The Im/Possibilities of Digitising Caribbean Carnival

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Abstract

London's Notting Hill Carnival has experienced major disruptions due to the pandemic legislation and Covid-19-related limitations. Following the cancellation of its parade and most related events in 2020 and the partial cancellation in 2021, a wide variety of online formats related to Carnival emerged. This contribution presents the results of an exploratory research study into the relationships linked to digitization by carnival practitioners and participants. Based on onsite and online fieldwork research conducted during the carnival season 2021, the article highlights how various social actors within the Carnival industry have negotiated the disruption of their creative practices and the meanings of virtual venues and platforms within the Carnival ritual and performance. Our investigation seeks to provide insights from a micro-perspective on how Carnival, with its localized aesthetic and performativity, is renegotiated, accepted, or rejected in the digitalscape. First, we will discuss the experiences of using digital media that creative professionals have shared in terms of opportunity and constraint. Secondly, the article presents an ethnographic qualitative investigation of multi-sensory embodied memories from offline participants in the Notting Hill carnival. It shows the improvements the online venues can offer to the carnival's management, audience, and practitioners while at the same time explaining some of its limitations.

August 2021, Notting Hill, London. Here we are in a steel band3 associative location that shares the space with a Mas' camp4. There is a table at the entrance, and people of all ages are lined up waiting for a COVID test; if it is negative, they are able to join their daily practice

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[3] Steel band: Trinbagonian and more widely West Indian musical ensemble made up of steel pans.

[4] Mas' camp: a Trinbagonian term that describes a space where carnival groups' costumes are designed and created. It is also a managerial hub for carnival events related to the groups. Historically these were located in the backyards of people's houses; nowadays, depending on the size of the bands, they can take place in community centres or industrial spaces dedicated to ad hoc carnival activities and management.

for Panorama5, which, after the enforced pause in 2020, was hurriedly organised for 2021 at the Emslie Horniman's Pleasance Park. At the Mas' camp, the bent wire carnival sculptures were collecting dust in a corner in front of thousands of 2019 carnival newspapers still packed in cellophane. Two years have passed with no paper media production. In this pandemic period, 2020-2021, everything related to the festival went online: information, advertisements, carnival fete6, musical training, including community centre courses. Everything has been shared through websites, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Zoom video calls. At the time of this fieldwork, in the summer of 2021, we were at the liminal point where the performative spaces created during the carnival took place between the digital online spaces and the urban onsite ones.

Introduction

Due to the unprecedented shift towards online events in the creative industries as a response to the Covid-19 crisis[7], digitisation has become intrinsically connected to the experiences of the pandemic. Forms of engagement that emerged in this context have also made the im/possibilities of digitising social and cultural experiences more visible. Our research project seeks to provide insight into how digitisation is experienced and negotiated by participants in the Notting Hill Carnival. Digital media have formed part of the Caribbean Carnival experiences for a considerable time, so many of the concerns as well as promises associated with the most recent adaptations of technology might not be entirely new. Our approach situates the digital in a perspectival set of landscapes which takes into account the festival's media and representational power dynamics, as well as how individual actors navigate these formations and the wider experience of the Covid-19 crisis: the sense of loss, isolation, and constraint, but also hope and progress. Therefore, structural inequalities and racism affecting Caribbean, African and Asian diasporic groups,[8] the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement[9], as well as a more general sense of social marginalisation,10 form the backdrop to analysing experiences of digitising Carnival during the pandemic.

Carnival is a secular rite (Schechner, 2002) that in the Caribbean region is shaped by the Middle Passage (Liverpool, 2001) and the rituals and art from its further migratory flows. Its practice made in the Caribbean Diaspora is also described as a massive street theatre (Liverpool, 2001; Hill, 1997) that expanded hybridlike in its different locations around the world. Nowadays, through the act of taking part in this celebration, participants take a space to imagine and represent their subjectivity as a need for self-redefinition, from individual and communitarian perspectives (Irobi, 2007). Carnival, being a performance, depends on the

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[5] Panorama: steel band formal music competition

[6] Fete is a Trinbagonian term to define carnival parties usually based on Soca music.

