island’ is a word recurring again and again when artists try to explain Bayreuth’s singular atmosphere. The seclusion has a
remarkable psychological effect, not only encouraging total concentration on work but creating a remarkable familial spirit.

Here place is connected to the atmosphere of the festival, in its temporary and recurrent flourishing. However, this view of the post-traditional festival plays into a perspective of the festival as homogenous entity. A continual problem with much of the way festivals have been characterised within some research and description is to see them as isolated worlds of their own, or black boxes. The ‘festival’ as a site of research suffers this kind of ‘black box’ condition, where it is viewed or imagined artificially under the illusion of integrity, completeness within a clear bounded, abstract notion of space, time and materiality, i.e. the view the festival is a ‘thing in itself’. Sassatelli (2011) identifies this in both the approaches of Durkheim and Turner, where the festival is described as a contained space away from everyday reality. As does Falassi’s (1987) definition of the festival as “time out of time”, which can be problematised for their exclusivity and lack of attention on the contextual setting of the festivals or the world outside which the festival occupies. It is an argument also brought to bear by Picard and Robinson (2006: 4–5):

Many studies of festivals, in both theoretical and empirical terms, are marked by tightly defined boundaries of their immediate social context, with an emphasis upon closed spaces, fixed times, indigenous social actors, internal regimes and symbolic contexts, and bounded rituals. Fewer studies have sought to position festivals in a context that is fluid, open to different scopes of (transnational) society and cultural vectors, and that resonates with the realities of ongoing change.

It is the simplification of the post-traditional festival as a site for the reception of cultural artefacts that fails properly to account for the experience of festivals. Thus a task of festival research is to “trace the complex, polyvocal, discursive and relational field that festivals generate, and thus see in them as a litmus test of contemporary public culture, providing an interpretative key to some important issues within it” (Sassatelli 2011:17). In order to address what can be learnt about wider societal trends by examining festival process there needs to be an expansion in the frames of reference for festival research. Analytical tools from
Figure 8: Screenshot taken from the public Facebook Group: Newcastle's Nightlife 1995 - 2010 (12th October 2014). Image: Peter Merrington
wider visual culture are required to interpret them; the fields of cultural consumption, production and display are central to this, as is a greater engagement with performative, affective spaces and significance of space and place in the discussion.

As demonstrated by the AVF03 Cinematic Orchestra event there is a complex interplay between many different desires, gathered together to create a sense of festival and the traces left by these moments effect the imaginary AVF sought to operate in the future. It is thinking of the post-traditional festival as a mobile process, and that gathering as a form of assemblage that allows us to trace festivals relational and contingent form (Latour, 2004; McFarlane, 2011). The conjuncture of events that made up a festival such as AVF; were dependent upon a remote processes of cultural production and the mobility of ideas, objects, people and lines of economic force. The process of festival is thought of as an assemblage rather than a discrete whole. The concept of assemblage is further elaborated in Chapter Five. The post-traditional festival creates a site that gives the illusion of independent identity, of being a contained, autonomous entity, but it is important to challenge this enclosure to examine moments of conjunction and the polyvocal atmospheres that emerge.

The process of post-traditional festival does not occur in abstract space, rather it is a process that defines its own spatial frames. It is dependent upon what is going on around and it what move in and out. A confusion over tangible boundaries, of defined territories, implies closure and stability, perhaps even a unique sense of attachment and belonging, but as Stallybrass and White (1986) rightly articulate, this obscures a structural dependence upon a ‘beyond’ through which this ‘local’ feeling is itself produced. Thus in a sense the post-traditional festival creates a space that is contradictory, it is both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. It is a place where limit, centre and boundary are confirmed and yet also relationally contingent and in a sense in jeopardy. This re-asserts the view that post-traditional festival is therefore not separate from everyday life, it does not exist as a separate spatial or temporal exclusion but rather as an intensification and remediation of the already existing social reality. Therefore, this approach seeks to move from a binary reading of the extra-ordinary and the everyday, of festival and labour into post-traditional festival as a remediating process (Bolter and Grusin, 1999).
2.4 Conclusion

In summary, the dominant trend in research on contemporary urban festivals fails to address their particular social and discursive function, as sites of the festive, participation, and sociability and to understand festivals as spaces of encounter and experience. Describing the festival as a process, in a sense is simply a means to privilege festival as a verb and not a noun. The tendency remains to see post-traditional festival as abstract entities rather than as a process with the potential to (re)organise urban flows, creating informal spaces for encounter, debate and criticism that have their own forms of inclusivity and exclusivity. It is clear that festival processes are determined by presence, and a desire for proximity and assembly, but this is predicated almost entirely on mobility, and the ability of people, objects and capital to move into and out of these specific, temporary sites. The distinction between traditional and post-traditional is useful to examine how various forms and arrangement have emerged, endured and persist in various forms of remediation, recuperation, hybridity and convergence. It is important to challenge the uncritical belief in post-traditional festival as a unifying social force, that in some way ‘speaks for’ a group. This view, embedded in the historical construction of traditional festivals, needs to be opened out to consider how contemporary festivals are relational processes that bring the outside in.

While there has been a significant growth in the number of post-traditional festivals, the economic argument for them is somewhat over determined and the increasing importance of the festive within secular society has been relatively obscured in the discussion. Although the festive is dispersed into many forms. In this sense, the festive atmosphere does not exist in the world fully formed, ready to be discovered and quantified; rather it is something in process that is active in the construction of various social and cultural encounters and events.

AVF, at its most basic, was a form of spatial and temporal arrangement, a process that assembles and organises people and things into proximity with each other, privileging synchronous presence. Here the post-traditional festival is not just a particular cultural mode or medium but a common principle for organising the spectatorial at its most general. Festival as a process of organisation is not the end or outcome of economic or cultural processes that come first, but an active form in the constitution of these processes. What is important to take from this chapter is the conclusion that it is primarily the festive that works towards
attachment and belonging to place, not necessarily the post-traditional festival. The event of AVF did not present a coherent authored whole, despite how it articulates itself in the ‘completeness’ of the programme, but sought to mobilise within its duration and territory as many possible encounters, between artworks and people. It is, potentially, what is emergent from these encounters that works towards attachment through festive affect.
3 AVF03 and the cultural economy of North East England

Today, our sight has dimmed; it no longer sees our future, having constructed a present made of abstraction, nonsense, and silence. Now we must learn to judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festivals, than by its statistics.

Jacques Attali (1985:3)

Civil society has moments where it falls in love with itself or celebrates anniversaries, when those ties again become enchantments rather than obligations. That era when connections were made, the possibilities were exciting, and joy came readily…Memory of such events becomes a resource to tap into through recollection and invocation, and celebrating those moments revives and reaffirms the emotions.

Rebecca Solnit (2010:165)

I wanted to make an object that would be a focus of hope at a painful time of transition for the people of the north-east, abandoned in the gap between the industrial and the information ages.

Anthony Gormley (1998)

3.1 Introduction

If the Gormley’s Angel of the North (1998) was the marker for a shift towards an ‘information age’ in North East England, then it was AVF03 that was tasked with culturally leading the region into a domain of artistic practice emergent from new technology, new media and the creative digital economy. Founded five years after the Angel’s installation, the instigation of AVF is bound up in the popular mythology of the cultural and urban ‘renaissance’ of North East England that the Angel commonly symbolises. It is difficult to discuss any cultural organising within North East England over the last thirty years without in some way establishing a relation to policy-led, cultural urban regeneration and AVF is no exception. AVF was shaped by the discourses of the neo-liberal creative city and entangled with
the instrumentalist agendas of cultural policy, as well as the cultural and creative industries. Some have suggested (Nayak, 2006), the economic history of regional transition is a story from coal mining to clubbing, where Newcastle and Gateshead has successfully been transformed from “Coal City to Culture City” (Minton, 2003). The history of AVF is entwined within these narratives.

Against a background of globalisation, industrial decline and a desire to develop new knowledge economies, many cities have sought to express culture as a means of gaining a visible competitive advantage. Former industrial cities and regions throughout the UK and beyond looked to cultural investment as a means of creating a substitute vision of place, not determined by an industrialised past that has seemingly eroded the identities upon which those cities were built (SMiles, 2005a). It is very common to assert the interrelationship and mutual contingency of culture and economy, particularly within the urban (Amin and Thrift, 2007; Foster, 2011), where sometimes problematically “he who pays the piper calls the tune” (Biggs, 2013). As a number of research interviews demonstrated, festival and biennial directors tend to be very pragmatic about this inter-relationship, and highly sensitive to the complexities and demands of working with public funding, but with a belief in the possibilities to open up new critical spaces and opportunities (Biggs, 2013; Fijen, 2013).

This chapter examines the cultural economy and regional context from which AVF emerged in 2003. Here cultural economy is taken to mean the space where the cultural and the economic collide. The term has many meanings that overlap with similar notions such as 'creative economy', 'cultural industries' and 'creative class' (Garnham, 2005; Gibson and Kong, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; O'Connor, 2010). Since the 1980s, cultural policy has operated in a new context predicated on a greater bifurcation of culture and economic development. The hybridity of the cultural and the economic is one characteristic of contemporary capitalism (Foster, 2011), where cultural institutions from museums to festivals have been adapted to serve the ‘experience economy’, feed tourism and define place promotion. This chapter explores the inherent tension between these two terms (see O’Connor, 2010) through examining the beginnings of AVF.

As was noted in the previous chapter, the rational for the festivalisation of particularly urban space is most prominently outlined as a result of neo-liberal economic policies, where policy-led urban culture is increasingly dominated by a series of organised spectacular events under the logics of tourist industry
expansion. More broadly, cultural policy in the UK since the late 1980s and across the ‘creative industries’ of media, technology and culture has been predominantly neo-liberal in character (Newsinger, 2015), where social and economic policy issues have been transformed into cultural policy questions, leaving cultural policy with negligible reference to art at all (McGuigan, 2005). In the broadest terms, this has been a prevailing logic for investment in new cultural infrastructure and organisations since the 1980s in North East England, where culture has been expressed institutionally as an instrumental device to reimagine the region as an attractive destination for inward investment. While this has manifested locally in new arts organisations and events, these have often been financed or related to new national and international projects that promoted inter-urban or regional competition for cultural funding (Vall, 2011), often seeking to fill institutional cultural consumption deficits in specific places.

The chapter evaluates AVF as a new arts organisation seeking to establish itself and gain legitimacy for its artistic and curatorial practice within the regional cultural economy, drawing on national and international flows of artists, artworks and ideas. It is testament to the particular regional cultural history of North East England that AVF became a relatively unique cultural organisation in the UK and beyond in its structure and activity. AVF began at a very dynamic period for the cultural history of Tyneside, during the height of the so called ‘Golden Age’ of New Labour, culture-led, urban regeneration, a period driven by the engine of redevelopment and the alignment of cultural investment and urban redevelopment in the UK (Cox and O’Brien, 2012).36 The first AVF took place in November 2003 at the peak of regional optimism about the possibility of new cultural, post-industrial identities. AVF03 happened between two significant moments of failed regional expression, the Newcastle and Gateshead bid for the 2008 European Capital of Culture that was awarded to Liverpool and New Labour’s defeated referendum to established an elected Regional Assembly in 2004. This duel sense of, on the one hand, great confidence, success and solidification and on the other failure, insecurity and dissolution is central to the regional cultural history of this period.

This discussion is central to the case study of AVF for a number of key reasons: firstly, the mantra of culture-led urban regeneration significantly

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36 Hewison (2014:64) notes that between 1997 and 2010 Arts Council’s grants-in-aid rose in real terms by 81 per cent, from £186m to £449m.
contributed to the creation of the venues and organisations with whom AVF worked; secondly, this provides the underlying rationale for the collaborative partnership model upon which AVF was based; thirdly, it created a certain cultural climate within the region, characterised by a unique optimism that allowed AVF to establish and shaped the regional, multi-sited geography of AVF; and, finally, it setup a relationship between the curatorial thematic and artistic programme of the AVF and regional economic priorities.37

The purpose of AVF was never explicitly identified as urban or economic regeneration, but the organisation benefited from the narratives and finance that those agendas provided. There was a consistent belief by those involved with the creation and production of AVF that it had a role to play within regional identity and the regional economy (Dobson, 2012; Harger, 2012; Shatwell, 2012a). This is evident in the following extract from the AVF03 evaluation report produced by Teesside University (Moore et al, 2004:5):

The North East is, (physically, socio-economically and culturally) a very diverse area. Sections of population have suffered from increased poverty due to industrial decline…great efforts have been made to enhance the cultural life of the North East. Developments like the AV festival have potential to impact on economic regeneration (through inward investment and through increased tourism) and social and cultural regeneration by making the North East a better place to live (Culture North East, 2003). This is not just a case of bringing people into the area or enhancing existing cultural and artistic activity, but also involves trying to include the currently “socially excluded”. AV Festival has developed out of this political and social context and is a very appropriate initiative given these aims.

Narratives of decline, deficit and transition are at the forefront of how the (cultural) regionalism of North East England has been imagined over the last four decades, but it is this unique social and political, as well as, economic and cultural context of the region that AVF was a product of. The focus on the ‘transition’ of North East England is in part a search for a social and cultural identity that is not signified by industrial production. This asks what it means to be a post-industrial

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37 See Lancaster (2002), for a typical characterisation of the optimism surrounding the opening of BCCA in Gateshead.
society. What is worked on through these processes is the symbolic, producing questions of how a region is imagined.

This chapter questions the relationship between AVF as a festival of contemporary art and the ecology of relationships that constituted the organisation from cultural economy, regionalism and cultural policy. This provides an important insight into how AVF related to wider discourses of place associated with policy and cultural change. This approach presents the top-down narrative of the genesis of AVF to establish the forces and power structures that inflected and shaped its form. However, it does not seek to discount the agency of individuals who have contributed significantly to AVF; rather it takes account of how these agents were shaped by the flows of ideas and money, and marshalled these to the advantages of themselves, AVF and wider agendas. Through examining these interactions, it should become clear that while AVF was certainly not policy-led or necessarily a strategic policy product it was significantly policy responsive. From examining the cultural economy out of which AVF emerged, it is clear that the organisation was shaped by an ecology of institutional forces inflexed with but beyond simply personal and professional ambition and desire. From these ideas AVF emerged as a hybrid event, at the intersection of differing agendas, through art, place, technology, identity, power and politics.

It is important to stress that the institutional cultural changes in North East England that influenced the formation of AVF were not spontaneous, top down moments of creation as they are sometimes portrayed. Rather, they are the culmination of a longer history of cultural production within the region that has its own evolution and contested practices concentrated over the last three decades. The role of festivals and temporary events is significant within this, but has been somewhat overlooked by the major accounts of these changes. From the initial post-war cultural policy to the emergence of AVF, the process of institutional arts administration within a regional territorial frame very much influenced the shape of AVF as multi-sited and inter-urban. As others have begun to question (Vall, 2011), this chapter asks whether cultural regeneration since the 1980s really represented a distinct break with past initiatives in regional cultural projection. Initially, it is important to explore the wider history of large-scale cultural events and post-traditional festivals in North East England and to trace these through the twentieth century, paying particular attention to the period between 1945 and 1990 to show the institutionalisation of the arts regionally and the introduction of
cultural policy. This long view brings history to bear on the creation of AVF within a specific regional context.

3.2 Arts festivals in North East England during the twentieth century

There are a number of significant and historic large-scale cultural and social gatherings in North East England. Two of the largest and oldest are the Durham Miners’ Gala, founded in 1871 in County Durham and The Hoppings, founded in 1882 in Newcastle. The Hoppings, begun as a temperance faire and now the largest gathering of carnival fairgrounds in Europe, takes over a large part of the Newcastle Town Moor in June every year (see Figure. 10).

The Miners’ Gala is the annual meeting, parade and celebration of mining communities from across the region, nationally and internationally (see Figure. 9). Based on kinship and solidarity, the Gala’s scale and significance is central to the history of celebration and regional expression in the North East as one of the world’s largest gathering of working communities (Colls and Lancaster, 2005; Mellor and Stephenson, 2005). Despite the slow dissolution of distinctive mining communities, exacerbated by the Thatcher governments’ attacks (Hudson, 2013) of the 1980s, the Gala still brings together Trade Union activists, local residents from surrounding towns, and tourists to witness the parade of union banners, marching bands, and political speeches. Today it is a festival of the political left more generally. The persistence of these events over such a long period is significant. Considering the scale and regional historical significance of an event such as the Gala, its contemporaneity is somewhat maligned: surprisingly there has been no crossover between the labour movement tradition and community expression and the post-war cultural policy initiatives in the region (Vall, 2010). Seen as regressive, these events are often framed within a heritage context as part of the “rich tradition of popular culture” in the region (Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council, 2002:19). This is part of the memorialisation of ‘old’ industrial culture that has allowed a rhetorical path to the investment in ‘new’ sites of cultural consumption. For example, the success of Lumiere festival of light in Durham stands in stark contrast to the Gala.\(^{38}\) The Gala’s polyvocal gathering of

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\(^{38}\) Lumiere was commissioned by Durham County Council and first took place in 2009. Its initial success saw it re-commissioned as a biennial event. It is now the UK’s largest outdoor ‘light festival’ and is produced by the London-based creative production agency Artichoke.
Figure 9 Durham Miners' Gala, 12 July 2014, image: Peter Merrington
many communities in shared celebration contrasts sharply with the spectacles and rather less self–reflexive light shows of Lumiere. It might appear necessary that some old cultural events were maligned in order to create the narrative space required for new ones.

Carboniferous capital created a prosperous region though the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and along with mineral exaction, shipbuilding, heavy industry, all the supporting industries were built on export of plentiful material resources (Hudson, 2000, Nayak, 2006). This was not without episodes of decline, particularly in the inter-war period. Attempts to revivify the regional economy and signify transition and change through cultural means was nothing new when it was implemented during the 1990s and 2000s. Attracting four million visitors between May and October 1929, the North East Coast Exhibition was the largest single event ever to be held in Newcastle (see Figure. 11). Despite its scale very little is written about the event with the recent exception of Barke (2014). Although regional in its frame the Exhibition took place on a dedicated 125-acre site on what became Exhibition Park, near the city centre of Newcastle on the edge of the Town Moor.

Taking place only a year after the iconic Tyne Bridge was opened in 1928, this inter-war period of investment and regeneration in grand architecture and celebrations of regional industry bears at least on the surface many similarities with the regeneration of the end of the twentieth century that also focused on an iconic new bridge, the millennium bridge and showcases of ‘world class’ events through the C10 programme. In the form of post-traditional festival and as a clear demonstration of regionalism and place promotion, the North East Coast Exhibition was a response to the regional economic difficulties of the 1920s when many shipyards closed in a period of industrial decline following the end of the first world war. The title of the exhibition highlights the economic significance of the region’s relationship with the sea through the shipbuilding industry. Organised by Newcastle and Gateshead Chamber of Commerce and designed with the broad appeal of the Great Exhibition of 1851 in mind, the exhibition was developed to be more open than a singular industrial presentation and included a

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39 Recent archive digitation projects have also published original film and photography from the exhibition, for example see British Pathé (1929); Co-curate (1929).

40 Prior to the 1929 North East Coast Exhibition, the park was also the site of Royal Mining Engineering Jubilee Exhibition 1887, another large-scale event attracting two million visitors. Notably, Exhibition Park is now the site of social celebrations such as the Newcastle Mela and Pride
permanent new building called, the Palace of Arts, where over 300 artworks were exhibited.

This was by no means a period of cultural isolation in Newcastle; there was great interest in arts and culture. Cinema played an important role in everyday cultural consumption in Newcastle. When the News Theatre that later became the Tyneside Cinema opened in 1937 there were around 47 cinemas in Newcastle, with a total of more than 40,000 cinema seats, mostly showing international films from Hollywood (Manders, 1991; Chaplin, 2011).

However, locally based cultural knowledge was perhaps something lacking and curatorial expertise for the North East Coast Exhibition was brought in from outside in the form of a curator from the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (Barke, 2014). In assessing the lasting significance of the Exhibition, Barke (2014:176) suggests it ultimately failed in its ambition to revivify the industrial economy:

It made a different interpretation of the role of the city more acceptable and achievable in reality. The built environment, although temporary, helped to create a sense of occasion and an atmosphere of modernity and thereby glamorise the role of consumption in its various manifestations. Rather than promoting or celebrating a new manufacturing future for the region, the Exhibition ended up almost as a demonstration of a post-industrial future.

The grandeur of the event emerges as something of a eulogy to the significant industrial innovation of North East England, although the region remained at the forefront of ship design until the 1970s, the Exhibition perhaps symbolised the height of regional industrial innovation (Byrne, 2002).

After the second world war and following events in the USA, many European cities began to use the arts and culture industries to promote economic regeneration (Waterman, 1998; Bianchini, 1999 in Sassatelli, 2008). Some countries, but predominately cities, began to endorse post-traditional festivals as a means of cultural regeneration following the war. The organisation of arts festivals was part of a process of developing new political, economic and social relations across Europe as cities sought to recover and project a new international future. New mixed art form festivals emerged, with a national and international focus
Figure 10 The Hoppings, June 1960, Newcastle Town Moor. In the foreground is the former Palace of the Arts constructed for the North East Coast Exhibition of 1929. Image: Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums
such as the Festival of Britain in 1951 as a conscious effort to use cultural events to bring about urban rebuilding. The Edinburgh International Festival begun in 1947 openly acknowledges these motivations (Bartie, 2013; AEA Consulting, 2006; Carey, 2013) and Brighton Festival was launched in 1967 with the explicit goal to set Brighton on the cultural map of Britain and help develop city tourism (Murray, 2004). Across Europe, large-scale visual art exhibitions such as Documenta in Kassel, Germany were founded with similar ambitions. Initiated in 1955, Documenta was the antithesis of the propagandist exhibitions of the years before 1939. Created against a backdrop of the trauma of the second world war and the Nazis’ attacks on modern art that they considered to be ‘degenerate’, it promoted the renewal of a humanist ideal (Marchart, 2008). It provided a model for the exhibition as a utopian and redemptive experience. Alongside the Venice Biennale, Documenta flourished to become the most important periodic exhibition of modern and contemporary art in the world.

This post-war trend for new post-traditional festivals mostly bypassed North East England. It was not until the late 1980s that new large-scale events began to be created with specific social, cultural or economic transformational functions in mind. In the North East, a continued economic decline occurred between 1961 and 1991 (Vall, 2007). The region went through a long period of post-industrial decline, suffering from the rise of a competitive global economy, disinvestment and overcapacity (Nayak, 2006). As a result, an association of a decaying, maligned, and left-behind place developed through this on-going deindustrialisation. This represented a permanent and fundamental change to social relations of the region, although many sentiments of collective identity related to industrial culture remained (Byrne, 2002), such as the Gala.

In relative terms, de-industrialisation still leaves the North East in deficit compared to other regions of the UK, with consistently the highest rate of unemployment in the UK (ONS, 2013). During this time, manufacturing fell from providing 28% to 13% of Newcastle’s employment, whilst the public sector and other services rose from 19% to 38%. This trend continued so that by the start of this millennium, the public sector and service industry accounted for 80% of the economically active in Newcastle, compared to less than 10% for the manufacturing and construction services (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). Employment in the region predominately shifted from industrial production to the immaterial labour of the service sectors with public services playing a significant
role. Attempts to diversify the economy into higher skilled activities were promoted by One North East (2006), including support for renewable energy, offshore wind and electric vehicles, process and chemicals, digital, healthcare and life sciences.

The loss of manufacturing in the region over this period provoked the search for new regional particularities and new narratives of identity (Nayak, 2006). During the 1970s and 1980s Newcastle, “reasserted itself in the circumstances of economic adversity by transferring regional particularity from production to consumption” as Newcastle City Council worked to realign the local economy towards a recreation-led consumption culture (Vall, 2007:131). Here new sites of consumption and recreation were expressly privileged rather than using the arts and culture.

This is by no means an isolated process in the North East and the implementation of ‘place making’ strategies brought on by the process of de-industrialisation of the economy as a result of global process and national politics, are similar to those in many European and American former industrial urban economies. By the early 1970s, three main cultural trends could be identified in Newcastle: a masculine, heavy-drinking culture centred in working men’s clubs and public houses (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002); a small but significant jazz and beat music counter-culture which was embodied in the television show ‘The Tube’ (Vall, 2007); and the supporter’s culture which had developed in the town around Newcastle United Football Club. The predominant mythic form of locational identity amassed around the meaning of the ‘Geordie’ shifted over this period from one associated with masculine working class production in the shipyards and coal mines, replaced by a recreational consumption in the form of football, drinking and clubbing (Colls and Lancaster, 2005; Nayak, 2006). This played into the ‘party city’ label that Newcastle has carried ever since, where the hedonistic actives of drinking and clubbing, cultivated the image of Newcastle’s night-time economy, once classified as the eighth best party city in the world (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002).

The association of this image with a sense of culturelessness and unsophistication plays into the formation of AVF in 2003 as a means to try to gentrify the urban night, in the same way ‘culture’ was reimagining the image of the city more widely.41 Despite the popular vision of Newcastle as a party city,

41 See Hae (2012) for an examination of the process of nightlife gentrification in New York.
beyond AVF and regular independent club nights, the city had not produced any major dance music festivals or events. An attempt to stage *Love Parade*,\(^\text{42}\) in 2001, organised by BBC Radio One, on the Newcastle Town Moor was cancelled at the last minute, turning away 250,000 people because of logistical issues with the Newcastle City Council’s event plan, highlighting the city council’s inexperience in effectively staging and managing such large-sale events (Hetherington, 2001).

Decades previously there was a number of arts festivals that regularly took place in North East England through the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. Most have faded with little documented trace, but all bear cultural legacies and speak of the isolated cultural ecology of the region up until the late 1980s when the cultural economy of the North East entered a new phase. Five are worth mentioning here.

Two years after the Tyneside Cinema opened, the first Newcastle Independent Film Festival took place in 1969 with other festivals running regularly until the cinema’s provisional decline in the 1990s (Chaplin, 2011). Various film festivals have emerged and disappeared from Tyneside Cinema over its history, notably the Tyneside Festival of Independent Cinema. A prize presented to Indian filmmaker Anand Patwardhan at the 1982 festival was obscurely referenced by Homi Bhabha (1994:31) in his seminal book, *The Location of Culture*, as an example of the “disproportionate influence of the West as cultural forum”. The reach of Tyneside Cinema at this time can in part be put down to Sheila Whitaker who was Director from 1979 and established Tyneside Festival of Independent Cinema. Whitaker went on to have a successful career running the London Film Festival and later programming the Dubai International Film Festival (Jeavons, 2014).

The Ashington Festival was setup by the Mid-Northumberland Arts Group or MidNAG in 1969 and ran biennially until a slow decline after the 1984-5 miner’s strike profoundly disrupted the community from which it emerged. The Ashington Festival was led by George Stephenson (see Feaver, 2011) but produced by the MidNAG committee. The first event in 1969 was 11 days long with an estimated 6620 in attendance. Northern Arts, Ashington Council and PRS supported it financially. This initial event had a varied programme, with an emphasis on popularity. Music dominated but there was a programme for children, poetry and readings, local social clubs were involved as well as floral art

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\(^{42}\) *Love Parade* began in 1989 in West Berlin, an electronic dance music festival; it grew to host audiences of over a million people. It was cancelled in 2010 after 21 people died in a crowd disaster. The BBC staged a version of the event in Leeds in 2000 with up to 300,000 people (Radio One, 2000).
Figure 11 Two postcards from the North East Coast Exhibition, 1929, Newcastle. Images: Newcastle Libraries
demonstrations, art competitions, and even sporting events. At the centre of the programme were several exhibitions including by the Ashington Group.  

In Newcastle, coordinated arts events emerged from the City Council, such as the Newcastle Festival of Music and Arts that took place annually through the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. It featured large-scale historical exhibitions at the Laing Art Gallery, such as Dutch Landscape Painting (Wright, 1983) and Art for Newcastle: Thomas Miles Richardson and the Newcastle exhibitions 1822-1843 (Usherwood, 1984). There were also large-scale civic celebrations, such as the Newcastle 900, a festival in 1980 that celebrated the 900-year anniversary of the founding of the city.  

While events like the Ashington Festival celebrated community participation in popular arts, others such as New Work Newcastle (1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991) presented experimental artistic practice. Developed by Projects UK (later, Locus +), it showcased new performance art and live art working with Mike Collier at the Laing Art Gallery but supported by the Arts Council’s ‘Glory of the Garden’, national funding designed to address the inequality of resource allocation that favoured London over the regions. The very lack of historic visibility of these events was the subject of a project to reinvent them in 2009 by the curator Sophia Hao (2010).  

Further south, the Cleveland International Drawing Biennale began in 1973 and ran until 1996. It was a drawing competition that brought the work of many significant post-war international artists to Middlesbrough including Sol LeWitt, Claes Oldenburg and David Hockney. The relationship with drawing significantly

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43 In his report on the first festival Stephenson (1969:1) states the advantages to the town of Ashington in holding the event: “the advantages to the town of a large successful festival are apparent in terms of publicity and prestige…but this was only a groundwork against which to set more intangible gains: the enjoyment to be created for a large number of people; the sense of wellbeing to the mind and senses by the complex entertainments offered by a festival; need also to be reckoned.” The festival grew with each edition and peaked in 1983 when events were attend by over 40,000 people. Stephenson’s ethos was driven by enabling local participation to create a “people’s festival”. The broad programme was a mix of North East artists who had achieved national recognition and each edition had quota of “big-name international stars”. With the help of Northern Arts, the festival also commissioned new work by North East notorieties like Scott Dobson that went on to tour the region. The later programmes included music, primarily, folk, jazz and pop, along with talks and workshops, theatre and sporting events. Film was introduced as a new category in 1983. In editions in the late 70s and early 80s the BBC recorded programmes from the Festival for national broadcast.

44 A large-scale festival to celebrate 900 years of the city in 1980. The festival celebrated the visual arts in the city and the associated activities of a group of artists working with Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore, at the Fine Art Department, of what was then King’s College before it became the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and latterly, Newcastle University.

45 For more on the history of the Basement Group, Projects UK and Locus + see Grayson (2006); Tarbuck and Hearn (2007). New Work Newcastle 87’ toured to Manchester and Bradford.
shaped the collection and curatorial programme of MIMA when it opened in 2007, including developing international connections with museums such as The Drawing Center in New York. Other events on Teesside include the Billingham International Folklore Festival which began in 1962 and continues today.

During the Thatcher governments of the 1980s, ‘culture’, previously seen as a marginal and mainly decorative or prestige expenditure, began to move closer to the centre of policy-making as a potential economic resource. A more apparent international cultural economy developed in the North East with events such as the 1986 festival of Japanese culture in Sunderland or the large-scale military spectacle of the Sunderland Airshow (begun in 1988). A celebration of Japanese culture was produced to coincide with the arrival of a branch plant factory of the car manufacturer Nissan to Washington near Sunderland (Conte-Helm, 1989). The Japanese festival offered a symbolic gesture of cosmopolitanism and an openness towards other national cultures. The Japanese festival was deployed as a celebration of inward foreign investment, through presentations of nationalised cultural traditions against a background of international capital drawn into the region to utilise the under-employed and non-unionised skilled labour in the region. Events such as this emerge at the same time as greater instrumentalisation of cultural policy, something shown by Belfiore (2002, 2004) as the need for cultural organisations to demonstrate their value in terms of economic objectives as a response to Thatcherism.

### 3.3 Regional cultural institutionalism

A productive friction between differing scales and territorial frames has played out throughout the history of regional arts administration within England and the North East in particular. Prior to Northern Arts, it was the regional cultural arts administration by the North East Arts Association, founded in 1961, that led the way to the significant white paper ‘A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps’ by Jennie Lee in 1965. This paper led to the creation of a network of regional arts councils across England and is sometimes deemed the first UK cultural policy (Hewison, 2014). The role of Northern Arts and its later incarnation as Arts Council England North East is fundamental to the institutional cultural development of the North East (Vall, 2010), and later to the founding, development and ethos of AVF. A conscious application of the arts to enhance place was present in the founding of Northern Arts as Vall (2011:1) notes:
When the first Arts Council of Great Britain regional boards were established during the 1960s, metropolitan arts officials referred to north eastern England as a ‘cultural desert’. This unfortunate predicament was to be alleviated by the new ‘Northern Arts’ through a range of initiatives that would establish orchestras, theatres, art galleries and museums, in a concerted effort to modify the image of the area as being peopled by former miners and ‘hearty barbarians rolling their “rs” and blowing crude pipes’.

The logic of creating new organisations to remedy a perceived lack of culture in the North East that Northern Arts embodied is the beginning of what Vall (2011) identifies as a new contested cultural identity, between contrasting celebrations of a unique, so called, vernacular culture within the region and metropolitan concerns of high culture. This contested regional imaginary between the presentation of vernacular and metropolitan cultural identities is central to the conception of cultural identity and policy since 1945 in the North East (Vall, 2011). However, by the 1990s it is clear that Northern Arts had little faith in the state of arts organisations and events in the region, stating in a report that the region had “no large, independently, well-staffed organisations…too many artistically and/or managerially weak organisations; too many poor arts festivals” (Northern Arts, 1991 in Bailey et al, 2004). This was to change dramatically over the next two decades.

Post-war regeneration in Newcastle was historically focused around consumption, retail and leisure spaces, coming through the urban planning utopianism of T Dan Smith’s vision to create Newcastle as the “Brasilia of the old World” (Vall, 2001; Jeffries, 2002), with the Eldon Square shopping centre opening in 1965 (Fawcett, 2007). Alongside these developments on Newcastle’s Quayside, Time Square and The Gate were all based on recreation and the development of ‘playscapes’: spaces of pleasure-seeking consumerism, but all controlled by a small number of national and local retail and leisure chains (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). At its opening in 1986 the Metro Centre in Gateshead was Europe’s largest out-of-town shopping centre.

The need for structural and economic regeneration has been the defining policy agenda over this period and one of the central tenets and perhaps the most discussed has been the ‘culture-led’ approach applied to targeted areas of the region (Byrne, 2002). Newcastle and Gateshead’s process of cultural regeneration
became an emblematic case study of this process and it reoccurs many times as a success story showing the creation of a twenty-first century iconic urban landscape. Yet within this there has been little that considers festivals and temporary events and AVF is absent from this discussion despite its regional scale. At the base of this expansive literature is the mobilisation of cultural resources, symbolic reinvention and economic growth, through the consumption of culture as tourism. By 2008 culture, tourism, sport and recreation businesses and creative industries accounted for only 10% of regional employment (Government Office For the North East, 2008:81). There is however a long history to these developments. There has been a great scholarly interest in the culture-led regeneration of what became known as NewcastleGateshead including numerous cultural and arts policy reports and documents (Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council, 2002; Minton, 2003; SQW, 2007; One North East, 2010) and even more critical analysis (Byrne, 2002; Bailey et al., 2004; Miles, 2005a, 2005b; Chapain and Comunian, 2009; O’Brien and Miles, 2010; Pasquinelli, 2014). The majority of these examinations focus on critically evaluating the impacts of culture-led urban regeneration, taking in cultural change, identity, economic restructuring and tourism, and focusing on the ‘landmark’ or ‘iconic’ building projects and public art on the Newcastle and Gateshead quayside. These projects clustered around the river, appealing to it as a locus of identity through its enduring and seemingly little changing form.

The principal projects of this period included the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation’s 1996 lottery funded, £3.5 million public art programme on the banks of the Tyne and the Wear, called Art on the Riverside, and the Angel of the North that was put in place in 1998. Following this, the major strategic investments in new cultural venues and infrastructure (see Figure. 12), including the Millennium Bridge (opened September 2001, costing £22 million); the BCCA (opened in July 2002, costing £46 million) planned with no permanent collection, but envisioned as an ‘art factory’ and the SG (opened in December 2004, costing £70 million) a regional centre for music and new home

46 O’Brien (2013:90) traces the significant role of social science research in quantifying this impact to establish notions of value with regard to such strategic investments.
Figure. 12 Riverscape – a romantic view of Gateshead Quayside from Newcastle with BCCA, SG, the Millennium Bridge and the Tyne Bridge. Image: Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, A Decade of World-Class Culture (Cultural Factsheet), Cultural Regeneration & Tourism (NGI 2009: 8).
for the Northern Sinfonia. This moment of buildings opening hides the long process of planning and implementation, which in the case of BCCA and SG began around 1990 when Northern Arts identified the need for major centres for music and the visual arts in Northern England (see Martin et al., 2000). Notably, this is seven years before the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened, which triggered much of the rhetoric around cultural regeneration came after and was placed on top of these major investments in Gateshead. In total, expenditure on the redevelopment of the Quayside area cost £250 million, about half of which came from public expenditure, with significant funding for BCCA and the SG coming from the National Lottery (founded in 1996 and instrumental in the construction of these projects). These new cultural assets emerge as central resources for a new knowledge-intensive capitalism (Amin and Thrift, 2007).

These developments have often been held up as a template of the refreshing achievements of culture-led regeneration (e.g. Bailey et al, 2004, S Miles 2005a). Such policy aggrandisement often relied on dubious narratives of transformation. For example: “Such was the commitment to cultural regeneration in Newcastle Gateshead during the 1990s that it was seen to develop from being pretty much a cultural desert, to being a serious contender for 2008 Capital of Culture” (SQW 2007:4). Yet, as we have seen, there have been numerous pockets of cultural activity, if not well known. As noted by Usherwood (2007), long before the BCCA, Gateshead has had the Shipley Art Gallery since 1917. Likewise, in Newcastle, the Laing Art Gallery opened in 1907 followed by the Hatton Gallery in 1925. The idea that these cities were artistically and culturally in deficit was valuable for leveraging new investment. In many ways what was more important than empirical economic regeneration, was the establishment of a credible narrative that North East England, and Newcastle and Gateshead in particular, were places where culture-led regeneration could occur successfully, regardless of the specifics by which that success is measured.

