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Rethinking the Aesthetic Geographies of Multicultural Festivals: A Nietzschean Perspective

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Critiquing dismissals in geography of the aesthetics of multicultural festivals as bland, superficial, and apolitical, this article illustrates how they can be also invigorating, imaginative, and empowering. To elaborate my argument, I draw on interviews and participant observations of the 2010 Fusion Festival (hereafter Fusion), an annual event located in the “ethnourban” context of the city of Surrey, British Columbia. My theoretical framework uses Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of aesthetic “justification,” which refers to art’s capacity to infuse human experience with constructive meaning and affirmative power. For Nietzsche, aesthetic justification incorporates two artistic forces: the Apollonian, which refers to illusion, beauty, and order, and the Dionysian, which refers to music, sensuality, and ecstasy. The article explores three ways through which Apollonian and Dionysian delimitations of space and time justify the multicultural values and identities of Fusion’s participants: first, how the Apollonian illusions of “cultural pavilions” manifest the creative capacities of local communities; second, how musical and theatrical performances generate Dionysian senses of belonging among performers and audience members; and third, how the embodied and transfiguring practices of dancing, painting, singing, and dressing up shift perspectives in ways that affirm diversity, combat despair, and raise awareness about protecting the environment. The article concludes by considering some future directions in geographical research on the aesthetics of multicultural festivals. Key Words: aesthetics, British Columbia, festivals, multiculturalism, Friedrich Nietzsche.

本文批判美学地理将多元文化主义庆典轻视为温和、肤浅及去政治化，同时描绘它们如何使人精神焕发、充满想象并且能够进行培力。为了阐述我的论点，我将运用在2010年多元文化融合庆典（此后以“融合”之称）进行的访谈与参与式观察，该年度活动座落于英属哥伦比亚省里士满的“族裔郊区”脉络之中。我的理论架构运用弗里德里希·尼采的美学“辩护”之概念，该概念指涉艺术将积极的意义与肯定的力量倾注于人类经验的能力。对尼采而言，美学辩护包含两种艺术驱力：指向幻象、美与秩序的太阳神阿波罗，以及指向音乐、感官与入迷的酒神迪奥尼索司。本文探讨透过阿波罗和迪奥尼索司式的时间和空间界定，辩护“融合”参与者的多元文化价值和身份认同的三种方式：首先，“文化展示馆”的阿波罗式幻象如何展现地社区的创造力；再者，音乐和剧场表演如何在表演者与观众身上产生迪奥尼索司的归属感；第三，跳舞、绘画、歌唱与打扮的体现及易容实践，如何以确认多样性、与绝望战斗，并提升有关环境保护意识的方式改变感知。本文于结论中考量地理学对多元文化庆典美学的研究的若干未来方向。关键词：美学、英属哥伦比亚省、庆典、多元文化主义、弗里德里希·尼采。

Criticando la desestimación de la estética de los festivales multiculturales por la geografía como insultos, superficiales y apolíticos, este artículo ilustra cómo esos festivales también pueden ser estimulantes, imaginativos y fortalecedores. Para elaborar mi argumentación, me apoyo en entrevistas y observaciones participativas del Festival de la Fusion de 2010 (en lo sucesivo Fusión), un evento anual localizado en el contexto “etnourbano” de la ciudad de Surrey, Columbia Británica. Mi marco teórico usa el concepto de Nietzsche de la “justificación” estética, que se refiere a la capacidad del arte de infundir la experiencia humana con significación constructiva y poder afirmativo. Para Nietzsche, la justificación estética incorpora dos fuerzas artísticas: lo apolíneo, que se refiere a la ilusión, la belleza y el orden, y lo dionisiaco, referido a la música, la sensualidad y el éxtasis. El artículo explora tres maneras a través de las cuales las delimitaciones apolíneas y dionisiácicas del espacio y el tiempo justifican los valores e identidades multiculturales de los participantes en Fusión: primera, cómo manifiestan las comunidades locales con sus capacidades creativas las ilusiones apolíneas de los “pabellones culturales”; segunda, cómo generan entre los intérpretes y los espectadores sensaciones dionisiácas de pertenencia las representaciones musicales y teatrales; y tercera, cómo cambian a las perspectivas las prácticas personificadas y transfigurativas de baile, pintura, canto y disfraces, en modos que afirman la diversidad, combaten la desesperanza y concientizan en favor de la protección del medio ambiente. El artículo concluye con la consideración de algunas direcciones futuras en la investigación de la estética de los festivales multiculturales. Palabras clave: estética, Columbia Británica, festivales, multiculturalismo, Friedrich Nietzsche.
In The Ideology of the Aesthetic, Eagleton (1990) argued that the modern concept of the aesthetic has always oscillated in the dialectics of liberation and domination. Specifically, Eagleton contended that although the aesthetic “figures as a genuinely emancipatory force,” it also operates “as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony” (28). For geographers who concur with Eagleton’s “brilliant treatise” (Harvey 1990, 429), the relationship between aesthetics and politics is similarly fraught because of an “ongoing either/or in geography’s relation to the aesthetic,” which demands that we “either reject or embrace, suspect or believe” (Matless 1997, 399). Geographical research, however, usually rejects and suspects the aesthetic. Geographers tend to endorse the aesthetic only if it contributes to politically desirable goals such as social justice (Blomley 1998), but they are more likely to spurn it because of its alleged “ethereal and precious associations” (Matless 1997, 397), “questionable romanticism” (Paterson 2009, 783), and propensity to facilitate oppressive forms of ideology (Goonewardena 2005), marketing (Thrift 2007), migration (Pijpers 2008), neoliberalism (Pow 2009), and suburbanization (Duncan and Duncan 2004).

In recent years, however, a growing number of geographers have begun to question these assumptions, advocating empirical, theoretical, and methodological reevaluations of the aesthetic (e.g., Dixon 2009; Kingsbury 2010; Dixon, Hawkins, and Straughan 2012; Aitken 2014; Hawkins and Straughan 2015). Drawing on the works of Rancière and others, they call for a “much stronger claim for the role of the aesthetic, one that interprets it as a concern with the production of difference in regard to the visibility and sayability of phenomena” (Dixon 2009, 412) and thus inseparable from the political. These studies argue that rather than interpreting the aesthetic as subordinate or ancillary to the political, we ought to recognize the role it plays in constituting the very conceptual terms and substantive terrains through which the political becomes intelligible and tangible. As Rancière (2004, 8) put it:

[Aesthetics] is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

My article contributes to this emerging literature by critiquing dismissals in geography and the social sciences of the aesthetics of multicultural festivals as bland, superficial, and apolitical (e.g., Waterman 1998; Lowe 1999; Meyer and Rhoades 2006). Drawing on the aesthetic theories of Nietzsche and the case study of the 2010 Fusion Festival (hereafter Fusion) located in the “ethnoburban” context of the city of Surrey (hereafter Surrey), British Columbia, I illustrate how festive aesthetics can be invigorating, imaginative, and empowering. Rather than confining aesthetics to disinterested judgments of taste or decorative surfaces that hide unpalatable socioeconomic problems, a Nietzschian approach regards the aesthetic as a lively, multifaceted, and potentially redemptive discourse that mediates people’s relations to space and society. From a Nietzschian perspective, then, the aesthetic is not, as most studies of festivals assume, “an entertaining irrelevance, an easily dispensable tinkle of bells next to the ‘seriousness of life’” (Nietzsche [1871] 1993, 13) but, rather, central to how our values, beliefs, and desires are animated and apprehended. Nowhere is this more publicly evident than in festivals that spatially concentrate and vigorously mobilize a wide range of artistic practices, sensory experiences, and embodied practices.