[7] Boundless Creativity Report, Arts and Humanities Research Council 2021.

[8] Documented in various reports, such as Hewitt, J., & Kapadia, D. (2021). Ethnic Minority Older People, Histories of Structural Racism, and the COVID-19 Pandemic (Runnymede/CoDE Covid Briefings).

[9] See https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/coronavirus-anti-racism-protests-notting-hill-london-berlin-wisconsin-613860

[10] Similarly to the debates on permitting Christmas celebrations in contrast to those for Diwali and Eid (https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/christmas-different-religions-missed-out-festivals-different-unfair-saved-eid-diwali_uk_5fd3643cc5b652dce5880319), many of our interview partners gained the impression that institutions lacked understanding about Carnival, what it means to those participating, and how it serves communities.

context in which it takes place; since it is modified by its situated historicity each performance differs from others (Schechner, 2002) without the possibility of being equally reproducible (Vladova, 2007). Carnival is a general term that embraces all the disciplines of the festival, such as costumed parades and various music performances, combining the bottom-up Bakhtinian principle of rule inversions with hierarchical, top-down authorized regulations in an institutionalised space made for the transgression of rules (Eco, 1984; Schechner, 2004).

Caribbean carnivals in the UK are simultaneously cultural events and political public manifestations of social criticism (Knottnerus and J. David, 2011). Following the first event in Leeds, many community-led carnivals appeared and often moved from distinct urban areas, becoming representative of the city, such as Moss Side in Manchester or Handsworth Carnival in Birmingham, and Cowley Road Carnival in Oxford. Since its inception in 1964, Notting Hill Carnival, which takes place over the August bank holiday weekend every year, has become emblematic of Carnival arts and culture in the United Kingdom and is thought to be the largest street festival in Europe (Cohen, 1982). At its origins, Notting Hill Carnival was driven by low-income citizens from the West Indies. During the 1970s and 1980s, the festival developed beyond a mainly celebratory minority cultural event in response to denunciations of political and social abuses between Black communities and the state (Cohen, 1993). Carnival riots took place against abusive white British authorities and social inequalities, police brutality, and violent racism (Knottnerus and J. David, 2011). From the 1980s and 1990s, the festival, which retains its community character based on public sources of funding, started to take place on a larger scale, becoming a focus of tourist interest where private corporations began to invest in sponsors (Jago and Shaw, 1998).

As a highly complex inter-ethnic and hybrid event, Notting Hill Carnival today is situated firmly in British public culture as well as in the transnational global Caribbean Carnival industry and has become a highly popular tourist event with worldwide policymaking (Nurse, 2004; Ferdinand and Williams, 2018). In addition to Soca, Calypso, and Steelpan, the Soundsystem of Jamaican music (Dawson, 2006) and Afrobeat are performed, along with a Brazilian Batukas drumming parade on the same streets. Nevertheless, the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival model remains a dominant influence. Carnival practitioners of Notting Hill predominantly use the Trinbagonian term Mas to name the parade. Mas, a contraction of masquerade, is defined by scholars (Henry, 2008; Liverpool, 2001; Crowley, 1956; Cowley, 1996) as a situated performance and multi-crafted art based on a strategy of bottom-up resistance and rebellion against dominant powers. This has historically included the colonial power(s), class discrimination, and hegemonic groups, which existed even following Trinidad and Tobago's independence. Although the significance of protest and satire might have been reduced in the contemporary manifestation of Carnival in the Diaspora, mainly due to commodification, rebellious and contestive forms continue to exist (Zobel Marshall et al., 2017). This complexity and ambivalence inherent in Caribbean Carnival are also articulated in the current moment characterised by the advance of digitisation.

Due to the scope of the research project, we mainly consider Notting Hill Carnival as a Caribbean-led festival and cannot include many of the trans-national and -cultural interconnections in our discussion. This corresponds with our own positionality as both of us have conducted major research projects in Trinidad (WI). It is also reflected in the sample of our interview partners, almost all of them with Caribbean backgrounds, even if their experiences of migration and diaspora differ widely.