Examples of best practice or case studies of success have played a significant role in the international spread of models of culture-led urban regeneration. As O’Brien (2013) argues, policy transfer from the United States to the UK, was

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47 For more on BCCA as ‘art factory’ see Martin et al., (2000) and Usherwood (2007). Sage Gateshead is titled after the locally based accounting software company SG - the sponsorship deal totaled £6m, one of the largest arts sponsorship deals (Usherwood, 2007). It is also worth nothing that it was neither Newcastle nor Gateshead that developed the region’s first contemporary art gallery, but Sunderland in the form of the NGCA, which opened in 1997.
based on the development of a 'Baltimore model' for regeneration. The 'Baltimore model' of regeneration used urban cultural spaces for leisure, entertainment and consumption (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993). Subsequently, the cases of Glasgow 1990 (Garcia, 2005) and NewcastleGateshead, became representative of this approach. NewcastleGateshead became emblematic, as the case study for this new mode of cultural economy.

Some of the theoretical background to these activities in the UK can also be traced to the work of the cultural consultancy, Comedia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the associated work of Francois Matarasso and Charles Landry. The arts sector began to develop arguments about managerial efficiency and economic benefits in terms of employment, tourism and image enhancement (O’Connor, 2010). These ideas were then recycled in the late 1990s by New Labour who adopted the principles and practices of New Public Management across all public policy, introducing the need for organisations to demonstrate a return on investment with a focus on the methods and practices of monitoring and evaluation (Belfiore, 2002, 2004; McGuigan, 2005; Lee et al., 2014; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2014). This filtered through into the approach for measuring success utilised by C10 and can be seen in the methodologies of the evaluation reports commissioned by AVF to evidence economic impact.

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48 Hajer (in Bianchini & Parkinson 1993:63) explains the influence of Baltimore on regeneration of Rotterdam's river front: “the harbour projects of cities like Boston, Toronto and especially Baltimore, are the archetypes for the regeneration effort in Rotterdam. They have had a visible influence on the overall approach to urban regeneration and on specific design features. Rotterdam’s festival ‘the City a Stage’, for instance, was a direct result of a lesson learned in Baltimore: if you are reorganising the city, let them know. The festival was meant to symbolise the new things to come.”

49 Newsinger (2011:122) expands the argument: “the development of the regional creative industries model...is best understood, not as a sea-change in cultural policy, but the continuation and consolidation of trends going back to the 1980s, in particular the deregulation of British broadcasting, the casualisation/individualisation of the audio-visual sector and the introduction of market systems of value into cultural policy. New Labour’s contribution was thus the consolidation of an institutional structure appropriate to the marketisation of cultural production in England and the upwards redistribution of symbolic and material power towards commercial interests.”

O’Connor (2010:32) writes: “John Myerscough (1988) developed a model for measuring the impact of spending on the arts; not just direct spending on employment (how many jobs per pound ‘invested’, as the new terminology had it) but attendance at arts events generated spending in cafés, restaurants and other local amenities. Myerscough was able to use a ‘multiplier effect’ which gave a figure for the additional employment and local spend generated by public investment in the arts. Myerscough’s work foregrounded the local economic impact of the arts. Local authorities in fact spent significant amounts of money on the arts, and they too were keen to assert the economic benefits of this spend.”
3.4 A new necessity: Tyne International

While much has been written about new infrastructure and buildings on the Gateshead quayside, less has been written about the preceding events in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These events led the way in opening up the possibility of further investment. The Gateshead National Garden Festival in 1990, Tyne International in 1990 and 1993 and the Year of Visual Arts in 1996 were all important for this reason, but also worthy of consideration in their own right. Such events were used as a means of justifying the need for new cultural infrastructure in the region, by highlighting the regional and national interest in the arts. As the preliminary feasibility study (Marchant and Nairne, 1993:2) for BCCA sets out:

Ultimately what could make the difference is not demography but recent history. The quality of much of the work presented at the Laing, the experience of the Gateshead International Festival and the visual arts programmes conceived as part of it, the earlier works of Projects UK and the Edge Festival, the past success of the Tyne International and Gateshead’s reputation as a model in the arena of Public Art, all point toward a unique position for the region.

This was a highly productive period for the creation of new artwork in Newcastle, with EDGE 90, Projects UK and New Work Newcastle, all commissioning new, primarily performance-based work (Grayson, 2006; Collier, 2015). Projects UK were presenting new work in Newcastle but they were also part of national networks and events such as Edge 88 in London (Tarbuck and Hearn, 2006). As with a number of new contemporary art biennials (Hal, 2010; Filipovic et al., 2010), Tyne International emerged into an urban environment where there was limited existing contemporary visual arts infrastructure, in the form of established galleries or museums showing new or contemporary work. It is clear that at this

50 Richard Grayson (2006) writes: “EDGE 90 (Art and Everyday Life in the 90s) was the best realised of the EDGE festivals. It was curated by Jon Bewley and Rob La Frenais and took place largely in a disused warehouse on Newcastle quayside designed by John Dobson, northern England’s pre-eminent 19th century architect. The commissioned work concentrated as much upon site-specific installation as performance based work and drew from an international spectrum of practices. Artists included Karen Finley, Bill Henson and Mike Parr, Black Market, Marina Abramović, Guillaume Bijl, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Isaac Julien, Cornelia Parker, Orlan and Richard Wilson among many others.”
time the region was considered to be lacking in cultural infrastructure. Northern Arts was central in identifying this lack, and instigating the significant investment in new capital projects as a result. As Bailey (et al., 2004:53) points out,

The key problem for the region was that it was simply not in a position to argue for substantial increases in funding for its general work in tackling such shortcomings. It was already one of the highest funded regions in the country. What it lacked, however, was the large-scale infrastructure of major facilities and producers that was enjoyed by other regions with major urban population centres.

Tyne International was created by from an arts development strategy of the Laing Art Gallery, led by Mike Collier who started working there in 1985 after a time at the ICA in London. As part of a national Arts Council programme to revivify regional museums with contemporary art practice, Collier was brought in to deliver the Glory of the Garden Strategy at the Laing. The proposal for Tyne International was to bring critical international contemporary art practice into Newcastle and into relation with the practices of locally based artists. 51 Tyne International happened as two large-scale, citywide exhibitions across Newcastle and Gateshead in 1990 and 1993. The events were represented by a group of high profile national patrons, including Norman Rosenthal, then Exhibitions Secretary, Royal Academy of Arts, London and Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate Gallery, London. Declan McGonagle, who had worked as the Director of Exhibitions at the ICA in London since 1978, curated the first edition, A New Necessity. It presented multiple, temporary public art commissions around Newcastle’s Quayside by international and local artists. It was a collaborative event, facilitated by Tyne & Wear Museums working with EDGE, Projects UK and TSWA and most importantly the Gateshead Garden Festival (Collier, 2015).

A New Necessity was planned to coincide with the National Garden Festival at Dunston, Gateshead in 1990, which also featured an exhibition Festival Landmarks

51 Marieke van Hal (2010:18) identifies four general objectives shared in the founding of new contemporary art biennials globally. These are also evident in the original aspirations of Tyne International to different degrees: “(1) to create a new platform for dialogue and exchange of artistic practices, hence stimulating the local or regional cultural infrastructure; (2) to gain a better image and visibility by integrating a peripheral city or remote region in a globalizing world and culture, formulating a new geography for international art; (3) to foster the local, global dialogue by internationalizing the local artistic circuit as well as the wider realm of related groups; and (4) to articulate or boost an international art economy, stimulate cultural tourism and potentially aim for urban gentrification or renovation.”
one of largest outdoor exhibitions of sculpture ever held in Britain (Usherwood, 2007). It was during the festival that the site that then became the home of the Angel of the North was identified for a large-scale public sculpture (Usherwood et al., 2000). The catalogue describes the purpose of the programmes relation to the region (McGonagle, 1990:4):

The aim of the Tyne International is to present a project every three years which: addresses within a regional framework, contemporary issues raised by International visual artists; stimulates critical debate within the North East of England; develops long term links between contemporary artists and the community; reinforces the role of the North East as a centre for excellence in the visual arts.

The exhibition sought to question a notion of public art that narrowly “emphasize physical location”, rather seeking to place it within the “social environment” where those that encounters the art works are defined as “participants in a cultural process already rather than being simply consumers of cultural products” (emphasis in origional, McGonagle, 1990:4-5). The programme contained a mixture of international artists, such as work by Nancy Spero, Dan Graham/ Jeff Wall and Gerhard Richter, and commissions by Newcastle, North East and UK based artists.

However, despite its own claims of independence (see Herbert in McGonagle, 1990) Tyne International was criticised for its relationship with the Garden Festival, writing in Art in America, Heartney (1990:55), argued:

Such festivals are intended to provide troubled communities with an influx of ready cash by transforming them temporarily into tourist meccas, but to American eyes, Gateshead’s National Garden Festival ’90 is a peculiar combination of church social, county fair and poor-man’s Disneyland…In the end, despite a number of provocative works, the exhibition falls short of its lofty aims. It is hard to suppress the cynical thought, observing the now-standard mix of international-circuit artists and local talent, that such shows have become formulaic exercises in just the sort of local boosterism for which the garden festival was roundly criticized.

The concept of the Garden Festival originated in post-war Germany when the rebuilding of urban centres highlighted the need for new inner city parks, gardens
and recreational green spaces. Long-term planning led to the creation of new parks whose inauguration was marked by a Garden Festival, the first of which, held in Hanover in 1951, coincided with the Festival of Britain.

Inspired by the success of German Garden Festivals, the Horticulture Industry in the early 1980s lobbied the then Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, to establish a programme of Garden Festivals in Britain. Heseltine was tasked with resolving the discontent evident in the social unrest of 1981 in urban areas such as Brixton and Toxteth. He saw Garden Festivals as a way of reviving urban economies by transforming derelict or contaminated old industrial property into developable land for new businesses and jobs (Theokas, 2004). The emphasis was resolutely on the economic growth and public-private partnership rather than the creation of new green public spaces. The inaugurations of Garden Festivals in Britain were directed towards the Thatcher government’s urban policy for a wider role of the private sector in inner cities, by the reintroduction property into the market (Theokas, 2004). The objective, in either the short or the longer term, was to focus renewed optimism in these areas with the aim of creating employment by attracting new investment.

The first Garden Festival was in Liverpool in 1984. Like each project since, it was conceived as the celebratory culmination of a large-scale land reclamation scheme, rather than as a construction of a new urban park or public space. Subsequently taking place in Stoke-on-Trent, Glasgow, Gateshead and Ebbw Vale (South Wales), the festivals were sited in post-industrial landscapes as a means of attracting investment capital directed at ‘regeneration’, they operated as an early model for the policy of culture-led urban regeneration.

Gateshead 1990 was the fourth Garden Festival in Heseltine’s scheme. The event took place on the site of a former gas works, that became derelict after the national grid was established to distribute North Sea gas as well as three other polluted sites that were reclaimed from abandoned coke and tar works. 61 of the 82 hectares of the Gateshead festival site were severely polluted. The event cost £37m of which £29m was spent on reclamation work and £8m for the operation of the festival - taking sponsorship into account the overall investment was over 50m - although the festival ran at a loss of around £3.5m (Theokas, 2004).

The Gateshead Garden Festival had an art programme called “Festival Landmarks ’90”, with over 70 installations (National Garden Festival, 1990). Commercial requirements overwhelmed, resulting in an assortment of designs and
intensions. Slater and Iles (2010:13) critically surmise the process, “The Garden Festival recalled the fanfare and populist cultural pageantry of the Festival of Britain, a motivation rebranding - treating urban problems as psychological rather than socio-economic”. Similarly, Theokas (2004) argues that unlike the German garden festivals, the British events were successful as festivals but did not have a strong record of post-festival economic legacy. As reclamation projects they triumphed - as festivals they were criticised for being too commercial as “catalysts for urban change” they were too gradual. However despite its lack of critical success, the Garden Festival and the associated programmes including Tyne International were taken as an indication that the region could manage and deliver large-scale cultural projects (Bailey et al., 2004:52).

A consideration of site, place and regional identity was arguably at the centre of the concerns for Tyne International. It was an approach consistent with the artist-led Basement Group in the late 1970s and Projects UK in the 1980s that were commissioning new temporary and performance works outside of the gallery infrastructure. As Collier describes (in Diserens, 1993:6):

Temporal art is being created because it can better address the social meaning of urban spaces… Artists are capitalising on opportunities to use the city as a public arena, extending to involve radio, television and newspapers, challenging social and political issues of ownership, gender and cultural identity.

In 1991, following the first Tyne International, the Garden Festival and informed by Glasgow’s well-received ECC programme, Northern Arts successfully bid in competition to host the 1996 UK Region of the Visual Arts. The Year of Visual Arts was the fifth in the series of year-long art form celebrations created by ACE in the run up to the Millennium with the title ‘Arts 2000’ (Bailey et al., 2004; Gee, 2006). The future for Tyne International looked secure in a triennial cycle running through to becoming the centrepiece of the Year of Visual Arts in 1996. However controversy around the second edition in 1993 brought the event to an abrupt end (Collier, 2015). The second Tyne International, titled Time & Tide (Diserens, 1993) invited seventeen international artists to make proposals for different spaces, concentrated within walking distance between Central Station in Newcastle and the derelict Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS) warehouse. There was also a film and video programme in partnership with Tyneside Cinema.
A considerable number of partners supported the event with finance coming from the Arts Council of Great Britain and Northern Arts, along with Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, the European Commission and various trusts and foundations. Artists commissioned were again a mixture of international and local including Rodney Graham, Christine Borland, Vito Acconci, Nan Goldin, and Wendy Kirkup and Par Naldi. The exhibition included a number of reconstructions of Vito Acconci’s early 1970’s work including the 1971/2 work Seedbed. This was Acconci’s infamous performance where he is said to have masturbated while expressing his sexual fantasies, hidden from view under a ramp built into the gallery floor over which the visitors walked. The content of the performance proved problematic for the Tyne & Wear Museum Services and the consequences of this were fatal for Tyne International (Collier, 2015).

The end of Tyne International as a regular event was not just the loss of a Tyneside-based recurrent large-scale international exhibition of contemporary art but also a lost legacy for the artworks and performances that were created during its two editions (Vincentelli, 2012). The impact of the event was still felt and the CWS warehouse would eventually become a luxury hotel refurbished by the Malmaison chain, rather than a new centre for contemporary art as those orchestrating Tyne International has envisioned (Collier, 2015). Yet this was still realised on the Gateshead side of the river in the form of the BCCA. Had Newcastle Council taken a greater interest in the events being locally developed at this point, BCCA might have been on a different side of the river (Collier, 2015). The success of Gateshead Council to develop new cultural assets is all the more impressive when contrasted with the failure of Newcastle Council to capitalise on the greater cultural status of the city regionally and nationally (Vall, 2011).

Tyne International was a forerunner of other public realm, urban, site-oriented contemporary art events that utilised unused buildings in the North of England such as Arts Transpennine and the Liverpool Biennial that began in 1999. The rhetoric of Tyne International was similar to that of many large-scale biennial events over the past 25 years, that of local engagement and international excellence (see Doherty, 2007) but in a way that explicitly sought to position themselves away from the art market. Although unconsciously, in many ways, the path that AVF developed from 2003 to 2012 filled the gap left by the end of Tyne

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52 Declan McGonagle was later the chair of Liverpool Biennial.
Figure 1.3 Gina Czarnecki, Spine, 2006. For AVF06. Image: Mark Savage. Courtesy of AV Festival
International. If Tyne International had continued through the 1990s and 2000s, AVF would have been shaped very differently or not at all. Where Tyne International failed to develop as an independent organisation away from the Laing Art Gallery, AVF succeeded in gaining independence from the Tyneside Cinema.

Similar to Tyne International, AVF presented work in the public realm outside traditional gallery spaces. For example, works at the Newcastle Civic Centre, Gina Czarnecki’s projection Spine (2006) (see Figure. 13) and Susan Stenger’s sound installation The Structures Of Everyday Life: Full Circle (2010). AVF also used the same unoccupied but iconic sites such as the empty auditory chasm of the Tyne Bridge North Tower, where Orshi Drozdik exhibited in 1993 for Time & Tide and where Will Schrimshaw installed the work Space Against Itself for AVF10, an acoustic environment that manipulated the soundwaves of the bridge. The tower was also where Attila Csíhar performed in AVF12 (see Figure. 4). \(^5^3\) AVF also worked on a similar partnership model to Tyne International, showing new work by locally based groups and agencies. AVF worked with Locus+ in AVF08 for Sonia Boyce’s For You, Only You at the Newcastle Castle Keep and in AVF12 for Jonathan Schipper’s Slow Motion Car Crash, presented in an empty shop in the main retail centre of Newcastle. AVF continually collaborated with artist-led project groups based locally such as CIRCA, ISIS Arts and NewBridge Projects as well as commissioning agencies such as Forma.

There was a 10-year gap between the end of Tyne International and the start of AVF and during this decade, the institutional cultural landscape of the North East began to change at an increasingly rapid pace. Capitalising on the attention brought to the region through the activity of the Garden Festival and the forthcoming Year of Visual Arts, along with the identified desire and need for new cultural venues in the region, Northern Arts developed ‘The Case for Capital’ policy. Tony Blair (leader of the Labour Party and MP for Sedgefield) launched the policy in May 1995. This coordinated strategic investment policy set out a ten-year vision for the arts in the North East to develop ‘world class’ cultural facilities, which led to the investment in BCCA and SG. Riding on the success of these new strategic investments and with the precedent set by Glasgow in 1990, the

\(^5^3\) The acoustic resonance of the Tyne Bridge Tower had also been utilised by Richard Wilson for his sculpture One Piece at a Time (1987), commissioned by Projects UK, where the sound of 1200 suspended car parts falling to the ground was collected and layered together over a five-week period.
Newcastle and Gateshead jointly put together a bid to become the European Capital of Culture for 2008. Glasgow’s narrative of success influenced the use of culture-led regeneration within the UK and across Europe (Mooney, 2004). While the narratives of possible transformation were significant, also of importance for Newcastle and Gateshead was the expansion of capital funding made available by the National Lottery (Cox and O’Brien, 2012; Hirshhorn, 2013). The bid for ECC was led by the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (NGI) who were funded by One North East, the Regional Development Agency, created by the New Labour government in 1999 to promote regional economic development as a ‘knowledge-based economy’. Arguably however, knowledge had also been at the centre of the industrialisation of Tyneside a century and a half before, concentrated in places like The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers founded in 1852.

### 3.5 Fragile regionalism

Given the consistent regional discourse surrounding cultural production in the North East, it is worth considering what is meant by this sense and expression of regionalism more generally. The Newcastle Gateshead European Capital of Culture bid failed in 2003. Liverpool gained the accolade, but developing the bid created a local leadership network, supported by key cultural and civic institutions (Griffiths, 2006). This had an important legacy that allowed AVF to grow dramatically in scale and organisational independence from its first edition.

The first AVF took place 6 months after the announcement of the failure of the ECC bid. The bid was evidently in the minds of those orchestrating AVF03, as an expressed aim for the first AVF was to “add value and demonstrate regional impact to enhance Newcastle-Gateshead’s bid for European Capital of Culture 2008” (Moore et al, 2004:2). During the process of bidding, Newcastle Gateshead was seen nationally as the frontrunner and at times, expected winner, and this moment instilled a confident and hopeful atmosphere within those working in the

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54 Research into Glasgow’s European Capital of Culture in 1990 revealed that culture was successfully employed as a tool for city marketing and regeneration, and the demand of the local community was balanced with external marketing of the city’s image. However, criticism surrounded the designation as there was little evidence of its contribution to local economic development, and the local community felt their culture had been devalued when it came to represent a marketable commodity (O’Brien 2013).

55 As Tallant (2013) acknowledged, Liverpool is now a city very much defined by what it culturally offers to visitors. See Cox and O’Brien (2012) for an assessment of the Liverpool approach to cultural regeneration.
cultural sector (Hirshhorn, 2013). It is because of this desire for regional cultural coordination (One North East, 2010) that AVF was envisioned as a regional event. The linking of three regional urban centres in the first AVF would not perhaps make sense outside the strategic and economic arguments being made at the time about regionalism, given their own strong individual urban histories, identities and relative distance apart (Hirshhorn, 2013). Notably, the links AVF initially made across the region were connected through local authority partnerships and funder relationships rather than partners based on art form relevance, or organisational expertise (Cook, 2012). Location was therefore the initial driving force to develop the cross-regional structure of AVF rather than possible artistic or curatorial relationships, which came later.

Advocates of regionalism within North East England have argued for a distinct relationship between territory and culture that is distanced from broader English conceptions. Raymond Williams (1976:265) in Keywords describes the regional as an attempt to assert a distinction of place and way of life through cultural specificity. This is determined by what Williams calls a “metropolitan-provincial cultural distinction.” The region is part of a greater whole, a related territory, and a site that might offer a position of relative inferiority to an assumed centre. To be regional is therefore to exist in some sense on the periphery of the perceived centre, but regions are slippery (Cresswell, 2013), they are differentiated from but connected to what is outside.

The idea of the North East as a coherent, self-conscious territory is a modern construction emerging through the twentieth century (Green and Pollard, 2007), with a particular relationship to visual culture (Fawcett, 2007). Its origins are in the collective imaginary of the industrial areas clustered around the coast and the three rivers of the Tyne, Wear and Tees. Furthermore, the North East region bears a relationship with wider imaginaries of the ‘North’ and ‘Northerness’ more generally (Davidson, 2005; Holt and McClanahan, 2013). In turn, the North East, located within that imagined North, is also viewed as a fluctuating, shifting and contingent creation, the product of social processes. It was the representation of the region in press and media in the form of regional broadcasting and Tyne Tees Television in the 1950s that constituted the territory in the sense it is commonly used today (Vall, 2011).

Newcastle has long been the major regional town since the Middle Ages, and it is also the largest English urban centre with the greatest distance from London.
This distance from metropolitan influence has encouraged a sense cultural distinctiveness. However, it can be problematic to think of a particular culture as occupying a fixed and bounded territory. The politics of critical regionalism has become a means of countering the flattening and universalising effects of globalised capital and modernity. Taken to an extreme degree of isolation, this can also manifest as reactionary and exclusive where associations with nationalism and xenophobia emerge. An alternative way of thinking about regions sees regions as entangled assemblages of flows, which refer to cultural routes rather than roots whereby connections between places, flows of ideas and practices serve to drive development (see Clifford, 1997). Therefore, in thinking about AVF as a regional festival, it is not the identity of the North East that it seeks to control of influence but rather in Amin’s (2004) conception of regions, the organisation asserts control over the networked flows in and out of place. This process acknowledges the fractured and fragile sense of regional conception.

A particular vision of North East regionalism has been characterised through a process of place marketing since the 1980s where the promotion of cultural distinction is linked to regional regeneration strategies and mirrored across Europe (Green and Pollard, 2007). In a sense, this is also strengthened by the long history of national spatial inequality across the UK, that has its origins in the inter-war period and the beginning of de-industrialisation in the northern industrial economies, followed by the growth of financial services economy collected in London and the South East. From the 1980s and 1990s market solutions to social and economic problems were privileges with an emphasis on simulating new sources of growth rather than on redistributing resources, where events such as the Garden Festivals were an intricate part. The regional policy of New Labour continued this growth-oriented policy led from central government through the Regional Development Agencies.

Although regionalism as an idea was central to how AVF was envisioned, the organisation has shied away from explicitly identifying with the ‘North East’ region as a whole, rather asserting its location within what it called the ‘urban centres’ of North East England, specifically, Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland (see Figure. 3). This made pragmatic political sense after the failure of the ECC bid and the failure of the Regional Assembly referendum in 2004 to galvanise greater governing autonomy for the region. Therefore, AVF fell in line with another political agenda, that of promoting the ‘City Regions’ of Tyneside
and Teesside, rather than a separate single North East region (Green, and Pollard 2007). The failure of the referendum perhaps highlighted the fragility and incoherence of a self-conscious regional identity, or at least a desire locally to confidently pursue greater autonomy.

AVF was the first arts festival to occupy multiple sites across a regional frame in North East England, rather than ‘representing’ the region in one place. The dissipated regional geography of AVF was historically seen as much as a unique advantage for the organisation as it was a logistical problem. As a distinctive feature of the organisation, the regional reach of AVF was viewed by ACE as a significant feature and ‘place’ was a central part of the reason for funding AVF (Batstone and Peace, 2012).

Regionalism and its cultural representation is fragmented and contested. While discussing how arts festivals in North East England created a sense of place, it was clear in the focus groups that there was no consensus that any regional arts festival could proclaim to represent regional identity. As the focus groups acknowledged there are no festivals in the North East that they saw as ‘representative’ of the North East as whole. Rather, the many arts festivals in the region collectively might present an idea of what a sense of regional cultural identity might be, albeit, incoherent, incomplete and fragmented.

There is of course a distinction between the ‘North East’ as represented through institutional cultural and economic practice, and a sense of regional identity itself. The regional narrative is shaped by numerous cultural representations of territory spread from bureaucratic or official to popular consciousness, of which AVF is entangled. Regardless of how a sense of regional territory is rhetorically framed, regionalism as a broader concept has been important in how AVF emerged and sought to project its practice. This is particularly the case for how the organisation thinks of itself in relation to other festivals and cultural centres, whether they are Glasgow International, Cortisane in Gent or Transmediale in Berlin or Sonic Acts in Amsterdam (Harger, 2012; Shatwell, 2012a).

3.6 The first AV Festival

The shift from coal mining to clubbing had a great effect upon the formation of local identities (Nayak, 2006). The ‘re-branding’ (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002) of Newcastle and Gateshead and the wider North East offered a new media image
which sought to overwrite the monochrome image of Newcastle as dreary post-industrial periphery with a bright and celebratory ‘Party City’: a place for heavy drinking and hen nights. This oft-repeated stereotype was embodied in the 2003 ECC bid slogan ‘feel the buzz’ (Nayak, 2006).56

Similar to the creation of previous events in the region such as Tyne International, AVF03 was a hybrid coming together of many interests that revolved around the relationship between regional cultural expression and economic development. This hybridity can be traced back to the individuals involved in the creation of AVF03, particularly Mark Dobson, the chief executive of the Tyneside Cinema and Jeff Cleverley, an independent music promoter. These two led contrasting groups with specific agendas that collided to establish the first edition of AVF. This productive friction set the parameters for the organisation and in many ways defined its position nationally.

The Tyneside Cinema had a long and established history within Newcastle and beyond as an important venue for independent cinema. It had a clear management structure and access to public funding. As we have seen, it also had a tradition in the 1970s and 1980s of producing internationally significant film festivals. Cleverley was part of the regional electronic dance music and club scene. The scene included a mixture of agents who came together as students and graduates of regional universities. The techno and house music scenes of the 1990s and early 2000s in Newcastle were characterised by an active but dissipated network of promoters, DJs, VJs, sound engineers, designers and club-goers, built on dedication and enthusiasm for music promotion and often but not exclusively with commercial aspirations. In creating AVF03 these two groups came together in a search for new forms of legitimacy, new audiences and status. Operating within quite different fields the two groups aligned their habitus and interests for a limited period to mutual benefit.

Cleverley was a promoter staging events in clubs and disused spaces in Newcastle, who was introduced to Dobson by Roy Pattinson, an arts consultant working on the rebranding of the Tyneside Cinema. Dobson was concerned with the need to reinvent the image of the Tyneside Cinema at a period when the organisation was struggling to attract audiences. Dobson was searching for a

56 This had particular gendered implications. The wane of traditional ‘masculine’ structures of culture and economy is synchronised with the rise of new cultural industries, nightclubs, festivals, restaurants and bars as part of the developing and mythologised, night-time economy (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002; Nayak, 2006).
means to develop a relationship with a younger, more dynamic audience, a group that essentially resembled Richard Florida’s (2002) archetypal ‘creative class’: young, tolerant, mobile and technologically aware middle-class, culture-savvy consumers. Aligning the Tyneside Cinema brand with the new technologies that were emerging in digital film at the time was one means through which the cinema could be reinvented. The creation of a festival with a digital and technological focus was a means for Dobson to align the Tyneside Cinema with emerging digital creative industries in the region (Dobson, 2012). The urban centres of the region were variously devoting political, civic and academic resources towards emerging digital creative industries. The digital and creative industries were one of One North East’s key areas of business support, with clusters in each of the region’s urban centres and also more widely, a policy agenda for European funding (Lee et al., 2014). Significant investment was being made through the programmes of Digital City in the Tees Valley and the Sunderland Software City as well as the creation of Codeworks, a regional organisation with the remit of promoting the digital sector. In general, the aims of AVF03 were extremely pertinent to the regional cultural strategy because they involved promoting existing digital media talents and businesses regionally, nationally and internationally as well as developing new skills and audiences from diverse backgrounds.

Cleverley introduced Dobson and Pattinson to the VJs and commercial video producers the Light Surgeons. This was a period when VJ culture was perhaps at its peak. With funding from ACE, they commissioned the Light Surgeons to create and stage a new work at Tyneside Cinema. The event sold out and Dobson was impressed with the local support for events that involved new digital technology to manipulate moving image. It was also seen as something relatively unique to Newcastle as a Light Surgeons event at Manchester’s Cornerhouse had not sold many tickets. This level of local support through the networks of Cleverley and his friends was central to the creation of AVF03 as it brought attention, audiences and production support. Following the success of these early collaborations with Tyneside Cinema, Cleverley suggested the creation of a

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57 In the North East in 2004 there were an estimated 5000 people employed in the creative industries generating £121 million to the North East economy (Skillset, 2004 in Newsinger, 2011).
58 A VJ is “an artist who creates and mixes video live and in synchronization to music” (Eskandar, 2006). Crevits (in D-Fuse, 2006) provides a useful overview of references associated with the history of VJ culture.)
Figure 14 AV Festival 2003 Programme Guide Cover
festival to Dobson as a way of continuing the growing momentum around the events they had been producing.

AVF03 did not have an explicitly expressed thematic, rather the programme was articulated in relation to loose terms, such as ‘urban culture’ with the ambition of promoting digital media, culturally and commercially within the region (see Figure. 14). At this point, there was no expressed relationship with the histories or practices of media art more generally; the relationship with ‘electronic art’ was developed later in AVF06 by Harger.59

AVF03 encompassed a relatively undefined set of cultural practices that broadly had some relation to ‘digital’ production, and the ‘live’ element of VJ culture. The programme of events was gathered together by incorporating existing, locally based, and touring projects. Many of the relationships were commercially inspired. Friends worked for free or saw an opportunity to develop networks and contacts out of working on the festival, across a range of technical, design and production roles. The festival was organised through a multi-agency partnership that included Tyneside Cinema, Middlesbrough Council, The University of Teesside and Sunderland City Council and onedotzero. While it did not take place in Gateshead, the Northern Music Trust that later became the SG was invited to contribute to the festival with an event at the old Odeon Cinema in Newcastle. The organisation of AVF03 can be characterised by something of a ‘thrown-together’ approach, with a reliance on Cleverley and his networks across the club scene, DJs and technicians and Dobson and his networks with funders, councils and universities. As a group of independent producers, Cleverley et al were able build a new sense of cultural relevance and purpose, deploying a mix of cultural and commercial knowledge as a form of habitus, built on trust and passion. Leadbeater and Oakley writing in a DEMOS report from 1999, titled The Independents, neatly sum up this approach (in O’Connor, 2010:46), where such groups:

thrive on easy access to local, tacit know-how – a style, a look, a sound – which is not accessible globally. Thus the cultural industries based on local know-how and skills show how cities can negotiate a new accommodation with the global market, in which cultural producers sell into much larger markets but rely on a distinctive and defensible local bias.

59 See Chatzichristodoulou (2013) for an evaluation of media art history in the UK.
It is worth noting that such a description could as easily be applied to those working through artist-led groups like Projects UK and those orchestrating Tyne International as much as it applies to Cleverley and his friends.

AVF03 was often dismissed by those involved with later editions of the festival as a ‘pilot’, but its significance should not be discounted. Although its staff, content and curatorial approach shifted over subsequent editions, the ‘AV’ name, the regional partnerships and the mixed art form approach all remained at the core of AVF as it was established in 2003.60 Along with this, AVF03 as a founding moment, a founding myth often plays into the audiences’ later imaginaries of the festival. In a number of interviews those involved with AVF03 reminisced fondly about the sense of excitement, scale and occasion that this new event in the city created. This is also, however, tinged with nostalgia set against the later developments of AVF as it grew into an independent organisation with a very different artistic ethos and intellectual focus. Most of those involved in AVF03 were not involved in later editions. This was even framed in one interview as a class-based appropriation of the cultural capital of those, predominantly seen as working class clubbers, who were the audience, participants and workers in AVF03, by a middle class, high-brow, professionalised cultural elite.

The energy of the participants who worked on AVF03, their particular ambitions and desire to produce something of success carried though into the later ambitions of the festival. What was evidenced to those with greater cultural authority was a public interest, appetite and desire for the work presented. What is important is not whether or not those who were involved in the festival have a deep historical understanding of the context of the media and events they were presenting but rather the agency of perceived novelty and its relation with the festival as a mode of cultural organising. ‘Critical mass’ and ‘sociality’ are both

60 It may sound counter intuitive given the festival’s title but AVF has very broadly not sought to aligned itself directly with a particular medium or artistic form. The audio visual of the title has generally been taken as one point of reference within a broader field of contemporary artistic and cultural practice. The ‘audiovisual’ as a conceptual terrain itself has never explicitly been explored as a subject within the festival’s programme. The choice of the title, was not an academic or theoretical placement but rather a marketing device to the give the festival a contemporary and popular brand. While this might negate the specific media and art histories of the ‘audiovisual’, it was a term used by those involved in the first edition of the festival, many of whom were involved professionally as sound engineers or technicians. See Chion, 1994 and Schedel & Uroskie, 2011 for more on the ‘audiovisual’. 
identified by Amin and Thrift, (2007) as keywords that encapsulate the work of urban assets in the new knowledge economies. These terms also embody the sense of atmosphere that AVF03 generated, significant, although difficult to define (O’Connor, 2010). Dobson (2012) offers an insight into the response to AVF03:

The first festival in 2003…was like pushing a snowball down a hill… At the end of it, there was a general sense, of relevance, energy, and in particular for the kind of stakeholders in the region, a sense that it was something quite exciting that they could be buying into… this festival was really important, because it had pieces of work that were in it that were the end of the night out for part of the audience and the beginning of a night out for the rest of the audience. So there was a sense that we had tapped into the kind of cultural experience that was different and could appeal in different directions.

From this position comes a strong sense of the possibility of this kind of event to embellish the urban nightlife of Newcastle, to gentrify it in many ways, offering new spaces for (cultural) consumption within the city.61 In talking about AVF03 to a local newspaper Cleverley (in Verma, 2003) also expresses the same sense of novelty for the audience:

We’re providing the level of entertainment that we want to and putting on a party that’s a sophisticated choice for modern Newcastle people. There are clubs everywhere, so we wanted to provide something that hasn’t been available before.

The sense that the festival had inadvertently occupied a new space of cultural consumption that was previously unavailable in the city brings together the somewhat contrasting new imaginaries of Newcastle as both a ‘party city’ and a ‘culture city’ at the same time. Despite this, following AVF03 in subsequent editions the festival moved away from explicitly developing events in the nighttime economy. Instead, it preferred to develop audiences through exhibition programmes, as a means of gaining credibility and legitimacy as a new arts organisation and with funders such as ACE.

After AVF03 there was a discussion about how the future of the festival could perhaps sustain itself commercially as an urban music festival. However, there was

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61 See Chatterton and Hollands (2002) for work on Newcastle nightlife more generally.
no faith in the organisation growing commercially through ticket sales alone (Dobson, 2012). At this point Dobson and Tyneside Cinema took control over the future of the festival and appointed Honor Harger as the new director with a remit to develop the next edition. Cleverley left the festival after AVF03. Following his departure Dobson and Harger needed to stimulate a new energy and necessity for the festival and they turned to the most obvious major source of funding in the region at time, C10.

3.7 Culture10: festival proliferation and festival fatigue

The process of developing the ECC bid encouraged the networking of cultural organisations, created new partnerships and developed competences in cultural planning and management (Griffiths, 2006). The connectivity and interdependence created through the bidding process, and the role of existing networks in shaping the cultural practices and institutions of the cultural sector in the region was seen by those involved as a significant development for the region and something to be capitalised upon despite the loss of the ECC (Matarasso, 2000; Griffiths, 2006; Comunian, 2011). The progress, potential and profile, drawn from the bidding process of the ECC led to the creation of C10 as a means of continuing the ‘momentum’ of the approach to cultural event organisation within the region. C10 was to be a programme of events and initiatives designed to attract visitors to Newcastle, Gateshead and the region, modelled on Glasgow’s ‘Festivals Unit’ setup in 1987 to coordinate Glasgow’s ECC programme in 1990 (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993).

One North East (2010:7) outlined the rationale for this approach:

Between 1999 and 2010, NewcastleGateshead began to reinvent itself as a thriving, cultural place to live, work, learn and visit, in part, by using the experience of bidding to become European Capital of Culture 2008. NewcastleGateshead became the ‘bookies’ favourite’ to win and when that didn’t happen, there was naturally disappointment felt by stakeholders, local people and investors. However, key funding partners of the Bid decided to push ahead regardless through the development of the culture10 programme – the development of a festivals and events programme over a 10 year period to continue to build the cultural reputation of NewcastleGateshead and the North East, raise aspirations, stimulate creativity, inspire business
confidence, create jobs, attract visitors and establish Newcastle Gateshead as one of the leading cultural destinations in the UK.

The £45m C10 programme was launched in October 2003 a month before AVF03. The seven year project, which was rather incongruously sold as a “decade of world class culture” ran until 2010 and was funded by a partnership of One North East, The Millennium Commission, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, Arts Council England, Tyne and Wear Partnership and The Northern Rock Foundation and was managed by the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (NGI), a tourist destination marketing agency (SQW, 2007).

The goal of C10 was to gain the perceived benefit of what would have been possible via the ECC but through dissipated means. The stated aims of the programme of C10 was to Support the development of the Newcastle Gateshead brand with four objectives (SQW, 2007:5):

- To deliver a regional economic impact
- To support projects outside Newcastle and Gateshead
- To support a small number of big projects each year
- To use the existing and emerging capital infrastructure

While the ECC bid may have been that catalyst for establishing C10, the principle driving it was the development of the tourist economy in the region. It was also in 2003 that One North East, along with all the other national RDAs were given the strategic remit for tourism. This reallocation followed the New Labour government’s review of tourism following the significant negative impact to the industry of the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak (One North East, 2010).