Using structured and semistructured interviews, as well as participant observation at Fusion in the summer of 2010, the article investigates one of the largest multicultural festivals in Canada. Located in Holland Park and described by former Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts as “an entertaining, family-friendly event that showcases our vibrant multicultural community and provides us with the unique opportunity to experience the music, dance, food and heritage of the many distinct cultural groups that live in our City,” the free-admission festival is a two-day annual event that attracts approximately 90,000 people. With over half of its nearly 500,000 residents foreign-born, most of whom are of South Asian descent, Surrey is an “ethnoburb” (Li 2009) of Greater Vancouver, which is itself a “super-diverse” (Vertovec 2007) city.

To explore Fusion’s aesthetic geographies, the article uses Nietzsche’s concept of aesthetic “justification,” which refers to art’s capacity to infuse human experience with arousing affects, constructive meanings, and affirmative power. According to Nietzsche, aesthetic justification can be achieved in daily life by incorporating the interplay of two artistic forces: the Apollonian, which refers to illusion, beauty, and order, and the Dionysian, which refers to music, sensuality, and ecstasy. My argument is that Apollonian and Dionysian delimitations of space and time justify the
multicultural values and identities of Fusion’s participants. By adopting a Nietzschian perspective, I do not wish to romanticize or exempt Fusion’s multicultural aesthetics from hegemonic practices that integrate it into neoliberalism and the “united colors of capitalism” (K. Mitchell 1993). As I illustrate later, some of my findings confirm the literature on the aesthetics of multicultural festivals that I critique. Recalling Eagleton’s assertion that the aesthetic has always been ensnared between liberation and domination, my main goal is to provide a theoretical and empirical counterpoint to geographers’ overemphasis on the negative side of this binary, especially in terms of the research on festivals. I am in strong agreement with Armstrong’s (2000) claim that to “have lost confidence in the aesthetic as a category, together with the possibility of generating new ideas about it, leaves one without resources of analysis in contemporary culture” (2). By dismissing the politically positive dimensions of the aesthetic, geographers risk banishing a significant component of multicultural festivals and thus limiting our ability to theorize and empirically discern the ways in which they entangle art and politics.

The article is structured as follows. The first section conceptualizes multiculturalism as an institutional practice and lived experience in Canada. It also explains how researchers have studied multicultural aesthetics and festivals. In the second section, I provide background on the empirical context of Fusion, as well as the article’s methods and methodology. The third section consists of an outline of Nietzsche’s concepts of justification, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as well as a discussion on why a Nietzschean perspective is particularly suited for a geographical understanding of festive aesthetics. I then turn to explore three ways through which Apollonian and Dionysian forces aesthetically justify the multicultural values and identities of Fusion’s participants: first, how the Apollonian illusions of “cultural pavilions” manifest the creative capacities of local communities; second, how theatrical and musical performances generate Dionysian senses of belonging among performers and audience members; and third, how the embodied practices of dancing, painting, singing, and dressing up shift perspectives in ways that affirm diversity, combat despair, and protect the environment. The article concludes by considering some future directions in geographical research on the aesthetics of multicultural festivals.

Situating Multicultural Aesthetics

Multiculturalism in Canada

Multiculturalism is a multifaceted phenomenon that means different things to numerous actors and organizations located in many places around the world. Despite this complexity, Clayton (2009) observed two distinct “strands of thought” in geography. On the one hand, “multiculturalism stands for the very condition of living with social and cultural diversity within specific nations and places that is, the social fact of the proximate coexistence of those identifying as different in a variety of racial, ethnic, and religious respects,” and, on the other hand, multiculturalism is “a set of formal institutional practices which juggle notions of equality, fairness, and justice” (211).

Both strands of multiculturalism pervade socioeconomic life in Canada. Regarding the lived experiences of cultural diversity, Canada’s historically high levels of immigration and settlement have meant that its metropolitan areas such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver are among the most racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse places in the world. Although there are debates about the degree to which urban Canada consists of “ethnic enclaves”—that is, the “clustering of certain visible minority groups in urban neighbourhoods and the spatial concentration of poverty” (Walks and Bourne 2006, 273)—most commentators agree that everyday experiences of multiculturalism in Canada are defined by relatively high levels of economic prosperity and social well-being (Good 2009). Researchers, however, also observe that many people’s experiences of multiculturalism in Canada are informed by asymmetrical relations of power configured in labor migration, colonial legacies, and the racial “othering” of bodies (Chazan et al. 2011; Ray and Preston 2013). In addition, Canada is a settler nation and there are complex and often fraught relationships between its Aboriginal peoples (Inuit, Métis, and First Nations) and state-led multicultural policies and practices (Kubota 2015). In recent years, researchers have begun to focus on the growing importance of the role of suburbanization in multicultural and immigrant experiences in Canada (Moos and Skaburskis 2010; Teixeira 2014).

In terms of the policies and frameworks that manage cultural diversity, Canada is renowned for being the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as government policy. Following its initial implementation
in 1971 to ease tensions between English and French Canadians, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) further strengthened multiculturalism as a formal institutional practice. In the early 2000s, researchers observed some Canadian municipalities such as Surrey and Richmond in British Columbia shifting from discourses of multiculturalism to "interculturalism," which is also the preferred term and model of governance in Quebec, as a way to facilitate greater ethnocultural integration in urban communities (Good 2009). This political shift has had implications in the planning of cultural festivals and events such as Fusion, which, as its name suggests, are increasingly about hybridity, creating dialogue, and bridging cultural divides. Even with this trend, some researchers emphasize the enduring appeal of multiculturalism, especially in terms of the rebranding of ethnic spaces such as Chinese markets in superdiverse Canadian suburbs (Pottie-Sherman and Hiebert 2015). In addition, multiculturalism remains a dominant discourse in Canada because it "is often seen to be a defining characteristic of Canadian identity" that "receives strong popular endorsement as a positive contribution to integration" (Ley 2010, 193).

**Multicultural Aesthetics and Festivals**

For most researchers in the arts and humanities, multicultural aesthetics refer to the properties of artworks within and across different geographical and historical contexts. In these accounts, the aesthetic is aligned with beauty, criteria of taste, and standards of judgment for assessing artistic media and artifacts (e.g., Elliott, Caton, and Rhyne 2002; Sharma 2006). This area of research typically endorses multicultural aesthetics because they preserve cultural artifacts, meanings, and practices. Criticisms of multicultural aesthetics, which are commonplace in the social sciences, argue that liberal state-sponsored policies and practices aestheticize, which is to say, obfuscate, pressing political issues such as economic equality, civic inclusion, and histories of colonial violence (Fortier 2008; Nagle 2009; Zheng 2010). This research equates multicultural aesthetics with the allegedly "thin' aspects of diversity" (Andrew 2004, 9) such as food, music, clothes, and fashion. In these accounts, the aesthetic is aligned with fleeting and shallow epiphenomena such as taste, happiness, and pleasure. Penrose (2013), for example, suggested that "important processes occur in the planning and execution of festivals that are often hidden from a public that is preoccupied by the superficial celebration and/or consumption of cultural difference" (3). Similarly, Brand asserted, "Multiculturalism is more than watching folk dances and eating spicy foods. People have to have equal access to equal justice, equal jobs, equal education" (cited in Horton 1991, D15).

Not all social scientists, however, reduce festive aesthetics to apolitical superficiality. Waitt (2008), for example, noted that "festival spaces offer creative possibilities through temporarily suspending social relations and sustaining playful practice that may challenge established geographies" (526). Penrose (2013) also claimed that the "artistic programming" of festivals is central to how they encourage "diverse and often very creative efforts to fix the meaning of cultural diversity in ways that support multiple visions of multiculturalism" (843). Other geographers note that festive aesthetics are relevant to the construction of people' identities (Duffy 2005) and the negotiation of cultural differences (Permezel and Duffy 2007). Although these studies acknowledge the role of the aesthetic in festival spaces, they nonetheless designate the aesthetic as a marginal concern insofar as it is passive, decorative, and descriptive.