Methodology

This article is based on ethnographic research that has been conducted following a plural methodology. The interviews were qualitative, semi-conducted, and recorded, both online and onsite according to the preferences of the interlocutors due to the pandemic. We also offered hybrid fieldwork that included a phenomenological ethnographic walking experience with those who could come to the Notting Hill neighbourhood. Through the act of physically walking together, making commented walks and walking interviews (Winkler, 2002; Evan and Jones, 2011) along the carnival route, we were able to revive more explicitly sensorial and situated life memories related to the carnival event which acquired increased importance especially in this investigation of its expansion into digital (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008). During one of these ethnographic walks, for example, a senior King costume performer, while walking in the area close to Grenfell Tower, started to recall his traumatic memory of encountering a 'Teddy Boy'[11]. Another senior steel band player, while walking slowly with a group of his peers in front of one of the judging areas, mentioned memories of his feeling of public recognition through carnival practice, and one of the eldest interlocutors shared with us his current concerns about the police's lack of empathy and how regulations hinder his participation in the parade due to age and health conditions. Ethnographic walks, through the solicitation of embodied situated memories that relate to spaces, can be pleasant, celebratory, or traumatic. They can evoke removed memories that, added to a qualitative colloquial mode of dialoguing, can be voluntarily shared. Without this kind of interactive and kinaesthetic methodology, such crucial and sometimes repressed sensorial memories that bridge present and past experiences of the carnival performance would not have been easily evoked.

For this short-term research, we were able to combine twenty-two people's accounts in fourteen recorded interviews. The interlocutors came from different generations and genders. The combination of diverse methodologies allowed us to encounter different people involved in the carnival, such as band organisers, carnival costume makers, and carnival party organisers, along with steel band and carnival players from the UK, the Caribbean, and the Black European Diaspora. Due to the high degree of gentrification of the district starting in the 1990s (Ferdinand and Williams, 2018), the number of those who migrated from the Caribbean and with Caribbean heritage in the area has dwindled significantly. Many participants visit Notting Hill exclusively for events related to Carnival. This includes also organisers of smaller Carnival parades in different parts of London. Therefore, added to the sense of insecurity due to the possibility of infection with Covid, some of the interlocutors preferred to exchange online with the consultation of carnival maps and images to discuss their sensorial memories.

In this article, the direct quotations are as the interlocutors said them, using either standard English or its creolized expressions; for this reason, we will not use the term 'sic', because there are no linguistic mistakes in the expressions shared with us. According to the interlocutors' requests, we also alternated real names to accredit expertise and position, and pseudonyms that secure anonymity, retaining the gender identification of each person.

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[11] The term 'Teddy Boy' refers to racist working-class white youths that acted violently against Black people during the 1958 Notting Hill race riots. The name comes from the fashion of long Edwardian-style jackets they usually wore.

Carnival and the digitalscape

Our concept of the digitalscape draws on Arjun Appadurai's theory of mediascapes and global cultural flows, which conceptualises how social actors navigate the multitude of images in a globalised world and make them part of their lived experience through imagination as a social practice. Together with other -scapes, they form perspectival constructions for the complex connections and intertwined dynamics within the global cultural order (Appadurai, 1996). Expanding on this concept, we use 'digitalscape' to investigate how digitality shapes experiences of Notting Hill Carnival. Our emphasis is on the act of 'scaping' or 'shaping' the digital, inspired by the etymology of the term landscape (Mitchell, 2002), with the termination -scape from ancient Dutch meaning to shape and referring to the act of artistically shaping the land. In this framework, we seek to understand how users keep forming, revealing and displaying their identities in digitalscapes, as well as how these are shaped by the digital aspect of carnival.

