

TOMORROWLAND FESTIVAL: A HETEROTOPIA OF DEVIATION

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Each year, the electronic music festival ‘Tomorrowland’ gathers in Belgium about 180,000 people who come from all over the world. A large number of festival-goers walk around with national flags, accessories or fancy dresses, which makes the festival unique. This research investigates consumers’ identity construction and expression through such material objects. Few studies have explored identity issues related to a music festival and the paraphernalia consumed during a festival. Through a naturalistic interpretive approach, we interviewed 29 informants of both genders and of different ages, nationalities, educational levels, and professional statuses. We also observed the festival and camping sites, and the behaviors of festival-goers. Emerging from data analysis and interpretation, this videography documents various profiles of festival-goers from their material possessions (i.e., the patriot, the devotee including the merchandisee and the creative, the child, the bohemian girl, and the provocateur) as well as the meanings and functions fulfilled by these possessions in their identity construction (i.e., identification, self-expression, socialization, communion, regression, and transgression). We also propose two more original interpretations that enhance our contribution to the literature. First, the consumption of paraphernalia used at Tomorrowland is typical of a *cathartic release* of inner tensions and emotions. The festival creates an “absorbing experience” that allows a “controlled decontrolling of emotions” in an increasingly disenchanting and ruled contemporary world. Second, referring to Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, the festival can be considered as a heterotopia of deviation because many festival-goers take benefit from Tomorrowland to regress and/or transgress societal rules and norms. The film illustrates a series of ritualized and commoditized deviant behaviors taking place in the fantasy and idle context of the festival.

You can find our videography on <https://vimeo.com/222471926> (password: tmlacr2017).

KEY REFERENCES

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