Following Nietzsche, this article understands the aesthetic as constitutive of what people can do, sense, imagine, and become, as well as how they relate to each other and the world around them. Such an approach echoes the recent research on the everyday textures of multiculturalism. Focusing on quotidian settings such as shops, streets, and parks, this work attempts to capture the phenomenological dimensions of multicultural life (e.g., Wise and Velayutham 2009; Watson and Saha 2013). Wise (2011), for example, addressed the "sensuous qualities of food thread through all of these encounters, invoking, evoking, knitting together, incorporating, pushing apart, and re-habituating bodies along the way" (85). Although this work addresses the "aesthetic feel" (Watson and Saha 2013, 2026) of multicultural life, it downplays the role of the aesthetic in the production of such spaces and has yet to examine the everyday aesthetics of public art, performances, and festivals. My interest lies in the geographical and political aesthetics of multicultural festivals and the following questions: How does the aesthetic mediate and
define people’s relations to space and society? What social and political benefits can the aesthetic make? How might the aesthetic help people overcome the challenges of living in a multicultural society? Before elaborating on why Nietzsche’s aesthetics are adept at tackling these questions, I first provide background to the methodology of the research and the empirical setting of Fusion.

Research Context and Methods

Methodology

This article is part of a wider research project on aesthetics and their role in multicultural places in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). Drawing on new developments in aesthetic geography (Hawkins and Straughan 2015), the research inquires into how sensations, affects, emotions, and judgments of taste structure people’s relations to society and space. Examining soccer and Italian nationalism (Kingsbury 2011), race and Iranian food (Naraghi and Kingsbury 2013), and creativity and Japanese anime cosplay (Kingsbury 2015), the research project uses qualitative methods to explore the geographical aesthetics of everyday multicultural life.

Much of the data that inform this particular study were collected during the weekend of Fusion on 17 and 18 July 2010. With the help of two research assistants, I used the qualitative methods of participant observation and semistructured interviews to explore people’s aesthetic experiences of Fusion. I also took extensive field notes, numerous photographs, and hours of video recordings to capture Fusion’s aesthetics. A total of ninety-eight audio-recorded interviews, each between one and twenty minutes, were conducted that focused on organizers’, performers’, and audience members’ interactions with one another, their artistic media, and experiences of Fusion. All of the interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim. Whenever requested, names were changed to protect the anonymity of informants. The project also used the method of discourse analysis to consider the ways in which aesthetic themes informed Fusion’s textual materials such as the official program, pamphlets, advertisements, and cultural pavilion displays. Finally, I conducted two semistructured follow-up interviews with performers and three semistructured telephone interviews with Surrey officials directly responsible for the organization of Fusion to verify and obtain background data on the event.

Surrey Fusion Festival

The City of Surrey is located 27 km south of Downtown Vancouver and 11 km north of the U.S.-Canada border (Figure 1). Renowned as one of Canada’s fastest growing and most ethnically diverse cities, Surrey has 500,000 residents, over half of whom are foreign-born, the majority of these being of South Asian descent. Like other Canadian cities, Surrey promotes its ethnocultural diversity by fostering multicultural policies, practices, and events such as Fusion. The first Fusion event was a three-day event held in 2008 as part of Surrey’s designation as one of Canada’s Cultural Capitals (CCC). According to the General Manager of Surrey Council’s Parks, Recreation and Culture department, as a direct result of the CCC award, Fusion received a “one-time funding” of CAD$320,000 from the federal government and CAD$220,000 of “matching funds” from the City of Surrey (Cavan 2008, 2). Given the success of the inaugural event, Fusion is now solely funded by the Surrey Council’s Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, corporate sponsors, participating organizations, and revenues from tickets to purchase food, beverages, and artifacts. The main implications of the federal and council funding cuts were the reduction of the event to two days, reduction of the number of entertainment stages from five to four, and (according to the Corporate Report) the reduction of “the budget for the more expensive ‘name’ entertainment” to “focus more on local artists.”

Today, Fusion is a two-day, annual, free-admission, not-for-profit, renowned regional event that attracts about 90,000 people and includes thirty-six “cultural pavilions” and more than forty acts on four stages. The City of Surrey decided to hold Fusion in Holland Park because it is centrally located, adjacent to the King George SkyTrain station, and, at over 25 ha, large enough to host a major event like Fusion. Holland Park is also used in the summer for music festivals. It was selected as one of British Columbia’s “Spirit Squares” to celebrate the Province’s 150th anniversary in 2008 and a “Live Nation” site during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. The park is popular with local residents who enjoy its large open fields, playground, waterfalls, pieces of public art, tree-lined promenades, and horticultural displays. Significantly, Holland Park
is located on unceded Aboriginal territory belonging to the Coast Salish peoples. Although this issue was not formally recognized in Fusion’s main opening ceremony, which included speeches by Mayor Diane Watts and a representative of Capital Coast Savings (the event’s main sponsor), the Welcome Ceremony opened with the Coast Salish anthem and included a Coast Salish band leading an Olympics-style “Parade of Flags” that represented the thirty-four countries participating in the event. Later, I address more fully the political aesthetics of Fusion’s First Nations performers and performances.

Echoing the City of Surrey’s slogan—“the future lives here”—Fusion is typical of other multicultural festivals that use ethnocultural diversity to boost a city’s image, promote citizenship, and reproduce neoliberal values (Quinn 2005). According to Councilor Barinder Rasode, Chair of Surrey’s Multicultural Advisory Committee, Fusion “celebrates our city’s belief that although yesterday’s world was set on its differences, today’s focuses on promoting unity by cultivating and honouring our differences” (Surrey Fusion Program 2010, 3). Regarding the demographics of its attendees, Daniel Nielsen, Special Projects Manager for the City of Surrey, stated:

We had a very large South Asian community turnout on the Friday night and there was a big Hispanic or Latino community present there. But we do find with this event, the South Asian community is the largest visible minority in Surrey. But we get a very wide cross-section of people attending the event. (Interview, July 2010)

The characteristics of Fusion’s crowd, then, draw broadly from the ethnocultural groups represented in Surrey and the surrounding GVRD. During the morning and afternoon, most attendees are youth, children, and families. During the evening musical performances that featured internationally renowned artists, the audience was mainly composed of young adults. As Nielsen noted, Fusion’s audience is made up mainly of Surrey’s South Asian ethnocultures that are the majority population. Such demographics were especially apparent during Fusion’s finale night that involved Bollywood superstar Lehmber Hussainpuri. During this performance, which I discuss later, Fusion was arguably more reminiscent of a Bhangra festival than a multicultural festival. My observations, however, revealed that the ethnocultural and racial composition of the audience was still diverse, with South Asians accounting for no more than approximately 40 percent of the
audience. Having said this, Fusion’s demographics evince the recent emergence of “minority majority” neighborhoods in North America and Europe. Fusion’s ethnoburban setting is important to my argument because I contend that its multicultural aesthetics are not so much about the utopian celebration of marginalized ethnic minorities as they are about the robust expression of well-organized and thriving communities.

The Aesthetic Geographies of Fusion

Justification, the Apollonian, and the Dionysian

Rather than systematically inquiring into the nature of art, beauty, and judgment, Nietzsche’s writings on aesthetics aim “to identify the conditions of the affirmation of life, cultural renewal, and exemplary human living” (Came 2014, 1). Nietzsche’s aesthetics have greatly influenced research on selfhood (Foucault 1986), language (Derrida 1978), urban life (Lefebvre 1991), and desire (Irigaray 1991). Recently, geographers have engaged Nietzsche’s oeuvre by addressing its “sophisticated geographies” of morality, politics, and postcolonialism (Jacobs 2010; see also Wood and Rossiter 2011); the “geographical problem-spaces” of the real world, the apparent world, and Europe (Wainwright 2010); environmental scientific practices (Comrie 2010); geospatial technologies (Kingsbury and Jones 2009); and the explosive “nuances” of everyday life (Kingsbury 2010).