The inseparable relationship between space and identity making in Carnival has formed an integral part of the diasporic experience and belonging in the UK context. Importantly, space is understood here as performative (De Certeau, 1980) and continuously constituted through interactions that entail a multiplicity of existence (Massey, 1999). In our article, we analyse the digital space as a performative urban one, which aligns with the manifold realities of carnival – not as a substitutive reality. Digital space is constituted by referentiality, which necessitates the analysis of how existing content is selected, negotiated in the communality of collective networks, and algorithmically distributed through automatic processes that make space usable for humans (Stalder, 2016). Following Appadurai, our framework zooms in on the social actor as the last locus of the perspectival set of the digitalscape and how they navigate the referential frame of meaning.

During the global Covid-19 pandemic, Notting Hill carnival management started to propose streaming events with online registration[12], developing a new website with historical online archives and hybrid onsite events[13], sound cloud musical event recordings[14], and wider carnival visual historical archives[15] among private media companies and the carnival bands' websites. In this transition, the question of spectacularization of the Caribbean carnival performance on screens enhances what is already a media-driven and worldwide phenomenon of diasporic carnivals (Green and Scher, 2007; Browne, 2013). In our investigation, we approach digitality in a continuum of exhibiting and interactive forms of engagement. For example, networked communication reinforces active viewing practices and participation, which means we can consider the player as a 'produser'[16] in what could be defined as telematic performances (Perez, 2014); for virtual Carnival programmes, the audiences join the role of the players as 'produsers' too.

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[12] Available at: https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/a33022510/notting-hill-carnival/

[13] Available at: https://aaa.nhcarnival.org

[14] Available at: https://soundcloud.com/djtriplemuk/notting-hill-carnival-2021

[15] Available at: https://artsandculture.google.com/project/notting-hill-carnival

[16] The author coined the term produser to mean a blend of the role of the producer with that of the user.

For the programme of Notting Hill Carnival 2020, a wide variety of formats were used across the spectrum. In our interview with Matthew Phillips, director of the Notting Hill Carnival Committee, he emphasised that the pandemic accelerated the use of digital technology, but these plans had been developed over the years before this crisis. One of the main purposes that emerged in the use of digital platforms has been archiving as part of a larger effort to educate participants and the wider public about the festival. It emerged from the majority of our discussions that many of the carnival organizers perceived a lack of knowledge about the parade[17] in the UK.

According to some of the carnival band organisers, the creation of private new online platforms can also be a tool for dissemination, for sharing and shaping collective memory about carnival. This is in opposition to the legacy of public broadcasting of Caribbean Carnival history and its art forms that often reproduced racist stereotypes[18], or chose to emphasise reports of crimes taking place during the event[19]. New online platforms, social media channels and formats such as livestreams facilitate independent broadcasting and amplify counter-narratives (Schuyler, 2021).

Moreover, the YouTube channel of Notting Hill Carnival provides pre-recorded performances of steel pan, mas, calypso and other music genres, and the collaboration with Spotify featured sound systems as well as a variety of podcasts. More user interaction has been facilitated in livestreams, in the first year of the pandemic via the NHC's own app, and in the second year, by using social media such as TikTok at Panorama as one of the few onsite events. Thus, the NHCC responded to the pandemic by using the centrifugal proliferation made possible by the digital environment (Dubois et. al., 2021), seeking to provide local visibility, while expanding their accessibility to a plural audience and enabling increased relationships between the Caribbean region and the festivals of its worldwide Diaspora.

Negotiating digitisation: Opportunity, power and constraint

Digitisation is primarily perceived as an opportunity when referring to the empowering effect of representing Carnival independently. In light of the history of the festival's media coverage, the shift towards community-led production testifies to the immense significance of platforms and access to tools to stream, document and archive festivals. Phillips stated:

> "If we can embrace in terms of the lessons we've learned about filming and things like that, we've purchased a lot of cameras and we have a lot of the equipment ourselves now, if we can use that and record and film things at higher quality, it can only get better and better".

However, smaller enterprises often face challenges in this process. In an interview with Ros Alexander of UKON Careers, she reflected on the experience of moving the Barking and Dagenham Carnival online as follows:

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[17] See https://www.redbull.com/gb-en/theredbulletin/notting-hill-the-beat-goes-on

[18] See https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/27/racisms-still-around-notting-hill-50-years-on-from-mangrove

[19] See https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2017/08/fears-over-notting-hill-carnival-reveal-more-about-racism-reality

> "[I]t was an absolutely horrendous experience, but we learned a lot out of it… horrendous as in the process of going through it but the outcomes were amazing! We achieved everything that we wanted to achieve and then we learned, oh we can actually deliver online now".