The C10 programme was emblematic of the use of the festival as an instrumental policy under the guise of economic development with the aim of what Quinn (2005a: 931) calls “civic boosterism”; the attempt to reinvent urban identities through shared cultural experiences created by political and urban elites. As it is stated in a regional economic strategy document in 2006 (One North East, 2006: 103):

Festivals and events, including those developed and promoted as part of the C10 programme also utilise the strengths of the region’s cultural base to
promote positive messages to visitors and equally importantly to provide the local population with opportunities for economic and social growth.

C10 is representative of the excitement about the theoretically catalytic effect that festivals could have to bring tourists, drive regeneration and claim public time and space for shared celebrations. Yet as Quinn (2005a) notes, empirical evidence for these effects is limited.

The Richard Florida (2002) concept of the ‘creative class’ is an obvious and much discussed reference here and one that was repeated hopefully in an interview relating to the founding of AVF (Dobson, 2012). Significantly, following the Florida mantra, One North East saw festivals and events playing a major role in attracting new capital and people to live and work in the region, as opposed to a mode of expression for those already resident. It was a central part of the Regional Economic Strategy (in SQW 2007:17), where it was expressed that:

By developing a vibrant cultural environment the region is able to attract more highly skilled, creative and innovative people. These are exactly the kind of people who, with their ideas and imagination, drive productive companies and lively economies.

The creative class concept itself has come in for much criticism (Montgomery, 2005; Brenner et al., 2012), particularly for presenting a dubious relationship to urban growth (Markusen, 2006). In relation to AVF, this positions the event as worthy of investment by councils and other cultural institutions because it offered a particular friction to attract and retain the so-called ‘creative class’, so desired of by those attempting to refashion regional economies as knowledge and service economies. The creation of an authentic ‘creative’ subjectivity and its binding relationship with a city like Newcastle was central to the ethos of the emergence and scale of events such as AVF and the enthusiastic doctrine of the era. This is seen quite clearly in another report from 2003 called Northern Soul, written by Anna Minton (2003:30) and published by Demos and RICS:

The degree of mobility amongst today’s creative and knowledge workers, which was unknown a generation ago, is another crucial factor. They are increasingly prepared to up sticks and move in search of a better quality of life or quality of place. Compounding this mobility, the arrival of broadband
communication has removed the traditional geographic disadvantage of the north-east. Creative professionals, many of whom only need a laptop and a connection, can now work from anywhere.

But above all it is the distinctive identity and soul of the Newcastle and Gateshead which appears to bring these incomers to the region. In conversation, many give the impression that their location decisions are as much based on these softer factors as on professional considerations. In some ways, choosing where to live is becoming akin to choosing what to wear: an emotional decision, rather than one based purely on property prices or job prospects. Choosing where to live is a core statement of personal identity and of how someone wishes to be perceived by others.

Such reports were part of the rhetorical surface that swept over much of the long-term changes in the region, which presented the narrative of success around culture-led regeneration in the region, without much in the way of empirical research, essentially designed to re-affirm the views of the policy maker. Much of the rhetoric of culture-led regeneration appeared long after the production of new events and organisations was underway or complete. What is often maligned in these ‘success stories’ is an anxiety towards who such developments benefit, and who might be maligned in the process (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002).

These processes of differential mobilities play into the ideology of neoliberalism. As Stallabrass (2004) argues, celebrated contemporary art furthers the interests of the neoliberal economy, it breaks down market barriers, dissolves existing local solidarities and cultural attachments in a continual process of fluid hybridity and mobility. The enthusiastic rhetoric of mobility and easy movement of an amorphous, mobile, educated cosmopolitan elite, is drawn in by the appeal of the ‘authenticity’ of the urban, what Minton (2003:27) calls its soul: “Places with soul are seen as ‘real’, with a live sense of their gritty past, combined with an ability to tell a confident story about the future.” Reflecting this Dobson (2012) commented that:

If there was a mission, unspoken, in the back of our heads in 2003, it was about doing something that would say that this region is credible, and makes interesting work and takes interesting artists seriously and be modern, I think that’s a really important message.

Part of the appeal of an event such as AVF was the potential for it to connect with
discourses of cultural practice and contemporary art that were ‘outside’ and in doing so bring in the gentrifying forces of people and ideas from elsewhere. For some, this sentiment is not seen as contested. The focus groups tended to view such processes as an important part of the formations of their urban cultural environment, developing a place to live where they felt connected internationally.

Privileging certain mobilities has the potential to give the artistic practice shown something of an esoteric atmosphere. Bringing artists and artworks from outside ran the chance of it appearing elite, exclusive or even intimidating for those who were not engaged in wider international art discourse or who feel alienated from it. This was something Dobson was very aware of and sought to position AVF so it could appeal to, “people on the number 6 bus” (Harger, 2012).

Here are two colliding mobilites at very different speeds, the relatively immobile ‘local’ groups who are determined by the paths of public transport, the bus network, and an external art elite who are flown into town for the festival: the problems of cultural mediation emerge through this friction.

The initial approach of C10 was to invest in existing cultural activity, primarily in the form of one-off events produced by existing cultural organisations in the region, but it also setup an umbrella programme to market an annual programme of activity and it initiated and managed a number of new festivals. Beginning with a small programme in 2004 called Hotbed, the C10 programme grew in 2005 under the generic title Alive and included five individual festivals: The Festival of the Rivers and the Seas, the Festival of Sport, the Festival of Music, the Winter Festival, and the Festival of Visual Arts. Later thematic years were titled East ’08 with a on focus culture from China to respond to the Beijing Olympics, a return to a more localised perspective was offered by the 2010 title, Place. It was this period between 2005 and 2008 that is often referred to by the arts professionals interviewed for this research in the region as the moment of regional ‘festival fatigue’, where seemingly there was a new festival every week and every form of cultural event had in some way been ‘festivalised’ (Vincentelli, 2012; Cook, 2012).

Utilising the term ‘festival’ in presenting programmes was seen as a way of appealing to the positive moral, discursive framing of the festival process, a way to advocate that the artwork presented was democratised and vernacular rather than elite. Each C10 event was timed to coincide with exiting projects and make use of existing venues, including the newly built icons of the BCCA, SG and the Quayside river-scape (see Figure. 12). The programme focused on supporting
events that sought to influence the regional image and gain significant national press attention. These included the Tall Ships Race (2005), the BCCA Spencer Tunick (2005) photographs of 1,700 naked participants in various positions along the Newcastle and Gateshead Quays and a large-scale Yoko Ono exhibition at BCCA in 2008-9 (Vincentelli, 2012). As well as these, C10 also established a NewcastleGateshead Winter Festival, supported the Evolution Festival, a popular music festival on the Quayside, and Design of the Times 2007 (DOTT 07) a design initiative set up by The Design Council and One North East to encourage regional design practice, that held a showcase ‘festival’ also on the Quayside.

While attempts at the spectacular and promotional dominated, the C10 programme also supported smaller, more critically engaged art events that were locally produced but which sought a national reach. For example, the 2005 Navigate Live Art programme was curated by Tracey Warr, who had previously curated an edition of Edge 90 in Newcastle, and included performances by André Stitt, Sachiko Abe, Karen Finley amongst others. The three-day programme of live art took place in BCCA and on the Subnitz, a boat temporarily docked on the Tyne. The event linked to the performance art work of Newcastle-based artists and groups in 1970s and 1980s. Navigate was produced by Forma, BCCA, amino and Michelle Hirschhorn (who later worked as a project manager and producer on AVF06 and AVF08). Another notable example was the 2008 Locus+ project with Japanese artist Tatzu Nishi, whose work had been well received at the Liverpool Biennial in 2002. Hotel Monument was to be a luxurious hotel room to be constructed at the top of Grey’s Monument in the centre of Newcastle. However, despite significant investment in the project it was eventually curtailed as the local planning authority rejected the final application.

The steady coordinated funding provided by C10 allowed organisations to gather a level of resources unprecedented in the region for festival events. As C10 was a collection of different funding sources brought together it also meant that organisations could build events through a relationship with only one funder rather than needing to develop individual relationships with many different funders. Significantly, however, C10 funded events and not organisations.

The Northern Lights Film Festival started at the same time as AVF in 2003, both coming out of the Tyneside Cinema and at one point sharing an office as well as a number of staff who crossed between the organisation in production and project management roles. Northern Lights ran successfully until 2010 when
funding and staffing problems led to its quiet demise, not unlike many of the previous film festivals to have emerged and declined during the history of Tyneside Cinema. The lack of organisational resilience and unclear funding climate after the end of C10 and the closure of ONE following the election in 2010 saw the end or significant descaling of many of the initiatives created during the previous years of festival abundance.

AVF was one of the only festivals in the region to exist before and after C10 in the region and also to become an independent organisation. Other smaller scale events such as EAT Festival, an event celebrating regional food production and VAMOS, celebrating Latin American culture, continued but on a reduced scale with limited ACE funding. Berwick Film & Media Art Festival began in 2005 and benefited from C10 also survived this period. Here again, the location of Berwick Film & Media Art Festival within a regional periphery was significant to its survival, as was the role played by its long-term director, Melanie Iredale who had previously worked on Northern Lights Film Festival and went on to work at Sheffield Doc Fest.

The relationship between AVF and C10 was significant as the ethos of the C10 project contributed to the shape and content of AVF in 2006, 2008 and 2010. Following the positive responses to AVF03, it was an obvious choice for Dobson to work towards making AVF a regular event. In 2004, the most likely source of funding to achieve this was building a relationship with C10 and ACE. This meant aligning AVF with two clear agendas, the ACE priority of ‘artistic excellence’ and the C10 focus on regional promotion.\(^{62}\) With an alignment to the values of C10 came a need to develop the event into something with a specific ethos towards scale, to be of national and international significance. C10 significantly invested in AVF, contributing £190,000 for AVF06 and £150,000 for AVF10, in both cases slightly less than half of each edition’s total budget. This also meant that AVF did not have a direct funding relationship with either the Newcastle or Gateshead Councils, because these councils’ events funding were channelled through C10. The relationship with Middlesbrough Council was instrumental in the maintenance of the organisation for the year in between festival editions, before AVF had regular annual funding from ACE. Middlesbrough Council provided the only funding for the festival in between the festival editions AVF06 and AVF10. This

\(^{62}\) Artistic excellence, itself is a contested term, particularly in light of the 2008 McMaster Report. What excellence is and how its value is measured is open to speculation.
allowed the director to remain in post and develop content and relationships for future festivals.

Harger (2012) sums up the attitude that surrounded the cultural programming associated with C10 and the expectation around how AVF should respond:

The direction going into 2008 was ‘bigger’, ‘better’. That was very much the logic of the North East in the mid 2000s, ‘lets do everything at scale’, ‘lets throw in huge amounts of money’ - this was before the financial collapse. There was a real expectation that we should take 2006 and make it more amazing, the screening programme bigger, the performance programme more amazing.

It is clear AVF was successful in responding to this agenda, seeking to position itself as the largest festival of its kind in the UK. AVF06 included 13 exhibitions, 29 screenings, eight performances, 17 talks, symposia and workshops, nine new commissions, and four launch events with an estimated total audience of 34,142. These statistics were then advanced in AVF08 where the festival contained 12 exhibitions, 37 screenings, 18 performances, 18 talks, symposia and workshops, 14 new commissions, four launch events and three radio stations, reaching 25 per cent more people, totalling 43,038 (Abbas & Ferrier, 2006; Audiences North East, 2008).

Despite the significant investment in new cultural initiatives and infrastructure, there are few independent festival events of perceived national or international significance in the region. This is in stark contrast to comparable nearby cities in Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Edinburgh or Glasgow, that, while all have iconic cultural buildings, also have large-scale festivals. Despite the sense of ‘festival fatigue’ often felt by those working in the cultural sector during this period, according to British Arts Festivals Association research (2008), the North East has one of the lowest per capita number of arts festivals in the UK. The multiple festival approach of C10 attempted to address this perceived lack of large-scale national cultural events in the region, but never managed to establish new independent festival organisations. It was identified in 2007 by an evaluation into the C10 programme, that “aside from Great North Run and Belsay, the region
does not have any nationally recognised annual/biennial events and this should be addressed” (SQW 2007:6).

At this point C10 sought to redirect the strategy towards “fewer, bigger and better events and identifying some specific high profile annual events, ideally using iconic locations” (SQW 2007:7). However, this approach never materialised, and following the end of the C10 programme the festival landscape of the North East was looking as limited as it had prior to the beginning of C10 with the notable exception of events such as AVF that in the interim period had managed to establish themselves as independent organisations.

The aim of C10 was to capitalise on the momentum of the ECC bid, as a smaller scale version of the ECC, spread over ten years rather than concentrated in one. The C10 programme in many ways mirrors the criticisms directed towards the ECC, particularly with regard to what could be called the mythology of success that is presented as empirical evidence towards impact. O’Brien, (2013) argues with regard to the Liverpool ECC year, that such investment achieves a re-mythologising of place, the generation of a new narrative, rather than an empirical structural change in a region. In the same way, the use of multiple photographs of the Angel of the North to represent the new identity of the region, or pictures of the quayside with the BCCA and the SG in the background, is a visioning process of change and success, it is part of narrative generation (see Figure. 12). The impacts this has on the long-term structural economic issues that define the region are, however, unproven.

In another sense, C10 lacked originality at the policy level, by applying a bland re-working of existing festival models (such as Winter Festivals, see Finkel, 2009) into a local context, that did little to define the region’s distinctiveness. It would certainly back up the assertion from Waterman (1998) that arts festivals developed for place promotion only encourage ‘safe’ art forms. The failure seems to be in the application of the symbolic economy to establish any events that have either a pretension to universality, despite the rhetoric of producing ‘world-class’ events, nor are they significantly given over to local specificity as to unite them with a uniqueness and novelty, or any notion of ‘authenticity’. The funding of events and festivals by C10 rather than organisations only created a short-term gain, as there was limited strategic investment in cultural knowledge or artistic

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63 Belsay Hall and Gardens in Northumberland managed by English Heritage produced a regular series of contemporary art exhibitions including the popular Stooteries exhibition in 2000.
excellence in the long term, with limited development of lasting organisational structures in the region to contain or benefit from the expertise brought into the region.

At a deeper level C10 offered an example of a misapplication of the post-traditional festival process through a conflagration of festive atmospheres (conviviality and belonging), with their positive moral framing as a means of improving ‘quality of life’ and the economic imperative of bringing new capital into the region. Ironically, one of the reasons for the success of the Quayside regeneration may also point to the less successful C10 programme. Bailey et al (2004:61) argue that the economic rationale was not central to the success of the BCCA and SG developments:

…these developments were underpinned not by economic imperatives, but by a will and determination on the part of local arts activists and politicians to provide the area with the cultural facilities that it deserved. It may well be the case that the cultural imperative is the crucial ingredient here. That, in other words, these developments appear to be having such a marked impact on the NewcastleGateshead area precisely because economic benefits were not their primary motivating force.

C10 was heavily underpinned by direct economic objectives through promoting, dubiously self-proclaimed, ‘world class’ tourism events, but without the means to bring into the region or foster substantial new artistic leadership. This shows an over determinism for the process of festival as an instrumental device, because of the seeming need to be ‘connected’ locally to place. An appropriate means to achieve the aims of C10 might have been to focus more directly on attracting conferences to the region, where the new iconic cultural buildings become temporary hosts for trans-national knowledge flows in the forms of international conferences.

In seeking to develop the urban culture economy, the activities of C10 fit within what many authors have identified as the city mobilised as a cultural good to be enjoyed and consumed (Zukin, 1995; Amin and Thrift, 2007). Whether investment is in the aesthetics of the urban landscape such as the Garden Festival and the Gateshead public art program, or investment retail and leisure complexes such as Eldon Square and the Gate in Newcastle city centre, or the multiple festival programmes of C10, or the place marketing campaigns of NGI, there is a
careful and elaborative process of image construction that eliminates social or architectural deterioration from view. Place as an imagined territory, and an affirmative image of that place becomes central to this process. One North East’s (ONE 2006:108) Regional Economic Strategy is testament to this ‘place-making’ approach:

Place: High quality place making will support the goals [of the report] through providing the physical infrastructure necessary to attract and support businesses, attracting and retaining highly skilled, creative individuals, connecting labour markets with areas of opportunity, and building on the region’s competitive advantage in terms of quality of place.

What schemes such as C10 attempted to do in order to achieve this was place a spotlight on new cultures of creativity, consumption and spectacle. Of course, what such an approach also does is conceal or neglect the everyday city and those existing on its physical, social and economic peripheries. The festivals of C10 by no means sought to celebrate the urban everyday, or even the economic everyday of the region. The vast majority of North East residents do not work in the cultural or creative industries. Such processes offer an example of reification, where attempts to create new urban subjectivities through cultural investment and change to urban infrastructure but leave social relationships intact (Brenner et al., 2012: 93). It is important to recognise that approaches to urban regeneration can be inherently socially exclusive. As McGuigan (1996: 99) suggests, urban regeneration can articulate the interests and tastes of the “postmodern professional and managerial class without solving the problems of a diminishing production base, growing disparities of wealth and opportunity, and the multiple forms of social exclusion.” This is perhaps reflected in some of the anguish participants in AVF03 felt, as the festival was taken away from them in the process of developing an independent organisation led by the Tyneside Cinema.

The proliferation of arts festivals in the UK and more widely, of which C10 was a significant example, is also connected to greater ease of physical movement and increased tourism. Along with this, a potential reaction against the advancing mobilities associated with neoliberal globalisation is driving a perceived loss in ‘authentic’ places and distinctive locational identity as a loss of aura. The economic determinism of cities competing for investment, tourism and the development of service and knowledge economies, is dependent on bringing in tourists and
migrant workers. The demands of the experience economy rely upon mobility and circulation, where authentic culture is often considered to only exist and can only be consumed in spaces away from where people live. Zukin, (2010:20) outlines this in terms of the representation to authentic spaces, which can only be viewed from the outside, from a distance. She writes, “mobility gives us the distance to view a neighborhood…to compare it to an absolute standard of urban experience, to judge its character apart from our personal history or intimate social relationships.” This positioning, what could be called a tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011), is central to thinking through the contemporary festival. Here authentic culture is seen as something that happens elsewhere, it takes place outside and as such can be marketed and sold within symbolic regimes. We can align this with what Crang (in Minca and Oakes, 2006:59) calls the re-mediation of tourism. In a similar way to the change in social relations between the traditional and post-traditional festival process, the position Crang sets out does not see tourism as “some fall from grace – from unmediated contact into a distanced gaze, but rather about circuits of media laid on top of each other, tangled through each other, and functioning because of each other.” Touristic modes of encounter are a central component of the contemporary festival and they are made up of multiple types of mediation. As Crang identifies, there has been an increasing interrelation between tourism and the everyday, where tourist modes of apprehending and engaging with surroundings overlap. Tourist activities are performed in our daily lives. In AVF this might be how festival audiences, even those familiar with Newcastle wander between the unknown venues following the AVF produced maps, often observing the city as much as the artworks within it.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the initiation of AVF within an ecology of relations that characterised the cultural economy of North East England during what has become known as the Golden Age of cultural investment in the region. Set against the background of globalisation and de-industrialisation, the complex interrelationship of cultural and economic activity during this period shaped the form and content of AVF in 2003 and the organisation’s development through the subsequent decade. Culture, broadly interpreted, has played a significant role during the transformation of the economy in the North East, from production to consumption (Pasquinelli, 2014). The beginning of strategic cultural programming
in the region dates back to the North East Coast Exhibition of 1929. However, it was during the 1960s that the development of regional administration for the arts began a process of rectifying the region’s deficit of cultural organisations when compared nationally. As the work of Vall (2011) shows this process has been built on an idea of cultural identity constructed in reaction to a perceived lack of culture. This was built against the historic trend of underdevelopment in cultural infrastructure in the region. At the point of the regional arts council’s instigation unlike every other region of the country, the North East did not have a symphony orchestra. Northern Arts was created as an alliance of local authorities to change this. The result has brought about new investment in the arts that has been characterised by a tension between a sense of cultural institutional deficit and local cultural practice. The process led by Northern Arts, but linked to national agendas successfully articulated this need for a new cultural institutionalism in the region.

During the 1980s and through the 1990s a new rationale for investment in the arts emerged, influenced by a US style cultural policy focus on urban renewal based on property capitalism, as economic regeneration and neoliberal intercity competitiveness turned to the expression of culture as a means of articulating urban and regional distinction. Within North East England festival events such as the Gateshead Garden Festival in 1990 and two editions of Tyne International, as well as the arts council Year of Visual Arts in 1996 began to build national attention on the region that fed into the failed bid in 2003 to become ECC, and major investment in new arts buildings on the banks of the river Tyne (see Bailey et al., 2004).

The hybrid character of AVF as a regional, multi-sited event, showing a mix of art forms and working with many organisational partnerships is emblematic of the period. An excitement for the artistic potential of new digital technologies infused with the rhetoric of the creative class, sought to invigorate a new field of creative industries that would economically and socially transform the region’s fortunes. Critics of AVF may argue that a group of established, cultural professionals was able to appropriate the passion and energy of a network of amateur practitioners to aid the reinvention of the Tyneside Cinema and direct the practice of AVF towards other more instrumental economic agendas around the ‘digital’ economy. Or that AVF itself is a bastion of elite cultural production and consumption within North East England that asserts a relationship with its locale for the benefit of a
privileged audience who seek an engagement with cosmopolitan art culture. However, presenting the history of AVF as a form of tribalism between a ‘local’ community of practitioners who setup AVF and then ‘lost’ control of it to the Tyneside Cinema fails to take account of the multiple agencies that came together to form the new organisation. It was the creative friction between these two groups and the confluence of their desires to present a progressive sense of place that ultimately unified their ambition. Beside ACE, the role of local government and the leading role of Sunderland and Middlesbrough Councils and other civic partnerships across the region were essential in formulating the scale and territory of the organisation. AVF03 may have contributed to the ‘party city’ image of Newcastle, but it was the prospect and potential of the organisation to contribute to the ‘culture’ city image of Newcastle and Gateshead that drew in the ACE public funding for AVF and ultimately has supported the organisation ever since.

A central tenet of the story of AVF between 2003 and 2010 is how the region was sourced with an abundance of funding for celebratory festival events seeking to present positive images externally. Backed by the Regional Development Agency, C10, the organisation setup to capitalise on the momentum of the ECC bid funded AVF for three editions in 2006, 2008 and 2010. This coordinated support allowed AVF to grow in status and legitimacy, building effective relationships with ACE and many regional arts organisations. The investment of C10 in festivals more generally therefore fits within the wider narrative of festival deployment in Europe since the 1980s, driven by competitive economic objectives, concepts of ‘regeneration’ and especially local authorities seeking to offer a means of ‘place promotion’ (Delanty, 2011). The multi-million pound investments of C10 supported the profile-raising of the newly built BCCA and the SG, yet its legacy in developing a long-term resilient festival programme in the North East was limited. The activities of C10 suffer the same critique as the Quayside development. Whilst these events provided a focused stretch of grandiose revival along the river, there was limited regional trickle down.

AVF was the only festival to exist prior to C10 and emerge from this period as an independent festival organisation able to raise funds and sustain its activity successfully after the closure of C10 in 2010. Many other events such as the Northern Lights Film Festival were not able to support themselves effectually without the coordinated investment of C10. In addition, AVF has benefited from
the lack of other major arts festivals regionally, with no regular contemporary arts festival or biennial, no sustained film festival or comparable music events. Despite the short-lived abundance of festivals and events funded by C10, AVF has been able to consistently articulate a clear and unique position in the region because there are very few other organisations that might seek to operate in a similar territory, artistically or geographically.

The C10 programme was about supporting the new infrastructure investment, rather than creating new lasting festival organisations, which goes some way to explain why other large northern cities have larger scale biennial festivals with million-pound plus budgets such as Manchester International Festival and Liverpool Biennial. Investment in AVF for C10 was about showcasing the new buildings (Batstone and Peace, 2012).

The position of AVF over this time is not straightforward; on one level, AVF was shaped by the desire to foster a vision of Newcastle and North East England as ‘creative’ in relation to an emerging digital economy. On another level, the initial reliance of AVF on a group of passionate local producers counters the suggestion that it might be a ‘top down’ policy product designed to meet the strategic objectives of the local authority. Yet in aligning with C10, AVF inevitably became infused with the enthusiastic rhetoric of a regional cultural ‘renaissance’.

There are two important things to take from this. Firstly, that the initiation of AVF and its growth through this period is because of the actions of a group of cultural mediators who were able to successfully navigate and energise both a North East-based audience for the events they were producing but also align these with the wider rhetoric of cultural economic development in order to gain investment. AVF was therefore by no means immune to changes in national government, politics or policy, yet its later focus on ‘artistic excellence’ allowed it to build a coherent relationship with ACE that ultimately secured its survival beyond the end of the Labour government in 2010. As with any other cultural organisation, AVF through this period, fought for resources and prestige, seeking to increase national and international attention as a means of ensuring continued investment.

The second important point is the interrelationship and co-creation of festival events through the interaction between the producers and consumers of culture. Festivals such as AVF only emerge and are ultimately legitimated if an audience participates in them; they are co-produced. It was a sense of relevance and
demand for a specific type of cultural encounter in the form of new nightlife events that led to the creation of AVF and it has been the continued support of an audience in attending that has allowed AVF to continue with a sense of relevance locally. The roles of local audiences as advocates has been central to the narrative of success played out in the descriptions of culture-led regeneration in North East England (Vall, 2011). The result of this process was a sense of local ownership and pride for the regeneration projects (Bailey et al., 2004), but it is unclear over time, if this will benefit all social groups. Also, owing to the iconic infrastructure of the BCCA, the SG and the Millennium Bridge, the Quayside is tangible evidence of regeneration, enabling local people to reassert their collective identities and reinvigorate the relationship between cultural, place and personal identity (Miles, 2005a and 2005b). Given the North East retains the highest rate of unemployment in the UK, it might appear as Usherwood (2007) points out that culture regeneration may have changed the identity of the region from “coal city to cultural capital” but in doing so the long term structural economic difficulties of the region have to some extent been masked. We are thus left with a very fragile history of an incoherent and scarcely self-conscious region.

AVF was never explicitly developed with an economic imperative in mind, but this inevitably became entangled within the objectives and rhetoric of culture-led economic regeneration. In a sense, what this has created is a remediation of the open and dynamic relationship between territory and culture. It is problematic to read culture as tied to bounded land, or that cultural identity is in some way a hierarchical attachment of layers. Such bindings of identity and place negate the flows of culture that make and transform regions such as North East England, and are relationally contingent upon multiple connections, channels and flows of which a festival such as AVF makes a small contribution. The concern is therefore with the way that different institutional forms have either limited or facilitated the control of material and cultural resources, either restricting or allowing the widest possible exercise of symbolic and material power (Newsinger, 2011).
4 Modes of practice: territory, mediation and coal fired computers

Action should remain a surprise, a mediation, an event.

Bruno Latour (2005: 45)

The frame is what establishes territory out of the chaos that is the earth. The frame is thus the first construction, the corners, of the plane of composition. With no frame or boundary there can be no territory, and without territory there may be objects or things but not qualities that can become expressive, that can intensify and transform living bodies.

Elizabeth Grosz (2008: 10)

Newcastle...where hell glows from the forges sang skies that are dark and heavy with particulates, an entire firmament collapsing with the weight of its accumulated carbon crust, to reign down on the town below in smutty chunks as big as factories.

Alan Moore (2010)

4.1 Introduction

From the interviews with festival directors and curators over the course of this research, a consensus emerged that the role of the curator, and by extension the organisations they represented, should be to work with artists, to do more than simply observe and represent the identity of a place: its changes, memories, histories and landscapes. Rather, artists should be encouraged to work towards intervening within place. This was generally articulated in the following sentiment: a newly commissioned artwork should not be about the city, area or site of the festival. Rather, the artwork should operate as an event in these territories, it should be active in the process of the creation of both the festival and its locale (Collard, 2012; Biggs, 2013; Carey, 2013; Domela, 2013; Fijen, 2013; Shatwell,
For AVF, this has been to think about territory, art and place together. The organisation positions itself as a mediator of these concerns, as an actor that appeals at times towards an ideal conception, a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk process where arts organisation - as festival or biennial - comes together with curator, artist, location and audience (see Block in Hal, 2010). As has been shown by considering Tyne International, events that are “governed by the organising principle of place” (Doherty, 2004b), reflect an ongoing development in artistic practice and its theorisation from a conception of site as a physical, bounded and fixed thing to a discursive, fluid more open process (Krauss, 1979; Kwon, 2002; Hawkins, 2012). What is important to consider in such a process of mediation, is to take account of how it territorialises.

One such interview was with Paul Collard (2012), the Chief Executive of Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE), a UK national agency set up in 2005 to coordinate creative partnerships with schools. For Collard, drawing on his experience of directing festivals as instrumental processes towards economic and social development, the arts festival can operate as a fundamental and particularly effective means to create a visible articulation or vision of place. This conceptualisation could loosely frame the post-traditional festival into two categories in relation to place, those that challenge (de-territorialise) a dominant narrative or imaginary of place and those that reinforced it. For those who were involved in AVF, creating such a festival offered a particular challenge to the dominant perception of urban and regional identity in Newcastle and the wider North East (Collard, 2012; Dobson, 2012; Harger, 2012; Shatwell, 2012a).

This interpretation is emblematic of the instrumental perception of post-traditional festival outlined in the previous chapter, where the festival is deployed as a generator of symbolic capital, as local authorities seek to rebrand their cities. This perspective views the operation of the arts festival as agent of locational identity, seeking to affirm either existing or alternative narratives about place. This view points towards one possible rationale for how a new organisation such as AVF sought to gain legitimacy locally, and further afield, by expressing and

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64 See Hawkins (2012) for a useful discussion of the overlap between contemporary artistic practice and geographical theories of place.
65 Collard has a background in culture-led, urban regeneration developed through working in the North East, where he had been director of the UK Year of Visual Arts in Newcastle between 1993 and 1997. Following this, he was also the director of the International Festival of Arts and Ideas in Connecticut, USA and briefly a trustee of AVANE between September 2007 and April 2008.
Figure 15 YoHa, Coal Fired Computers, 2010, part of AVF10. Image: yoha.co.uk/cfc
promoting itself in opposition to the dominant and imagined public perception of its location.

This chapter examines this idea, to address how AVF as a new cultural organisation developed its own mode of practice shaped by social, cultural and economic relations with its particular locality. At the centre of this discussion are questions of agency, legitimacy and authority. This challenges any consideration of cultural practice that legitimates notions of singular or authentic locational identities, by seeking to present the contingency, mediation and the always-in-process understanding of the relationship between culture, identity and place.

Beginning with a discussion of the motifs of mediation and territorialisation, the chapter traces the specificities of the processes that AVF used and was subject to, that defined its organising principles and ethos. This includes the regional territorial frame, the thematic curatorial approach and the practice of artist commissioning. The aim of this is to use the concepts of mediation and territorialisation as a lens to consider how the AVF model or mode of practice, in particular the deployment of a thematic curatorial model was established and maintained. This is to examine the degree to which AVF as an expressive cultural force can be said to consolidate (code) a territorialised identity or destabilise (decode) its locational identity. This examination takes a particular perspective from what could be called the 'view from above', by drawing on interviews with previous AVF directors and curators. In doing so, it examines the role of the director in negotiating issues of place in relation to that of the artist and the arts festival. Building on this, the chapter examines one project commissioned by AVF10, YoHA’s Coal Fired Computers (300,000,000 Computers – 318,000 Black Lungs) to show how this is played out in practice (see Figure. 15). CFC is explored as metaphor for how AVF more widely operated within mediating and territorialised processes. YoHa’s CFC machine or apparatus, presented at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle, brought together a complex but inter-related set of things, bodies, surfaces, movements, materials, histories, voices and processes. The work connected coal extraction in North East England to industrial disease compensation data, and the relocation of coal industries to China and India through the allegorical display of a blackening, sickened sheep’s lung. The chapter shows how the genesis and context of the commission within the framework of a thematic subject explains the particular mode of practice of AVF with regard to locational identity.
4.2 Mediation and territory

The starting point for this chapter is once again social and material relations brought together at the convergence of art, festival and place. AVF, as mobilising process, is taken both as a practical mediator creating relations between artist, curator, audience, and more widely as a conceptual (re)mediating process within ideas of materiality, technology, site, space and place. In this sense, mediation is taken as a vital process, something that shapes and transforms life (Kember and Zylinska, 2012), a process within wider media ecologies and systems (Fuller, 2005). This is an attempt to attest to the messy and relational multiplicity of mediations presented in AVF and festival processes more generally.

The concept of mediation is an epistemological principle, linked to a Kantian understanding of the categorical conditions of knowledge, which argues that there is no direct cognitive apprehension of the world, thus we know or understand the world only by using concepts or representations (Costello & Vickery 2007). Socially, modes of mediation can be broken down into different space-time registers, as types of interactions, with different senses of co-presence. From the work of Thompson (1995), we get three types of mediation, the face-to-face interaction, as dialogical encounter predicated on co-presence, is contrasted with other mediated and quasi-mediated interactions, over space and time. Here, mediated interaction is through a technical medium, a letter or a telephone for example, where the interaction is still dialogical, but there is a distanced presence or a quasi-mediated encounter which is monological in character, such as reading a book or listening to the radio (Thompson, 1995). AVF, and festival as process more widely complicates this neat tripartite description of mediated interaction. As in the process of festival there are a multiplicity of mediations that act upon each other.

Mediation is sometimes critically taken as a ubiquitous process in the contemporary social world (Livingstone, 2009), where the role of new media and communications technology has remediated everyday, particularly, urban life (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Crang et al., 2007; Crang, 2012). As a result, co-present human relations have been envisioned as altered and sometimes irrelevant, although as we have seen with the rise in the number of arts festivals a desire for co-presence is by no means in decline.
Mediation, as it is used here, is taken not simply as arbitration or an act of connection, the process of intervening between two separate entities. This is how it is generally deployed in media and cultural studies (Anderson, 2014) where our communications systems and the organisations that manage them are embedded with symbolic and cultural beliefs and values, from the emergence of printing through to contemporary networked new media (Thompson, 1995). Instead, this perspective draws on a relational and non-representational understanding, influenced by Latour (2005:39) where, “mediators… transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry”. Meaning is not simply ‘given’, not something fixed that is external and out there to be discovered but rather meaning is actively produced and reproduced. Mediation is therefore an open and on-going process, where it transforms the constituent parts or all elements in the process. Mediation occurs through multiple channels and forms where entities affect one another in and through relations.

Mediation is a woven and heterogeneous process, acting across scales and space-times (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Adey, 2009; Kember and Zylinska, 2012; Anderson, 2014). The term ‘mediation’ can be variously deployed at differing points of intersection as both mediating subjects (such as artists, curators, audiences) or as conceptual processes. The cultural encounter predicated by AVF needs to be placed in context, as it is always experienced through a constellation of mediating forces, in linguistic, social, discursive and technological forms. Therefore, encounters with artworks or the sociability of events created by AVF are subject to several orders of mediation, where mediation is a relational process that involves translation and change in the articulation of the consistencies, coherences and temporary stabilisations of the festival encounters. In a practical sense, it is important not to view the director or organisation as simply a passive intermediary between the artist and audience. Rather, the meanings, flows and effects of an exhibition or festival event emerge though the constellation of mediating processes of artworks, discourses and sites. The curator cannot be offered as the sole agent in the process of mediation undertaken by the organisation. The curator is a central node in the process of mediation but dissipated within wider networks of power, knowledge, authority and legitimacy.

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66 This runs against any notion of mediation as representation as identified by Lash and Lury (2007) in Adorno’s culture industry where mediation could be seen as a means of representation in terms of domination and resistance.
These networks extend over multiple scales depending on the relative mobility of those involved, for example, the majority of AVF’s audience comes from within North East England, whereas the artists involved generally have established mobility in wider international networks.\(^{67}\) Here the spatial power geometries of processes of globalisation are at play (Massey, 1993; 2009), where some groups are more mobile and move more comfortably than others.

There are numerous orders, modes or planes of mediation at work within AVF but this chapter places specific emphasis on how mediation relates to permanencies, codes, forms and fixing that are encompassed within the varied uses of the concept of territorialisation. Processes of mediation operate in and through space, they are therefore in some sense territorialised, they are processes that can create, destroy, join or expand frames. The term territorialisation and its constituent processes of formative re-territorialisation and disruptive de-territorialisation have a number of interrelated uses, in both spatial and non-spatial senses. It is worth briefly elaborating on these to think through how the processes of arts festivals are territorialising in different ways.

How festivals territorialise is a central mode to understand them (Sassatelli, 2011; Waterman, 1998 and Hobsbawm, 2013), a conception of territory and its making and remaking is therefore important for our understanding of AVF and its particular geographies. Territory, writes Elden (2013: 17):

> cannot simply be understood as the political-economic nation of land, nor even as a political-strategic sense of terrain but instead comprises the techniques used to - among other elements - measure land and control and manage terrain…Territory is not simply an object: the outcome of actions conducted toward it or some previously supposed neutral area. Territory is itself a process, made and remade, shaped and shaping, active and reactive.

This conception of territory builds on ideas of assemblage and de/re-territorialisation in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), concepts that are directed towards understanding fluid and fractured subjectivity in contemporary capitalist cultures. This is characterised by acceleration and access to information,  

\(^{67}\) It was concluded in the AVF08 evaluation report that “the majority of audience respondents were from the UK (91%). Of these 53% were from Tyne & Wear, 18% were from the Tees Valley, 6% from Northumberland and 5% from County Durham. There was an increase in inbound tourists amongst audience respondents from 22% in AV Festival 06 to 26% in AV Festival 08…63% of artist respondents were international artists.” (Audiences North East 2008:6, 19)
culture, commodities and the disruption of traditional temporal-spatial experiences, the homogenisation of places and the purported challenge to cultural difference. Deleuze and Guattari deploy the term on all scales, and level of life, including micro-organisms, nation states, languages, societies and bodies. Territorialisation is the process that creates and maintains these frames; it is the connection of forces that produces distinct wholes. Within these processes, power and authority is exercised and is mediated between differing scales and agents.