Despite the extent of his influence, some readers might be surprised by my claim that Nietzsche warrants serious consideration to rethink the aesthetic geographies of multicultural festivals. How is a nineteenth-century philosopher who espoused the alleged antiliberal philosophies of the “will to power” (Wille zur Macht), the “superhuman” (Übermensch), and “order of rank” (Rangordnung) to be taken seriously as a thinker on a multicultural context? Central to Nietzsche’s writings and multicultural discourses are the themes of power, values, tradition, religion, cultural renewal, and national identity. Although some commentators describe Nietzsche’s position as “inter-culturalist” (Shapiro 2009, 488), most assert that Nietzsche’s work endorses the principal tenets of multiculturalism because it valorizes cultural differences and epistemological perspectives in the face of dangerous majoritarian norms (e.g., Baumann 1999; Geuss 2010; Tutt 2011). My concern in this article, however, is not about whether Nietzsche would have approved or rejected multiculturalism per se. I am interested in how Nietzsche’s aesthetics, which highlight the complications of space, aesthetics, and politics, provide the basis for a more germane theory of aesthetics for understanding the lived spaces of multicultural festivals. Nietzsche assigned a great deal of importance to festivals because he believed that their aesthetics are capable of renewing people’s affective attachments to social life. His assertion, “what do all our art of artworks matter if we lose that higher art, the art of festivals!” (Nietzsche [1882] 2001, 89) is typical of the many laudatory references to festivals scattered throughout his writings.

For Nietzsche, the aesthetics of festivals are bound up with the artistic interactions between Apollonian and Dionysian “forces, principles, or drives” (Geuss 1999, xi). In Nietzsche’s schema, the Apollonian, named after the ancient Greek deity Apollo, is associated with dreams, moderation, illusion, individuality, and the plastic arts such as sculpture, architecture, and epic poetry. For Nietzsche ([1871] 1993), Apollo is “the soothsaying god. Etymologically the ‘shining one,’ the deity of light, he also holds sway over the beautiful illusion of the inner fantasy world” (16). The Dionysian, named after the ancient Greek deity Dionysus, is associated with music, excess, ecstasy, and intoxicating energies. According to Nietzsche ([1871] 1993), when an individual experiences Dionysian joy, his or her “subjectivity becomes a complete forgetting of the self” (17). Nietzsche argued that the creative tensions between Apollonian and Dionysian forces were not only central to the greatness of ancient Greek tragedies but they could help renew modern European culture by providing “the foundational conditions that invite love of life and protect against world-denying pessimism” (Came 2009, 41). To flourish in the face of life’s harsh inevitabilities such as death, suffering, and anguish, Nietzsche’s wager is that an aesthetic praxis combining Apollonian restraint with Dionysian rapture is a more effective coping strategy than indifferent scientific reason or ascetic Christian morality. This is why Nietzsche ([1871] 1993) boldly asserted, “It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified” (32, italics in original). Commentators suggest that Nietzsche turned to an aesthetic theodicy because he contended that “none of the traditional ways of justifying existence by reference to formal rationality, the exigencies of freedom of the will, or principles such as
parsimony, efficiency, plenitude of being etc. works” (Geuss 1999, xxiii). They also describe how, for Nietzsche, “one way of justifying the world (or ‘life’ or whatever) does work, namely contemplation of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon” (Geuss 1999, xxiii).

Why Adopt a Nietzschean Perspective?

My contention is that Nietzsche’s notions of justification, the Apollonian, and the Dionysian can further our geographical understandings of the aesthetics of festivals. In this section, I elaborate on the usefulness of Nietzsche’s perspective by attending to Lefebvre’s (1991) emphases on space, the festival, politics, and the social in the following assessment of the Apollonian and Dionysian:

The Dionysian side of existence—excess, intoxication, risks (even mortal risks)—has its own peculiar freedom and value. The living organism and the total body contain within them the potential for play, violence, festival and love (which is not to say that this potential must necessarily be realized, nor even that any motivation to do so need be present). The distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian echoes the dual aspect of the living being and its relationship to space—its own space and the other’s: violence and stability, excess and equilibrium. (178)

Lefebvre’s viewpoint, which is widely held in Nietzschean studies, highlights how the Apollonian and Dionysian are inherently spatial concepts (see also Westin 2014). The former is aligned with stable and clearly delineated boundaries that delimit spatial relations among objects, individuals, and groups of people, whereas the latter is associated with formless flux and the blurring of social boundaries. As I illustrate later, a Nietzschean approach eschews conflating the aesthetic with superficial surfaces that hide deeper truths and enduring realities. This maneuver helps avoid the trap of dismissing festival aesthetics as apolitical because they are phony and superficial. Furthermore, the Apollonian and Dionysian compose a dynamic and antiesentialist aesthetic geography that does not rely on the fixity of binaries such as surface–depth, true–false, and subject–world (Kingsbury and Jones 2009). A Nietzschean perspective, then, provides us with a supple yet rigorous pair of analytical categories that can make sense of the complicated aesthetic spaces of festival sites.

It is notable that Lefebvre used the term festival in his discussion of the Apollonian and Dionysian. To be sure, Nietzsche ([1871] 1993) devoted a considerable amount of attention to delineating how Apollonian and Dionysian forces are materialized in festivals, specifically in terms of music, lyrics, speeches, stages, arenas, paintings, performances, and audience participation. The Apollonian and Dionysian are well suited for analyzing the social ontologies of festivals in terms of their practices, meanings, experiences, and built environments. Although the Apollonian and Dionysian are multidimensional concepts, Nietzsche’s writing is frequently clear and consistent about their various properties. The decisions behind my designations of phenomena in Fusion as either Apollonian or Dionysian are directly informed by Nietzsche’s descriptions of the two terms. I regularly cite Nietzsche during my analysis of Fusion to highlight the reasons behind my categorizations of the Apollonian and Dionysian. More than a simple exercise in description that merely identifies which aspects of Fusion are Apollonian or Dionysian, my article explains how and why Fusion’s Apollonian and Dionysian social ontologies are fundamental to the production of social and political relations that are invigorating, imaginative, and empowering. As Lefebvre (1991) noted, the Dionysian is political because it evokes a “peculiar freedom and value” (178). Equally, the Apollonian is political insofar as it tempers and circumscribes with its “just boundaries” (Nietzsche [1871] 1993, 51) the “potential” of the Dionysian so that its violence need not be “necessarily ... realized” (to use Lefebvre’s terms). In addition, Lefebvre’s (1991, 178) claim that the Apollonian and the Dionysian subtend the “dual aspect of the living being ... its own space and the other’s” illustrates how both concepts are social because they define the relationship between an individual’s space and the space of her or his “other”; that is, other members of society.

Another reason why the Apollonian and Dionysian are particularly suited for understanding festive aesthetics is because they are bound up with Nietzsche’s rich notion of justification. Nietzsche’s famous aperçu that “it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified” (Nietzsche [1871] 1993, 32, italics in original) is usually read as an assertion that life is only worth living if one can temper Dionysian “excess” with Apollonian “equilibrium” (to use Lefebvre’s terms). Similarly, too much Apollonian “stability” might require some Dionysian “violence” to avoid an overly rigid or disciplined life (again using Lefebvre’s terms). Nietzsche’s notion of justification also brings to the fore art’s capacity to infuse human experience with meaning.
and affirmative power. This is especially important for our empirical understandings of multicultural festivals because their lived spaces are ridden with forces, materials, meanings, and corporeal differences that entwine art, power, and politics. I now turn to explore three ways through which Apollonian and Dionysian forces aesthetically justify the multicultural values and identities of Fusion’s organizers, performers, and attendees.