While stressing the empowering effect of developing the skills to broadcast UKON's work independently, her account also emphasises the pressure digital production can put on small-scale organisations due to its time- and work-intensive nature. Insights into the process also shed light on unequal access correlating with research on community-centred digital labour and the related informal economy, showing that the image of the white, male software developer and programmer type has served to conceal the diverse contributions to platform economies and unpaid reproductive labour (Gregg and Andrijasevic, 2019). While independent online broadcasting provides an opportunity for self-representation, the experiences of producers give insights into the impact of structural inequalities.

Our findings also indicate that the experiences of artists in the production process differ widely. A young steelpan player commented on their band's contribution to the digital Carnival in 2020:

> "For the 10 minutes that you are recording obviously you have to be dancing[20] and then there is a cut and everyone has to… I don't know you come back out of that zone, whereas when you are playing on the street, on the stage, you are just like surrounded by that!".

Eversley Mills, band manager of the Metronomes, also described the disruptive effect of cuts, retakes and locations for the virtual programme. In contrast, he reflected on the experience of digital content production for the weekly band practice. The informal sessions at the panyard were streamed on the Metronomes' Instagram page without time limitations. Calypsonian Alexander D'Great compared his Zoom performances during the pandemic to previous media activities, such as his weekly Calypso programme on the BBC:

> "In some ways playing on Zoom is easy because it is me strumming a guitar and the song comes through […]. It was always good, that's why I have been doing it for a really long time, I wrote 600 songs for the BBC".

Calypso's history of recording in studios and public broadcasts can thus benefit adaptation to digital spaces. Interestingly, sound systems were assumed to be suitable for online programmes by both creatives and audience members. DJ Lynda Rosenior-Pattern commented on performing for Notting Hill Carnival in 2020:

> "You know it is a different kind of exhaustion, because you are having to work more. […] It was such a challenge to keep up the energy… in your voice, when you are introducing the tracks, you got no audience".

Her experience is evidence of the creative labour in digital production which tends to be disregarded if the focus remains on the technological aspects. While there are fundamental differences between art forms depending on their history of mediation, conventions in

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[20] The verb "dancing" here refers to the act of playing Pan in a collective, within the band, flow experience.

production processes are often experienced as constraints by artists indicating the need for opportunities to adapt technological possibilities to their practice.

Another dominant theme in interviews is the potential of the digital presence to change public perception. Particularly with regard to Mas, this is intertwined with hopes for the future development of the art form. Dexter Khan, a veteran from Mas Band Cocoyea, which has existed for more than 40 years, expressed hopes for increased visibility. Ansel Wong, a leading member of Elimu Mas Band and activist, commented on the post-pandemic future of virtual Carnival:

> "I think my attitude is that it now becomes an integral part of the carnival, and both as not seen as one or the other, both as an essential element. (…) For me when we talk about road art, the art of costumes on the road, we are also talking about digital art. The art of the costume on a digital platform and it is an integral part now"

Ros Alexander related concerns about how this development could also result in reinforcing the hegemonic power imposing control over Carnival:

> "Ever since I have known [Notting Hill Carnival], ever since I was nine years old, there's always been a move to try and cancel, move it, shift it. [...] The digitalness of it now potentially raises the risk of Notting Hill being changed, there's potentially the risk that it might go in the park. If you have the money to pay for it, you can pay and enter. If you've got a very large family and you don't have much money … [pauses]. So, it becomes a gentrified event for those people who don't necessarily understand how important it is. With carnival, you're not only a spectator but you're a performer. So, you're taking away that from the people whose culture it is a part of. But then you have these spectators who… yes, it's great to look at, but do they understand?"