People may assemble to form territorialised festival spaces where they collectively experience the same event, but, at the same time, those who have the authority to call an assembly in the first place govern these collective encounters. However, there can also be re-territorialisation, within these events as people make space for their own expression and response or by choosing to attend a different festival or no event at all. Here there is a relational matrix of power at work. AVF may be able to determine what cultural encounters it deems are important at a particular moment, by showing a particular film. Yet a potential audience could occupy the space in an untended way by sleeping through the film or deciding to ignore this entirely by spending their time elsewhere.

Taking the concept of territorialisation literally, the process of arts festival is always enacted in a particular place, within some notion of territory. Following De Landa (2006:13) processes of territorialisation “define or sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories.” The mobilising process of the arts festival employs some defined notion of territory, whether it is a city, a region, a building, a nation, or group. This territory is often, although not in AVF’s case, denoted in the title of the festival. The assemblage of festival events, artists, audiences and artworks that made up AVF are also territorialised or territorialising entities each defined by particular spatialities and a possible set of boundaries. Organisations such as AVF operate in chosen buildings and across particular sites, from gallery rooms to cinema spaces to car parks. The jurisdiction of their legitimate authority coincides with the physical boundaries of those spaces (De Landa, 2006). Additionally, with the process of festival this authority tends to be deployed in a clearly bounded, short-term, temporal segment as well. In AVF’s case, events take place across multiple sites, sometimes simultaneously, within concert halls for one evening, films are shown in the cinema for a set duration or exhibitions fill gallery
spaces for a month before the artworks are dismantled or moved on elsewhere, all of which are negotiated with the authorities that operate those venues.

Related to the spatial definitions, de-territorialisation refers in its Deleuzian conception, to non-spatial processes that increase the internal homogeneity of an assemblage, what De Landa (2006:13) calls “sorting processes”. Essentially de-territorialisation is the breaking of habits, rules, traditions, conventions and customs and re-territorialisation is the tightening or formation of them. These sorting processes are directed towards, fixing, defining and protecting stasis, or excluding, segregating, or occluding those that may destabilise authority or endurance. For example, processes of migration that might increase or decrease the ethnic homogeneity of a region (De Landa 2006). Thus any process directed against this, which destabilises or transcends spatial boundaries or increases internal heterogeneity, can be considered de-territorialising.

This is not just about physical, embodied movement. Media technology has been historically blurring the spatial boundaries of social entities by eliminating the need for co-presence, where networks can form over greater distance than co-presence allows (Thompson, 2005). Importantly, festivals tend to work against these forms of dissipated communication by privileging co-presence between audiences, artworks, events or objects as mediated encounters. AVF gathered people physically in place, but utilising different modes of mediated presence was something the organisation played with, artistically and practically. For example, developing online and local radio stations in AVF08 and AVF12 or producing YouTube and Vimeo channels containing video documentation of AVF events or interviews with artists. Using these technologies has allowed AVF to engage audiences all over the world without their co-presence in AVF territories.

Processes of cultural globalisation are central to a conception of de-territorialisation, which is sometimes aligned with a weakening or dissolution of the connection between culture and place. This reaffirms one of the arguments seen in the previous chapter for the rise in the number of post-traditional festivals. Here festive affects could be seen to counter processes of local alienation. The intensifying conditions of spatial de-particularisation, homogenisation and locational un-specificity are seen to exacerbate the sense of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life, as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari and many others (Papastergiadis, 2000; Eriksen, 2014)
This is to consider globalisation as intensified, but uneven, flows of people, commodities, finance, information, images and technology as much defined by inclusion, as exclusion (Appadurai, 1996). Here de-territorialisation is a process of globalisation characterised within the flows, networks and assemblages that make up relational geographies of dynamic objects, concepts and movements that are not bounded to any spatial site, such as a territory, which is sometimes called topological thinking (Lash and Lury, 2007; Castells, 2010; Fuller & Goffey, 2012a; Lury et al, 2012). De-territorialisation here refers to the reach of ‘global’ connectivity into localities, how what happens on the outside effects the inside, how the ‘local’ is penetrated by distant events and forces which unsettle what might otherwise be viewed as firmly in place or fixed and vice versa (Gibson-Graham, 2002; Martin, 2012). Broadly, de-territorialisation has affinities with the idea of the ‘disembedding’ of social relations. This is played out through the motion of cultural subjects and objects and the processes of gathering and dispersal with which AVF can be characterised by. However, this is not necessarily to be considered as damaging or as a process of loss; a process of re-territorialisation always accompanies de-territorialisation. Rather, this is to assert that culture is always in motion, it is simultaneously de-territorialised and re-territorialised in different parts of the world as it moves (Legg, 2011). As cultures and cultural objects move between places, they gain new re-territorialised relational meanings in the sites they are displaced or projected into. The weakening of the authentic identity of place through globalisation has perhaps been overstated. As with AVF, attention has shifted to what the possible relation to external culture might be ‘appropriate’ or ‘possible’ in a particular place.

It is this process of de-territorialisation that has been ascribed as one of the rationales for the rise in the number of post-traditional festivals, through the perceived loss of authentic expressions of place and belonging (see Boissevain, 1992). Yet the dissipated subjectivity in contemporary capitalist cultures allows for the fragmented, and many cultural tastes to be performed and deployed within the festival frame. These questions were played out through the history of AVF, where the organisation has consistently considered how it relates to regional identity, particularly in its desire to avoid and challenge dominant cultural stereotypes such as post-industrial decline or the somewhat unrefined Newcastle party city tag.
Excluding artist-led walks, the AVF12 programme included three artists living within North East England: Richard Fenwick, Sneha Solanki, and :soviète:france:. The remainder of the 22 exhibitions, 38 film screenings and 15 concerts were developed with nationally or internationally-based artists, filmmakers or musicians. Even artworks commissioned and produced in response to a ‘local’ context emergedguard or related to the much wider context of contemporary art practice, the geography of which has changed significantly over the past three decades.

As Massey (2005) has insisted, places are always the local distillation of global processes. These processes of conjunction that de-territorialise can produce potentially emancipating outcomes by opening up tightly-bound, fixed geographic identities with the fluidity of relations in a more nomadic mode, where novel and unexpected encounters can occur (Kwon, 2004). The dynamics of de-territorialisation deployed in AVF also work towards the articulation of subjectivities and locational identities. Again from Deleuze (2004) we get a notion of the self as multiplicity; identity as a partial incomplete assemblage always in a process of becoming, never fully stable. Just as territory is not given, but constituted, locational identity is likewise entwined in processes of mediation and continual production. The mediation we see here is the habits, customs or rules that are strictly defined in a territorialised space - remediating or challenging these doctrines; adopting rejecting or appropriating them offers a process of re-territorialisation. It changes the defined forms of behaviour and identity that are active within a territory. As Lewis Biggs (2013) writes on what makes a successful contemporary art biennial commission:

An important part of this is otherness / difference – the challenging quality that takes us out of ourselves sufficiently to make us want (and enables us) to talk to strangers about the experience. When our own sense of identity is unsettled by something that we have not previously experienced, we turn to strangers (as well as friends) to help re-establish our own sense of identity, and those strangers get taken into our (cognitive) world.

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68 Also see Gibson-Graham’s (2002) work on the interrelationship between such territorial scales.
69 Similar to Stuart Hall’s terms where identity can be thought of as a “production” always incomplete, in process and importantly consisted within and not outside of representation (Boullata 2008:29). For all sense of self is an ongoing process of production, not through correspondence with some pre-existing exterior condition and its maintenance or re-articulation but rather through a questioning or remediation of inherited cultural practices.
For an unknowing member of the public to walk into an AVF exhibition by chance could create an encounter that feels familiar, comfortable and reassuring or that does not suit, that is in some way alien. It is important to remember that the festival is a territory and within its boundaries, certain subjectivities and identities are more comfortable than others. It is not that there is something inherent in the self of the individual who feels alienated or unwelcome within the festival spaces, it is merely that there are set of practices, habits, and rules associated with the spaces a festival such as AVF operated within (galleries, private views etc.) to which some are more accustomed than others.

Up to now this chapter has argued that processes mediation and territorialisation are both central to our understanding of the contemporary arts festival and specifically how the festival relates to locational identity, what follows is a detailed examination of this through a discussion of the emergent practice of AVF.

4.3 Thematic curating and the artistic ethos of AVF

One particular means of tracing the processes of mediation at work through AVF is by following how the organisation has deployed a ‘theme’ for each edition as rhetorical framework that sits across curating and marketing. This framework sometimes referred to as the title or subject of the festival played a significant role in the organisation and development of AVF and is a valuable lens through which to examine the territorialised processes of cultural encounter it created. It was the thematic approach along with the regional geography, a reliance on partnerships and an art form segmentation that was consistently identified throughout the research interviews as the most important defining elements of AVF. Providing a thematic voice to unify the festival programme created a redirecting of attention away from objects (artwork mediums) to subjects in the presentation of cultural encounters.

It also works toward a conceptualisation of artistic, social or political necessity, by providing a sense that the organisation is in various ways connected to the community of practice to which it responds (Tallant, 2013). For AVF the thematic was central to how and where it operated and how it conceived of its practice and relationship with its locale. The use of thematic exhibition curating or programming is not uncommon, and themes are often deployed in many contexts across film festivals (traced to the 1970s by Valck 2008) and exhibition practice, in
contemporary art biennials and other temporary festival events. Biggs (2013) provides an insight into how the thematic can operate:

A title, theme or subject is a good way for a biennial to reach out to people who work in the media, and the many other individuals who are not particularly interested in art, in order to give them a handle as to how to become engaged with art. Nevertheless, as the number of people who feel at ease with contemporary art grows, the need for titles, themes and subjects diminishes (along with the need for 'professional' curators).

The aim of this section is not to trace the particular origins, specific motivations or authorship of individual curatorial or artistic decisions but primarily to examine the wider forces shaping the need to make certain decisions within this thematic mode. It is possible to characterise a process of refinement over the course of the first decade of AVF from a relatively open and all-encompassing approach of programmatic inclusion to an ever more authorial and centralised approach as the organisation evolved, reflected and built on the narrative of its own history. Much of the development of AVF over this period responds to the conditions of the post-traditional arts festival outlined in the previous chapter. This was played out in a microcosm of regional partnership politics and control over identity and symbolic relations between individual actors and organisations within North East England. This approach seeks not to examine directly how AVF was related to regional identity but rather to examine how AVF mediated the flows in and out of the region, instead of asserting control over a specific territory, AVF controlled multiples sites by managing what and who flows, in and out.

The first festival, AVF03, was presented without a specific thematic focus. Rather, it sought to present an eclectic programme of digital culture in a broad sense. The new director, Honor Harger first used the thematic as an explicit curatorial and marketing device for the second AVF in 2006. Harger, an artist, curator and academic originally from New Zealand, moved to AVF after a position as the Webcasting Curator at Tate in London. She directed two festivals, AVF06 with the theme of *Life Like* and AVF08 titled *Broadcast* (see Figure. 1). Harger went on to work as a guest curator for Transmediale 2010 in Berlin and later as Artistic
Figure 1.6 AVF06 Marketing Posters in the AVF archive. Image: Peter Merrington
Director of Lighthouse, a digital culture agency in Brighton and the Executive Director of the ArtScience Museum in Singapore. The subsequent themes developed by the following director, Rebecca Shatwell, were *Energy* for AVF10 and *As Slow As Possible* for AVF12. Both of their roles in relation to the small scale of the organisation meant that they were involved in all aspects of the festival production, from curating the festival programme through to fundraising, managing marketing and press, overseeing technical production and many other practical aspects of festival production. This undoubtedly shaped the possible practice of AVF where greater divisions of labour in larger or more established organisations might allow for greater attention to be paid to specific aspects of the organisation.

The use of a thematic to organise the festival programme in AVF06 was explained by Harger (2012) as a requirement for authorial clarity:

> As a curator I work better if I have a framework to work into. I was conscious that no matter how we structured it, the festival was going to be incredibly diverse. It was not artform specific, we were working with visual art, we were working with music, with education, workshops, some performance as well and there needed to be something that knitted it together more than the stuff has something to do with technology which to me doesn’t seem to be a thing…I felt we needed an organising principle.

It is possible to trace various rationales for the initial implementation and continued use of the thematic curatorial approach as a means of mediation by Harger and subsequently Shatwell, each with its own particular territorialised frames and scales. These included:

- Post-medium art history and the expanded concerns and practice of contemporary artists.
- The particular practice of other festivals that the early AVF sought to align with and drew inspiration from, such as ARS Electronica (founded in 1979 in Linz, Austria) that was programmed thematically for each edition.
- The demands of relating AVF to a specific conception of an imagined public audience through marketing and press management.
- The requirement to present a ‘cohesive’ programme after collecting and connecting the festival programme through many collaborating organisations and incorporating already existing or planned events.
The professionalised role of the ‘independent’ curator that both Harger and Shatwell followed to a certain extent and the need to define their own authorial voice as a result.\(^{70}\)

In addition, one of the most significant rationales which was relatively unique in relation to AVF was a desire to connect the thematic and curatorial totality of the programme of each festival to a particular regional imaginary, and to make a connection to the regional economy and identity. This saw the thematic deployed as a discursive attempt to define the programme of the festival with ‘local’ specificity and relevance, and simultaneously offer clarity in presentation to the totality of the event that might otherwise appear disparate in conventionally bounded modes of practice, via art form for example. Although at different times AVF articulated a relationship with art forms such as ‘electronic art’ or ‘digital art’, it never sought to expressly represent a single medium, field or discipline of practice, preferring to adopt a hybrid or transdisciplinary approach.

Upon joining AVF in November 2004 Harger\(^ {71} \) sought to realise the potential of the moment. Many, including Dobson, recognised in the success of the first festival, the potential to build something with international reach, as Harger outlines (2012):

My approach was to align the festival with international media art, along the kind of work I had been working on at Tate Modern, also linking up with festivals that we knew we could have a really good relationship with, so Transmediale, Future Sonic as it was at the time. Looking at centres like FACT [Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool] and how we could build an allegiance with them. My task was very much to try and steer it in a direction that was to sign-post the region, as a hotspot for media art. The logic for that… was because there was already some really important work happening in the region… the work that Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham were doing at the University of Sunderland… and their new media curating course, but Sally Jane Norman had just arrived in Newcastle as well and set up Culture Lab and they represented a very significant set of allies.

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\(^{70}\) See Gielen (2010) for a useful analysis of the ‘independent’ curator.

\(^{71}\) Prior to AVF06 it is important to note that Harger was appointed on a part-time, freelance basis. At this stage no funding was in place for either the organisation or any future editions of the festival.
Harger drew on existing professional networks and used AVF as a device to develop new relationships with artists, curators and cultural producers in the region and beyond. The process of developing AVF that Harger undertook privileged building a network of new relations outside of those that had originally brought it into being, with the aim of developing greater scale and legitimacy. It was deemed significant to those shaping AVF after the first edition that specific art form knowledge was necessary to gain and sustain public funding, which it required to be reproduced. Aligning with media art and digital art seemed the most appropriate route to achieve this. Dobson also saw the possibility of AVF taking a very different route. It could have moved towards a semi-commercial or a commercial urban music festival, perhaps more in line with the vision of it from some of the earlier actors such as Jeff Cleverley and those involved in promoting the club-nights that brought the festival to the attention of Dobson and the Tyneside Cinema in the first place. Yet the majority of the programme, even in AVF03, was related to moving image in some form and presented within a cinema and therefore for the Tyneside Cinema to benefit from the profile of it further, they needed to develop the artistic merits of it. Dobson (2012) explains this in practice:

I had a concern that the festival needed to develop some artistic integrity beyond this very spurious thing we had put together. So a couple of things happened to enable us to do that, I went with Jenny Hall to Ars Electronica and that was a real eye opener for us… that’s not to say that in any way we set out to try to copy Ars Electronica, but there was a sudden realisation that there was a richness of a certain kind of work, that they called electronic art that really could be the foundation for an artistic-led festival as opposed to a festival that was more about urban culture with a commercial aspect…Then we were also aware that we needed someone to run it. We didn’t have expertise, we didn’t have artistic leadership. We needed it really badly. So with the money that we raised we put an advert into the paper to run it. And at that time with a lot of advice from Rebecca [Shatwell, in her role at ACE]. We got Honor and Honor started the journey that Rebecca [Shatwell] is continuing now. The journey of making it into a credible art festival.

The ambition to align AVF with an international conception of new media art, electronic art and digital culture required the knowledge and professional
networks that Harger brought in 2004. There was a sense at the time that the UK lacked a large-scale organisation with a national and international reach working within the field of new media art at this time and this was a gap AVF could fill. It was envisioned that the fledgling grounding that AVF had almost inadvertently stumbled upon in AVF03 could be utilised to gain public funding to develop a new organisation. It would be an organisation that could operate within the larger national and European network of existing festivals and conference events that dominated the field of new media and electronic arts at the time, such as ARS Electronica, Transmediale and ISEA. However, this potential was not considered without a certain caution or questioning of the practices that were being promoted. As Harger (2012) was keenly aware, “when establishing a festival, credibility is everything”. Credibility is built on trust. In the context of how biennials and festival organisations establish, Biggs (2013) offers some eloquent insights, “trust is the name we give to the ability to trade a known past for an unknown future” where:

trust is the counterpart to surprise…Surprise is an essential tactic. If we don’t have expectations, we are more open to new experiences. On the other hand, without expectations we may be so focused on our everyday lives that we miss out entirely on what is happening on the doorstep. So diversity is important, giving a little of what is known in order to get people in the right place to experience something unknown.

In addition, the need for legitimacy with funders offered the chance to ask questions about a field of practice that at times seemed primarily concerned with the novelty of new technology, as a form of techno-fetishism, often deployed with limited critical art historical or media theory awareness. The lack of surety towards this art form and its place within the wider field of contemporary cultural practice was compounded by the complexity of the organisational form that emerged from the first festival, as Harger, (2012) describes:

72 Organisations such as FACT in Liverpool.
73 The friction between media art and contemporary visual art is characterised by Medosch (2003) as follows: “Media artists are ‘considered to have no awareness of their relation to art history or theory’ – they are perceived as being concerned only with the ‘newness’ of technology.’ In turn, the art world is accused of being technologically ignorant and of clinging to archaic notions of individualism, originality and authorship.” Also see, Chatzichristodoulou, (2013).
At the time I took over, the festival was weird, it was a joint venture partnership, between Sunderland Council, Middlesbrough Council and the Tyneside Cinema, and they had written a partnership agreement, so it didn't exist as an organisation at that point. It was administered through the Tyneside Cinema but this joint venture agreement meant that there was already a board in place. There was Mark [Dobson], Kari Vickers [Sunderland Council] and Jenny [Hall] from Middlesbrough Council. So in terms of what art forms…there was some expectation…that we needed to have film, because Tyneside Cinema was involved, there needed to be a really strong art dimension, that was something that was a real directive and there needed to be work that existed in the public realm, outside of venues. So those were expectations that I needed to respond to. For me I have a passion and background in experimental music and I knew that the region had a great history in experimental music and I wanted to bring that in and it didn’t seem too difficult to do that, to create dialogue between the films the art and the music…it was partly my choice, and partly responding to those conversations we had in the first six months and partly what was expected from the partners and the funders.

In negotiating and responding to these varied artistic, institutional and locational demands as well as personal interests, Harger developed the new mode of a ten-day thematically responsive festival, covering two weekends and this time including venues in Gateshead as well as Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough. The thematic for AVF06 was very broadly categorised under the Life Sciences, using the title *Life Like* (see Figure. 16). It was framed around new developments in biotechnology and how artists were engaging with these ideas. Harger (2012) explained her rationale for this:

One of the things that the North East region is very well known for is its work in bio-sciences and this is obviously situated around Newcastle University’s work with stem cell technology that’s got a public face in the Centre For Life… We were very much part of that Culture 10 project of celebrating the region and giving the region its rightful place on the public stage so we wanted to play to the regions strengths and so it seemed to me that doing something around the life sciences work at Newcastle University was a good anchor point, and we took it a little bit wider, and came up with this notion of *Life Like*. 
It was evidently a strategic and shrewd political gesture to choose a thematic frame for AVF06 that crossed both the regional funders in C10 and One North East for promotion and positive image production and that cut across the media art field.\(^4\) In 2004 Newcastle Embryonic Stem Cell Group, made up of Newcastle University and the NHS Newcastle Fertility Centre at the Centre for Life, were the first in UK and second in Europe to be given a license to perform research on stem cells.

This played well promoting the region as a ‘transitional’ knowledge economy with links across the arts, technology, science and education sectors simultaneously as well as acting as a mode for regional tourism. The life sciences were highlighted as a strength by the ONE Regional Image Strategy as part of their campaign to change the external perception of the region. It was part of the “Healthcare Pillar” designed “to create a critical mass of interacting high-value businesses, research and clinical activity and build on work of the Centre of Excellence for Life Sciences (CELS), the universities and Newcastle Science City” (One North East, 2012:13). By 2013, the life science sector was a significant contributor to the regional economy, with a combined turnover of £1.7bn (NELEP, 2013).

The re-invented AVF in 2006 had evolved significantly from the mode of the original event and the theme was a central part of this, as it allowed disparate, new and existing projects to be incorporated together. Some projects were brought in through an open-call for projects. Others were part of the existing programmes of various regional arts organisations that were badged as part of AVF06. The desire to build an event of national significance and with the rare opportunity provided by the large-scale public investment in arts festivals through regional development funding allowed AVF to shift into a mode that responded to the wider economic and social shifts perceived to be taking place in the region. It

\(^4\) Harger’s (2006) AVF06 programme introductory text reads: “The theme of AV Festival 06 is life — though it’s life not quite as we know it. You will see the very stuff of our existence portrayed, remixed and even made from scratch by some of finest international artists in the world and by some of the talented artists that we have right here in the North East of England. We have art happening in galleries, clubs, concert halls, cinemas, schools and even on the outside of buildings across the region. Why is the festival exploring life? Because advances in genetic engineering, bioscience and nanotechnology that not long ago seemed purely the stuff of science fiction are now real. On top of that we are all already increasingly swapping our ‘real’ lives for artificial realities, lived virtually in online communities and games. And a great deal of this is happening right here on our doorstep. A hundred years ago the North East of England was the crucible of technical innovation in the industrial revolution. Today, we are at the international leading edge of the biotechnical revolution, with pioneering work happening here.”
was also moving away from its industrial past into a symbolic, service and knowledge economy. As the AVF proclaimed in the tag line for the 2006 edition (Harger, 2006), “AV Festival 06 is the UK’s newest, and largest, international festival of digital arts, music, electronic art, games, film and new media”. Most of these categories align to a particular regional industry that was being promoted or activity developed through various public agencies at the time, such as Codeworks who produced the annual Thinking Digital Conference and promoted digital business, or Northern Film and Media, promoting the commercial creative media industries of film and television. As Harger (2012) outlines about her choice for the Life Like theme, despite the emergence of AVF from actors within the region and its support by local audiences, there was a perception that in some way the organisation needed to make a clearer discursive articulation towards the locational identity of where it was taking place:

It was trying to be honest, to come up with something that had an honest connection with the North East as a place and something that we knew that media artists were very good at and had a history of making excellent and analytical and aesthetically excellent works around, and also something that we felt that the public could connect around.

The articulated need to make a connection to a local public at this stage was a continued constituent of the strategy deployed in the early editions of the event. What this early thematic approach offered was a direct and well-articulated alignment between the regional policy strategy in tourism, industry, economics and culture, and at the same time promoting a narrative of the region, in AVF’s form as a regional event. AVF was presented as a conceptual re-territorialisation that sought to challenge any latent post-industrial narratives of decline. Deploying a thematic mode also aligned the festival with wider ‘art world’ trends as Gielen (in Seijdel, 2009:9) identifies “those who know the rules of the present-day art world, for example, go in for themed exhibitions, which today prefer to embrace social responsibility”.

This aligns the role of festival director and curator with what Ramírez (in Greenberg, 1996:15) calls a “cultural mediator” or “broker”. As addressed in Chapter Three, what C10 sought to do was use the role of the arts festival as a sanctioned institutional form to speak for locational identity. The AVF directors have therefore not just been concerned with the arbitration of a particular
cultural or artistic medium, as they might be in a museum context, but also have the need to operate as a mediator of territorial conceptions. What offered this process legitimacy for AVF06 and grounded a continual doctrine associated with the festival in the subsequent editions is the alignment of the thematic focus of the event with wider concerns of regional policy makers.

In the case of AVF06, the thematic construction was used to bolster a new image of place where biotechnology and science were offered as a progressive representation of the region. This was not unwelcome, as rather than offering a specific singular descriptive representation, the discursive frame of Life Like sought to unsettle, activate and raise questions. Here AVF took on a pedagogic task of seeking to shape or reshape cultural tastes in the region through offering novelty in artistic form. Of course, this is a somewhat grand task, and central to these attempts to present alternative narratives is convincing an audience to attend: if the public were not content with how they are implicated, they could have simply ignored the festival. It is important to recognise that by making particular curatorial choices intended to include certain groups or publics, those orchestrating the event are simultaneously expelling other groups who do not respond to such stimuli, intentionally or not. There is no coherent public; there is merely a set of many individual relations operating on different levels of intensity. However, there is an awareness of this fragmentation in how AVF sought to address multiple publics, through multiple art forms, types of events, educational levels, and times of day. This prerequisite to meet the needs of differing tastes and demands is clearly visible when each festival has articulated the breadth of the programme numerically.

Following this, AVF sought to educate, not as an additional institutional function but as a core component of how it imagined its role within wider social relations. A pedagogic imperative was constitutive of the organisation: the desire of successive festival directors to engage specific audiences was often referred to in interviews (Dobson, 2012; Harger, 2012; Shatwell, 2012b). The mediating process of AVF attempted to create a sense of relevance to a local public of new media: contemporary art from ‘outside’. What the thematic discursive mediations of AVF06 was partly directed towards was countering any elitist view of contemporary art or that the festival might not appeal to a ‘local’ audience. The

Harger (2008): “it was our remit to try and bring to the audiences of the North East new and exciting trends in technically mediated art.”

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remit of establishing the model of this early festival form, discerned a need to engage and target the programme, via marketing to what they termed the ‘general public’, as Harger (2012) articulates:

The general public was always the intentional audience, that was the most clear from the start, because of the partners. Audiences were always the primary consideration. There was a very strong sense that we needed to be going beyond the gig-going public or the gallery going public, to talk to what Mark [Dobson] referred to as ‘the lady on the number 6 bus’…we were not going to dumb down the programme because the ‘lady on the number 6 bus’ wouldn’t understand it…. so that was the challenge… we were not selling the festival, we were really trying to get the festival for the North East audience.

The creation of a particular imaginary conception of a culture, consuming or encountering, public was clearly a significant structuring point in how AVF decided to present its programme from 2006 onwards.

Rebecca Shatwell took over the directorship of the festival in October 2008, just after the Audio Visual Arts North East (AVANE) charity was established and after the festival had received RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) status from Arts Council England. She became the first ‘full time’ employed director of the organisation. Shatwell had trained in curatorial studies on the Royal College of Art’s Visual Arts Administration, Curating and Commissioning Contemporary Art MA (now Curating Contemporary Art), and developed a career as a curator with a specialism that traversed visual arts, sound and music. Before taking up the role, Shatwell worked at ACE as the Visual Arts Officer for the North East region, initiated and curated a small, but well respected independent gallery in Newcastle called Alt.Gallery. The gallery worked with AVF08 to present Yokomon by the Staalplaat Soundsystem, as part of the Broadcast programme. Through her role with ACE North East, Shatwell had a significant role in continuing support for the festival as it was established and shaped in its early editions. Mark Dobson cites Shatwell as a central figure in the development of the festival through this period and in shaping how the festival developed from its first edition. Shatwell suggested

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76 Established in 1992, the two year programme combined critical theory and history of visual culture with curatorial studies and was based on the Bard College Centre for Curatorial Studies programme in New York that was initiated in 1990.
Dobson travel to Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria after the 2003 edition to get a perspective on what was happening within the media art field internationally at that particular moment, and to give an insight into possible directions the festival could take in terms of its programme. This provided a significant marker for the scale and shape of events that could be developed in the North East.

This change of director and the new forms of organisational fixing or coding, such as charity registration and brand trade marking that took place in 2007 and 2008, saw the major characteristics of the organisation reinforced. This also enshrined the regional territory of the festival into the organisation’s name. The stated goal of AVANE was then “…to advance the education of the public in audio visual arts in the North East of England in particular, but not exclusively, by promoting electronic art” (AVANE, 2007:2).

Shatwell retained a series of key characteristics: the permanencies of the organisational form of the festival. These highly territorialised, sticky features included the creation of a festival itself as the primary operation of the organisation. There had been a series of discussions about the possibility of the new organisation operating through different modes of public engagement, as some form of cultural agency. Also retained was the AVF name, the thematic curatorial approach, the cross-regional range, primarily presenting work with and in partner organisations and the general approach to funding. While these features were maintained, there were also a series of changes in ethos as the festival changed director. The curatorial framework of AVF moved towards articulating three specific strands of visual art, music and film and away from media art and technology as defined fields of engagement. The temporal frame of the event shifted to exhibition daytime programming, rather than night time club programming. The festival was already moving in this direction in 2008 which was more centrally curated from Harger’s research rather than the primary programme coming from an ‘open call’ as had been the case in 2006, and Shatwell accelerated this trend. In this sense, the festival moved from a relatively open programmatic structure, gathering many pre-existing events into a more

77 The AVF marketing strapline evolved over each edition as follows:
    AVF03: film / music / video / animation / computer games / digital art / internet
    AVF06: International festival of digital arts, music, games, film and new media
    AVF08: International festival of electronic arts, music and moving image
    AVF10: International festival of electronic arts, music and moving image
    AVF12: International festival of art, technology, music and film
    AVF14: International festival of art, music and film
centralised and authorial approach. This was characterised by a process of artwork and artist selection that was directed by Shatwell, but with significant relationships with partners such as record label manager and music producer Paul Smith who brought his networks into the festival programme in collaboration with Shatwell.

Another strategic move was towards presenting the festival for a professional visual arts audience as well as engaging a local audience. The most significant structural development that Shatwell introduced was to change the advertised duration of the festival event from the ten-day event of AVF06/08/10 to become thirty days for the 2012 edition where it specifically occupied the month of March. As the festival established itself within these characteristics, the practices of the organisation became firmer over each edition, the organisation also gradually extracted itself from its relationship with the Tyneside Cinema. This offered a both symbolic and logistical sense of ‘independence’ to the organisation. Dobson retired as the chair of AVANE in 2013 and the same year AVF moved its office out of the Tyneside Cinema building down the road to Alderman Fenwick’s House, a building managed by Tyne & Wear Building Preservation Trust.

As Shatwell took over, it was clear that the thematic curatorial approach introduced by Harger gave the festival a significant sense of differentiation and legitimacy within its regional and national position, and it was therefore logical for Shatwell to continue this format. Following Harger’s approach to developing pragmatic and regionally responsive festival themes, Shatwell chose Energy as the subject of her first festival in 2010. She (2012a) explains how she made the thematic selection:

I used the framework of energy for the 2010 festival because I wanted to play with a concept that was relevant in terms of an economic growth area in the region and was being talked about a lot in the news, and artists’ work responding to issues of climate change… I was trying to think of a theme that was relevant across contemporary art and culture and technology and at

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79 The theme was introduced in the festival programme as follows (Shatwell, 2010): “This year the curatorial theme is energy: a universal force that connects, transforms and renews life. Exploring energy from scientific, technological, environmental and spiritual perspectives we present work that resonates across the Festival centres in NewcastleGateshead, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, and beyond.”
that point, a lot of artists were starting to think about climate change and alternative systems that artists could setup.

In a sense, the *Energy* thematic offered a similar approach to the 2006 *Life Like* theme, taking a relevant public issue, connecting it with local industry, research and the economy, and aligning it with the demands of the regional image strategy. It was a process of maximising a possible positive relationship with the wide range of stakeholders and other organisations affiliated with the complex wider network of AVF from the Regional Development Agency and the ACE, to the individual local galleries, partner venues as well as the artists that the curator would like to work with.

The regional development agency, ONE, closed when after the general election in May 2010, just a few months after AVF10, when the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government took office. With its closure, there was a significant shortfall in the coordinated funding of festival events in the region. Shatwell (2012a) took this into account when she began as Director of AVF in 2008:

> We need to remember that when I started there was a very different climate in the region. One North East was very strong, the region was very much exporting itself in relation to science, and I think because we knew a recession was coming culturally, when I started I very much thought… one industry that hadn’t been effected was science. With 2010, I wanted to play with having a more science-focused theme. It was good as it did cover a broad range but was very located because of science and technology.

The *Energy* theme also allowed for new partnerships relations to be developed, with the New and Renewable Energy Centre (NaREC), the Science Festival and the Environment Agency. However, these were short term, individual project partners rather than organisations that the festival worked with on any longer term basis. Ultimately, Shatwell articulated (2012a) a similar sensibility as Harger towards the continued deployment of the thematic as one of the central modes of mediation: “the theme helps me as a framework to research structure and programme the festival. But what I want to do is find a way for audiences to find a way in as well.”
The AVF10 programme was presented with regional partners concentrated in Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland, and with events organised by type: exhibitions, performances, talks, film screenings. It was structured over ten days, covering two weekends with three ‘launch’ events, one in each of the urban centres as part of a programme called ‘AV Late & Live’. The festival offered a series of spaces for audiences to gather at different times with a ‘daytime hub’, at the Tyneside Cinema managed by the artist Kate Rich who presented *The Feral Trade Café*, where the transnational food supplied was transported by the movements of people to the festival. There was also a ‘late night hub’ at the Star & Shadow Cinema, with films and events every night of the festival. The festival commissioned new work by a range of local and international artists including a series of projects developed with producer and manager Paul Smith. These included a trilogy of events and one installation with the minimalist musician Charlemagne Palestine and a collaborative performance between the graphic novelist Alan Moore and the musician Stephen O’Malley, titled, *Simultaneous Conjugation of Four Spirits in a Room*, that took place at the Laing Art Gallery and incorporated the painter John Martin’s *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (1852). Smith also introduced the writer Iain Sinclair and the composer and musician Simon Fisher Turner. Sinclair took up a residency at the NRFTA (Northern Region Film and Television Archive) and Fisher Turner presented a sound installation in the Sunderland Winter Gardens. A large proportion of the festival film programme was developed under the title of ‘Recycled Film’ focusing on artists and filmmakers who used archive, appropriated or found-footage in their work, such as Kenneth Anger, Craig Baldwin and Rick Prelinger. The programme was funded through Northern Film & Media, a public regional agency that sought to develop the film and television industry in the region. According to the festival’s commissioned evaluation report produced by BOP consulting, which primarily focused on the festival’s ‘economic impact’, AVF10 attracted 38,161 physical visitors.

A key aspiration and achievement for AVF has been commissioning new artwork, something both Harger (2012) and Shatwell saw as central to what AVF could and should do. Shatwell’s approach sought to, where possible, commission work within an increasingly regional context. For AVF10 there were 18 new

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80 It was also sponsored by NorthernNet a programme part of a pan-Northern project developed in partnership between the Northwest Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward and One North East to promote digital connectivity.
commissions. A number of these new commissions existed in the form of artists presenting their work in the local context, such as Kate Rich’s *Feral Trade Café* specifically for the festival. Some were one-off or special events that were produced specially for AVF10 such as Alan Moore and Stephen O’Malley’s *Simultaneous Conjugation of Four Spirits in a Room* at the Laing Art Gallery. From the collection of the new commissions in AVF10, one stands out for its particular relationship to the North East and more emblematically as an example of how the commissioning of new artwork is subject to processes of mediation and territorialisation. This is the YoHa project *Coal Fired Computers*.

### 4.4 Coal Fired Computers (300,000,000 Computers – 318,000 Black Lungs)

Enquiry in *Coal Fired Computers (300,000,000 Computers – 318,000 Black Lungs)* was directed towards the mediating process of conjunction, the mobilising process itself, rather than any bounded subject or object (see McFarlane, 2011a). This was the mode of artistic practice undertaken by YoHa to create *CFC* one of the most significant commissions of AVF10. The project examined and questioned processes of de-territorialisation through the creation of a re-territorialising artwork assemblage. *CFC* pointed towards the effects of neoliberal globalisation on bodies, communities and flows of power. As a way of thinking through the mediating and territorialised processes produced by AVF, *CFC* is examined here to provide greater insight into the fluid, dispersed and contested spatiality of AVF. *CFC* also provides a valuable lens on to consider a historically contingent notion of place as both discursive and contested, to better understand the position AVF took in relation to place in 2010.

The artwork stands out from other AVF commissions in this context because, in a sense, it acts as an argument and as an enquiry, in a similar way to how the theme of AVF10 was used generally. *CFC* offered an emblematic proposition that was closely aligned with Shatwell’s curatorial ethos for AVF10. The process of festival and the artwork are inseparable here, in discussion about one, the other is inherently implicated, they compound and co-function. This was not the case with all artworks, or film events in the festival, many of which could be said to be merely passing through AVF in a de-territorialised manner.

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81 Following AVF10, *CFC* was exhibited at Arnolfini in Bristol (25 September – 21 November 2010) and Artefact Festival in Leuven (15 – 24 February 2011).
Literally and conceptually, CFC operated across the realms of socially engaged, media, participatory and relational art practice, or what Harwood himself called “aesthetically active” art (Harwood, 2010). It fitted with the tradition of ecological and critical artwork associated with artists such as Hans Haacke from the 1970s and what became known as institutional critique. CFC sought to provide a sense of the complexity and criticality towards the context of AVF and Energy as a subject within its location: in other words, the history of the North East region and its long association with mineral energy production, via coal extraction and related industries.