Manifesting Creativity

Since the mid-nineteenth century, grand depictions of colonial, national, and imperial worlds as aesthetic phenomena have been a common feature of world fairs, expos, exhibitions, and expositions (Waitt 2008). According to T. Mitchell (1988), these sites involved a “machinery” of “representation” wherein “everything [was] collected and arranged to stand for something, to represent progress and history, human industry and empire; everything set up, and the whole set-up always evoking somehow some larger truth” (6). Reminiscent of these commercial spectacles, Fusion’s stages, posters, and volunteer t-shirts were adorned with images, slogans, and banners that advertised the corporate or colonial worlds of Chevron, energy company BC Hydro, property developer Concord Pacific, and other local companies. Fusion’s stages also provided prominent positions for powerful actors such as local business leaders, who declared how “proud [they were] to invest 7 percent of [their] profits, every year, into the community” and invited attendees to “look behind [and] see those two towers, and our commitment to Surrey to bring development over the next ten years” (author, fieldwork video recording, 17 July 2010). Evoking the built environments of world’s fairs, Fusion’s layout was organized around thirty-six “cultural pavilions” that exhibited and sold (for pre-purchased tickets) various national products such as art, food, crafts, jewelry, and clothing (Figure 2).

Demarcating the world into orderly and intelligible parcels of space that constitute a larger harmonious whole directly accords with the logics of Apollonian beauty. Organized into neat rows and identified by flags bearing the names of countries, Fusion’s pavilions allowed attendees to easily navigate the panoply of national sights, smells, textures, and sounds. According to Candace (age twenty), because Fusion was “so well organized . . . I could really experience a lot of different cultures.” The nation-state pavilions also reflect the Apollonian: Nietzsche (1999, 98) appointed Apollo as a “state-founding” god who, giving spatial form to individuals and institutions through “the principium individuationis [principle of individuation],” secures a “sense of homeland” through “the affirmation of the individual personality” (98). Similarly, Fusion preserved national homelands by spatially individuating them into separate pavilion tents and on-stage individuals or “cultural performers” (to use Fusion’s official term) that included Japanese Taiko drummers, a Bob Marley tribute band, traditional Korean dancers, and Sri Lankan Kandyan dancing. Framing different national cultures in terms of the discrete spaces of pavilions and stages promotes hegemonic relations insofar as “Apollo seeks to pacify individuals by drawing boundaries between them . . . [and calling to mind] demands for self-knowledge and moderation” (Nietzsche 1999, 50). While observing attendees in the pavilions, I wrote the following in my field notebook: “Some attendees examine the various artifacts as a result of intrigue, but most attendees take their time to read the pamphlets and poster displays that neatly categorize the nations’ cultural, historical, and geographical backgrounds.” The pavilions, then, were thoroughly Apollonian because they spatially demarcated individual cultural worlds that were apprehended by calm and thoughtful appreciation. Boundaries were also enforced around the pavilions in terms of the $800 entry fee (introduced after the withdrawal of federal funding) for local organizations wishing to use them. Although I found no evidence of exclusion, such a cost might have prevented low-income communities from participating.
Despite the preceding, Fusion’s aesthetics differed considerably from the pre–World War II World’s Fairs. To begin with, Fusion’s pavilions and stages were much smaller in scale, more local in origin, and amateurish in style. In contrast to the World Fair pavilions that staged colonial powers’ commercializing gazes, which possessed a “remarkable claim to certainty or truth” (T. Mitchell 1988, 13), volunteers from local community centers operated Fusion’s pavilions representing former colonies such as Barbados, Ecuador, Ghana, India, and Jamaica, rather than colonial powers. Instead of advancing grand claims about certainty or truth, Fusion’s pavilions justified peoples’ identities and values through lively illusions. Recalling researchers’ routine claim that festive aesthetics are phony and superficial, Fusion’s pavilions evinced how its artifacts such as crafts, paintings, and needlework were not so much misrepresentations of a real world as they were playful Apollonian explorations of imaginary and fictional worlds. Fusion’s pavilions were rife with illusions such as performers riding on giant birds with fake rider legs, imitation palm trees at the Jamaica pavilion, and attendees taking photographs of themselves sticking their heads through the holes of picture boards depicting Bollywood dancers and a Taj Mahal backdrop. From a Nietzschean perspective, these Apollonian appearances are not deceitful masks hiding deeper truths; rather, through their “honest deceptiveness” (Acampora 2009, 323) or fictiveness, the pavilions give material and visible form to the constructed status of national cultures, which rely on the imaginative frameworks of myth, metaphor, legend, and so on.

The status of a national culture as something created was reinforced in the pavilions’ imaginative frameworks that were unabashedly amateurish in style. That is to say, the pavilions were composed of handwritten signs, magazine pictures, newspaper clippings, and displays of knick-knacks that conveyed an impression of well-meaning care rather than corporate fastidiousness or professional sophistication. More important, by rendering visible the volunteers’ creative labor, the pavilions helped to justify the cultural values and identities of local communities. The Polish pavilion, which was organized by the Polish Canadian Sport & Recreation Club: Polonia (hereafter Polonia), exemplified these creative traits through its depictions of medieval Poland (Figure 3). Polonia, which was founded in 2009 under BC’s Society Act, consists of a board of directors and “approximately one-hundred members” who live throughout the GVRD. Polonia states on its Web site and in its pavilion pamphlets that its mission is “to develop and promote sport and family recreation programs and events in BC available

![Figure 3. The Polish pavilion. Source: Author. (Color figure available online.)](image)
for adults, teenagers and children.” To fulfill this, Polonia’s “main focus” is “the organization and promotion of cultural, athletic and recreational events for its members, while integrating within the greater population of BC” (Polonia 2010). Fusion provided an ideal space for Polonia to pursue this mission.

It is tempting to interpret Polonia’s map of medieval Europe, portraits of kings, and canvas castle brickwork as fake images and sanitizing narratives that veil harsh historical and political truths. Such an interpretation, as Goss (1999, 48) warned, would, however, fall prey to the pitfalls of “western metaphysics” belief in a “depth ontology” wherein “truth” is aligned with that which is concealed below a surface. Such a reading would also ignore the pavilions’ Apollonian aesthetics of “profound superficiality” (Young 1992, 139)—the ways in which art externalizes truth through artifice. Polonia’s patently fake canvas castle brickwork, the kitschy candlesticks, and casually laid-out apples on a gold tray harkening back to a distant era, the imitation Medieval helmet and crinkled pictures of Polish castles, kings, and noblemen, all concretize and bear testimony to the creative powers of Apollonian “image making” (Nietzsche 1999, 15) or the construction of artistic representations. Here, Polonia’s iconography does not simply call attention to the exhibitors’ cultural background; it also expresses their striving, dedication, and creativity. As Pawel (male, late forties), a Polonia volunteer, proudly explained to me, “Our pavilion shows people what we can do. We built it to tell our stories of where we come from, who we are, and what we do. It tells people about our wonderful young dancers and soccer players, our musicians and theatre people.” In doing so, the pavilion aesthetically justifies by giving visual form to the amateur talents and creative capacities of the local Polish community.

Such justifications were publicly reinforced when Polonia became the eventual winner of Fusion’s Best Dressed Pavilion competition (India placed second and Jamaica third), as well as recipient of a certificate of appreciation for “Recognition of Its Outstanding Contribution to Promoting Polish Culture” from the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Vancouver.

Generating Belonging

Many of Fusion’s amateur performers told me that they spent large amounts of time—“weeks and weeks. Actually, no, more like months and months!” (Sandeep, female, mid-teens)—rehearsing in schools, dance academies, martial arts clubs, and cultural community centers to be “absolutely ready for this huge event” (Nasir, female, late teens). Although researchers typically regard festivals as fleeting distractions from the everyday, Fusion performers’ long-term preparations evoke the extent to which everyday life itself can be structured by and focused on the looming importance of a daunting thirty-minute festival performance. Importantly, Fusion performers’ singing, dancing, and musical skills were honed alongside or with the support of friends, family, work colleagues, and residential neighbors who would eventually perform with them on stage or watch from the audience. One consequence of practicing and performing collectively is the generation of a sense of belonging. Such aesthetic practices generate senses of togetherness as they emerge out of and cohere around the Dionysian intoxication of music and drama. For Nietzsche, the dynamics between the performers on a stage and the members of the audience could produce an intense Dionysian “state, abolishing the habitual barriers and boundaries of existence” (Nietzsche 1999, 39), as well as “an overwhelming feeling of unity” (39).

Fusion’s grand finale, which took place on a balmy July evening, exemplifies these intensities. With the crescent moon shining between silhouetted fir trees, Lehmer Hussainpuri, renowned as one of the greatest Punjabi musicians of recent times, walked onto the Concord Pacific World Music Stage and prepared to sing (Figure 4). Wearing a bright orange turban and embroidered red and green silks, Hussainpuri opened the set with the popular Bhangra song Seetiyan (meaning “whistles”) about a ravishing pale-skinned woman (gori) who, “while dancing rouses dust up to sky” at a wedding celebration. According to the song’s Dionysian lyrics, while male guests eagerly blow whistles at the “delights of her beauty,” each of them “risks having his heart stolen” and “losing consciousness.” Flanked by the male dancers of the Surrey Folk Bhangra Club and driven by the thumping bass beats of dhol drums, for the next fifty minutes Hussainpuri performed a medley of songs that enraptured a screaming, whistling, and undulating crowd of approximately 10,000 mainly South Asian youths and adults. In stark contrast to Lowe’s (1999) depiction of a Los Angeles multicultural festival as “an aestheticized utopia of third world artists … a polyvocal symphony of cultures” (86–87), this scene illustrates the extent to which music can unify and enthrall local residents. Amidst the joyous Punjabi screams of “Balle! Balle!” that joyously affirmed the songs and the dancers’ moves,


numerous individuals in the crowd—friends, neighbors, lovers, and family members—held up glowing smartphones, hoping to capture a steady shot of the ecstatic performance. Here, embodiment in a multicultural public space involves not simply “rubbing along with unknown others” (Watson 2006, 156) but also singing along with significant others and cheering for an “entire on-stage world, the drama proper” (Nietzsche 1993, 43).

Music’s capacity to unite and enliven also propelled the drama of the Polish pavilion’s “Puppet Theater Jester”: a local, nonprofit traditional puppet theater whose mission is to “entertain and educate.” During Fusion, the Puppet Theater Jester, which was “very popular with more than 1000 children,” staged its first ever showing of the Polish legend of the Wawel Dragon (Polonia 2010). Framed by the painted backdrop of Kraków, a castle wall, and the river Vistula and propelled by the lifelike speech and movements of the puppets, the play generated spontaneous screams of delight and howls of fear among the children in the audience. Propelled by Dionysian energies, the theater thus gave life dramatically to Polish tropes and traditions, especially during one scene when the dragon suddenly exploded and died. From a Nietzschean perspective, the scene allowed the audience to heed the Dionysian lesson that life and earthly existence are at the mercy of chaotic and sometimes tragic forces. As lead puppeteer Wojtek Ulasewicz, one of the founders of Polonia, told me:

The story is violent, the dragon is brutal: it kills people and animals. We have to make sure that our presentation is kid-friendly but we do not want to hide from kids that life itself is brutal and sometimes unfair. The dragon explodes because it drinks too much water. That explosion with confetti flying from the stage makes it the most exciting scene. (Interview, February 2014)

Another notable Dionysian Fusion performance that brought people together was the local martial arts club Sun Hang Do’s demonstrations of self-defense and weapons sparring, which according to the stage posters, embodied the club’s Korean “philosophy” of a “strong will, spiritual and physical power” as an “ever changing and growing . . . ultimate art for humanity.” From a Nietzschean perspective, Sun Hang Do is a public gathering of performers who strive to create a “sense of belonging to a higher community” (Nietzsche 1999, 18). As Dean (male, mid-teens) told me, “Our symbol of the red circle is all about passion and the desire to better ourselves.” These Dionysian justifications of belonging through the expressive powers of performance challenge the idea that multicultural aesthetics are about protecting the heritages of vulnerable minority ethnocultures that are spatially dispersed throughout the large-scale entity of a nation state. In
contrast, Fusion collectivizes and spatially concentrates the artistic energies of talented and robust ethnocultures located in the ethnoburban setting of Surrey. Far from a superficial or celebratory tolerance of fragmented cultures, the Dionysian aesthetics of a Bollywood superstar, local Bhangra club, and amateur puppet theater demonstrate the extent to which multicultural festive aesthetics consist of thriving and unifying discourses that help to justify the activities of cultural and community organizations.

By making this claim, I do not wish to suggest that all of the Fusion participants shared the same sense of belonging. Fusion's multicultural aesthetics were dismissed as irrelevant by Mal (male, early fifties), an Aboriginal powwow participant, who stated, “We are more than happy to join in . . . [but] we don't consider ourselves multicultural, we're unique.” This remark reveals how Fusion's avowed inclusiveness is split between indigenous and settler interests and points toward the lack of relevance of multiculturalism to Aboriginal peoples. This criticism also evinces how, since its official adoption in 1971, Canada's policy of multiculturalism has never adequately addressed the interests and political claims of Aboriginal communities (Alfred 2005). That said, many First Nations participants told me that they were thankful for being officially invited to Fusion by the City of Surrey through its partnership with the Kla-How-Eya (mean- ing “welcome!” or “how are you?” in Chinook) Aboriginal Centre of the Surrey Aboriginal Cultural Society (hereafter Kla-How-Eya Aboriginal Centre). Julianne (female, early fifties) told me that her community was “left alone to run our traditional powwow . . . to get our young ones together to learn the ways of the different nations.” I return to the political aesthetics of being “left alone” in terms of the powwow in the following section. The First Nations communities, like the cultural organizations that ran the pavilion, were very well organized. According to Nielsen, the ability of these groups to self-organize meant that the City of Surrey could take a bottom-up approach to the event:

We invite cultural organizations to be stewards of their own pavilion. So the City of Surrey doesn't micromanage. We don’t set up the pavilions, we don’t do any of the programming for those areas, we don’t set up the food service, we don’t set up any of the merchandise, any of the arts and crafts that they have for sale. (Interview, July 2010)

There is an important and somewhat problematic politics of the city’s bottom-up approach insofar as it is indicative of a neoliberal approach that reduces funding and downloads responsibility to community programs (Veronis 2006). Yet, crucially, there is also another politics at work: Well-organized pavilions and stage performances—all exemplars of different artistic genres and cultural traditions—meant that Fusion mobilizes an aesthetic politics of what I call “superculturalism” insofar as they gather and, more important, select talented and accomplished artists, volunteers, and performers. Fusion’s aesthetics are not just about celebrating Surrey’s many or multicultures; they are also about unifying around superlative artists ranging from talented local high school students to a renowned Bollywood superstar. Much of Fusion’s aesthetics are about thousands of local residents feeling collectively alive in and through the sounds and sights of dynamic artistic performances. In addition, the sartorially named Best Dressed Pavilion competition evinces how aesthetics were used as an index or criteria to measure a community’s or, better still, a superculture’s value or vitality. Even if multiculturalism as a policy or a category might not be relevant to Aboriginal peoples, they could still be participating and even contributing to the lived experience of superculturalism insofar as powwows involve the selection and affirmation of accomplished dancers, artists, and drummers. These issues are important for our understandings of the aesthetic geographies of festivals because researchers frequently privilege the perspectives of consuming attendees rather than artists, performers, and volunteers and their effects on and interactions with audience members. If Fusion’s supercultural aesthetics justify the lives of individuals and communities through alluring Apollonian spectacle and rollicking Dionysian rapture, then its verve and prospects for future growth were neatly captured in the following intergenerational exchange in the online comments section of a Vancouver Sun newspaper article about the 2013 Surrey Fusion Festival. Responding to an adult’s complaint that “multiculturalism is a myth that has never worked and never will work,” within an hour, a high school student tersely replied: “You must be a hit at parties.”