Haacke’s transversal modelling of a bio-technological system in Rhinewater Purification Plant, 1972 (see Skrebowski, 2013) explored the incorporation of biological systems within the gallery. Invited to produce a two-month project for the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, West Germany, Haacke set up a chemical treatment, charcoal and sand filtration plant to process polluted water from the Rhine. The purified water collected in a large acrylic basin containing goldfish, which demonstrated the successful restoration of a life supporting, albeit artificial, habitat. Haacke’s work carried a particular political charge because at the time it was produced, the city of Krefeld was a major polluter, releasing forty-two million cubic metres of untreated household and industrial waste into the Rhine annually. Haacke’s practice, reflected in CFC, is part of a field of art practice that interrelates technology, economy and politics to the ecological and biological, insisting on presenting nature not as a separate entity to be commodified, exploited or spiritually revered. Such work is often linked to the conceptual transversalism of Felix Guattari (2000), where nature cannot be separated from culture. In his book, The Three Ecologies (2000), a transversal approach joins subjective, social and environmental registers of ecology into an ‘ethico-aesthetic’ practice, extending the definition of ecology from environmental issues to incorporate social relations and human subjectivity. This approach is politically oriented, as a way of understanding the various scales and contingent relations of the materiality of media, and opens the field of environmentally engaged artistic practice to journalists, photographers, designers, activists, organisers and teachers.82

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82 For an overview of the issues of the interrelationship of contemporary and ecological politics see the work of TJ Demos (2012 and 2013).
Figure 17 YoHa, Coal Fired Computers, 2010. For AVF10. Image: Louise Hepworth. Courtesy of AV Festival.
The commissioning and presentation of the project plays out a complex set of contradictory values and layers of mediation that ran through AVF10 and its need to appeal to different, sometimes conflicting agendas. The work connects to previous discussions around economic regeneration and the instrumental deployment of the arts, but inherent in it, are the same contradictions that exist within AVF as a whole. It attempted to promote a critical and artistic practice that questioned the social and economic structures in North East England and dominant readings of regional history. The commissioning and exhibiting process visible in CFC, how it responded to the thematic territorialised frame and its locational context created a project that was a complex node of competing and contradictory forces, but ultimately representative of AVF more broadly.

Graham Harwood developed CFC in collaboration with Matsuko Yokokoji who together make up YoHa (Japanese for ‘aftermath’). CFC was developed with the support of Jean Demars, a student on the MA course, Interactive Media: Critical Theory and Practice that Harwood taught at Goldsmiths, University of London. The project culminated in a presentation event over three consecutive days during the final weekend of AVF10, Friday 12 March to Sunday 15 March 2010, straddling the entrance to the Discovery Museum in Newcastle.

The content of CFC emerged from early conversations between Shatwell and YoHa about the Energy theme and the approach she wanted to take to commissioning artwork as the new festival director. She explained her approach (Shatwell, 2013):

I’m always interested in the theme having some sort of wider context, not at a community level, but in relating to issues in society and politics and wider culture today… the theme always comes about through my own artistic research, observing current trends in practice, and looking at how that can be translated into a North East context, so I’m always looking at how that can be rooted in some sort of site specificity, even at the early stage, I don’t know the artists yet, but I can get a sense of the atmosphere and the wider environment of the region, just as to how the theme might settle here, to have some sort of fit.

Shatwell met with YoHa at Transmediale DEEP NORTH in 2009 in Berlin, where YoHa were presenting Tantalum Memorial (originally commissioned in Italy for Manifesta7, see Harwood et al., 2010). Harwood was then invited on several
site visits to Newcastle to begin researching a project for the festival and discussions continued with Shatwell and the AVF team regarding the Energy theme and the regional context of AVF. From these site visits, Harwood’s interest in the industrial history of North East England became apparent, where, as he put it “flesh and the machines are very inseparable” (Harwood, 2010). Jean Demars began to talk to ex-miners, activists and a relationship began to develop between the miners’ strike of 1984-85 and the displacement of coal extraction to China and India. This re-territorialisation of industry and the resulting social, cultural and physical impacts on those it directly affected are central to the CFC narrative.

YoHa presented the miners’ strike of 1984-85 as a key moment in British political history and the defining event marking neo-liberal domination in national politics.

The final CFC display brought together multiple materials and discursive elements, and provided its own sense of festive atmosphere. With a faire-like feel from the colours, sounds and smells of the showman’s steam engine, discussions took place around the interconnected contraptions. Mediation in CFC was not a secondary interpretive act, it was not translation for an audience. The hermeneutic process was part of the work itself: the open dialogue between the artists and the audience at the museum, the written texts, the archive displays, the accompanying artists’ talk, publication and documentary film were all central to the artwork. All operated as ways of communicating to and interacting with possible publics.

Here Harwood (in Fuller, 2010) explains the rationale for the way the project brought things together:

The work it seems to me is that in a context in which ‘the world is too complicated to describe or to understand’, it provides something like a diagram, or a formula which shows how a series of things are joined together, how certain kinds of momentary connections are made, but does not renounce the difficulty of such work of abstraction, and really gets into the very different kinds of qualities, materiality, knowledge, histories and powers of the things that are nevertheless joined.

CFC was a flow of energy. It started with one and a half tons of coal feeding into a one-hundred year-old, 35-ton showman’s steam engine, a Burrell 6NHP
Showman’s road locomotive ‘Excelsior’ (see Figure. 17). This particular engine was designed to provide power for travelling fairs with a dynamo fitted to generate electricity. For CFC electricity produced by burning coal was used to power a computer and an air compressor, which was connected to the final part in the chain, a blackened sheep’s lung (see Figure. 18). Running on the computer was software and a dataset. The database contained over 164,000 records detailing coal mining accidents and deaths in the UK from 1600 to the present day. These models and props, the computer, air compressor and pair of lungs, were placed on a table at the entrance to the museum, with a visible connection to the steam engine outside (see Figure. 17). Visitors to the museum had to walk past both the steam engine and the display in order to enter the general museum space. To place the work in a sense is to assimilate its site: the site of CFC is the body, ecological crisis, revanchism and the museum, but all of which are territorialised through the frame of Newcastle’s material and symbolic history of coal extraction. The Discovery Museum was a place where the innovation of the pioneers of regional engineers and scientists are celebrated alongside social history.

Exhibited alongside the CFC machine was a series of smaller displays relating to the research undertaken by Demars into the industrial and community history of mining activism in the area and particularly the 1984-85 miners’ strike. This process sought to connect individual stories, to find people who could speak for events personally from experience, who were present during the exhibition and public talk. The displays included musicological artefacts, books and materials, assembled from differing individuals and groups associated with the miners’ strike and present day mining communities. These included, the National Union of Mineworkers, David Douglass (an ex-miner, activist, and writer), SEAM (Save Easington Area Mines), Peter Arkell (a photographer, activist), the Amber Collective, and Pin the Pits. Harwood, Yokokoji and Demars and other invited

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83 The engine, owned and operated by Graham Atkinson, was brought to Newcastle from Yorkshire.
84 Harwood (2010) cites the significance of placing his work in this location alongside a boat called The Turbinia designed by the Tyneside engineer Charles Parson as a space for celebrated technological achievement, but also that decedents of the Parson’s turbine are found in contemporary power stations.
85 For a discussion of place identity and musicological display on Tyneside see Whitehead (2008).
Figure 18 YoHs, Coal Fired Computers, 2010. For AVF10. Image: Louise Hepworth. Courtesy of AV Festival.
guests from the groups above and AVF volunteers, continually managed these stalls and displays over the three-day presentation. Dialogical mediation with museum visitors was important to the project. The material on display operated as a catalyst for discussions about the interrelationship between coal extraction, power and media (see Figure. 19). There was also an accompanying public talk, held at the Tyneside Cinema, as part of a series of AVF12 discussions entitled, *Art and Energy*. In addition, a short documentary style film was made of the exhibition and a booklet detailing the project including extensive photographic and video documentation was created.

The project had a similar set of characteristic processes seen in many of Harwood’s previous artworks such as working with specific social and material histories and communities as well as bodies, atmospheres and air pressure. His approach was indexical and research based, where indexing was performed to a set of related events, historical or conceptual, this was then brought into a new co-functional set of relations, aimed at revealing disproportionate power relations.

As Harwood outlines, although seemingly de-territorialised, significant, if latent connections remain in the processes of material extraction, production and consumption, “when we use an Ethernet cable we rarely think of the poor bastard who had to mine the copper or think about the effect of early copper mines on our cultural, social evolution” (in Fuller, 2010). Harwood’s practice encompasses teaching, research, activism, and producing artworks through commissions in specific organisational contexts. His artwork engages media ecology, questioning materiality and data, what Fuller (2005:2) calls relations of “processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter”. *CFC* was not a whole, but a process – it constructed from the interaction of a number of system processes, motions, materialities and events - coal, heat, steam, turbine, electricity, computer, data, screen, air pressure, flesh, and sound.

*CFC* as artwork reflects what Thrift (2005) has described as the three registers of the changing conception of materiality within the contemporary: body, screen and software. Something partially reflected in Bourriaud’s (2002), conception of the significance of post-production. As Thrift (2005:232) argues, “these three different registers are all different forms of reanimation of the world which involve the active mediation of machines of various kinds in sending new kinds of life to us, changing the nature of ‘us’ as a result.” Data is territorialised in *CFC*, for example the miners’ compensation claims cannot be understood outside of
Figure 19 YoHa, Coal Fired Computers, 2010. For AVF10. Image: Louise Hepworth. Courtesy of AV Festival.
political and economic relations. Just as Harwood (2011) talks about the census as a controlling form of power/knowledge, data such as the compensation claims can reform territory.

Harwood is one of the artists and founding members of Mongrel (made up of Mutsuko Yokokoji, Richard Pierre-Davis and Mervin Jarmen), an artist collective that has been exploring the interrelationships between software, bodies and screens for a number of years. There is a small but insightful volume of literature drawing on his work (for example, Muir, 1988; Shanken, 2009; Fuller, 2010; Cook and Graham, 2010; Parikka, 2011) and his wider collaborations, including his own writing and publishing (Harwood, 2008 and 2011; Harwood et al., 2010).

One of Harwood’s most celebrated projects was developed from an invitation to make a work for the Video Positive Festival in Liverpool in 1995. In Liverpool, Harwood worked with patients at the Ashworth Maximum Security Mental Hospital creating the installation Rehearsal of Memory, an interactive CD-ROM and web-based software artwork. The project developed Harwood’s interests in the body, data, social control, antagonism and systemic turbulence where portraits of those incarcerated within the hospital were documented using a scanner with their faces pressed to the screen. Patients’ experiences at the hospital could be explored through clicking through various pages within the programme. Julian Stallabrass (2003:3), picks up on the significance of the collective authorship of the project:

Harwood is described merely as the ‘director’ of this highly collaborative project. Patients and staff at Ashworth are credited with the ‘artwork’, while students at London community computing space Artec (many of whom had experienced long-term unemployment) helped build the work. (With Harwood, those students went on to become the members of the radical art group, Mongrel.) The inclusion of two distinct socially excluded groups in the making of the work muddies the usual ‘self and other’ schema on which critiques of documentary depend.

Rehearsal of memory is perhaps an apt title for Harwood’s wider body of work and poetically emblematic of the project undertaken for AVF10. His work consistently takes alternative narratives and places them in a contemporary context in order

86 The project was shown in the exhibition Serious Games at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle curated by Beryl Graham in 1996 and later collected by the Pompidou, Paris.
to dispute the very condition or foundation of those memories, a de-
territorialising approach central to CFC. Similarly, projects such as Uncomfortable Proximities an early net.art commission for the Tate’s website demonstrate a critical stance on the institutionalisation of art. The Mongrel/Harwood work Uncomfortable Proximities collaged and reassembled the history of the Tate through its website text and images to present a mocking and ironic examination of the relationship between Tate, colonialism, imperialism and elite status. It rewrote the history of the Tate as it presented itself to the world via its website as a form of institutional self-critique (see Cook and Graham, 2010). This created a de-
territorialisation through the mutation of a form, through the combination of disparate parts brought into new relations. The Mongrel site looked similar to the official Tate site, but in this mocking retelling, Tate Britain becomes "the home of 500 years of tasty babes, luxury goods, own goals and psychological props of the British social elite", Tate Liverpool claims the gallery was "set up with the help of the Toxteth riots" and Tate St Ives presents "modern British art in a spectacular coastal setting located in one of the lowest waged areas of Britain". As Cook and Graham (2010: 43) outline, the Mongrel group represented many of the characteristics of postmodern art practice:

It is a loose collective of designers, artists, educators, and political activists who use technology - often modifying it to suit their own needs - to engage in discussions about memory, place, and access with communities of interest and social groups. Their work is often as much research or outreach as it is art. Yet, like most artists, they have been able to use the institutions of the art world to their benefit, even if they don’t fit the mould of being single authors of static works.

This describes a process of mediation, where authorship is dissipated and meaning emerges through conjunction. The practice of mediation demonstrated in CFC, perhaps has most in common with the Harwood/Mongrel 2005 project, Lungs: Slave Labour presented as part of the exhibition Making Things Public curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel at ZKM (Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany)(See, Latour and Weibel, 2005). Mongrel had previously exhibited at ZKM as part of the Net_Condition exhibition in 1999. Lungs: Slave Labour deployed a similar methodology to CFC to bring a series of histories, datasets, technological objects and a specific relationship to the body together in a novel
assemblage. Starting with the history of the ZKM building, which during World War Two was occupied by 4,500 foreign forced-labourers working on munitions production, Harwood collaborated with the Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, which had collated documents, materials and data relating to the areas use as a site of forced labour, where approximately 17,000 forced labourers worked. This dataset was then parsed through an algorithm that calculated the lost lung capacity of these enslaved bodies. This data was then passed through a speaker system, where the air moved by the speakers corresponded to the breath of those maligned bodies. The gesture becomes a sonic and somatic memorial, again a rehearsal of memory, as Harwood (in Fuller, 2010) describes his process, “in my own work I exploit this by creating assemblages of code, hardware, histories, people and materials. Particular datasets have particular resonance in certain geographical, social and political situations.” Fuller (2010) neatly describes the functioning of Harwood’s contraptions as artistic devices:

Rather than smoothly functioning, these assemblages motion towards a demystification of technological apparatuses. They produce allegories in the place of utilities and these allegories in turn output images that infect and taint historical representations… A contraption in English is where the domain of the technical overlaps the imaginary, an experiment with nothing to prove. Usually strange, unnecessarily intricate, unfinished, inherently unstable, improvised machine.

Harwood’s work responds to a specific context, often a set of histories, which he and his collaborators are invited into. This is a process where mediation could be said to replace authorship. Harwood acknowledges the multiple agencies that go into the production of the event. This assemblage of agencies become a possible material to work and manipulate: “I leave as much work undone as possible, so as it unfolds it can contest the space in which it is showing and the space/geography can contest the contraption.” As Harwood describes, “the work doesn’t make its argument through affirming a set of categories but by drawing out these formulae in uncannily clear ways through this process of conjunction” (in Fuller, 2010).

What is important for Harwood is that there is something relatively unique to working within the spaces afforded by contemporary art that offer this opportunity. As he argues, (in Fuller, 2010)
...in the art space, or more usually on the boundaries of art, the works are contraptions made up of situations, peoples, geographies, networks, technicalities that bring the historical, social, economic, political into proximity with each other to create a moment of reflection and imagining... the utility... must reveal something about the nature of power in which its mediation is taking place.

Harwood places the encounter created with the public and its pedagogic or discursive function at the forefront of his projects. CFC does not provide any solutions or aim to relieve the problems of energy and its production within contemporary society. The artistic process deployed in CFC through AVF is mediating not authorial, by symbolically connecting technologies, materials, processes and bodies, it re-territorialises. The development of CFC interrogated AVF's own knowledge and AVFs relation to its place of operation; it offered a space for AVF to re-imagine the conditions of the institution in how it related to specific contested histories of the region, materially and socially. Inviting an artist such as Harwood into the structure of AVF invited something of a self-reflective critique.

The process of mobilisation and assemblage AVF allowed YoHa to undertake, worked towards the territorialisation of a particular narrative of violence and loss, of social and material destruction. The significance of this itself is the process of transformation and mediation of coal and the body, as one is transformed and mediated through the other. It made evident the movements of power and capital through coal extraction that transforms well bodies into sick bodies. CFC presented a de-territorialising assemblage of differing parts, one of which was the festival itself, but at the centre of it laid quite a simple indexing gesture, the act of highlighting connections, harmful connections that might otherwise go unspoken.

4.5 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has demonstrated how a new arts organisation was shaped, curatorially and institutionally by various forces beyond the artistic that influenced its particular mode of practice. These processes allowed AVF to persist and grow throughout its first decade; while many other festivals developed in the same time and place did not. A central concern for AVF over this period was its relationship with the social, economic and political history of its locale. AVF was used as an expressive cultural force with the ambition of destabilising (decoding)
or challenging certain characteristics of its locational identity. The thematic, subject-based festival programme allowed the directors of AVF to express an openness to what this particular regional identity might mean, through the themes of Energy and Life Like they sought to make new connections that worked to consolidate (code) a new progressive sense of territorialised identity. Using a thematic mediation to provide additional context and cohesion to the curated programme AVF could propose historical counter-memories, rehearsals of memory, that sought to re-territorialise, to intervene in the possible imaginaries of its locale. Even if only temporary, these occupations of a territorialised cultural landscape offer a space of possible critique as demonstrated by CFC. The processes enacted by AVF in articulating thematic explorations of regionally significant subjects such as bio-science and energy sought to destabilise and decode the construction of regional identity. CFC also resisted the historicisation of the regions present relationship with coal as a fuel source, emphasising coals displaced, but important contemporaneity. With projects such as CFC, the AVF re-territorialised, through a rehearsal of memory, a narrative of regional history accounting for the violence of wider processes of economic globalisation.

In doing so however, what is visible is the scramble for legitimate forms of cultural mediation and how AVF aligned itself with regional economic priorities as well as a specific engagement with notions of locational identity in order to achieve this. What appeared as an inherent conflict, between, on the one hand, utilising resources from C10 designed to promote a particular regional imaginary that negated a social reality, and on the other critically interrogating the very historical conception of this activity through commissioning work such as CFC. For AVF, investing in artists and artworks with a particular critical artistic resonance was one of the reasons the organisation outlived C10 and the particular rationale of cultural organisations to promote positive regional images. Gaining artistic legitimacy and credibility in the longer term, provided a more successful organisational strategy for AVF, than providing statements of regional boosterism by the way of a celebration of existing markers of regional identity. This ensured ACE funding for AVF which was necessary to endure the end of C10. AVF demonstrated that this process had a value far beyond the purely symbolic values attached to festivals as generators of symbolic capital for place. AVF interweaved a multiplicity of processes of mediation that are flowing through the institutions and discourses it interfaced. As a result, AVF offered a sometimes
contradictory but polyvocal engagement with regional identity. Neither, expressly antagonising nor reinforcing, but rather entering into the assemblage of knowledge, practices and power relations that produce and reproduce the seemingly stable coherences of regional identity.
5 Assembling John Cage’s Variations VII in Gateshead.

Process instead of object

John Cage (1993)

5.1 Introduction

AVF consistently privileged sound, music and sonic art practice, presenting works in a range of media contexts and sites from field recordings, radio, minimalism and electronic media to more traditional concerts and performances. From the origins of AVF in the club scene of Newcastle, to the thematic curatorial engagement with sound artists and musicians in the later editions, AVF has sought to present the auditory as a central constituent of contemporary artistic and cultural practice more widely. These often multimedia practices have a historical linkage with the expanded cinema and intermedia experimentations of the 1960s and 1970s. Developing fertile exchanges between cinema, film, dance, music and sound, playfully adopting new or cheap technologies, and presented in site-specific or non-traditional venues and spaces, these practices can be said to offer a historical and theoretical association to AVF’s practice.

One of largest and most ambitious projects AVF undertook between 2003 and 2012 was the AVF08 recreation of John Cage’s 1966 composition Variation VII. Cage’s 1966 work, part of 9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering, brought together a

87 The programme of sound pursued by the AVF curators has followed the role of sound in the legacies emergent in expanded cinema, as well as avant-garde and modernist music. This has included commissioning artists such as Ryoji Ikeda and composers such as Michael Nyman, as well as working with the SG and developing longer term working relationships with field recordist Chris Watson, who lives in Newcastle, and the musician Susan Stenger, who contributed to AVF commissions and events in AV10 and AVF12.
mass of multiple domestic and technological sound sources, all amplifying electromagnetic waves present at the moment of performance. The work made audible the sonic urban background from across the radio magnetic spectrum, drawing on specific sound sources from chosen sites around New York. These dislocated sonic nodes fed into the performance by a series of telephone lines and played simultaneously in a sonic assemblage. The result was a cacophonous and disjunctive urban soundscape.

The recreation of Variations VII (1966) for AVF08 was important for AVF for three of reasons. Firstly, it explicitly positioned the organisation within the legacies of the emergent intermedia art and sound practices of the 1960s. Secondly, it was the first major collaboration between AVF and BCCA. Finally, it was the largest project authored by AVF and, while it was developed with many partners, it was an AVF thematic commission, and emerged from relationships within North East England. This chapter seeks to address why a work that has its origins in the 1960’s avant-garde New York scene, by one of the most significant composers of the twentieth century, gained its next major performance 42 years later at a festival in Gateshead in North East England. This seeming divergence of space, time and history works towards a greater understanding of how AVF was situated, and how the post-traditional festival operates more widely. The recreation of the Variations VII (1996) for AVF08 coalesces times and places, speaking of memory, technology and the archive - 1966 New York into 2008 Gateshead - on the surface perhaps a seemingly at odds correlation. Variations VII (1966), read through its mediated geographies, challenges a conception of place that is static or bounded. It articulated the interconnection of not only technologically mediated space but also culturally mediated presence. Temporary, fleeting and incoherent, it gathered and connected the background and gives it presence. In the sense discussed in Chapter Two, it is something of a dissonant atmosphere, and in its construction and it reflects, allegorically, the festival as process more widely.

In creating Variations VII (2008) the gallery, festival, archive and city merge as a site of performed aesthetic archaeology in a very different world from that of its original staging. Drawing on archive research, including audio and video recordings as well as interviews, this chapter moves to explain through the example of Variations VII (2008) how AVF was situated and sought to present a progressive, if problematic, sense of place. This focuses on ideas of agency, ontology and
causality examined through a discussion of recreation of Variation VII (1966). This project is discussed using two related modes of thinking, relational geographies drawn from the work of Doreen Massey, and assemblage theory as proposed in the work of Manuel De Landa. The opening position is that AVF and its constituent parts (artworks, audiences, venues, etc.), are autonomous but are not reducible to each other: the artworks and the cultural encounters they create operate as co-functioning parts of the whole.

The chapter builds on the analysis in the previous three that address AVF as a post-traditional festival, that is a porous and fluid historically contingent social process. Through examining the way AVF deployed the John Cage performance, it shows how AVF operates through the contingent networks of power generated by social, technological and cultural encounters rather than operating within a pre-existing homogeneous plane or coherent notion place or society. What this discussion also offers is the chance to examine how organisations such as festivals endure over time, why certain forms persist, and modes of practice are established. This presents an understanding of the durability of particular places and how certain constellations of relations repeat and endure which is central to a conceptualisation of the festival as process.

5.2 Relationality and cultural encounters

First, it is necessary to sketch an outline of relational thought and how it can be applied to AVF08 and Variations VII (2008). To argue that an entity is relationally contingent is the starting point of much contemporary social-spatial theory (Amin, 2004; Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Anderson et al., 2012). Taking the social and spatial as relationally constructed offers a view on culture as a flow that does not privilege either social actors nor specific cultural objects or phenomenon, but instead emphasises the relations between the social actors and the processes by which these relations create enduring cultural forms (Delanty, 2011: 641). Deploying relational thought is to assert that entities, phenomena or things are emergent through their position within a relational arrangement and their form, agency, meaning or efficacy is a product of this relational position. The basis of a relational ontology argues that the qualities of things emerge from interrelationship with other things. They are mutually constitutive. For example, identity is simultaneously individual, as a unique nexus of relations, and communal
because such multiplicities are shared in common where things are connected through heterogeneity.

The move towards such thinking is in part driven against notions that could be called essentialist. This challenges any view that would express the post-traditional festival as a hermetic and homogenous territory or entity. Rather, it draws attention to the interstitial relations, flows and networks that constitute the event and allows it to endure over time. In this sense, there is nothing hiding behind these relations, nothing to be revealed. This is a rejection of any kind of abstract framework that implies that place, culture or community originate from abstractions, such as common beliefs, theories, principles or values. It is through these relations, the encounters and relationships that they create that cultural phenomena such as identities, memories, values, beliefs, and affects are generated and endure. Following this, a relational theory of cultural spatiality articulates that culture is formed and emergent from the interaction of differing groups (Delanty 2011). This presents the cultural encounter, the event of that encounter, as a particularly dynamic cultural force and one that the post-traditional festival is prominently situated to perform. AVF’s act of creating Variations VII (2008) produced a moment where a specific and potential cultural encounter could come into being.

To think of culture broadly as “fragmented, mobile and plural” and as relational, draws on a conception that is “post-representational”, where culture does not depict something external, but is itself a process of self-constitution (Delanty, 2011: 640). Culture is not a straight transmission from creator to receiver, author to audience, but culture is relational, mediating and transforms as it connects. Culture is not predefined, static or internal, it hides no essence to be discovered, it is always in the process of being made, it is formed by the interaction and encounters between social groups, objects and concepts (Delanty, 2011).88 A relational account of AVF is one that foregrounds the messy and

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88 This is to take relational thinking broadly and apply it beyond individual artists’ practice as the curator Nicolas Bourriaud (1998, 2002) does with his category of artistic production called ‘relational aesthetics’. Here the artists’ work is situated in relations between groups or individuals. However, this wider, relational thinking takes art to be inherently relational in general, although there is some theoretical crossover. Bourriaud (2002:14) traces his ideas through a group of artists he worked with in the 1990s and proposes “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.” The specific forms that a relational art practice might construct are heterogeneous but typically would include “meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality” (2002:28).
tangled process of negotiations of power, identity, taste and responsibility, present in the process of its production. It follows then, that there is a need when thinking about the post-traditional festival to reject thinking that ascribes them in bounded, static or ahistorical representations of space and place. It is necessary to reject a notion of the post-traditional festival as a phenomenon that happens in a privileged sphere, outside of the everyday or outside of labour relations, but that constitutes relation to them and operates through them.

Claiming that entities such as AVF are relational in process, or emergent and constituted from relations, and take places in relations, does not, on its own, offer any particular insights into how they operate and what they do. Relationality needs to be deployed as an analytical position (Anderson, 2014) for, as a process, it can be claimed for all aspects of AVF, the artworks, cultural encounters, spaces and affects that constitute it. It is necessary is to consider through this ontological priority, what these processes work toward, what they offer and what they occlude.

While relationally has been used in understanding culture it has also been theorised in geographies of space, where space can be thought of as a product of interrelations, and place is one of the possible enduring cultural forms that is emergent from these relations (Massey, 2005: 9). David Harvey (2006:4) summarises it succinctly, defining a relational view of space against absolute or relative notions of space:

> The relational view of space holds there is no such thing as space outside of the processes that define it. Processes do not occur in space but define their own spatial frame...An event or a thing at a point in space cannot be understood by appeal to what exists only at that point. It depends upon everything else going on around it.

This view of space takes account of an epistemological shift that rejects a Kantian conception of space as an ‘absolute category’, where space becomes the gathering together of multiple, open-ended, interconnected, trajectories constituted through interactions, or a ‘species of space’ (Crang & Thrift, 2000: 24; also see Latour, 2004). Space here is conceived as plural, as the outcome of social and

89 Relational thinking is well established within post-structural geography, centred around the writings of Amin (2002), Harvey (2006), Massey (2005) and Thrift (1996, 1999).
material practices, and as indivisible from time. Following Thrift (in Clifford, 2009: 96), it is necessary to,

abandon the idea of any pre-existing space in which things are embedded for an idea of space as undergoing continual construction… this is a relational view of space in which, rather than space being viewed as a container within which the world proceeds, space is seen as a co-product of those proceedings.

Similarly, Massey calls for a rejection of notions of place based on dominant fixed abstracts, where the construction of a singular and static identity for place is defined against the Other who is outside (Darling, 2009; Dovey, 2010). What is needed, Massey (2005:13) contends, “is to uproot ‘space’ from that constellation of concepts in which it has so unquestioningly … been embedded (stasis; closure; representation) and to settle it among another set of ideas (heterogeneity; relationality; coevalness)”. For Massey, following the Deleuzian notion of becoming-in-the-world, the alternative relational view offers a break with static, fixed, closed and dangerously essentialist notions of place, but preserves a provisional ontology of place-as-becoming: there is always, already and only becoming-in-the-world (see Dovey, 2010). This offers a view where locational identity is provisional and unfixed, a product of interrelations and always in a process of construction. It is from this relational view that we get the idea of peristaltic process of gathering and dispersal that characterises the post-traditional festival and AVF. Therefore, when we think how it was placed or how it was situated, it is necessary to consider the constitutive processes that brought it into being. This will become clearer through the discussion of the AVF version of Cage’s 1966 Variations VII.

5.3 Variations VII: 1966, New York

The performances, compositions, publications and lectures of John Cage have influenced many visual artists. His work altered the history of art by experimenting with new technology, indeterminacy, media and interactivity, through challenging traditional boundaries between artist, environment, artwork and audience. Cage’s work was often cited in AVF programmes and his work was the inspiration behind the title of AVF12 (see Chapter Six).
Variations VII (1996) was the third in a series of collaborative events in Cage’s Variations series where he worked with engineers and technicians using electronic systems and knowledge from Bell Laboratories.\textsuperscript{90} The work formed one part of the series of events, 9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering produced by the engineer Billy Klüver and Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.).\textsuperscript{91} The project emerged after a music society in Stockholm sought to put together a festival of art and technology and asked Klüver to create an American contribution to the event. The project in Sweden was never realised but Klüver continued to develop it and eventually produced it in New York at the 69th Regiment Armory in October 1966. The concept for the project was to bring together the contemporary knowledge of electronic engineering with avant-garde theatre, dance, art and music; the final programme paired ten artists with over thirty engineers. Cage (1966) sets out the concept for his contribution, in the program provided at the first performance:

My project is simple to describe. It is a piece of music, Variation VII, indeterminate in form and detail, making use of the sound system which has been devised collectively for this festival, further making use of modulation means organised by David Tudor, using as sound sources only those sounds which are in the air at the moment of performance, picked up via the communication bands, telephone lines, microphones together with, instead of musical instruments, a variety of household appliances and frequency generators. The technical problems involved in any single project tend to reduce the impact of the original idea, but in being solved they produce a situation different than anyone could have pre-imagined.

The work reflects Cage’s wider conceptual sonic project, where his compositional process represents a shift from the creation of traditional musical objects, scores from which performances can achieve some fidelity, to the creation of musical events, where there is no pre-determined sonic outcome, but rather a set of relationships that can be reproduced openly (Panzner, 2012). Through the electronically mediated process of audition in Variations VII (1996), Cage sought to actualise a specific spatial and temporal acoustic ecological event. Cage did not

\textsuperscript{90} Cage’s Variations V and VI were also produced in collaboration with Bell Labs.

\textsuperscript{91} E.A.T. was created to promote “the possibility of a work which is not the preoccupation of either the engineer, the artist, or industry, but the result of the exploration of the human interaction between these three areas” (Young, et al. 1997).
produce a score for the event, but rather there was a series of technical illustrations and a list of equipment. He later wrote two texts that elaborated the ethos of the performance, the unpublished *12 remarks re musical performance* (see Kuo, 2013) and the later 1972 text *Variations VII: 7 Statements re a Performance Six Years Before* (see Bardiot, 2006). Significantly, for the AVF recreation, the *9 Evenings* series of performances were proficiently documented in writings, drawings, film, photography and audio. These materials were exhibited as an archival account of *9 Evenings* at MIT List Visual Arts Center, shortly before AVF08 in 2006 (see Morris et al., 2006; Bock and Forster, 2007). This was part of a wider growing interest in re-visioning accounts of the significance of *9 Evenings* and politics of the period from which it emerged (Kuo, 2013). AVF08’s version of *Variations VII* (1966) was part of this attention that the same year resulted in a DVD publication of the 1966 performance (Schultz-Lundestam, 2008) and the Mobius Artists Group presenting *Variations VII* in Boston during March 2007 and April 2008 (Miller, 2009).

*Variations VII* (1966) made use of forms of amplification to technically and sonically demonstrate a range of motions, process and activities going on externally to those in the performance space (Pritchett, 1993). It created an augmented and mediated relationship between the audience and these dislocated sites. What *Variations VII* (1996) played with and to a certain extent distorted is what Thompson (2005:37) calls “de-spatialized simultaneity”, in this case a kind of aurality created by electric media that enables sound to be transmitted over large distances with an insignificant level of delay. In a way it provides a mediated co-presence, the sites chosen for the performance could be heard in virtually the same period, even though they did not share the same spatial locale as the sound sources. The orchestrated radio and the television allow the audience to see, hear and experience sounds, actions and images that are both simultaneous and de-spatialised.

For the performance, Cage assembled sound sources from all over New York and beyond, in an attempt to confluence the technological possibility of objects and processes of audibility that was possible at the time. There was even a discussion to try to bring sound from Bell Labs antennas picking up electromagnetic waves from outside of the earth’s atmosphere, but this was not accomplished. Ten open telephone lines were connected, and acted as a topographical map of the city as Cage saw it. The connections included a
restaurant, an aviary at the zoo, an electronic power generating station, a lost dog shelter, the New York Sanitation Department depot on the East River, a bus depot, The New York Times press room, Merce Cunningham’s studio and a turtle tank in the composer Terry Riley’s home. As well as the telephone lines, the event brought together ninety-five separate sound sources, including twelve contact microphones on domestic appliances such as a blender, a juicer, a toaster and a fan. It also included other receiving devices, a twenty-band radio, two Geiger counters, a television and four amplified body sounds (heart, brain, lungs, and stomach). The devices were incidentally controlled by a specially developed set of photocells. Lights were placed at floor level around the staging of the equipment. These activated or deactivated the sound sources as the performers moved around the space, interrupting and altering the light levels. The lights used to engage the photocell system threw the shadows of the performers on large white screens at the back of the performance area. Cage saw no distinction between the radio spectrum and the physical environment. Writing about Variations VII, and Radio Happenings I–V, he remarked, “all [radio] is making audible something which you’re already in. You are bathed in radio waves” (in Harger, 2008a:5). Cox (2009: 23) neatly surmises Cage’s approach to radio:

[F]or Cage, the radio was a tool of indeterminacy, since the composer and performers had to submit themselves to whatever happened to be broadcast at the time. And, of course, radio is a perfect model for acoustic flow: it is always there, a perpetual transmission; but we tap into it only periodically…For a brief window in time, it attunes us to the infinite and continuously unfolding domain of worldly sound. As Cage once put it: ‘Music is continuous; only listening is intermittent’ (1982: 224).

In Variations VII (1966), Cage invited the audience to move around freely and many stood close to the performers. Others walked around the Armory, or lay on the floor to listen to the thick soundscape reverberating through the hall. The filmmaker Jonas Mekas (1966 in Fetterman, 2010:137), present at the performance, later commented on the geographical imaginary that the situation created:

Peter Kubelka says Madison Square Garden is the most beautiful auditorium in the world. In a sense it is ... that’s why it was so great during the John Cage performance all those hundreds of people got up and moved across the
floor area to where the musicians were working- and for a moment it looked and sounded like I was in Grand Central.

It is meaningful that Variations VII (1966) might evoke the sonic atmosphere of the train station. As a site at the intersection of flows of people, technology and infrastructure, the train station is an assemblage of many forces of control and movement that are contingent in the creation of its acoustic mediated ecology.

5.4 Assembling and reassembling AVF

The following elaborates on ‘assemblage theory’ might offer a conception and analysis of events such as AVF, through a detailed consideration of Variations VII, but beginning with a discussion of the nature of thinking in assemblage. Cage’s work, theory and practice, has a strong relationship with Deluzian conceptions from which assemblage emerges. They share an expression of difference over stability, privilege process over object, and are resistant to restrictive applications of power to the individual or collective (Panzner, 2012).

To start it is necessary to outline the terms of what is meant by assemblage. The process of festival in general can be described as an assembly, a process of assembling. Chapter Six shows how AVF as post-traditional festival is a mobilising process that assembles and disperses. In its simplest form, the festival is a gathering of people, in a place, for a common purpose. As we saw in Rousseau’s description of the constitution of festival, “assemble the people and you have a festival” (in Friedrich, 2000:3). This sense is mirrored in Richard Sennett’s (2012) articulation of the festival as an event of reassembling and renewing social ties, accruing social bonds, what was outlined as the festive affect in Chapter Two. Gathering, is some-thing assembled (Latour, 2004), a process of connection, and AVF is the result of a process of connections. However, the meaning of ‘assemblage’ as it is deployed within this chapter is taken from a different conception, as a mode of analysis, where agency is not confined to the subject.

It is also no coincidence that Cage’s work is associated with assemblage as a concept. Assemblage as a mode of artistic production was central to conceptions of the practice of a number of artists and curators associated with Cage and others in New York throughout the 1960s. This conceptualisation is drawn from historical linage between pictorial collage and intermedia assemblage, as elaborated by Uroskie (2010) in relation to the work of John Cage and Merce
Cunningham, VanDerBeek, Robert Breer, Bruce Conner or Allan Kaprow. Assemblage was a term in common parlance at the time.92 The 1961 exhibition The Art of Assemblage at the New York Museum of Modern Art curated by William Seitz traced these historical links to collage.93 Uroskie (2012:163) recognises that Seitz “sought to displace the traditional conceptualisation of collage as the incorporation of heterogeneous material within the pictorial frame of the canvas, with a more encompassing, multidisciplinary attention to the artwork’s situation within and against a given institutional environment”. Located at the intersection of institutional traditions and aesthetic media, these performances highlight the kind of interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation that had become fundamental to a generation of artists seeking a way out of the confines of self-referential medium-specificity (Uroskie, 2012).

While assemblage as a development of collage may have a long history in artistic practice, more recently a philosophical conceptualisation of assemblage thinking has been taken up as a mode of analysis. John Cage’s work brings together both conceptualisations of assemblage. As Deleuze & Guattari (1987:267): wrote of his work, “it is undoubtedly John Cage who first and most perfectly deployed this fixed sound plane, which affirms a process against all structure and genesis, a floating time against pulsed time or tempo, experimentation against any kind of interpretation, and in which silence as sonorous rest also marks the absolute state of movement.”