Shifting Perspectives

In this final section, I illustrate how Fusion’s aesthetics inspired participants to adopt new perspectives on themselves, other people, and the world around them. I focus on how these shifts in perspective took
place through the embodied and transfiguring practices of dancing, singing, painting, and dressing up. Although “festivals in general are never impromptu or improvised events, and arts festivals, in particular, are never spontaneous” (Waterman 1998, 59), small pockets of Fusion were sporadically punctuated by attendees’ impromptu off-stage performances. The “public” experience plays a key role in these transformative perspectives because they involve a high degree of public visibility (e.g., face and henna hand painting), and many participants interacted with each other (e.g., yoga and turban tying workshops) and audience members (e.g., impromptu dancing and musical performances). Fusion evinces how festivals—although highly planned—could consist of participants acting in ways that challenge the normative idea that performances or “the visibility and sayability of phenomena” (Dixon 2009, 412) should be restricted to official stages, scheduled events, and authorized artists. In so doing, Fusion destabilizes the perspectives and sharp distinctions between artists and spectators, as well as stages and viewing areas. By emphasizing the public dynamics of people’s shifting perspectives, this section echoes and complements previous work on the liminal spaces of festivals, much of which draws from the works of Bakhtin (e.g., Smith 1995).

Exemplary of the preceding themes was “Patrick,” who mesmerized scores of attendees with his impromptu dances (Figure 5). Clad in a silvery-blue sequined flat cap, vest, and vinyl pants with tassels, bells, and a sash attached to a belt, Patrick danced between the pavilions before exhilarated onlookers. Slowly moving his arms and hips, as well as pausing to shake his backside for people’s cameras and uneasy delight, Patrick appropriated a seemingly nonartistic space into a space of Dionysian spontaneity and sensuality. When asked about his motivations, Patrick responded:

I have rediscovered myself and I’m an artist. I write my own music on my own time and I dance everywhere I go . . . the whole idea is that you create your own creation. Happiness is based on being there, being yourself, and being the product of who you are. (Interview, July 2010)

What is striking in this statement is how Patrick describes himself as an aesthetic phenomenon. Patrick’s notion of turning himself into an artwork echoes Nietzsche’s suggestion that justification can be achieved by becoming “poets of our lives” (Nietzsche [1882] 2001, 170) through the “art of staging and watching ourselves.” For Nietzsche, artistic media and perspectives are not confined to paint, canvas, bronze, and so on; they also include the body. Fusion hosted numerous activities such as face painting, henna hand painting, Bhangra dancing, and yoga and turban-wearing workshops that used people’s bodies as canvases. In so doing, Fusion provided people with new perspectives on their bodily appearances and movements. Numerous participants recounted the thrills of “trying on different and beautiful” clothes and “weird but totally fun” yoga poses. Amrit (female, early twenties) noted: “I was walking down the way and I saw this turban and I thought ‘Oh my god!’ I wanted to wear one. And yeah, so I got my wish!” During my observations of the yoga and turban workshop activities, I wrote the following in my field notebook:

Most participants nervously wait in line. Then they awkwardly learn about the various yoga poses and techniques for tying turbans. Eventually, nerves give way to smiles, laughter, and for some outright joy. Even the leather-clad white male bikers hug the volunteers. When the workshops are over, most of the participants walk away reading the information pamphlets. Some linger to ask questions.

From a Nietzschean point of view, the yoga and turban tying workshops instantiated an “artistic distance” (Nietzsche [1882] 2001, 104) that allowed people to “take a rest from” (104) themselves. That is to say, the workshops enabled participants to step outside the time-space constraints of their usual Apollonian routines and into a destabilizing Dionysian realm that granted an alternative perspective on the self.

**Figure 5.** Patrick mesmerizes a small crowd. Source: Author. (Color figure available online.)
According to Jane (female, early thirties), “They [yoga moves] felt a bit strange at first but I soon got the hang of them. I’ve also discovered some new muscles and a new hobby!” Notably, the impacts of these practices were not spatially confined to the site and weekend of Fusion. Numerous participants told me that they would take up yoga. In addition, many participants exited the Fusion site proudly showing off to passersby their face and henna paint. One henna hand painter informed me that the henna paint could be preserved to last for days because “after the paste dries they can put on some lemon juice and sugar water at home.”

Although the preceding aesthetic shifts in perspectives support researchers’ previous findings that multicultural festivals can promote inclusivity by promulgating different cultural meanings and practices (Penrose 2013), there are no studies on how festive aesthetics involve deeply personal testaments about art’s ability to grant new perspectives on life that result in the overcoming of despair, addiction, and suffering. The redemptive and palliative capacities of art are central to Nietzsche’s understanding of the aesthetic. Ten years after boldly declaring the eternal aesthetic justification of existence and the world, Nietzsche revised his formula as follows: “as an aesthetic phenomena existence is still bearable for us” (Nietzsche [1882] 2001, 104, italics in original). In this version, Nietzsche asserted that art can rescue people from the pains and horrors of life if they are able to view life as an aesthetic phenomenon. Far from a heroic enterprise of self-fashioning, from a Nietzschean perspective, “the ‘strong’ individual or culture does not mysteriously possess special powers of ‘will,’ available in advance for conferring [aesthetic] meaning upon existence. Rather, strength is revealed by the self or culture which is mutable, at risk and yet embedded in life” (Jenkins 1998, 219). In other words, the power to overcome life’s ordeals derives not from an innate strength but from the receptivity for change and the acceptance of vulnerability that can be apprehended from the vantage point of art.

Fusion hosted numerous artists who, through their lyrics, paintings, and chitchat with the audience, publicly declared their vulnerability to suffering, addiction, and anguish, as well as their gratitude to art for ameliorating their lives. What is notable here is how empowerment takes place individually and collectively insofar as performers recount how art has helped them overcome despair and the audience is able to joyously reaffirm and take inspiration from such messages. Hip-hop singer Joey Stylez, for example, a First Nations Canadian and member of Moosomin Nation, told the audience that his lyrics were born out of his struggles as a “victim of poverty in his youth despite being relocated to Saskatoon by a hardworking single mother” and dealing with “constant struggling and derision from outsiders.” Stylez’s chats with the audience also highlighted the “injustices” he faced as an “Aboriginal kid” in residential schools and his embrace of “First Nations activism.” Another singer, Hussein E.V., who fronted the hip-hop Desi (South Asian) urban fusion group A-Slam rapped about the difficulties of growing up with his single mother and the temptations of drug dealers. Elsewhere, the India pavilion housed oil paintings by Surrey-based Punjabi artist and actor Vipin Kapoor. According to Kapoor, his self-portrait, which he called a “painting of meditation, it’s the will power,” not only dramatically depicted but also rescued him from the horrors of alcohol and sex addiction (Figure 6).