Apart from the sonic, assemblage has been used as a concept in relation a number of disciplines, including urbanism and cities, networks, community, affect, the public sphere, dwelling, place and ethos. Most assemblage thought of this kind emerges from the philosophy of Deleuze and has been advanced in different forms by thinkers such as De Landa (2006, 2010, 2013), Latour (2005), and Bennett (2009) and has been appropriated in human geography by Anderson et al (2012), Adey (2012), Dovey (2010, 2011) McFarlane (2011a, 2011b) and applied in film

92 In a review of Bruce Conner’s assemblage works Brian O’Doherty wrote at the time “assemblage as a technique is permeating all of the arts with extraordinary vigor” (O’Doherty 1964 in Uroskie, 2012).
93 Seitz singles out assemblage as a mode of practice that is emblematic of modernity more generally… “every work of art is an incarnation: an investment of matter with spirit. The term ‘assemblage’ has been singled out with this duality in mind, to denote not only a specific technical procedure and form used in the literary and musical as well as the plastic arts, but also a complex of attitudes and ideas. Just as the introduction of oil painting in 15th century Flanders and Italy paralleled a new desire to reproduce the appearance of the visible world, collage and related modes of construction manifest a predisposition that is characteristically modern” (MOMA, 1961).

In a sense, as Anderson et al (2012: 177) acknowledges, there is no clear definition of assemblage. The term assemblage is an indirect translation of Deleuze’s concept of ‘agencement’ (see Philips, 2006). An assemblage is a provisional collage of different bodies or parts that cannot be identified as an organic whole, nor reduced to the constituent, heterogeneous parts, significantly for thinking of AVF, “an assemblage is finite: an emergent effect of processes of gathering and dispersion” (Anderson et al, 2012: 177).

De Landa first presented assemblage, as a coherent theory in his 2006 book A New Philosophy of Society. De Landa (2006) provides the most thorough interpretation of the technical, abstract and formal use of assemblage in the Deleuzian schema. De Landa’s assemblage theory adopted here, takes a realist social ontology, moving away from social constructivism. It offers a desire to consider a social and material gathering such as AVF or Variations VII (1966 and 2008) as assemblages constructed through particular historical processes. These are processes in which language plays an important but not a constitutive role, where assemblage theory expressivity cannot be reduced to language and symbols (De Landa, 2006). Assemblages for De Landa are provisional states whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts, which can be applied to a range of social scales, from conversations to cities, from atoms to biological organisms, species and ecosystems. The central tenet of the approach relies on the Deleuzian conception of relations of exteriority. This privileges the relation or connection as an ontological entity that takes place before the emergence of subjectivities.

Central to the concept is what is often described as the ‘part to whole relationship’, the idea that certain ‘ wholes’ (in this case festivals) are emergent from the relationships of their ‘parts’ (which could be artworks, gallery spaces, audience members or tastes), but not reducible to them. Assemblage is not just the result of the properties of its component parts. It is the interactions between

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94 Assemblage also has a relationship with Foucault’s notion of dispositif or apparatus. Legg (2011) shows how they can be thought together. Foucault (1980:194) defines his notion of dispositivo or apparatus as: “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions - in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between elements.”
components that form the assemblage, and these interactions cannot be reduced to individual properties alone (McFarlane, 2011a). As Phillips (2006: 108) writes “agencement designates the priority of neither the state of affairs nor the statement but of their connection, which implies the production of a sense that exceeds them and of which, transformed, they now form parts.” The parts of an assemblage can be exchanged, mixed or recombined. In the way the parts of a mechanical machine can be taken out and replaced or used elsewhere, so the parts of an assemblage can be recomposed (De Landa, 2006; Dovey, 2010). For instance, AVF is not a whole nor is it just a collection of discrete objects, but in this sense an assemblage of many assemblages, that offer a form of coherence.

Assemblage can be taken as a bundle of relations, which topographically, rather than hierarchically arranged, can come together and create (uneven) flows of power. Similar to actor-networks, assemblages are provisional unities that might themselves have an emergent or complex causality that is irreducible to their component parts (Anderson et al, 2012:178). Where assemblage denotes “indeterminacy, emergence, becoming, processuality, turbulence, and the sociomateriality of phenomena”, it is, then, part of a more general reconstitution of the social field as materially heterogeneous and practice based (De Landa, 2006 in McFarlane, 2011a: 653). Power is implicit in assembling within the array of assemblages that constitute what we call a festival. AVF cannot therefore be regarded as a bracket or container, indifferent to its contents. It is pernicious to think of the festival in the abstract, as articulated throughout this thesis it needs to be considered as a process that works through social, cultural and spatial relations.

From this perspective, things, objects and phenomena are not determined by their own internal reality, by some essence, but rather by the multiplicity of relations that constitute their morphogenesis. This follows earlier discussions about the conceptualisation of festival, as somehow a privileged spatial or temporal entity ‘out of’ rather than consisted in relation to the everyday. Following this approach aims to avoid any essentialism regarding the festival, which might see it as some kind of transcendental or mythologised space such as this. Assemblage differs from models of social composition that use organic system metaphors: it is not a total system, in an organic sense, where parts are subsumed into homogeneity (Anderson et al, 2012).

In an assemblage, the ‘becoming’ or relation of the parts attains its own independent ontological status as in Deleuze’s often-cited example of the wasp
and orchid that together create a ‘becoming’ or symbiotic emergent unit.\textsuperscript{95} This is mirrored in Philips’ (2006) example where a wound created by a knife, is an event that brings together the knife and the flesh but cannot be reduced to neither the knife nor the flesh. The sonic ecology of Variations VII (1966 and 2008) can therefore be considered as an emergent event, co-produced by the encounter the between various sound sources and their particular resonances at the time of the performance. As Cage’s practice demonstrates, the resulting sonic creation is manifested from the relational construction of many heterogeneous parts. It emerges from the relationship between these sound sources. This is what the radical composer and Marxist, Cornelius Cardew (1974:43), writing on Cage, calls his interest in “quantity, not quality”, where the sonic ecology of Cage’s works develop not from internal existing relationships, their own inner logic, but rather by chance according to phenomena and conditions from the outside.\textsuperscript{96}

Expanding this out to the frame of AVF, the organisation is as much constructed in spaces between html code, jpeg image files, ical calendar files, DVD players, plane tickets, debit card transactions, excel spreadsheets and the conversations of those who organise it and their subjective passions and tastes. Paying attention to such practices is significant as Deleuze & Guattari (1987: 555) argue:

> It is necessary to ascertain the content and the expression of each assemblage, to evaluate their real distinction, their reciprocal presupposition, their piecemeal insertions. The reason that the assemblage is not confined to the strata is that expression in it becomes a semiotic system, a regime of signs, and content becomes a pragmatic system, actions and passions.

Here expression offers a similar concept to ‘ethos’ and ‘coherence’, terms often deployed by interview subjects when reflecting on the practices how AVF was curated (Pate, 2012; Shatwell, 2013).

De Landa (2006) offers a clearer insight here by differentiating between the capacities and properties of the event assemblage. Properties can be listed and are

\textsuperscript{95}Deleuze and Guttari (1987:25) on the rhizome: “there is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders.”

\textsuperscript{96}Cardew (1974:44) was a fierce critic of this approach, as he wrote: “The revolutionary aspirations which Cage professes flake away under scrutiny to reveal a deep-rooted, pie-in-the-sky”
finite - this is people, electricity, capital, gaffa tape, buildings, fields, objects - but
the capacities of the event are different and infinite and include sensations, affects,
emotions, memories, cognition. These emergent intensities are drawn from the
spaces *inbetween*. The capacities are those that go towards the convening of social
ties and bond, the belonging associated with festive affect. Thinking through
assemblage is an attempt to emphasise that the process of festival is more than
just relations. The histories and labour required to produce and sustain them are
also significant, which exceeds beyond the sum of the connections, and as such
cultural assemblages are structured, hierarchised, and narrativised through
profoundly unequal relations of power, resource, and knowledge. The population
of different, often indirectly competing festivals within particular art form genres is
testament to this.

What is important here is to start with assemblage as a means of attending to
and explaining the ontological category of the phenomena under consideration.
As Anderson et al (2012:175) comments, “by attending to the ‘ontological priority’
(Massumi, 2002) of processes of composition through which forms emerge (and
may return), the term assemblage invites us to think outside a distinction between
the structured and the unstructured.” It moves, as Marcus & Saka (2006:101),
outline to provide a rationale “that permits the researcher to speak of emergence,
heterogeneity, the decentred and the ephemeral in nonetheless ordered social
life.”

The component parts of an assemblage can be extracted and placed into a
different assemblage in which its interactions are different (further elaborated in
Chapter Six). *Variations VII* could move from 1966 New York to 2008 Gateshead,
and still retain the coherent claim to be *Variations VII*, but it was dependent upon a
legitimate institutional framework to enable it to happen. Artworks, as
assemblages, shift between exhibitions, collections, texts, images, catalogues and
websites all the time and they are able in a sense to maintain meaning. While they
do not employ the term assemblage, Preziosi and Farago (2012:75) do seek to
configure the study of artistic production as an assemblage of distributed agencies,
as they write:

The history of the idea of art is a series of transformations or distortions of
what might be imagined explicitly or implicitly to be an idea matrix of
relationships between producers, products, and their meanings or function
for users - who may also at times be producers. The identity, nature and
actual histories of these aspects or dimensions of the art system - their
topological shape and the fittingness or decorum of that set of relations - are
consistent only when embodied locally at given times and in particular places
or given communities, and then they are fixed only for a time.

This is similar to the work of Bruno Latour (2005) for whom assembling implies
the creation of connections between objects from which the social emerges.
What is significant, and follows the outline of relational thinking, is the possibility
of providing an account of the formation of consistency, of enduring regularity or
the presentation of coherence, to make a claim for the specific ways order
emerges and endures through and in-spite of change. This consistency or stability
is otherwise referred to on a scale of territorialisation, where the territorialised
or de-territorialised set of relations denotes the fixity or solidity of assemblages:
in a sense its power to remain and continually actualise. This perspective offers a
non-linear form of causality, an idea central to Cage’s work more generally and
clearly aspired to within the process of control in Variations VII (1966).

Assemblage thinking is relational; it considers the matrix of relations that
constitute a possible whole that we can call a festival as something not purely
symbolic or abstract as a Hegelian totality. Thinking in assemblage allows greater
freedom to consider the imaginary in the construct and operation of festival
spaces. As a relational set of concepts, there is a need to consider the various
forms that constitute these relations and their emergent properties. The starting
point for an assemblage-based analysis as Anderson et al (2012:174) sees it is “to
understand assembling as an ongoing process of forming and sustaining
associations between diverse constituents.” The event of festival appears as a
seemingly well-ordered form. The abstract brochure schedule presents it as so,
and the audience judge its curatorial narrative based on how ‘cohesive’ it appears
and how closely the artworks and theme cohere. In a number of AVF case study research interviews, subjects defined the curatorial success of a
festival programme by how well it appeared to be ‘cohesive’.

97 On average during AVF12, each audience member attended a small number of events (3.4 according to BOP
2012) events related to the festival, conscious of their place in the programme of it or not, there is clearly no one experience that makes up a cultural encounter
with AVF. The semblance of relational coherence has an agency within the social
and attending to this, to what becomes stuck or fixed, is central to the
understanding of AVF. The history of the event is in a sense a narrative of things that have been solidified or held temporarily in place long enough for certain intensities to emerge (the flow of things and people is further elaborated in Chapter Six).

Following this, thinking in assemblage allows for a consideration of the situated, of how AVF and Variations VII (1966 and 2008) emerge from and are constituted by place as a territorialised assemblage. This definition of place is defined by connections and the interactions between parts rather than essences, similar to Massey’s articulation of a relational concept of place outlined earlier. AVF is one set of assemblages within the wider collections of actions and mediations that constitute the urban cultural multiplicity. In terms of the analysis through assemblage, it follows that an empirical focus on the spatial forms and processes of AVF are themselves assembled, held in place, and work in different way to territorialise (code or close down) or de-territorialise (de code or open up) possibilities. Following McFarlane (2011b:652) here,

...assemblage does not separate out the cultural, material, political, economic, and ecological, but seeks to attend to why and how multiple bits-and-pieces accrete and align over time to enable particular forms of urbanism over others in ways that cut across these domains, and which can be subject to disassembly and reassembly through unequal relations of power and resource.

Thus AVF08, and Variations VII (2008) as part of AVF, must be considered as the result of multiple trajectories, rationales and agencies that are realised through diverse assemblages of institutions, desires, actors, practices, objects and encounters and therefore they cannot be understood as a simple elaboration of economic determinism or individual desire. The value of assemblage thinking is that it is directed towards an engagement with particular cultural alignments formed through processes of gathering, connection, dispersion, and change. It is important in considering these processes of material change not to ignore the political and economic structures and institutions within which they are embedded (Brenner et al, 2012:129). The performance of Cage’s Variations VII (2008) can, in a sense, be read as a wider metaphor for the AVF’s spatiality, and the boundaries and territories it relates to, but also demonstrating the provisional multiplicity that place is emergent from.
5.5 Variations VII: 2008, Gateshead

Variations VII (2008) was performed as the ‘opening gala’ event of AVF08 on Friday 29 February at the BCCA in Gateshead. It became the first staging of the event in Europe since the 9 Evenings performance in October 1966 in New York and was billed as the European premiere of the work. Prior to AVF08, the work had only been staged twice in 1967 and 2011. It is perhaps little performed due to its scale, technical complexity and indeterminate form, as well as its reliance on technical rather than musical performance knowledge to enact. Harger (2008) expressed her logic for presenting the performance as follows:

Whilst we were an electronic arts festival and it was our remit to try and bring to the audiences of the North East new and exciting trends in technologically mediated art. We also considered it our role to look back into history for inspiration as well, so this is one of the works we commissioned for the 2008 festival which was a recreation of a work from 1966 by John Cage which used very, very domestic media… in combination with what at the time was very cutting edge technology, photoelectric cells.

Over the evening two separate performances of the work were produced each to an audience of up to 250. Harger initiated the project and brought together an ensemble of academics, musicians and technicians local to the North East to work on the research, production and performance of the event. The ensemble was made up of Atau Tanaka, who was then Professor of Digital Media at Newcastle University, and the ambient and industrial music group, :zoviet*france: made up of Ben Ponton and Mark Warren and Matt Wand. The performance was produced through a close collaboration with the technical team at BCCA as well as Laura Kuhn from the John Cage Trust. It was a significantly large financial investment for AVF, the largest single event production undertaken by that date.

The curatorial rationale behind staging the event was the relationship between Variations VII (1966) transmission technologies, which aligned with the theme of the AVF08, Broadcast (see Figure. 1). The festival thematic of Broadcast, sought to develop links with wider national changes in broadcast infrastructure and the move from analogue to digital technologies, discursively playing on this moment of change, but predicated on questioning some of the social, political and economic implications of the shift. Unlike the AVF06 programme, Broadcast was not
Figure 20 Variations VII (2008), John Cage, performance diagram, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, 2008, Gateshead. Part of AVF08. Image: AV Festival
developed from an international open call for projects, but rather came explicitly from Harger's own research, as both an artist working with radio technologies and research from a PhD she was undertaking while working on AVF.98

Variations VII (2008) ran as the 'headline' conceptual and symbolic event for the Broadcast programme, while the wider programme featured artists and musicians responding to the theme, including commissions by Joyce Hinterdinc, Chris Watson and Marko Peljhan, and working across different notions of radio and broadcasting. The programme embodied an ethos of experimentation with radio as a medium, drawing some inspiration from Bertolt Brecht's text on radio as 'an apparatus of communication' from the 1930s.

The enactment of a new version of Variations VII (1966) was created by piecing together how the original performance was produced from fragments of information. This drew on film documentation and other sources from the John Cage Trust, including Cage’s notes and a list of sound sources from the 1966 event. The ensemble sought to ‘update’ the work by enacting it as a musical transposition or theatrical adaptation (Ponton & Tanaka, 2010) which was unlike the previous exhibition of materials from 9 Evenings, at MIT List Visual Arts Center in 2006 (Bock & Forster, 2007).

Operating with slightly less (64) individual sound sources than the 1966 performance (see Figure. 20), the devices were triggered using photoelectric cells and stage lighting on the floor through the disruption from the audience who could turn on and off various devices with their movement. However, the 2008 event used a similar set of objects and processes to gather sound, as well as augmenting and changing some of the elements and sources, a mixture of Geiger counters, ultrasound devices, body sensors, radio stations, satellite television, and other domestic electrical appliances were drawn into the space. Inevitably, over time, some of the objects meanings had changed, from icons of 1960s commercial

98 The programme guide introduction (Harger, 2008) to AVF08 reads: “We have just entered the second century of broadcasting. And it finds us on the apex of massive change. The switch off of analogue broadcasting has now started and will continue apace throughout 2008. Information and entertainment which has been sent via the airwaves since the beginning of the 20th century is going digital. What does this mean for the future of broadcasting? Does the switch to digital create greater possibilities for cultural and community participation in broadcasting? Or will the switch create more complex regulatory frameworks, which disempower potential broadcasters? Will the airwaves fall silent after the switch off? What is the fate of the part of the spectrum that radio and television use now? Will this valuable natural resource be opened up for public use? Or will these frequencies be sold to mobile telephone companies or the military? The answers to these questions may define our entertainment culture for the next decades, and will provide the backdrop for AV Festival 08.”
domestic America to the grey media and retro-futurist kitsch aesthetic of the ‘teas-maid’, found in charity shops around the North East.

The locations and mode of telephone communication was also transposed in technology and place. Fixed telephone landlines became mobile phones and Skype internet connections. The heterogeneity of the contemporary North East region allowed for an imaginative transposition of the sites of sound sources from the original New York sites, some with more consistency than others - Merce Cunningham’s studio was replaced by a connection to Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art and the New York Subway was transposed to the Tyne & Wear Metro. Other sites included the Claremont Road Cat & Dog Shelter, NCJ Media Press Hall, North Shield’s Fish Quay and in place of Terry Riley’s turtle tank, a connection via Skype to the sound recordist Chris Watson’s garden where there was a microphone in with the worms in his compost heap. What these sites might lack in terms of status in relation to their historic counterparts, they make up for in a playful mapping of the everyday urban and domestic background of the region.

The experience of encountering the performance of Variations VII (2008), in all its swarming sonic multiplicity was somewhat confusing and frenetic, with no clear sound dominating and no clear spectatorial role. It could easily be said to fit within what, Cornelius Cardew (1974:35), an astute critic of Cage, called “an oppressive chaos.” The awkward audience circled around the constellation of equipment moving back and forth gaining differing aural insights or retreating to darker corners to chat quietly. Nothing dominated visually, audibly or spatially. There was clearly no whole to be grasped, but an attempt to make sense of the flow of sounds, and watch the manipulations of the ‘technicians’ as they brought sounds into and took sounds out of the space (see Figure. 21). Those involved were keen to stress their lack of authorship, Ponton explicitly describes the ensemble as ‘technicians’, not performers (Ponton & Tanaka, 2010).

In line with Cage’s ideas on indeterminacy and chance, Variations VII (1966) worked towards an erosion of the composer or musicians’ agency that is present in his wider work. The work of the technicians becomes a process of editing, managing or smoothing the sounds pulled from around the city. The sense of distributed agency emergent from the assemblage, does not pose the subject as

99 Cardew (1974: 45) places Cage's interest in indeterminacy, resolutely within class struggle… “The ‘randomness’ idea is a familiar weapon of the bourgeois ideologists to divert the consciousness of the masses from the real laws (laws and randomness are counterposed)"
the origin of the event, but rather sees the subject as selecting from potentials already at work in the same way that one “dips a rudder into a rushing stream” (Panzner, 2012:91). Bringing together these parts into unheard relations, requires us to think about these sonic manipulations as a fabric that threads itself across space linking atomised sounds and producing new lines of connection. In doing so sound becomes a fundamentally relational medium with each seemingly separate part impacting on all that has gone before and all that which comes after. This is not to deny the presence of human actions or self-directed action: as Variations VII (1966) demonstrates, human intentions do have significant effects on unfolding situations but they are constantly displaced as the sole meaningful producers of actions. Instead, human intentions and musical works can enact a transformation on an assemblage. While they can change the virtual relationships within an ecology, but they can never be the sole determiner of what occurs in the messy, manifold sense of causality presented here. It is perhaps Bruno Latour (2005:502) who best characterises this relationship. He writes:

All of us live in an artificial landscape generated by the crisscrossing of an endless number of artefacts, each of which is the result of some decision about a certain order of the world no matter how confusingly carried out. Every object was first a project. The problem is that these assemblages have no assembly to represent them; this is the reason that ‘technology’ can look like a dull, mechanical, autonomous force that exerts power without anyone actually holding the controls. And yet, when we look more closely, there is not a single technology around which, very quickly, you don’t find a swarm of different people assembled to bring it into existence.

Latour offers us a vivid account of the process Cage enacts and AVF re-enacts through the staging of Variations VII (2008). What the process produces is a powerful presentation of the vitality from the dull assemblages of everyday technology, site and place; it matches the liveliness and heterogeneity of space that Massey (2005) discusses.

The contingent, unstable and provisional whole of Variations VII (1966) as event, was captured in the archive, in film documentary produced by E.A.T, in photographic documentation, in audio recordings of each performance and in notational form in Cage's writing and other technician’s notes, as well as reviews and personal accounts. The possibility and desire to reform this provisional whole
Figure 2.1 Variations VII (2008), BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, 2008, Gateshead. Part of AVF08. Image: Louise Hepworth. Courtesy of AV Festival
in a different place and time gains its potential and possibility from the archive of materials created directly and indirectly from the first event, not from a score or script as a single document to be transposed. In a sense the AVF event acts as a performative gesture, as an actualisation of the archive. It is also to appropriate and align the festival with the symbolic value of Cage’s legacy as one of the most significant composers and artists of the twenty-first century. Here, once access has been gained, the archive in its multiplicity is a material assemblage that must be mediated through the planes of the event as part of AVF08. The re-staging of the performance becomes a re-staging of the documentation of the first performance where the archive offers a provisional and unstable notion of memory. The 2008 performance becomes, in part, about re-creating the visual surface: the visual appearance taken from the film and photographic documentation of 1966 and enacting the atmosphere of the performance space through particular lighting. What affords the AVF08 performance its legitimacy is its adherence not to specific 'rules' of the original composition but to an appropriate ethos and coherence emergent from the first staging, present in the archive and performed in its re-staging.

The performative element is evident in the process of staging Variations VII (2008), AVF and the ensemble do not seek to recreate a similar set of technological or scientific relationships of the kind that initially allowed Cage to work in the way he did through collaboration with Klüver and Bell Labs. Instead the relationships are worked through the archive, with the John Cage Trust, with the BCCA’s gallery technicians and the university institution. Having limited resources, BCCA and AVF approached British Telecom (BT) for financial support as a ‘sponsor’ of the event, as cultural PR, and as cultural brand affiliation but not as a co-producer of the event as Bell Labs had originally operated as (Vincentelli, 2012). This approach for sponsorship is telling, as it is emblematic of the transfer of the performance into something of museological concern, likewise it speaks of institutionalisation of the arts in North East England, adopted for the generation of symbolic value for place. Taken as historical re-enactment, Variations VII (2008) evokes questions of authenticity and performance.

The conceptual and technological complexity of the original performance is diminished in the archive re-telling of it. It demonstrates certain practices, ideas, concepts and knowledge that have endured and thrived since the original performance, to the point that it was deemed significant in Gateshead in 2008 to
recreate it. The endurance of these forms speaks to how AVF actively sought to maintain and produce the practices emergent from these pioneering works across events such as E.A.T.

If *Variations VII* (1966 and 2008) offer a process of listening to ‘place’, then what does it sound like? Tanaka (Ponton and Tanaka, 2010) articulates that *Variations VII* "...was a way of listening to the 'state' of a place, of a city in 1966". Tanaka commented on the difference between the two AVF performances, that the second one sounded much more like the original New York performance. What is interesting is the replacement of urban features from one city to another, as a kind of topological overlay of the urban; it shows that the ‘same’ sites of sound, ultimately that the manifold event of the performance sound very similar. Where, in isolation, Gateshead in 2008 sounded a little like New York in 1966. The emergent sound field itself seems to give us little insight into the specificity of place, it is only in its performative multiplicity including the various social and spatial imaginaries assembled that as ‘sense’ of place can be discerned. This shows the unfolding and lively practice of site. These sites are not static containers of sound, to be discovered, amplified and heard, but are flows to be entered into. What is not clear is whether this is a performative gesture by the ‘technicians’ tuning the performance to sound more like their experience of the archived 1966 event.

Rather than a producing a singular sociality or spatiality, the sound actualised in Cage's performance engenders numerous planes of socio-spatial and sonic assemblage. The parts are irreducible to each other and each has certain autonomy; yet they are articulated in contingent ways through relations of synergy, affordance, coding, conditioning or causality. Sounds engage in feedback, not fusion. Relations are a matter of symbiosis, not of organism. Cage's ultimate point is that sound is emerging through the agency of the assemblage, of chance, and as a key constituent of place, of the embodied, affective part of place. We can infer that this furthers our understanding of a heterogeneous, open-ended and lively sense of the potential of place. What the re-staging of Cage's *Variations VII* (1966) points towards, is the Deleuzian conception, that objects are processes, that things regardless of their apparent dullness, fixity or lifelessness, have a potential agency because they are themselves processes. This is extrapolated form both the original performance, as technical objects deployed in the creation of a sound field, but also as technical objects (such as images, video etc.) in the archive that have
their own dynamisms and exert their own influences. Through assemblage, they combine, to create a situated event that has its own agency, emergent from these relations. For Cage, as for Deleuze, agency occurs out of the assemblage itself in its bringing together of potentials. It is the assemblages themselves, not individuals that are the agents of a performance. Moreover, things are themselves open-ended assemblages that enter into ever-larger assemblages, the festival, the urban, the region and beyond.

5.6 Conclusion

As should be clear from examining the creation of Variations VII (2008), AVF is an assemblage of proximate and distant social, economic, cultural and political relationships, the scale and scope of which do not necessarily converge neatly around territories or temporalities. The analysis of John Cage’s Variation VII (2008) developed a relational matrix of space-place-performer-sound-audience through a discussion of assemblage theory. Through these discussions, this chapter has outlined the relationship between AVF and the sonic and mediated geographies it inhabits and works through as fluid and historically contingent social processes. AVF and the cultural encounters it created were borne of multiple agencies. The scale, complexity and ambition of staging Variations VII (2008) offers a particular statement about the ability of AVF to work within a territory of practice usually associated with much larger, well-resourced organisations. The process here has been to describe the cultural encounters emergent from AVF as relationally constituted assemblages, and as mechanisms through which AVF promoted a progressive sense of place. The discussion points to the potential of the festival in general as a process of listening, of paying attention, often to what is already there, historically, socially but also to listening outwardly, to bringing things, objects, people and ideas into new, situated relations. Emphasising the fluid nature of social life as situated practices has moved attention away from viewing the spatiality of the festival as an inert, indifferent container, towards an understanding of it as a manifold set of interconnected imaginariness that are continuously folded, stretched, distorted, aligned or ignored.

Space is not regarded as a site of the event, but a co-functioning element in the creation of the encounter: the materiality of the former flourmill on the Gateshead Quays provided a distinctive contribution to the overall soundscape, as the way radio waves were either able or unable to pass through it into the
performance space. The de-spatiality of Variations VII (1996 and 2008) is an element of the creative imagination and as an artefact of musical or artistic practice, space is both produced and transformed through this sonic assembly. Social relations are also significant. The multiplicity of the social relations emergent from this group, gathering in this place, at this time, mediated through the aspirations and motivations of those curating and organising the event result from AVF operating as node in a larger network, or movement of actors between diverse, but particular geographies.

Thinking through the recreation of Cage’s Variations VII (1966) as assemblage seeks to capture the plurality and contestation of the processes enacted through material infrastructure, archive, and curatorial desire. The heterogeneous elements that temporarily coalesced in 1966 New York were committed to the archive only to be re-formed in the urban fabric of Gateshead and Newcastle in 2008. Of course, 2008 Gateshead is not 1966 New York, and this conflagration speaks of a performative cultural practice of assemblage undertaken by AVF, but as seen in Chapter Two this process of connection is directed towards the cultural economy as much as it is towards critical artistic practice.

The assemblage that was Variations VII (1966 and 2008) can be seen as a collage made of disjunctive media, but significantly, it is only ever provisionally ‘made’ at all: the temporality of assemblage belies its provisional construction. The work of assemblage is always only a work to-be-constructed through an act of collaboration with its spectator, a site where the spectator is actively solicited to rework light, movement, sound and image (Uroskie, 2010). What this chapter has attempted to achieve is to animate the diverse complexities of thinking through music, sound, visuality, space and the social, as the festival itself attempts to do. Moving beyond this the next chapter addresses how motion, movement and the forces that drive mobility, at a range of scales, have shaped and are integral to the festival assemblage.

The Variations VII (2008) performance animates the diverse complexities of thinking through festivals, sound, space and the social together. To account for the elements that form these multiplicities (sound and image, sound and space, subjectivity, sociability and affective process) are immanent in the cultural encounter that emerges from the messy flux of mobile processes that AVF undertook. The discussion of Variations VII (1996 and 2008), however, takes in concepts of ontology and causality, seeking to account for the agency of coherence
in the processes that manifested AVF. Here, the assemblages of the contemporary bureaucratic cultural institution are formed from office desks, posters, people with roles and tasks, hierarchies of authority, aeroplane tickets, dvd players, a history and an archive as well as individual ambitions, passions and taste, that come together in the event of festival. Using assemblage goes further towards developing a conception of the arts festival that is not an abstract entity, or totality, that happens in place but as a process in an ongoing relationship forming and reforming place. Assemblage provides a further elaboration for considering festival as a process, entering into place and acting on place.
6 Mobility: temporality, friction and slowness

Boredom plus attention = becoming interested

John Cage (1993)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the significance of the ‘mobility turn’ within the social sciences for an understanding of AVF and the arts festival. It explicitly examines this through the theme and programme of AVF12, As Slow As Possible, which took place in March 2012 (see Figure. 2). The central argument is that thinking in mobilities transforms our conception of the arts festival into a process of mobilisation and assemblage. AVF thought of in these terms was a process in motion with different degrees of stasis and flow. These motions act upon territory and place. Rather than consider how the processes enacted by AVF remEDIATE and re-territorialise a specific place, here the flows that constituted AVF itself are examined.

There were two key insights that triggered this necessity to consider AVF through the lens of mobility and to think about the contemporary festival as a process that deals with the problem of distance. The first deals with the movement of people. During a selection panel convened to choose an artist project for a large-scale public event commission in 2009, funded by C10 (discussed in Chapter Two). The funder stated that if the panel could not find a project that would be of sufficient scale, quality and public interest to motivate audiences to travel from Manchester to Newcastle to attend then it was not in...
their interests to fund the project. It was this evaluative logic in relation to the ability of an art event to mobilise that this chapter seeks to take account of. The second insight concerns the movement of objects and artworks. In Heidegger’s famous essay, *The origin of the work of art* (2011:84) he writes, “a painting travels from one exhibit to another. Works are shipped like coal from the Ruhr and logs from the Black Forest”. Heidegger was writing in the late 1930s, decades after the establishment of the first large-scale temporary exhibitions of art, such as the Carnegie International founded in 1896. Carnegie began through a desire to bring European modern art to Pittsburgh so that it could be viewed and collected by wealthy industrialists and enter the collections of the Carnegie Museum of Art (see Neal, 1995 and Biggs, 2012). For Heidegger, artworks became mere resources to be moved, stored and speculated upon, a process enhanced through the seeming speed and efficiency of modernity. Here, there are two different flows: one the movement of people to encounter art as experiences, and the other the movement of art to the people. It is these two flows and the entwined relationship of media, power, transport, logistics and consumption that is integral to a new conception of the post-traditional festival.

AVF spent a significant amount of its resources moving things and people, moving them into a position and moving them out again, gathering and dispersing. In a broader sense, a conceptualisation of movement itself was at the centre of the creation of AVF. In 2002, Pattinson viewed the Tyneside Cinema as bureaucratic, slow and unresponsive. It was this characterization of immobility that prompted Pattinson and Dobson to build new relationships that eventually led to the creation of AVF, as a realisation of the desire to present a more dynamic programme to a more mobile audience.

The production of AVF was caught up almost entirely with thinking about movement and managing movement in different corporeal and material forms, from curating to ticketing and scheduling, to travel booking and hosting, from print traffic to web design. A concern for what, and who moves in relation to AVF

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100 Approximately 3 hours or 150 miles.
101 On the condition of modernity, Peter Sloterdijk (in Cools & Gielen, 2014:95) provides an insightful overview where “the categorical impulse of modernity is: in order to be continuously active as progressive beings man should overcome all the conditions where his movement is reduced, where he had come to a halt, where he lost his freedom and where he is pitifully fixed”. Crary (2013:66) qualifies the outcomes of this in more complex, messy terms, “modernity, contrary to its popular connotations, is not the world in a sweepingly transformed state...it is the hybrid and dissonant experience of living intermittently with modernised spaces and speeds, and yet simultaneously inhabiting the remnants of pre-capitalist life-worlds, whether social or natural.”
Figure 22 Leif Inge, 9 Beet Stretch, Star & Shadow Cinema, Newcastle 2012. Part of AVF12: As Slow As Possible. Photo: Colin Davison. Courtesy of AV Festival
runs through its entire production. As a regionally dispersed, multi-sited festival, distance and mobility was also always a problematic issue for AVF. It consistently preoccupied the AVF directors and effected how they managed to mobilise artworks and audiences.

This chapter, therefore, sets out to examine a conception of mobility to build a wider argument around the relational ontology and agency associated with the process of the post-traditional festival. Initially, by examining recent scholarly work on mobility to consider how AVF as a mobilising process, as a specific ‘mode of mobility’, with its own temporalities can be characterised as a temporary stabilisation or mooring, privileging co-presence. Following this, two modes of mobility AVF produced and entered into are examined.

Firstly, this means addressing corporeal movement as the gathering of people into co-present relations to constitute AVF events. This leads to a discussion of the AVF12 curatorial theme of slowness. This elaborates on how differential mobilities operate across a range of speeds with differing degrees of friction, associated with the body at rest, where the festival offers a mediation between absence and presence. Secondly, the movement of objects is addressed, seeking to examine what and how AVF gathered. This focuses on a detailed analysis of a subset mobility system within AVF. A system that is often present within many film festivals, the logistical management of ‘print traffic’, where film prints and media are gathered for screening: this traces the material movements of objects through differing spaces and regulatory systems. These insights from a post-traditional festival show how mobility and movement are related to desire, belonging, identity and power. All of these are visible in what makes people move and what obligations create motion.

6.2 Temporary stabilisation, friction and festival

The starting point for a consideration of mobilities is the ubiquity of movement itself. Everything is in motion.\textsuperscript{102} From a phenomenological perspective movement is the very condition of being-in-the-world. As anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011:65) outlines “we are dealing here not with a way of believing about the

\textsuperscript{102} Heraclitus offers a view of the world where all is in motion, nothing is fixed, and in which both time and space are in continual flux, it is not possible to go back to regress temporarily or spatially. In Heraclitus’ famous notion, it is not possible to step twice into the same waters of a flowing river (see Sutherland, 2013).
world but with a condition of being in it...being alive to the world...to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next.”
In these terms, motion is a condition of being, but what moves and how it moves within the social world is determined by differing temporalities, levels of friction, energy, viscosity and speed, where human and non-human agency act upon and in these flows in different ways. These situated flows constitute the form of AVF. This is not to argue for a seemingly ‘placeless’ conception of the process of festival that is only made up of networks, flows and connections. Rather, it is to think about the remediation and territorialisation these flows enable in specific places.

Over the past two decades a new approach to the study of mobilities has developed across the social sciences, sometimes called the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ or the ‘mobile turn’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007; Canzler et al., 2008). This examines in detail an integrated approach to the mobility of people, things and ideas across all scales. For sociologists, such as Mimi Sheller and John Urry, two of the leading thinkers in this subject, mobility and different mobilities compose contemporary society (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007; and Sheller, 2011). Their work has examined how interdependent ‘mobility-systems’ constitute every aspect of contemporary life, where “all social relationships as necessitating diverse ‘connections’ that are more or less ‘at a distance’, more or less fast, more or less intense and more or less involving physical movement” (Urry in Canzler et al, 2008:13). Influenced by the sociology of science and technology, and the material and spatial turns, as well as drawing on actor-network theory, mobility research considers infrastructures, technical objects and embodied practices that enable or disable movement. Significantly, for the understanding of the arts festival, this places emphasis on immobility, temporary stabilisation, dwelling and stillness as much as speed or fluidity. Here, mobilities operate across the socio-technical assemblages of human and material hybridity, in which the post-traditional festival is subjected. Everything from artworks to shoes, DVDs, mobile phones, tickets and passports, satellites and software codes, are all embedded within and support specific mobility regimes (Sheller, 2011).

In this sense, AVF as a mobilising process seeks to create flows and move people and things into relations: this assembling act enables both placement and displacement, as simultaneous de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Tim Cresswell (2012:279) provides a seminal account of mobility: he offers a simple
definition of mobility as “the movement of people, objects or ideas”. AVF sought to move all three of these. Therefore, what needs to be addressed is the act of mobility, where mobility is the act of displacement that enables people, things and ideas to change location. Mobility is displacement, with its social associations of alienation, marginalisation and nomadism; but at the same time, it can be evoked as an act of placement, with its counter associations of stasis, attachment and belonging. The concept of mobility is at the core of studies on migration, transnationalism, diaspora and citizenship, transport, tourism and mapping. John Law (in Adey 2009:17) offers a similar relational view. For Law, mobility and immobility are active. Where they are relational effects, he gives the example that “concrete walls are solid while they are maintained and patrolled”. Mobilities and immobilities are therefore the result or accomplishment of a relation.