Attempts to ameliorate suffering through aesthetics also permeated Fusion’s powwow, which was organized by the City of Surrey’s Kla-How-Eya Aboriginal
Centre. According to the official Fusion program, a powwow is “the Aboriginal people’s way of meeting together, to join in dancing, singing and visiting, it is a time of renewing old friendships and making new ones.” Importantly, the powwow was located apart from the pavilions on the edge of Fusion’s site. As a result, there were limited interactions between First Nations participants (apart from at the Aboriginal cultural pavilion and between Joey Stylez and his fans) and settler or settler-immigrant groups. Conversations with First Nations participants, however, revealed that the powwow’s location was a good one because it respected the sacredness and healing powers of the drumming and powwow dancing. For Stan (male, early fifties), a member of the Ojibwe Nation, powwow dancing helps “[our youths’] self-esteem” because their “spirit is broken” as “they’re not doing anything, they’re bored, they’re into drugs, and alcohol.” According to Walk Bear Woman (female, late forties), another member of the Ojibwe Nation, the powwow’s healing powers were derived from the “drumming [which] is the heartbeat of mother earth and very sacred.”

The affirmation of the earth’s sacredness through powwow dancing and drumming reflects the Nietzschean notion of “geoaesthetics” wherein “the aesthetic is a significant avenue for exploring the possibilities of earthly life ... in which fully embodied agents affectively respond to and alter their environments” (Shapiro 2009, 480). Among the organizations participating in Fusion, several happened to promote geoaesthetic perspectives. The Khalsa Ladies Camp, for example, which was organized by the Vancouver-based Yoga West studio, involved (according to a pamphlet) “a spiritual gathering of women” on BC’s Sunshine Coast and a “profound experience” of “sacred music” and Kundalini yoga so they can “Relax and Rejoice in Mother Nature.” Elsewhere, the City of Surrey’s Salmon Habitat Restoration Program (SHA RP) promoted geoaesthetic attitudes toward local habitats. According to its pamphlet, SHA RP’s mission is to “educate businesses and community members on salmon stewardship while employing local youth to enhance Surrey’s fish habitat.” SHA RP’s goals resonate with other similar organizations across British Columbia such as the First Nations Wild Salmon Alliance. The Aboriginal geoaesthetics of wild salmon—an animal that is widely regarded as a sacred gift from the Creator—are a prominent feature of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices, especially on the West Coast. SHA RP’s exhibit invited attendees to make paper salmon hats, dress up in salmon costumes, and play the “wheel of death” to discover their fate in the life cycle of a salmon. During the game, which usually ended in a swift symbolic death, SHA RP volunteers invited the participants to “participate in some field teams which actually go out and restore habitat.” Although it is a commonplace in geography to juxtapose the alleged gratuitousness and ephemerality of festivals with the permanence and seriousness of the real world, SHA RP’s transformative aesthetics of dressing up to identify with the perspective of salmon empowered participants by educating them about the vulnerability of the environments in which they live, on which they depend, and to which they must return after leaving Fusion.

Conclusions

This article has illustrated the ways in which Fusion’s aesthetic geographies involved manifesting the creative capacities of local communities, generating senses of belonging among performers and audience members, and shifting the perspectives of participants in ways that affirmed diversity, combated despair, and raised awareness about the environment’s sacredness and vulnerability. It drew on Nietzsche’s aesthetic concepts of justification, the Apollonian, and the Dionysian to highlight the dynamic and material intertwining of space, aesthetics, and politics. By focusing on Fusion’s invigorating, imaginative, and empowering aesthetic geographies, my study provides a strong empirical and theoretical counterpoint to the focus in geography on the blandness, superficiality, and apolitical status of multicultural festivals. Although some of Fusion’s aesthetics confirmed this literature, I illustrated how its location in the ethnoburban setting of Surrey meant that much of its aesthetics consisted of unifying discourses that were produced and consumed by thriving communities and well-run organizations. These findings challenge the tendency in studies of multicultural festivals to emphasize how these sites consist of utopian celebrations of vulnerable and marginalized minority ethnocultures. At the very least, Fusion demonstrates how a multicultural festival site can consist of multiple and contradictory aesthetic and political discourses. In addition, the article contributes to the field of Nietzsche studies by providing a detailed empirical investigation of the lived spaces of a multicultural festival through a Nietzschean lens. In the remainder of this article, I suggest several future directions—empirical, theoretical, and
methodological—in geographical research on the aesthetics of multicultural festivals.

Empirically speaking, my study provides insights into how a suburban festival can be an important site for shaping multicultural and immigrant experiences in Canada. Fusion not only attracted a significant number of people including artists, politicians, business leaders, local residents, and community organizers, it also mobilized a great deal of their time, energy, and money. Regarding my claim that the generation of belonging among an ethnoburban audience evinced a supercultural rather than multicultural aesthetic, the rise in ethnoburban areas throughout North America, Europe, and Australasia suggests that Fusion’s aesthetics are likely not unique. Future empirical research, then, could usefully inquire into where, how, and to what effect other multicultural festivals in ethnoburban contexts around the world are producing supercultural aesthetics by gathering and selecting famous artists, powerful actors, and talented communities. In addition, Sandeep’s exclamation that she had practiced for “months and months” to prepare for Fusion and Jane’s claim that she discovered “a new hobby” speak to how the effects of festive aesthetics are not spatially and temporally confined to a festival’s site or duration. Additional empirical research could usefully explore how and to what extent off-site and preevent contexts such as schools, homes, and community organizations influence people’s lives. Such lines of inquiry could also open up new methodological possibilities such as using the method of “shadowing” performers and participants before, during, and after festivals. Conducting this research would likely generate new insights into art’s capacity to shift people’s perspectives in spaces beyond festival sites.

Given the paucity of theoretically grounded research on how the aesthetics of multicultural festivals can be socially and politically positive, this article had to conceptualize these possibilities in the first place by way of an introductory rather than comprehensive account of Nietzsche’s aesthetic theories. Future theoretical research could devote greater attention to exploring the conceptual depth and nuances of justification, the Apollonian, and the Dionysian, as well as their distinctive spatialities. In addition, future research could usefully engage Nietzsche’s other important aesthetic concepts such as the will to power and the superhuman, as well as draw on the recent literature that addresses the complexity of Nietzsche’s writings on the intertwining of aesthetics and politics, especially in terms of art, morality, nihilism, selfhood, and hierarchy (e.g., Ansell-Pearson 2014; Came 2014; Young 2015). Although I examined three major ways—the manifestation of creativity, generation of belonging, and the shifting of perspectives—through which Fusion justified the lives of Fusion’s participants, each of these moments could have been greatly expanded in the fieldwork. For example, I could have extended my research on the extent to which Polonia’s victory in the Best Dressed Pavilion competition enhanced its creative capacities in the wider Polish community; how Lehmber Hussainpuri’s performances generated (or failed to generate) different senses of belonging among different ethnocultural groups in the audience; or how singer Joey Stylez’s lyrics inspired (or failed to inspire) his fans to combat despair in their own lives. In addition, although my focus was on the politically positive side of Fusion’s aesthetic geographies, future research could examine more carefully the ways in which aesthetic geographies are implicated in political tensions, resistances, and antagonisms. Recalling Stan’s criticism of the relevance of multiculturalism to First Nation communities, further research is needed to address more fully where, when, and to what effect aesthetics are used to challenge or resist the hegemonic discourses of festivals. Beyond these possibilities and limitations, my research should give pause to those geographers who assume that the aesthetic is a mere swirl in the “décor of democracy” (Birrell 2008, 8) and the lived spaces of multicultural festivals.

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Notes
2. All subsequent amounts are in Canadian dollars.
3. My use of the term First Nations is deliberate. Although this term is a legal category created by the Canadian state to distinguish "Status Indians" from "non-Status" people, all interviewees referred to themselves as First Nations or as members of a specific Nation.

References


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