There is nothing novel about considering what moves. Clearly, considerations of mobility are historically significant, and therefore not unique to the contemporary world. It is not movement itself that has changed but the modes and regimes of movement are arguably more dynamic and complex than ever before, and thus mobility is one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary world. As Massey (2003:116) outlines:

Mobility is a theme-tune of our times. Mobility, nomadism, flows: a space of flows replaces a space of places; networks instead of territories. But these are descriptions (accurate or not), not prescriptions. Principles as general as this would anyway be problematic. For the world is specific, and structured by inequalities. It matters who moves and how you move. Nomadism is also the mantra of the neoliberal: financial capital is constantly circulating.

To be placed or displaced, is positioned against a background of theories of globalisation and nomadism. Many other critical thinkers have addressed these issues. Urban sociologist Manuel Castells’ (2010) accounts for the spaces of flows within network society, highlighting a new global scale of exchanges built around interconnected networks. Many scholars have examined the spatial and temporal implications of the remaking of connections over distance through modernity and beyond, work such as David Harvey’s (1989) notion of ‘time-space compression’ or Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) ‘liquid modernity’. Often filtered through economic globalisation and the neo-liberal deregulation of markets in the late 1980s, nomadism is a mantra of neo-liberalism as market forces ease globalised flows to
the most profitable labour markets. As we encountered in Chapter Two, this goes hand in hand with the rise in the number of arts festivals. The increasing, if uneven, acceleration and global flows of capital, things, images, sounds, people and information provides, through these varying viscosities, deeply uneven mobilisation (and immobilisation) of particular bodies, information, images, and commodities, through specific sites. Such conceptualisations point towards the ‘global’ sublimating the ‘local’ significance of place through ever-greater homogenisation and standardisation. However, this can fail to take account of processes of remediation or re-territorialisation that also occur. As Massey (1993) argues mobility is not a threat to place, but rather place is actively constituted by mobility. It can be about routes, instead of roots. The recognition of a seemingly continually accelerating world does not imply a Futurist exultation of all that moves in simple opposition to stability. Not everything moves at the same speed. It is not enough to assert simply the novelty of mobility.

Questioning the power relations of what and who moves or doesn’t is sometimes called ‘critical mobilities thinking’ (see Cresswell, 2014a). This approach does not simply place attention on flows, speed, or a cosmopolitan or nomadic subjectivity, but seeks to trace the power of discourses, practices and infrastructures of mobility in creating the effects of movement, friction and stasis. Following Adey (2009 and 2010) and Sheller (2011), critical mobilities interrogates who and what is mobilised across different scales, and the situation where mobility or immobility might be desired, coerced or interconnected. It accounts for friction, turbulence, dwelling, pauses and stillness, as much as speed, motions and flows, questioning how these differential rhythms are “produced, practiced and represented in relation to the gendered, raced, classed (im)mobilities of particular others” (Sheller, 2011:3).

The aim of such an approach is to reveal what is at stake over the control of differentiated mobility, where movement and stasis reflect and reinforce power. Agency is often equated with the freedom and ability to move. However, critical mobilities research tends towards a suggestions of non-actor-centred processes of feedback and assemblage, which may shape dynamic processes in ways that are not directly caused by the agency of reflexive subjects (Sheller, 2011).

Mobility is sometimes viewed in terms of the ‘problem of distance’. How to live and solve the problem of a desire to effect everyday life with relations to people, things and places that are distant is central to mobility thinking (Cresswell,
Post-traditional festival, as a mobile process and a mooring, is one means of solving this problem of distance, or at least proposing a way of gathering and coming together that provides an intense temporary *somewhere* for cultural and social desire to be explored. Rather than conceive of the festival as a set of bounded flows in and out of place, this is to consider it as an assemblage of movements in which circuits of flows are tangled through each other and on-going. The process of contemporary festival is therefore a mode of entering into and acting upon existing mobilities, ultimately only creating temporary stabilisations. These processes are plural and contingent; the temporary fixing or mooring of moving objects and subjectivities allow for the actualisation of the other. For example, an audience member may have flown from Brazil to AV12, where they watched a film produced in Indonesia, but the 35mm film print was driven from Berlin, and an after-film discussion took place with a critic who rode a train from London, who answers questions from an audience member who took the metro from South Shields. The post-traditional festival produces these intersecting, colliding multiple physical and imaginary mobilities. The mobile processes of festival offer a temporary immobility of holding-in-place while encounters occur. The process itself is by no means neutral. For example, there is an obvious environmental critique of the flows of people and materials, privileged by a large-scale event that espouses and obliges long distance travel to attend.\(^{103}\)

An approach is required that tries to avoid thinking of mobility as a specific movement from point A to point B, with a determined rationale for that movement. Rather, this is to think of motion more like that of clouds, as a simultaneous process of gathering and dispersing. At any point, atmospheric condensation can be both simultaneously building and dissipating as it moves through the sky, creating and dispersing clouds concurrently (Ingold, 2011). This is similar to the way Deleuze (1995) describes movement in his short text *Mediations*, where he describes the motion of the wind surfer, as a motion but without a particular starting point. By putting such actions into orbit, they are entering into existing forces, in this case the wind and the waves, and moving through differing intensities and motions. He contrasts this with sports that effect through direct effort, shot-put, for example. Following this, we can consider the

\(^{103}\) See Stallabrass’ (2012) critique of Documenta 13 for example.
festival, not as an end but rather as a change of intensity in a wider set of ongoing mobilities and temporalities that possess their own rhythms.\textsuperscript{104}

Significantly, this is not just a discussion of the individual mobility of humans, objects and ideas. Rather, the contingent relationship and intersecting assemblages of these motions points to festival as only a temporary stabilisation and point of intersection and encounter between, or a bringing into presence. It is clear the contemporary festival is predicated upon multiple mobilities; it creates and enters into flows of differing speeds. However, it is not just the creation of movement that is important. Rather it is the relations between differing rates of movement, from, on the one hand, a sense of accelerated fluid motion to, on the other, the dragging static of the need the festival creates for embodied presence in a specific place. To borrow from Saskia Sassen (2001 in Massey, 2005:95), “the global city itself, with its enormous capacity for generating and controlling flows, is built upon vast emplaced resources. The impetus to motion and mobility, for a space of flows, can only be achieved through the construction of (temporary, provisional) stabilisations”. Adopting this thinking more broadly, we can think of the post-traditional festival as operating as one of these provisional stabilisations, a temporary sticky place. As a result, the process of festival can be seen as a node or mooring for the production of social life.

Along with festivals, there are numerous spatial moorings constituted from multiple mobilities such as hotels, motorways, airports, beaches, and art galleries. This is not a single network, but a complex set of intersections making up an endless regime of flow (Adey, 2009). These moorings are themselves sites of particular territorialisation, where the control of movements and intensities are central to the power and agency in the assemblages of bodies and technologies and the affects they produce.

As sticky sites, these moorings produce frictions that hold as temporary stabilisation (Markusen, 2006). Thinking in terms of friction for Anna Tsing (2005), is a way of studying a multitude of global connections where these intersections “come to life in friction”, the friction of converging encounters. This also gets us beyond the many unproductive discussions of the distinction between the so

\textsuperscript{104} This we could position alongside Henri Lefebvre’s understanding of time and space in terms of rhythms, where rhythm is a concept for seeing the urban, not as a singular abstract temporality, but as the site where multiple temporalities collide (see Crang, 2001). It is the inter-relationship of the multiple planes and movements, the relations between them where differential mobilities emerge.
called ‘global’ and ‘local’. Tsing (2005:1) is concerned with how universalities are “charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” - in how they are manifest in the particular and the specific. Culture is continually in process, produced through interactions, through the frictions and rub of encounters, it is open to “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (2005:4). For Tsing, universals do not need to be thought as truths or lies but rather as sticky engagements. Through coalescing at the point of encounter, friction is both a productive and destructive force. We can think of a pencil drawing a line on a piece of paper or warm and cold fronts coming together to create a storm. The friction between the pencil and the paper creates the residue of the line, its transversal trace. As Tsing (2005:5) writes, “a wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere.” Her use of the metaphor of friction emerges as a reaction against the prevailing conception of the smooth flows of capital and things in the globalisation doctrine of the 1990s, touched upon earlier, where motion is made possible through friction (2005:5):

How we run depends on what shoes we have to run in. Insufficient funds, late buses, security searches, and informal lines of segregation hold up our travel and regular airline schedules expedite it but guide its routes. Some of the time, we don’t want to go at all, and we leave town only when they’ve bombed our homes. These kinds of ‘friction’ inflect motion, offering it different meanings. Coercion and frustration join freedom as motion is socially informed.

AVF as a mobile process is by no means smooth flowing. Some events sell out, stopping more people attending, other events under sell and have to be cancelled or altered, artists withdraw at the last minute or thier flight is delayed, both bad weather and good weather can dissuade potential audiences from attending. All of these frictions act towards mediating the relationship between AVF and place, they are part of a territorialisising process. These frictions are the productive force of the situated-ness within AVF, this is the co-production of the interrelationship between the relative mobilities of things and people.
6.3 Festival modes of mobility one: moving bodies

Following Urry (2007:7-8), the mobilising process of the contemporary festival can be delineated into different modes of mobility, the movement of people, objects and information/knowledge. Each mode differs in how it moves, yet all are highly inter-dependent mobilities that form and reform social life, each with critical inequalities and power relations (Urry, 2004). There are two significant movements of people associated with AVF; firstly, there is the movement of people to attend AVF events and then the movement of the audience within and around festival spaces. The physical and embodied movements of festival participants are activated or interrupted by AVF events. Sometimes artworks themselves are forms of corporeal mobility, such as Hamish Fulton’s Slowalk during AVF12 (see Figure. 23). A meditative hour long walk across the Spillers Wharf car park on the Newcastle banks of the Tyne, where 150 participants moved extremely slowly and tentatively across the length of a single car park space. While embodiment is the subject of such a work, all the artworks, events or encounters within AVF had their own particular forms of embodied movement from sitting still in a cinema, to slowly walking around and positioning oneself in a gallery or dancing to music at a concert.

Situated across the North East region, AVF’s broad territorial range was an imposition. Simply put, festivals predominantly seek to gather people in one site, but the dispersed geography of AVF included many distanced sites. While most festivals seek to situate themselves within a central area or city, AVF through all the rationales outlined in Chapters Three and Four sought to operate simultaneously in four ‘urban centres’, with the furthest apart, Newcastle and Middlesbrough, being over an hour apart, by train or car. The multi-sited, dispersed geography of AVF was a concern of those organising the festival; with its limited resources and its staff base in Newcastle, it found itself constantly working in cities and towns that are outside of the place where the staff lived. Festival staff, in the research interviews conducted around AVF12, frequently referred to a series of problems and complexities associated with this distance (Morrill, 2012; Pate, 2012; Shatwell, 2013). This was not a logistical problem for the organisation of the festival but it was also a central problem for the audience of the festival. The distance and travel required between separate exhibitions and
Figure 23 Hamish Fulton, Slowalk, 2012, Newcastle. Part of AVF12: As Slow As Possible. Image: Colin Davison. Courtesy of AV Festival
events precludes attendance for many, or at least limits the likelihood of the audience seeing the entire programme. However, this was also sometimes framed positively. For example, the focus groups expressed that one of the values of AVF was that it took people to places that they might otherwise not go. The basic point here is that the problem of distance and what moves or is unable to move deeply effected the conception of AVF both in an imaginary and practical sense. The physical transport infrastructure of the region defined the boundaries of AVF as much as the regional imaginary.

Attending any festival involves moving from one place to another through some form of corporeal travel. Whether it is as artists, tourists, professionals or those who have travelled to a city for another reason and attend a festival through happenstance. The mobilisation of an audience in this sense is a clear priority of any contemporary festival. Public festivals such as AVF seek to activate the mobility of people outside of their homes in order to attend. AVF interacted with many existing mobility systems within the city to enable the movement of its participants across the existing infrastructure and the urban transport network.

AVF measured its own success in these terms by counting the visitor numbers and their relative distance travelled. The evaluation report for AVF10 produced by BOP Consulting (2010:2) is a clear testament to this and the domination of the particular language of tourist subjectivity that the post-traditional festival produces:

In terms of audience levels AV10 has built considerably on the previous Festival, with a total of 38,161 physical visitors, an increase of 65% from 2008. With 20,959 visitors, Newcastle was the most visited sub-region, followed by Sunderland with 7,955, Gateshead with 6,652, and Middlesbrough with 2,595. However, the Festival experienced its most significant growth in visitors from outside the North East of England. Whereas in 2008 the total number of visitors from outside the North East were 4,172, in 2010 they rose to an estimated 9,811 – a growth of 135%. Assuming continued growth numbers of visitors could rise to 16,630 in 2012. The growth in visitors from outside the region is significantly boosting the economic impact of AV10.

As this shows, corporeal movement itself offers its own validating frame, and tends to be valorising, sometimes to the extent that a nomadic condition is romanticised. Alternatively, in some cases it is critically applied in opposition to
fixed ideas of place, for example, Manifesta that operates as a ‘roving’ contemporary art biennial (Fijen, 2013). On a practical level and from the ethnography in the AVF office, there were many instances of conversations between staff that revolved around the potential of an audience to be mobilised for an event, questions were asked such as “who will come to this?”, “where will they come from?” and “how will they get there?” It was also a central part of AVF’s Communications Strategy (Barnes, 2010). If an event was not in an established venue, a great deal of thought was generally applied to how an audience would travel to the event. AVF required a certain ability to move in order to attend. If one person were to visit all the exhibitions for example, without a car, it would require considerable co-ordination, cost and time to travel between galleries and spaces across Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland. A point raised by the focus group participants was frustration at never “getting to” as much of AVF as they would have liked. One of the rationales given by Shatwell (2013) for the extension of the festival duration to a full month for AVF12 was about allowing the time for a local audience to see more of the festival, i.e. to mobilise them over a greater period in greater numbers.

While these frustrations and frictions for the AVF audience occurred on a very short-term basis, for the staff, employees and freelancers working for AVF they were amplified over much greater durations. Cools & Gielen (2014:26-27) point to the dislocation of the self through excessive mobility. They describe the implications of the post-fordist, mobile labour privileged by post-traditional festival organisations. When “the responsibility for one’s immediate environment, social context or circle becomes dysfunctional when one had to continuously move, either mentally or physically, in order to survive.” These forms of labour were problematic for AVF, despite its reliance upon them. Only requiring three quarters of the paid festival staff for the six months prior to the event, AVF was dependent upon short-term, freelance contractors. With this came a loss of knowledge and experience after each festival edition as the transient workforce moved on to find new employment taking with it any knowledge, skills and

105 Espousing modes of nomadic subjectivity is not without its critics. Kwon (2000:42) asks while considering the oft-celebratory rhetoric attached to the nomadic artist, “what is the impact...of the spatial and temporal experiences that such conditions engender not only in terms of cultural practice but more basically for our psyches, our sense of self, our sense of well-being, our sense of belonging to a place and a culture?” This mirrors Cresswell’s (2006) critique of the over-abundance of the nomadic metaphor, where privileging ceaseless movement removes the specific, the groundings of place and kinship.
experience acquired. The large numbers of volunteers that supported each AVF also fell into these mobile and transient modes. The volunteers tend to be recruited from groups who were in liminal and mobile social modes: students at half term, recent graduates yet to get a full-time employment, those who unemployed, or ‘between’ jobs, or looking to change careers, or those new to the region looking to make friends and contacts. Of the hundred or so volunteers recruited for each AVF edition, less than ten percent return to volunteer again at subsequent festivals, usually because they had ‘moved on’ either physically or professionally. The labour of the post-traditional festival is particularly predicated towards temporary, flexible and mobile employment relations. AVF promoted transitory relations where volunteers and freelancers were often recruited under the pretence of ‘training’ and ‘skills development’. In this sense, post-traditional festivals more widely, are the epitome of post-fordist, ‘creative’ labour and are written through with the promise and precarity this brings (Gielen, 2010).

This temporary mobilisation of a workforce mirrored the relationship between AVF and artists. AVF directors valued the physical presence of artists very highly. The organisation spent considerable time and money arranging and paying for the travel of artists, musicians, speakers, and the press by arranging and booking their plane and train journeys. The instigation of this corporeal travel brought with it a need to host these ‘strangers’ in the city. Once within the AVF further local movement required additional mediation. Movement around the urban was managed by AVF; artists were collected from the airport, they were given travel passes as well as local train timetables, maps and descriptions of routes between key festival venues and their hotels. Information of local nuances and customs was also provided, for example, that you cannot easily hail a taxi on the streets of Newcastle. These hosting processes are central to the mobility of the contemporary urban festival that plays to the tourist subjectivity throughout. Dragan Klaic (2013) picks up this point more generally about the contemporary urban festival when he writes that:

Festivals are players in the urban politics of space and location, they are capable of achieving a certain re-mapping of the city in the minds of its inhabitants and visitors, to challenge habitual perceptions of the urban environment, dispel prejudices and ‘common truths’ about some neighbourhoods, create alternative routes for the curious and set out new paths of mobility.
AVF offered a remediation of urban movements, but only for those who were festival participants, a temporary, privileged few.

Mobilising an audience, as AVF attempted to do, was a process that privileged what is sometimes called ‘co-presence’, overcoming distance through a ‘compulsion to proximity’ (as in Harvey Molotch’s phrase in Adey, 2009:28). Co-presence describes the social need for subjects to gather, connect and present themselves in specific situations and places. As Urry (in Canzler et al, 2008:14) explains:

All social life, of work, family, education and politics, presumes relationships of intermittent presence and modes of absence depending in part upon the multiple technologies of travel and communications that move objects, people, ideas, images across varying distances. Presence is thus intermittent, achieved, performed and always interdependent with other processes of connection and communication. All societies deal with distance but they do so through different sets of interdependent processes.

Co-presence is seemingly obligatory for the sustaining of families, friendship, workgroups, businesses and festivals (this is shown in detail in Larsen et al, 2005; also see Amin & Thrift, 2002). This again points to the festival as mobilising process that works towards solving the problem of distance, where the festival mediates relations between absence and presence, where the central activation of mobility is directed towards co-presence.

Phil Niblock’s presence and performance at AVF12, offers a particular insight into the networked, co-present flows that the AVF was constituted by and worked towards. Niblock is a prolific curator and is instrumental across European and North American avant-garde music scenes, a nomadic artist in many senses. Niblock has a long a celebrated career and is known internationally for his minimalist microtonal music, emergent from his participation within the early days of the 1960s New York minimalist movement and the practices of artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt. He is involved with the performance spaces, Experimental Intermedia in New York and Gent in Belgium and producing and hosting concerts and collaborating with musicians.106 Travel between new performance arenas in different cities has been central to the development of this

professional practice for Niblock, contemporary music festivals are essential organisations that support the movement of musicians. AVF supported this kind of movement; it offered a particular form of sociability through the temporary concentration of performers and artists within a single place for a short time. This is conducive to sustaining and developing nomadic relationships and absent professional relationships. As Niblock (2009) demonstrates:

People in the scene… form a network in various places. I was in Australia and New Zealand and played with several guitarists. There was a crossing of people in Sydney and in London, for instance. Oren Ambarchi, who played with me in Sydney and then recommended me to the CD label ‘Touch’ in London, who had just published his CD. I had met Mike Harding of Touch at a festival in Vienna the year before, but had forgotten the label name. The contact worked out to be a CD on Touch. In Tokyo I met a man at a concert of my work who is from Mexico City and he invited me to a concert there. I have since invited him for a concert of his music in NY. I have met a very mixed crowd of people on the road. I am always recommending contacts to them, and they also make contacts for me.

This network extended in and out of AVF. Shatwell had already built a working relationship with Susan Stenger who was invited to perform during AVF10 and whose partner, the record label manager and music producer Paul Smith had been responsible for producing the event English Journey Revisited at the SG in AVF10. Stenger then curated a performance event in response to the slowness theme for AVF12, Lament for John Cage also at the SG. The ensemble event featured a new work commissioned by AVF called A Cage of Stars composed by Phill Niblock for the harpist Rhodri Davies. Following this, A Cage Of Stars was later released on the Touch record label. As an artist living locally to AVF, Davies (2012) summed up the significance of this co-presence for his own nomadic artistic practice:

…if you're an artist, your experience of the festival is going to be 'who did you meet there?', 'how pleasant was it?', 'how easy to meet other people was it'?… AV is a very important part of that, because it is looking outside of the area... I've been friends with Phill Niblock for years but it was getting that opportunity, we've suggested he write me a piece of music for years but we never had that opportunity until he was on my doorstep.
What AVF did was to create what Urry (2004) might call an obligation to co-presence, a need or desire to move in relation to a group, event, person or thing. For those in attendance the post-traditional becomes an obligation to experience a ‘live’ event that happens at a specific moment, situation or place. These obligations generate the need or desire to move where the impetus for post-traditional festival is co-presence with cultural encounters, situations, performances, events or people. Creating a successful obligation to co-presence, is what festival directors, curators and producers (Shatwell, 2012a; Cook, 2012; Hirshhorn, 2013) often referred to as achieving a “critical mass”, a sense of scale and unique occasion or potential festive atmosphere.

Travel to post-traditional festivals offers physical co-presence between artists, audiences and objects, but also those attending with colleagues, friends or family, the festival moves people together. Organisers seek to create a situation where the resulting proximity is felt to be obligatory, appropriate, or desirable. Festival becomes a site to sustain particular intermittent relationships with friends, family or colleagues. In the case of AVF, one of the areas the festival contributed to in this sense is what could be called the arts ‘scene’ of the North East.107 AVF brought together a group of professionals and interested individuals every two years, sustaining and renewing social and professional ties, by placing this group into a regular form of proximity.

In AVF, this was achieved formally at dinners for invited guests, receptions and events and more informally in concert waiting lines or post-event drinks in the hotel bars. These encounters and gatherings almost always entail movement by the participants to these neutral territories, where the tacit rules of appropriate behaviour are generally understood and reproduced, in the waiting line for tickets, or queuing to enter a performance for example.108 The AVF12 performance by Attila Csihar, A Scrying: First and Second Action (NCL) took place within the hollow north tower of the Tyne Bridge. The audience was deliberately kept outside the tower by event producers and allowed to form into a long queue. The sense of theatricality and anticipation built as the sounds of Csihar’s baritone voice reverberated through the tower under the Tyne Bridge and onto the quayside.

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108 Urry (2007:235) quotes Goffman (1971:13) on the importance of this: “The realm of activity that is generated by face-to-face interaction and organized by norms of co-mingling - a domain containing weddings, family meals, chaired meetings, forced marches, service encounters, queues, crowds, and couples has never been sufficiently treated as a subject matter in its own right.”
below, where the waiting audience could hear them but not gain access to the performance space. These small, performed elements of the production of AVF worked to enable the sociability of the co-present encounters.

The central obligation or movement that AVF created was the need to experience a particular ‘live’ event programmed to happen at a specific moment. This can be of varying duration, from a ten-minute performance to a month long exhibition. Many such temporally bounded events offer this mobile necessity as well as festivals such as political rallies, concerts, plays, sports matches, celebrations, and so on. Such events seek, in real time, to generate intense moments of co-presence that cannot be missed. An important desire to attend is motivated by a fear of missing these seemingly unique moments. As we have already encountered the festival offers a particularly unique and bounded temporal frame that must be adhered to in order to be able to claim presence, to say, “I was there” (Sassatelli, 2011).

One event of extreme stasis that AVF12 offered was in the form of a retrospective the long-duration films of the Philippine director Lav Diaz at the Star and Shadow Cinema in Newcastle. This included a screening of Melancholia (2008) an epic that examines the legacy of failed revolution and military oppression in the Philippines. The film critic, Jonathan Romney (2012), described the unique intensity and shared experience of collectively watching the film in a video interview recorded by AVF to accompany the AVF12 film programme: “anyone whose watched eight hours of a Lav Dias film together, they will have something in common. He talks about his faithful viewers as being warriors, so we are all warriors together.” This kind of extreme duration of cultural encounter could also be questioned as a form of arrogant discernment, a pretension on the part of those who proclaim its excellence, knowing its limited appeal beyond the mass culture encounters of conventional cinema. Yet it is this kind of performance, by both artist and audience that AVF12 sought to present, events with esoteric appeal perhaps, but that sought to perform in a way was the antithesis to normative cultural encounters and in doing so, as Romney suggests, building social ties.

The privileging of co-presence and the particular mobilites it acts upon can be beneficial for some, but simultaneously exclusive to others. A discussion that developed in a research focus group revolved the positive shared experience of travelling to a festival with other people for the same reason. This was described
as creating a positive atmosphere, and it made people ‘feel good’ because they were all part of the same co-present group. It formed and reinforced their sense of a particular identity. In the case of AVF, this might have involved the cosmopolitan cultural knowledge it espoused, but it is important to remember that in creating this temporary sense of community it also excludes those from whom this particular identity is not so comfortable. Perceived cultural choice aligns with affluence and the mobility this brings. In discussing the appeal of the production of so-called, ‘site-specific’ artwork by regional or peripheral arts organisations, Stallabrass (2001:25) addresses the core issues of the differing mobilites of art object and audiences that a festival such as AVF worked through:

It makes sense for regional arts organisations to establish their own network, a circuit of culture that holds itself aloof from the capitals, and also to support work that makes a virtue of its placement… Such work sets up a number of barriers to circulation, both spatial and temporal. Although the work itself is temporary, its force is on the side of fixity, stasis and memory… It asserts as a matter of principle that it is not a consumer object, to be bought, owned, moved about and sold… The appeal of such work for the regional arts organisation is obvious: to experience the work fully the viewer has no choice but to come to them; the work is never going to travel to you… Their obdurate and often obscure being stands opposed to the exchange in swiftly recognisable symbols that passes for contemporary art in the salesrooms. Yet what the works purchase in profundity and quality of attention, they pay for with limited access, being available to a tiny, often elite, audience… The question has to be asked insistently: who is this art for?

Creating obligations for physical movement to encounter art is a central preoccupation of organisations such as AVF, beyond bringing visitors from outside the region; it also sought to intervene in existing flows to create happenstance or disruptive encounters. Intervening in venues and public spaces, that are not known for contemporary art, was adopted by AVF to stage encounters with the public who were not part of a privileged few who sought out such encounters. Gina Czarnecki’s Spine, for AVF06, was projected onto the exterior of Newcastle Civic Centre (see Figure. 13). Chris Watson’s Whispering in the Leaves filled the Sunderland Winter Gardens in AVF08. YoHa’s Coal Fired Computers occupied the entrance of the Discovery Museum in AVF10 and Jonathan Schipper’s Slow Motion Car Crash was visible in an empty shop just off Northumberland Street.
Newcastle’s main shopping area during AVF12. These projects were situated with a specific audience encounter in mind, an encounter that aimed to intervene upon an already mobile subject, a weekday shopper, or Sunday afternoon family outing for example.

Why audiences gather for cultural encounters at arts festivals also involves a conceptual, affective and imaginative form of mobility. Audiences seek out experiences of imaginative mobility. People move in order to be moved. Arts festivals deploy many means of imaginative travel, across space and time through visual and aural media. AVF was as much about mental mobility as it was about physical mobility. The film programme of AVF offered the most direct means to this kind of imaginative travel and the moving image becomes “a means of transport” (Bruno, 2002: 24 in Adey, 2009:68). Film, in this sense, can be discursively read for its transmission of cultural values, meanings and ideologies associated with other places and times. An example of this kind of movement is clear in Phil Niblock’s performance at AVF12. Niblock’s The Movement of People Working comprised two parts; a series of films played simultaneously on two screens and a score partly played by live musicians. The films depicted, as the title implies, literally, the movement of people working.

The films presented during the AVF12 performance were a selection of works from a series Niblock made between 1973–91 under the title Looking at the movement of people working. The series was shot while Niblock travelled through various countries, including China, Japan, Portugal, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil on 16mm colour film but with no sound. The movement of labour depicted tends towards a repeated action, a tripartite assemblage of worked-on objects, tools and hands, in some form of motion aimed at making, fixing, cleaning or collecting through weaving, digging, carving or harvesting. Hands are visible stitching with a needle, hammering stone or rubbing and wringing clothes in water or making bricks or shoes. The images present ‘work’ as the simple motion of material states through human action, always outdoors and always without electricity in seemingly non-industrialised communities focused on agrarian or craft actions. The shots tend to be taken with a static camera and while some actions are familiar in style and obvious purpose, others are unidentifiable.

A hybrid performance such as Niblock’s combines objects, technologies and affects out of which distinct places are produced and reproduced. Here the corporeal body is re-positioned as an affective vehicle through which a sense of
place and specific emotional geographies are produced (Crouch, 2000; Bondi et al., 2005). Imaginative travel involves experiencing or anticipating in one’s imagination the ‘atmosphere of place’. AVF12 evoked multiple ‘senses of place’ through its programme, whether it was James Bennings’ films of Milwaukee’s industrial valley, One Way Boogie Woogie, Lav Dias’s works that explore the post-colonial history of South-East Asia or Kenneth Goldsmith’s reading of the Weather Diary of Thomas Appletree, a 1703 daily account of the weather in rural Worcester, performed in Morden Tower, Newcastle. Each offered a particular encounter that sought to create a relation between the site of their performance within AVF, its theme of slowness and their dislocated subject of times and places elsewhere.

In thinking of AVF and the post-traditional festival as a mobile process, it is also necessary to take account of another mode of mobility: virtual movement. Virtual movement offers a different kind of dislocation, but one that was none-the-less just as important to AVF. Real-time travel over the internet or through networked communications allows for a kind of movement that transcends geographical distance, without significant corporal motion. AVF’s presence online might offer a form of imaginative travel to viewers transported to other imaginary geographies of the sites of festival. This is a mediated form that goes through the press, images and maps of the festival that are disseminated externally. The symbolic authority of a festival is central to this virtual movement. Many people can build relations with a post-traditional festival without physically attending it. AVF12 presented 712 hours of online radio over the festival month through the Boredcast programme curated by Vicki Bennett. This was accessed from all over the world. The AVF08 theme of Broadcast allowed for numerous means of building these seemingly dislocated encounters between the AVF and an audience.

The 2012 edition of AVF, As Slow As Possible was titled after John Cage’s composition ASLSP (As Slow aS Possible). Cage’s practice and engagement with differing temporalities was cited as a reference for the thematic coupling of artists’ work within the programme.109 The approach of AVF12 to pay attention to modes of slowness, stillness and immobility offered what Bissell and Fuller (2011:12)

109 John Cage’s work Organ2/ASLSP, originally written in 1985, does not specify the duration of its performance, one performance of the work in the St. Burchardi church in Halberstadt, Germany started in 2001 and will not end until 2640.
might call “a sensitivity to still as a relation to the world that moves beyond the
dualisms of mobility and immobility”.110

Across AVF12, artworks responded to differing notions of temporality and the
experience of time through a hybridity of different forms. The thematic was a
phenomenological call to attend to the pace of the cultural encounter.
Rhetorically, the thematic subject of AVF12 was also set against the London 2012
Olympics that took place the following summer. AVF12 sought to explore artists’
imaginative play on differential mobilities, temporalities, and modes of affect and
perception, but as a counter point to a sense of excessive approval for hyper-
mobility and speed. This can be thought of as a kind of sticky process or what
Mieke Bal (2000:80) calls the creation of sticky images, “images that hold the
viewer, enforcing an experience of temporal variation. They enforce a slowing
down as well as an intensification of the experience of time.”

There is a clear theoretical connection to this approach found within Virilio’s
(2006) emphasis on ‘dromology’ (from the Greek dromos, for race or running)
that is concerned with the extreme phenomena of absolute speed in modern
societies (Olympic world records, supersonic air travel, telecommunications), but
also with relative speeds and slownesses understood as thresholds of tempo. The
curatorial approach of AVF12 sought to examine ‘slowness’ through different
means to challenge the normative pace of cultural encounters within
contemporary art, with an explicit political attempt to challenge what Shatwell
(2011) called the “pervasive acceleration” of the contemporary. This was
underpinned by a claim to the necessity of slowing down as a means of heightened
affective and intellectual experiences. Drawing on Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1977) classic
definition of place as a centre of meaning, Cresswell (2014:4) calls place a “pause
in the wider world of space” where for Tuan “compared to space, place is a calm
center of established values” (Tuan, 1977:54 in Cresswell, 2014b:4). Attachment
and belonging are concepts associated with this calm, slowness that seemingly
establishes place. The thematic of slowness in this sense logically followed

110 The introduction of AVF12 (Shatwell, 2012c) reads: “AV Festival 12: As Slow As Possible. In the run-up to London 2012 with its motto of ‘Faster, Higher, Stronger’ we propose an alternative slower pace and relaxed rhythm to counter the accelerated speed of today. Titled after ASLSP (As Slow aS Possible) by pioneering artist John Cage, the theme explores how artists have stretched, measured and marked the passage of time. Some works last the full 31 days, others are infinite in duration or move imperceptibly slowly: 14 seconds become 31 minutes, one hour becomes 24, and we can all dream together in a 12-hour sleep concert. This fifth edition of the biennial Festival runs, for the first time, over a whole month. It takes place at different speeds, paces and times of day, across NewcastleGateshead, Middlesbrough and Sunderland.”
Shatwell's (2013) curatorial desire to ‘root’ AVF in its locale. In AVF12, slowness presented a refusal towards the dromomania of contemporary society. The festival showed work by artists that addressed how the passage of time is measured, such as On Karwara’s *One Million Years*, and work by Hanne Darboven and Susan Stenger.

Slowed corporeal movement was played out through Hamish Fulton’s *Slowalk*, where co-presence was central, as was the relation to the iconography of modernity and immobility in the site of the performance, a disused car park (see Figure. 23). The cinema works of James Benning and audio visual compositions of Phil Niblock both aimed to antagonistically play with the ability of an audience to sit still and listen or watch, to slow an audience down in its encounter, to create meditative states, as did Leif Inge’s *9 Beet Stretch* (see Figure. 22) and Stephen Stapleton’s overnight, *Sleep Concert*. Essentially AVF12 mobilised an audience to attend in order to corporally immobilise them for a greater duration than might otherwise be considered normative for cultural encounters. This negotiation with normative rhythms and “a commitment to occupy time more attentively” (Parkins, 2004:364) aimed to gain enhanced aesthetic or sensory experience and place these spaces of slowness as interventions in public domains. Stillness in AVF12 was associated with spaces of retreat, privileged spaces where a subject can engage in personal or spiritual reflection (see Figure. 22). AVF12 sought to create spaces where an audience can achieve some distance from the immediate demands of the everyday and engage in a greater degree than is possible in normal life in personal reflection.

The appeal to slowness, stillness and the act of slowing was partly qualified as an ethical response to the normative rhythms of contemporary society, aligned with the movements for slow food, slow media and the Cittàslow movement which involves engaging more slowly “in everyday practice in particular ways at a routine, personal, individual level” (Pink, 2007:63). The performed stillness of the body in the cinema for eight hours or in a car park for two hours was made visible and problematic because it operated outside of the codes of known bodily movement within these sites. In one sense it destabilised, in order re-territorialise these spaces. These actions gain their efficacy by performing trajectories for the body that are outside of the normative expectation within these spaces; in a sense they created a friction.
According to Cools & Gielen (eds. 2014:28) “The contemporary predilection for slowness, slow food, slow living, slow time, slow art” offer a potentially ethical response to the social implication of increased hyper-mobility. Yet they question whether such actions ‘bring down the fever’ but do not ‘cure the disease’. In a hyper-connected world in which market competition is the model for social interaction, for them “resistance can therefore only be built up by cutting oneself completely or partially out of the web”, although they do not elaborate on the practicalities of this further.

There is something of an irony about a contemporary arts festival promoting slowness and immobility, when, as is clear from the discussion so far, the particular form of contemporary festival that AVF was predicated upon needs to mobilise an audience as much as possible from the greatest distance possible. The contradictions between the rhetoric of the programme and the structure of the event became clear during the opening weekend when a number of arts professionals and press visited the festival from outside the region and were toured around all the exhibitions in 24 hours. The speed required to experience all of the work somewhat counteracted the emphasis on stillness and contemplation. There was always another artwork to see, another encounter to have. This goes to highlight further the particular sets of practices and mobilities that are embedded within the cultural encounters that the contemporary arts festival promotes, where mobility is privileged for some over others.

For the most part those who attended the events AVF12 offered were, according to the AVF’s research (BOP12), regular cultural attenders - familiar with certain types of more extreme cultural experience. Slowness itself could here appear as something of a novelty that people sought out - as an experience to be consumed, a challenge to be met and overcome, and thus on one level at least it becomes indoctrinated into a particular tourist subjectivity, perhaps losing some of its critical surplus. What AV12 created was not singularly still bodies, but rather bodies that were immobilised in order to do something, creating the capacity, to listen, watch, sleep or think. For Bissell and Fuller (2011) such readings reaffirm how stillness is often conscripted into a logic of practical action; a stillness that always gives way to movement and is always thought of in relation to movement.

What AVF12 offered was a discursive celebration of immobility, a calling to attention of stillness, reinforcing the idea that stillness has its own value and
potential. If was a message from AVF12 it was, stillness has its own worth. Waiting, slowness and boredom are just as important to many situations as speed. It is as Bissell and Fuller (2011:35) critically ask, “how can life emerge through the cessation of accumulation, intensification and promotion?” In this sense, AVF12 offered a model or maquette for spaces of stillness. It offered these not as protest but rather as performance - it was a mediated, temporary stillness. It is this process of artistic enquiry and modelling that each thematic programme of AVF conceptually built around, and offers a potentially rich progressive sense of place, as each new festival seeks to engage with new questions.

6.4 Festival modes of mobility two: moving things

Having considered the many corporeal states of stillness AVF12 attempted to engender in its audience, it is now valuable to connect this with the non-human flows that entered and moved through the festival. Just as AVF temporarily gathered artists, staff, volunteers and audiences, it also assembled, artworks, objects and materials. Gathering these things was directed towards their exhibition, or the creation of a relational encounter between them and a public. Contemporary exhibition practice is contingent upon the changes and developments brought about through greater availability of travel and mobility, through new technologies and modernising processes.

Practices of display going back to the Great Exhibition (1851) can be read in relation to the flows of goods, cultural objects and ideas around specific routes across the globe. The compulsion to exhibit is directed towards creating a static site for encounter, to temporally hold an object in place to be viewed, consumed, bought or sold. Unlike a museum, a contemporary festival such as AVF offers something that is seemingly immaterial, without buildings, collections, or much at all in the way of objects. It only exists as an archive, documentation, a series of texts, images and videos, and a website. Yet festivals do enter and act within very material flows of objects and things, just within a different temporality to the museum. AVF, for the most part, was highly fluid because it floats through existing sites of greater fixity, such as established museums, galleries and cinemas that operated independently to the festival. It was almost parasitically, reliant upon these moorings in order to show its programme. Festivals do not tend to require new fixed infrastructure, the exception being events like Garden Festivals. Nevertheless, we can trace a relationship between arts festivals and subsequent
investment in more permanent forms of fixed cultural infrastructure - the role of events like Tyne International had in leading to the development of BCCA, or organisations like FACT in Liverpool that developed out of the Video Positive Festival. As outlined in Chapter Three, the cultural infrastructure investments on Tyneside during the 1990s and 2000s created significant new cultural spaces that AVF then operated within.

For AVF, the physical movement of objects was as important as the corporeal movement of subjects: this was the assembling of artworks, the materials to construct artworks, as well as musical instruments, film prints, sounds systems, generators and so on. Some artworks circulate more easily than others, depending on value, ownership, and relationships with artists and museums. For AVF this ranged in form from an artwork being professionally couriered from a museum in Europe, to an artist bringing a DVD or hard drive with their film on for display in the festival. AVF gathered and shed a multitude of objects in a rhythm over its two-year cycle between editions. In the preceding months prior to a festival edition the AVF office slowly filled up with deliveries of all manner of props, tools, prints and marketing materials. These were then dispatched to galleries or cinema and the sites of the programme. Subsequently, after the conclusion of a festival, AVF slowly removed many objects, sending some back to their points of origin, some to waste disposal, and others into storage. Very little remained between the editions of AVF (see Figure. 24). This process of moving, and assembling and reassembling into new and changing configurations performs the complex hybrid geographies of human and non-human entities that contingently enabled people and materials to come together as a temporary stabilisation in the form of a festival.

There is a contested theoretical and philosophical terrain surrounding the movement of artworks and it is worth briefly addressing the relationship between the art object and its site. A combination of autonomous free movement and fixed meaning for an art object appeals to what Douglas Crimp (1993:17) called “the idealism of modernist art”. Within this frame, the artwork can move easily between galleries and seemingly retain its autonomy:

the art object in and of itself was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning, determined the object’s placelessness, its belonging in no particular place, a no-place that was in reality the museum…Site specificity opposed
that idealism—and unveiled the material system it obscured—by its refusal of circulatory mobility, its belongingness to a specific site.

Immobility and friction has historically been argued as resistance against the institutions of art, museums and galleries that espouse modernist and autonomous notions of the art objects and are themselves sticky sites proclaiming this universalism (Cant and Morris, 2006). Biggs (2013) offers a further clarification of this position in relation to the value attributed to the art object and place:

The problem… with artworks (and their contextual wrapping) focusing on place and time is that these specifics might be thought to limit the ability of the artwork to circulate freely (in time and space) as a global currency. Art as a token of monetary value cannot afford to be tied to place and time. Monetary value trumps meaning.

Although as Kwon (2004) and others (see Ehrlich, 2003) have shown, the political potential of the frictional and contested nature of ‘site-specific’ art has itself been somewhat diluted by its overabundance, and often vague usage as an artistic and curatorial motif.

Beyond the artistic programme, the production of AVF was entirely predicated on different modes of communicative movement through person-to-person messages via letters, telephone, email, and mobile phone (see Thompson, 1995). AVF12 was effectively organised through email communication with many remote actors. Festival staff, the majority of whom work on freelance, temporary contracts were often not based in the AVF office and worked remotely. Given that the delivery of the majority of the AVF12 programme was through partnership relationships with other venues, the ability to organise through such communications networks was essential. Likewise, the AVF12 marketing strategy worked with these forms of communication, and the audience was mobilised through email bulletins, facebook event pages and PDF press releases emailed to journalists. The process of marketing was directed towards the mobilisation of an audience through the management of information in various databases and software that allows the organisation to present AVF to potential audience members.

The primary tool AVF used to mobilise its audience was the printed programme brochure. The timetable for the production of the programme
Figure 24 AV Festival storage inventory, Newcastle, 2014. Courtesy of Diana Stevenson.

Box 1
- A5 leaflet holders x 8
- A4 leaflet holders x 7
- High viz vests: M x 3
  L x 5
  XL x 2
  XXL x 1
- Clickers x 23
- Vests
- Lanyards and plastic pockets
- ‘Do not touch’ and Exhibition continues’ signs

Box 2
- Earplugs (lots)
- Tissues x 17
- Chain block
- Church candles x 6
- Candle holders (flat glass) x 6
- Music stand lights x 6
- Thermo flask x 4
- Hot water bottle
- Iron
- Cotton wool
- Wrist bands
- Stamp
- Spirit level
- Computer keyboard (deli)
- Mouse
- PDQ media player x 2
- USB audio interface
- Silicone gun

Box 3 (cables)
- Microphone cables (x4)
- Instrument cables (x 4)
- DP/N cables x 4
- DSLN cables x 13
- 3 pin power cable x 5
- 2 pin power cable x 11
- Low voltage computer cable x 11
- Scart cable x 11
- Single socket extension leads x 8
- 2 socket end leads x 1
- 4 socket end leads x 5
- 3 prong tv cables x 4
- Telephone extension cables x 13
- Cable on drum
brochure effectively dictated many decisions around the programming and 
organisation of the festival, as event details (locations, times, prices, etc.) needed 
to be confirmed prior to being printed in the brochure. The fixity of print, (time, 
cost and materiality) demanded that decisions are made in a way that the 
flexibility of website content does not. The brochure was distributed to a 
potential audience, locally via other cultural venues and through the post to 
subscribers and contacts on the AVF database.

While AVF12 generated and distributed many objects, from PDFs to 
brochures to artworks, it also gathered many objects that were already in forms 
of circulation. In order to screen already exiting films, a festival must gather the 
physical media to show each one. To do this AVF entered the material flow of 
‘print traffic’ around what is sometimes called the film festival ‘circuit’. Prints refer 
to the physical media of films that were shown within AVF12. These encompass a 
number of different formats from film prints on 16mm or 35mm celluloid to 
various digital formats such as DCP (Digital Cinema Package), Digibeta, HDcam, 
or a hard drive. The programme of AV12 included 38 films from 21 different 
countries over a month long programme, with five weekly screenings and two 
focused weekend events, during the opening weekend and the Slow Cinema 
Weekend. The programme was split across two venues in Newcastle, Tyneside 
Cinema and the Star and Shadow Cinema. Moving image was also a prominent 
part of the exhibition programme. Gallery film installations were shown by James 
Benning (at NGCA and Platform A), Cyprien Gaillard (at MIMA) and John Gerrard 
(at MIMA) and moving image projects made up other artists’ work within the 
festival, including Benedict Drew, Agnes Meyer-Brandis, Torsten Lauschman, 
Bob Levene and the CIRCA Projects series in Sunderland with Martin Arnold, 
Manon de Boer, Ben Russell and John Smith. This discussion is concerned with 
films screened in a cinema context, and denoted by the AVF as part of the AVF12 
‘Film Programme’. These are films that were generally classified as feature films, 
and were shown only once, within a specific schedule, they were ticketed and paid 
for events, unlike the exhibitions programme where film were shown on a loop 
for the duration of the exhibition and free to attend.

Print traffic is a mobility management system, with its own established 
procedures, practices and rules governing the behaviour of those who enter into 
it. It is a process primarily associated with film festivals and cinema management 
but it shares a similarity to the processes of museum loan management. While
primarily curated by the festival director for AVF12, the sourcing, logistics and management of physical films was undertaken by a freelance manager because of the specialist nature of the task. Films were some of the most mobile and well-travelled objects that AVF assembled. Film prints or hard drives are generally of high endurance and little friction. Many films in various formats travel around the world screening, at different festivals. It is critical here to appreciate how the things that the festival mobilises are reliant upon complex, and somewhat immobile infrastructures to allow and sustain that movement. Given the relative small size of film reels, tapes and hard drives and ease of reproduction, film prints move with relative ease, yet they are still subject to many points of friction as they travel.

Tracing the mobility of film prints can be considered within what is sometimes called ‘follow the thing’ ethnographies, which examines the movement of specific, usually consumer objects, from their source of production, through logistical movement, to their point of consumption (Cresswell, 2011). However, here this discussion is not tracing a single object from its point of creation, but rather seeking to describe the complex assemblage of multiple flows of mobile things that are gathered for a festival, and examine the practices that brings them into relation with an audience. This is to examine how a festival enters into existing mobile processes.

AVF acted here as a node, station or temporary stopping point in the movement of a film print around the world, where film prints are constantly shifting in and out of different states of rest and activity. The first stage of managing print traffic is to identify if it is possible to get a print of the desired film. Films and film prints in the first place need to be visible to be found and gathered: the availability, format and cost of transport of a print can determine what films end up in a final festival programme. Before a film is confirmed in the programme, the rights holder, artist, filmmaker, sales agent or distributor need to be identified and fees, format and transport negotiated. In some cases, the rights holder is not the same as the person who physically holds the print, therefore multiple relations and costs are negotiated in order for them to ‘release’ the print to the festival. Films that are not available in an easy-to-screen format (depending on the venue) can require the hire of additional equipment. Films that are rare and only exist in a limited number of prints (sometimes there is only one print of a film), cannot be
shown because at the point a festival would like to screen them they are elsewhere in the world at another festival, or being restored.

Transport is arranged once the format, rights and availability of a film are secured; in the UK, this can be relatively simple as there are national film courier services that specialise in film transport (such as National Film Transport). Films are constantly circulating between cinemas, archives and storage facilities. Some AVF12 films were packed within existing, regular shipments to local cinemas such as Tyneside Cinema to reduce the transport cost.

Assembling films from outside the UK created additional complexities, as various relationships with different international couriers needed to be entered into. It was not always as straightforward as transporting a film from where the rights holder was based. For example, often a film that is based in Europe may have been screening in a festival in the USA immediately prior and therefore transport would need to be arranged from this festival, along with the additional logistical costs and customs complications this brings. Travelling through international borders also requires further levels of bureaucracy and documentation to be attached onto the film, identifying its purpose for transport, insurance value and whether it contains explicit content or pornography, in the case of US customs. Transporting with international couriers also brings its own risks, for AV12 a 35mm print of Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker (1979) was to be screened at the Star and Shadow Cinema, but it was shipped in two separate consignments, with only one arriving at the AVF office. Tracking the film back through the various nodes of identification with the courier, AVF staff identified the other consignment reached a warehouse in Gateshead, but dropped out of the system and could not be located.

Films began to arrive to the AVF office up to a month in advance of the screening. On arrival they were catalogued and tested to allow enough time for replacement sourcing if there was a problem.111 As temporary custodians of the film, care in labelling and identifying each film so that there were no mistakes or technical problems when the films were screened to the public was very important. After films had been screened, they were returned either to source, or in many cases, sent on directly to another festival.

111 DCPs can be encrypted with a password that is supplied by the providers. These allow access to the content for only as limited window of time.
6.5 Conclusion

Mobility is the defining process of the contemporary arts festival. Through examining the movement of objects and things activated by AVF, this chapter has argued against a view that determines these flows through a placeless smooth nomadism, and has asserted the significance of assembly and movement in the creation of a progressive sense of place. AVF can be thought of as an event that is both simultaneously mobile and situated. AVF was contingent upon and inseparable from multiple differential mobilities of both human and non-human flows. Thinking in terms of mobility is a necessary means of establishing how AVF operated and to consider the hybrid relations it entered into and was formed by. Considering what moves and how offers a valuable counter approach to thinking about rather static, abstract concepts of the 'global' and 'local' that are so often applied within contemporary art discourse. The aim of this approach is to reveal what is at stake over the control of differentiated mobility, where movement and stasis reflect and reinforce power.

AVF was reliant upon and connected to numerous interdependent infrastructures and governance procedures that extended over different scales and territories. Describing the process of film traffic management places AVF within the assemblage of ongoing flows sustaining the commodity networks of other film festivals, distributors, filmmakers, agents and archives.

Festivals such as AVF are part of the cultural traffic of contemporary urban culture. Post-traditional festivals both open up new mobilities and simultaneously close them, creating social and cultural frictions where festival processes act to overcome the problem of distance and our desire for co-presence. This recognises how unequal power geometries (Massey, 1993) operate in such a way that the speed of others can come at the expense of the stillness of some (Bissell and Fuller, 2011).

The process of festival mediates between absence and presence; it privileges corporeal co-presence. Co-presence is always a relational encounter, and the encounters AVF offered takes external flows of ideas (slowness) or material flows

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112 As Sally Tallant (2013) described from her position as Director of Liverpool Biennial, the local and global are seen as conflicting but productive entities: "All biennials are what I describe as local organisations in a global context and they are always about situated curatorial practice in a networked culture. And those two things don’t fit together easily. It’s very hard because they don’t sit together easily but that conflict is what hopefully produces a dynamic exhibitionary moment."
(film prints), and brings them into new sets of relations within the specific: the locational, where they become sticky places or temporary stabilisations. As was evident with AVF12, it is possible for festival processes to disrupt and challenge the normative rhythms of society, however temporary, fleeting or exclusive these encounters may be.
7 Conclusion: reassembling art, festival and place

This thesis has brought ideas of art, place and festival together. In doing so, it has provided a critical account of the geographies of a new festival of contemporary art by asserting an original approach to thinking in mobilities to understand the interrelationship between art, place and festival. This concluding chapter encapsulates both the theoretical and practical insights developed over the course of the research project. It will also point towards necessary future research trajectories within the subject and consider how this work has contributed and advanced the fields of festival studies and the cultural history of North East England.

As an AHRC collaborative doctoral award, this research evolved in a particular manner. While the remit to produce a case study of AVF was predetermined in the initial brief of the collaborative doctoral award, there was scope within this to develop bespoke questions in response to my research interests. What evolved was, rather than a straightforward critical and contextual case study of AVF, a reconceptualisation of festival by way of thinking through its relationship with place using the concepts of process, assemblage, territory and, most importantly, mobility. It is in progression, that the unique contribution this thesis makes lies.

The organising principle and description of festival is applied so broadly today as to almost be meaningless. Therefore, to begin, this thesis addressed the ontology of festival by tracing how cultural sociology and anthropology has addressed festivals as social phenomena. The growth in the number of arts festivals across Europe and beyond in recent decades has not been matched by an increase in the scholarly or critical attention on their form, function or content. Despite recent advances in the field of festival studies (Delanty, 2011; Klaic, 2014), the critical geographies of place have not been significantly addressed in research on the contemporary arts festival. The exception is the work of Waterman (1998), Quinn (2005a), Delanty, (2011) and Sassatelli (2011) that offer insights into how arts festivals are situated. This thesis has built on these foundations, and has
advanced a new theoretical conception of the festival as process, bringing new mobilities research into the understanding of the subject. The general theoretical literature was inconclusive and limited in relation to the contemporary arts festival’s relationship with place, tending to sideline them as insignificant when compared with traditional festivals. An over determined view of mythical forms of participation within the traditional festival denies the complexity of more contemporary forms of festival and ignores their potential social and cultural significance (Sassatelli in Giorgi, 2010).

Post-traditional festival is a performative social construction, a mobile process, concerned with the expression and validation of the beliefs, values and cultural tastes of a group or community. However diffuse those relations may be, the conclusion of this research is that the post-traditional has the potential to remediate relations between people and place through processes of territorialisation. This thinking arose from a need to question a prevailing view expressed in some literature, of the festival, as an entity that sits outside of the everyday or in opposition to it. The AVF case study shows that rather than occupy a separate sphere, the process of arts festival exists in relation to the everyday, and in many ways is embedded within the structures of urban life, contemporary capitalism and the cultural economy. This is set against a background where in some urban areas the change from industrial production to post-industrial service sector economies has often been based upon re-imagining places, culturally by attracting new inward public and private investment or tourism and the experience economy. It is clear from the recent rise in the number post-traditional festivals across Europe and beyond, that the process of festival today cannot be considered wholly outside of economic processes.

A necessary distinction needs to be made between, the festive as an affective atmosphere, and the post-traditional festival as a mode of organising cultural encounters. This distinction is central when thinking about how the post-traditional festival relates to ideas of place, but particularly to attachment and belonging. It is primarily the festive affect, in its multiplicity and dispersed forms that work towards attachment and belonging to place, not necessarily the post-traditional festival per se. As Charles Taylor (2007) and others acknowledge, the festive is an important social phenomenon, drawing as it does from its associations with sociability, conviviality, celebration and belonging. There is much more that could be said about these powerful moments of affirmation in how identities are
formed and reformed, how attachment and belonging develop to specific places. These processes operate well beyond the frame of the post-traditional festival, but are sometimes performed and produced within. Further research is required to establish the significance how festival processes form, challenge or maintain identity, although Delanty et al’s (2011) work into arts festivals and European and cosmopolitan identities begins to do this.

AVF has provided a nuanced frame to examine how the arts festival is situated because it promoted a hybridity of practice across art form, geography and organisational structure. This hybridity led the need to find a theoretical perspective that could describe and account for its multiplicity. Three central subjects emerged from the preliminary research into AVF and these directed the content and structure of the case study: cultural policy, thematic and place-orientated curating, and artwork commissioning. These were considered through a number of theoretical conceptions that have a relevant affinity with the process of festival more broadly; territory, assemblage and mobility.

Here AVF is a mobile process, constituted by multiple, territorialisied flows, and made up of numerous interrelated assemblages. This theoretical perspective from post-structural geography was employed to consider how social phenomena such as the post-traditional festival could be viewed as a mobile process of gathering and dispersal, rather than a discreet entity. Thinking in terms of the relationality of culture has allowed for an account of AVF that acknowledges the diffused agency of the cultural encounter and how AVF mediates place through a networked, dynamic, multi-media and multi-site topology.

While these theoretical constructions allowed a manifold means to describe the process of festival, the AVF case study also paid attention to emergent cultural economy of North East England over the last three decades. Thinking in terms of the interrelationship between culture and economy, is central to recent North East history. As we have seen it is also consistent of contemporary urban capitalism more widely (Foster 2011, Amin and Thrift 2007). AVF was well positioned as a means to examine the institutional cultural and artistic developments in North East England in the first decade of the twentieth century. AVF was born at the height of a wave of regional cultural optimism in North East England. Looking at the ecology of relations that created, shaped and sustained AVF allowed for a valuable insight into the actions of cultural leaders, artists and curators as they negotiated the expectations and demands upon cultural practice.
during this time. AVF’s relationship with regionalism was messy. This research has shown AVF was not a bounded regional entity expressing any kind of cultural regional autonomy. Rather, AVF as post-traditional festival was a porous territorialising process; it orchestrated movement in and out of the region.

The emergence of AVF in 2003 overlapped with a major change in the conception of the North East’s institutional cultural ecology. Following significant public investment in BCCA, MIMA and the SG, amongst others, it was no longer possible to coherently articulate the region in terms of an organisational cultural deficit, lacking in modern modes of cultural consumption in the form of orchestras, theatres, galleries and concert halls. In contrast to the history of these new buildings, the history of arts festivals in North East England over the last four decades is one of failure as much as it is success. Despite the large expenditure of C10, the cities of the North East still lack large-scale contemporary arts festivals of any kind, especially in comparison with other northern cities, from Liverpool to Glasgow. Post-traditional festivals are primarily organisations as much as events. They are successful over time if they build up knowledge and leadership to mobilise artists and audiences. Public investment over this period did not reflect this.

When considering regional cultural history, attention needs to be paid to how the festival as a process has been deployed there more widely, from events of community and solidarity like the Miners’ Gala, to the mass spectacle and tourist gaze of Lumiere, that co-exist across similar space and time. There is little scholarly work on the events within regional cultural history, such as Tyne International, Cleveland International Drawing Biennale and Tyneside Festival of Independent Cinema through the 1970s and 1980s that perhaps tell a different story of cultural expression in the region than that of simple economic decline. Future work needs to be carried out to critically assess these events within a globalising regional context.

In the 1980s new events such as Tyne International (taking place twice, in 1990 and 1993) defined Tyneside nationally and internationally for its presentation of contemporary, site-responsive, visual arts. Thirty years later Tyneside still benefits from this. Despite contemporary art gaining a much wider audience and popularity nationally, the North East, due to its economic history and spatial inequality, retains a lower engagement than the rest of England (ACE, 2012). In policy terms, what is important to learn from this is how cultural production
within a region like the North East can and should work towards enhancing, challenging and responding to the needs, desires, interests and passions of the population and not potential investors. Policy therefore needs to take account of participation as much as consumption when considering the relationship between culture and place.

AVF self-knowingly replicated its own position with each new edition, seeking to provide cultural encounters within the region that would not otherwise be available. Maintenance of the organisation, through continual fundraising, continual staff and contractor recruitment and on-going administration should not be overlooked when considering how a festival is shaped and what is replicated over each edition. The dependence of cultural organisations such as AVF upon the language, agendas and priorities of a limited set of funders (ACE, C10, local authorities, etc.) inevitably sidelines or alienates some voices while advocating for the tastes and aesthetic conceptions of others. Without certain pragmatic negotiations that reflect the wider economic and social conditions of AVF’s institutional ecology, the organisation would not have remained through its first decade. Here in particular it is important to note how the thematic curatorial development of editions AVF06 and AVF10 reflected regional economic development priorities in the life sciences and energy industries. Along with this, it was through the tenacity, leadership, networks, commitment and passion of Cleverley, Dobson, Harger and Shatwell over this period that AVF continued from festival to festival without the organisational surety that ACE later provided by taking AVF into the its portfolio of regularly funded organisations in 2008. The future of any such small to medium scale arts organisation that is dependent upon continual public invest will only be maintained through coherent and bold artistic leadership. The central funding provided by ACE and C10 was essential in building the scale and ambition of AVF, but also tied its practice to specific subjects and shaped how the organisation operated regionally and through partnerships. It is of course impossible to say whether and in what form AVF might have continued after its first edition in 2003 without the coordinated public investment that C10 provided, but had it been able finance itself privately or through ticket sales it would have necessarily been a very different event. AVF’s refusal to sit easily within a specific medium or site was perhaps its greatest strength in allowing it to sustain. The ability to move between different subjects and different areas of artistic practice allowed AVF to seek new relationships, providing it with a wider financial base than reliance upon ACE alone.
could provide. However, ultimately it was becoming an ACE national portfolio organisation and receiving regular annual funding that allowed AVF to ride out the regional changes in funding structures (after the close of ONE and C10) that many other festivals created after 2000 were unable to negotiate.

While the actions of individuals are important, the history of AVF cannot be considered without examining its relationship to the policy agendas of culture-led urban regeneration in the North East. Just as AVF never coherently engaged with clear artistic disciplines, neither has the organisation unequivocally bought into the rhetoric of cultural regeneration nor the creative class. AVF was inevitably shaped by the demands of the funding ecology from which it emerged. It was the passions, tastes, knowledge and networks of those creating the programme, developing relationships with artists and gathering artworks that shaped the festival, more than the influence of any policy. Here the dynamism and creative entrepreneurialism of the festival’s directors in the pursuit of their own expression through the festival programme has gathered many people and artworks. It is clear that those who have planned and developed the programme of each AVF edition have done so with the approval of their peers in mind, not some homogenous entity that is the public of the North East region. This network of peers, some of whom are based locally, are generally part of wider national and international artistic network of artists, curators, festival directors and academics.

AVF’s hybridity, as part film festival, part visual art biennial, part music festival, placed it in an interesting intersection between literatures on the arts festival. While there are established and growing bodies of work that address the contemporary art biennial and the film festival, there has been very little work that traverses these seemingly isolated fields but that are underpinned by many similar cultural, economic and urban logics. There is much that could be learned from thinking across these types of cultural institutions, particularly with regard to their relationship with place. This thesis has privileged a view from the production side of the arts festival, to examine how a new arts organisation emerges, acts and develops and what shapes these processes. In doing so, it has not sort to generalise about a specific typology of event, be it a visual art biennial, film festival or music festival. This position has allowed for an understanding of how movement creates cultural encounters, from cultural policy through to the individual decisions of curators and artists. AVF’s history is constituted by these encounters: as a festival, it leaves behind very little material trace other than these
moments of intersection, meeting, memory and sensation. Such cultural encounters are only the product of a relational meeting between a public and an artwork, event or situation.

In addressing the research question on artwork commissioning, two AVF projects were selected for analysis and discussion out of the hundreds of events AVF produced over ten years. These two projects were chosen because they represent the ethos of practice AVF developed between 2003 and 2012 with reference to ideas of place, mobility and assembly. While emerging from very different trajectories, what the discussion of both John Cage’s Variations VII (2008) and YoHo’s Coal Fired Computers (2010) showed is how AVF sought through artistic means to reterritorialise place. In the case of Variations VII (2008) by bring the legacies of avant-garde New York music and art scenes of the 1960s to Gateshead and in Coal Fired Computers (2010) by re-appropriating local political, social and economic history with the violence of material extraction and economic globalisation. What is important for both of these projects is to see how they themselves are emergent from the institutional practices of AVF and in a sense cannot be read outside of them. The thematic curating of AVF entwines these artworks within the wider frame of the organisation. These two artworks are emblematic of the assembly of multiple flows of people, materials, media, practices and histories that festival processes brought into being. AVF mobilised and remediates in this sense the creation of artwork and cultural encounter. These two artworks both spoke of a progressive and contested sense of place, but in very different ways. CFC sought to re-territorialise the history of coal extract in the region by bringing the violence this perpetuated against the bodies of its labourers and inhabitants to the visible surface. Whereas the reinvented performance Variations VII (2008) tells a confident, yet uneasy story of a place seeking to re-present itself as a pioneering contemporary art producer, a place of originality, progression, creation and novelty but to an extent reliant upon academic re-production. AVF is not alone in ‘recreating’ John Cage’s work in the manner undertaken for AVF08, performing the archive, particularly in relation to Cage’s work is something that would benefit from greater scholarly investigation in the future.

Both CFC and Variations VII (2008) speak of the processes of place in its becoming, not static but as fluctuating, and open to new possibilities, to new connections and to new ways of encountering and thinking about identity and
history. These two artworks, like AVF, itself perform an assemblage of proximate and distant social, economic and cultural relationships. The scale and scope of which do not necessarily converge neatly around territories or temporalities. Just like *Variations VII* (2008) the assemblage of AVF into some kind of whole; its locale, history and artworks can be seen as a collage made of disjunctive media, but only ever provisionally ‘made’ at all. The temporality of assemblage belies its provisional construction. The work of assemblage is always only a work to-be-constructed through an act of collaboration with its spectator, a site where the audience is actively solicited to mediate light, movement, sound and image (Uroskie, 2010) through sensation and cognition.

Building on the provisional, the temporary, and the encounter embodied in relational and assemblage thinking, the thesis went on to assert the significance of mobility as central concept in understanding the intersection between art, place and festival. This is an area of thought relating to the arts festival that is under represented, and the case study on AVF promoting this way of conceptualising the mobile process of festival opens new paths.

One clear conclusion of the case study on AVF is that the arts festival as a mobile process acts upon both bodies and material things bringing them into new co-present relations. From this perspective the post-traditional festival can be thought of as a process that deals with the problem of distance, of people, materials and knowledge that are detached by temporarily gathering them into new relations. Creating an obligation, for some, to be co-present is what the mobile process of AVF produced with each edition. This is the same for the people who came together to drink and dance at club nights in AVF03 as it is for those gathering to participate in the Hamish Fulton’s performance *Slowalk* in AVF12 (see Figure. 23).

Tracing what moves and how in the production of AVF editions showed how the post-traditional festival cannot be thought of outside infrastructures and systems of control and management that make up everyday mobility in urban life across scales and territories. From the logistics of transportation, whether artworks by couriers, journalists by trains or artists by aeroplane to the tourist subjects imagined in the audience members, who are given new maps created by AVF for them to navigate their own cites.

In arguing the importance of mobility, this thesis has expressed a specific view of how AVF and post-traditional festivals relate to place and art. Place is
sometimes associated with notions of stasis, belonging and attachment, where place and stillness are concurrent, and dwelling is characterised by an absence of mobility. In this sense place could be viewed as the opposite of mobility, where, in a globalising and networked world, motion and flows erode a coherent sense of place. In contrast, this thesis has articulated a view of place (and by extension the process of festival that brings place into being) that is constituted by flows by asserting festival as mobile process. This advocates the significance of mobility in the construction of territory, mobility and immobility as territorialising processes.

The mediation of presence and absence in the process of festival is central to the co-present relations that constitute it. AVF’s projects such as CFC or Variations VII (2008) remediate territorial conceptions through activating movement in both space and time. As Chapter Five examined, why was a performance that was first staged in New York in 1966 not re-performed until it was staged in Gateshead 42 years later. This is an imaginative, temporal and geographic leap. Within these attempts to present a progressive sense of place, the mobility of AVF sought in many ways (not just artistic) to de-territorialise, to break open the possibility of new cultural relations within its locale, to create encounters that would not otherwise occur. AVF’s privileging of the development of new commissions is testament to this. These are actions that seek sticky outcomes, in themselves forms of re-territorialisation. They seek cultural encounters that build memory and attachment over time. The productive inter-relationship between mobility and festival studies offers potential for future research, particularly in relations to cultural policy, which often seeks to assert a view of place that is somewhat static.

The starting point of this project was to think about AVF’s relationship with place, how it can or should engage. This thesis moved beyond simply questioning AVF’s desire to speak about its locale, in either a critical or a celebratory way. While this research has gone on a considerably journey through AVF, its practice, history and relationships, in a sense this initial point of enquiry necessarily remains open. AVF’s hybrid, contested yet progressive sense of place, was a messy relationship, but one that reflected the differing paces, frictions and conceptions of its locale in North East England generally. Just as festival is process, place is process. The process of festival defines its own space-time frame. Over time, this process builds on history and memory, just as each edition of AVF re-performs elements of previous editions, it builds as palimpsest. The coherences, continuities, and composition of territory emerge from these actions. There is a risk, as
Hobsbawm (2013) identifies, that the repetitious process of festival over time becomes an esoteric social and cultural performance for an enlightened or elite few, an irrelevant reenactment rather than an experiment in encountering the contemporary. What is important is that this process of temporal repetition of festival maintains a critical and public desire to intervene in time and space; to work with artists to question and respond to the necessities of place, publics and the necessities of the contemporary, however enigmatic these terms might appear. As part of a cultural commons, festivals must seek to renew and renew relationships with multiple publics. Post-traditional festivals still celebrate, but what is celebrated is also a reflection of who is able to gather the resources and authority to mobilise such festivals. This is central to an understanding of the power geometries and characteristic of the particular modes of mobility a festival such as AVF has produced between 2003 and 2012.
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Expert Interviews: Festival and Biennial Directors and Curators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Location / Format</th>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lewis Biggs</td>
<td>30 Aug 2013</td>
<td>Curator Folkestone Triennial; former Director, Liverpool Biennial and Tate Liverpool, UK</td>
<td>via email</td>
<td>Biennials, place, art commissioning, curating, Liverpool Biennial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorcha Carey</td>
<td>6 Nov 2013</td>
<td>Director, Edinburgh Art Festival, UK</td>
<td>Edinburgh Art Festival office</td>
<td>Edinburgh Art Festival, biennials, place, curating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Collard</td>
<td>21 May 2012</td>
<td>Chief Executive, Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE), UK</td>
<td>CCE Office, Newcastle</td>
<td>Place and festivals, North East England, international festivals, curating, urban regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Collier</td>
<td>12 Mar 2015</td>
<td>Tyne International founder and Reader in Art and Design, University of Sunderland, UK</td>
<td>University of Sunderland</td>
<td>Tyne International, biennials, place, North East England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Domela</td>
<td>25 July 2013</td>
<td>Former Programme Director, Liverpool Biennial, UK</td>
<td>FACT, Liverpool</td>
<td>Place and festival, biennials, curating in a biennial context, Liverpool Biennial, Manifesta, urbanism, regeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Etherington</td>
<td>22 Nov 2013</td>
<td>Director, Tusk Festival, UK</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>Tusk Festival, music festival programming, place, audiences, North East England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedwig Fijen</td>
<td>20 Aug 2013</td>
<td>Founding Director of Manifesta, the Netherlands</td>
<td>via Skype</td>
<td>Manifesta, biennials, curating, place, funding models, cultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo Fusi</td>
<td>3 Oct 2013</td>
<td>Director, Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool; former curator, Liverpool Biennial, UK</td>
<td>Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool</td>
<td>Curating in a biennial context, Liverpool Biennial, memory, place, audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristoffer Gansing</td>
<td>29 Nov 2013</td>
<td>Director, Transmediale, Berlin, Germany</td>
<td>via Skype</td>
<td>Curating, Transmediale, biennials, Berlin, festivals and media art, novelty, place, community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lars Henrik Gass</td>
<td>17 Sep 2013</td>
<td>Director, International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany</td>
<td>via Skype</td>
<td>International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, film festival programming, film festivals, cinema, audiences, place, funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Gorschlüter</td>
<td>4 Nov 2011</td>
<td>Deputy Director of MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Germany; Curator Terminal Convention 2011, Cork, Ireland</td>
<td>Static Gallery, Liverpool</td>
<td>Curating in a festival context, Terminal Convention, place, cultural identity, memory, artist commissioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Location / Format</td>
<td>Topics Discussed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Grayson</td>
<td>12 May 2015</td>
<td>Artist, founding member of The Basement Group and Projects UK, and curator 2002 Biennale of Sydney, Australia</td>
<td>Newcastle University</td>
<td>Biennials, curating in a biennial context, Newcastle art scene, North East England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pieter-Paul Mortier</td>
<td>16 Sep 2013</td>
<td>Director, Courtsiane Festival, Gent, Belgium</td>
<td>via Skype</td>
<td>Courtsiane Festival, funding, place, festival curating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Stubbs</td>
<td>8 Oct 2013</td>
<td>Director, FACT, Liverpool and AND Festival founding partner, UK</td>
<td>via Skype</td>
<td>AND Festival history and development, curating, festivals, festival labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally Tallant</td>
<td>3 Oct 2013</td>
<td>Director, Liverpool Biennial, UK</td>
<td>Liverpool Biennial office</td>
<td>Biennials, exhibition making, Liverpool Biennial, urban regeneration, place-making, curating in a biennial context, novelty, audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Watkins</td>
<td>13 Nov 2013</td>
<td>Director, Ikon Gallery</td>
<td>Ikon Gallery, Birmingham</td>
<td>Curating in a biennial context, audiences, memory and place, Ikon Gallery, Venice Biennale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 2: AV Festival Research Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Location / Format</th>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Batstone and Sam Peace</td>
<td>19 Jun 2012</td>
<td>Arts Council England Relationship Managers, North East office, UK</td>
<td>Arts Council England North East office</td>
<td>AVF12, AVF history, ACE, funding models, place-making, cultural policy, North East England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Cook</td>
<td>7 Aug 2012 and 1 Oct 2012</td>
<td>Broadcast Yourself co-curator, AVF08 and CRUMB, Sunderland)</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF history, AVF08, AVF12, North East England, Broadcast Yourself, festival production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodri Davies</td>
<td>12 Jul 2012</td>
<td>Artist, AVF10 and AVF12, AVANE Trustee</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF12, the role of festivals for artists, Commissioning, Music Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Dobson</td>
<td>11 May 2012</td>
<td>Chief Executive, Tyneside Cinema, AVF and AVANE Trustee and Chairperson 2003 to 2014</td>
<td>Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF history, Tyneside Cinema, North East England, cultural policy, place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Gregory</td>
<td>22 March 2012</td>
<td>Participation Coordinator AVF12</td>
<td></td>
<td>AVF12, festival management (volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor Harger</td>
<td>28 June 2012</td>
<td>AVF Director 2004 - 2008</td>
<td>Lighthouse, Brighton</td>
<td>AVF06, AVF08, AVF history, curating, new media art, cultural policy, North East England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Hirshhorn</td>
<td>1 March 2013</td>
<td>Curator, Project Manager AVF06 and Producer AVF08</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF06, AVF08, AVF history, curating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Morrill</td>
<td>9 May 2012</td>
<td>Festival Producer AVF10 and AVF12</td>
<td>BCCA, Gateshead</td>
<td>AVF10, AVF12, festival production, North East England, commissioning, place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iain Pate</td>
<td>25 May 2012</td>
<td>Producer AVF12</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>AVF12, festival production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Phillips and Sam Watson</td>
<td>7 June 2012</td>
<td>Co-Directors CIRCA Projects; AVF10 and AVF12 partners</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>CIRCA, AVF12, festival production, curating, North East England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alistair Robinson</td>
<td>5 April 2012</td>
<td>Director, NGCA, Sunderland</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>NGCA, AVF06 - AVF12, AVF history curating, Sunderland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Shatwell</td>
<td>6 Jan 2012; 1 Nov 2012; 19 Dec 2013</td>
<td>AVF and AVANE Director, 2008 to present</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF history, curating, themes, artists, cultural policy, North East England, artist commissioning, festival production, biennials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Smith and Susan Stenger</td>
<td>4 June 2012</td>
<td>AVF10 and AVF12, Artist, Producer, Supporter</td>
<td>via email</td>
<td>AVF10 and AVF12, curating and producing festival events, North East England, place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola Singh</td>
<td>24 May 2012</td>
<td>Participation Coordinator AVF12</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF12, festival management (volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnamed x3</td>
<td>Nov 2013</td>
<td>AVF03 Participants</td>
<td>via telephone</td>
<td>AVF03, AVF history, North East England, music and club scenes, VJ culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alessandro Vincentelli</td>
<td>18 July 2012</td>
<td>Curator, BCCA</td>
<td>BCCA, Gateshead</td>
<td>AVF history, curating, North East England, festivals, cultural policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Warman</td>
<td>27 Nov 2014</td>
<td>AVF Festival Assistant 2013-14</td>
<td>via Skype</td>
<td>AVF history, film print traffic management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo Wilson</td>
<td>18 May 2012</td>
<td>Communications Manager AVF12</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>AVF12, festival marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>