Similar to Wong, Ros Alexander situates the changes of digitisation in the wider context of Carnival's current conjuncture. However, her perspective emphasises the long history of resistance to initiatives to displace the festival and impose entry fees, underpinned by funding politics, police violence, and media discourses on crime as traced back to the campaign to relocate it to Finsbury Park in 1978 (La Rose, 2019). As recently seen for 2022 Manchester Carnival, the ramifications of fenced park settings guarded by private security could also facilitate racial profiling and policing.[21]

For Notting Hill Carnival, the issue of gentrified audiences encapsulates the continuing power struggles over public space, economic interests, tourist attraction, and ownership. Members of its management regarded events that extended carnival performances, such as the 'Carnival Culture in the Park' at Opera Holland Park, as a success, as they attracted visitors who possibly would not have taken part in the festival otherwise. During one of the shows, when the music director asked the attendees who were encountering a steel band for the first time that night, the majority raised their hands. The ethnographic onsite research provides an important context for understanding the tensions of the digitalscapes. Our research indicates that the widespread use of recordings of extended performances during the pandemic has established an idea of virtual Carnival focusing on imagined 'new' audiences. In relation to the continuous pressure and resistance to 'moving and shifting'

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[21] See https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/30/manchester-police-under-fire-over-deeply-racist-tactics-ahead-of-caribbean-carnival

Notting Hill Carnival there seems to be a simultaneous onsite and online displacement which is reinforced through digitisation.

In fact, the centrality of spectatorship also reflects the underlying question about the role of resistance in contemporary Carnival. At the core, Caribbean Carnival is a celebration of freedom rooted in the region's histories of resistance against slavery and colonial oppression.[22] In the UK, this political potential was unlocked in the context of heightened racism and social unrest in the 1960s to 1980s, while opposing forces are not so clearly defined today and Carnival often reinforces and contests hegemonic power simultaneously (Zobel Marshall, 2018). Michael La Rose situates the resistance against displacing NHC in historical continuity to the 'radical' tradition of Caribbean Carnival challenging powerful authorities, "from the seventeenth-century slave system in the Caribbean and the Americas to the Metropolitan Police and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London today" (2019, p. 491).

Based on our findings, it is evident that creative practitioners see potential in developing digital Carnival art forms. Audiences and their address seem to be a fundamental and often conflicting issue. The mutual dependency on the spectator to create the energy of the performance runs through all Carnival art forms discussed in interviews. While this applies to stage shows and similar static performances as well, interview partners mainly contrast the digital with experiences on the road.[23]

Limitation of the digitalscape: What about the senses?

"Hey... look at people!"[24] Jerome shouted when talking about his first memories related to Notting Hill carnival:

> "[...] coming out from the underground ... and because it's up, you know, and the road going down and then you see the... I don't know how many people there are, but you see an amount of people like crazy. [...] For me carnival is the people, and the truck, and the music. That are the three things that you're like 'WOW! This is Notting Hill Carnival', you know, because the sound is heavy, the trucks they are big, the roads are tiny and there is a lot of people"

Jerome quickly summarised three aspects of carnival in Notting Hill that cannot be replaced by the digitalscape: 1) carnival is a mass phenomenon; 2) it is a contextualised event embedded in its urban location; and 3) it is a multidisciplinary performance where soundscape is a determinant phenomenon.

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[22] In debates on digitalisation between researchers and practitioners, a recurring question is if and how and how signifiers of liberation are renegotiated in the context of digital practices. For example, the panel "A Bitter/Sweet Taste of Carnival: Digital Media and the Trinidad Carnival in a Pandemic" at the 9th International Carnival Arts Conference at Oxford Brookes University in July 2022 initiated discussions on the im/possibilities of digital engagement focusing on the transformative and liberating experience of playing mas.

[23] This refers to marching on outdoor roads as a street theatre stage (Hill, 1997)

[24] The interlocutor started his account by rhetorically blinking his eyes to the famous Soca Song by Rupee "You Make Me Wanna Jump" (2004).

> "The streets are long but smaaall and the buildings on the side make the sound vibrating like... make you tremble a bit. I don't know; when the truck pass close to you, you feel it like 'BRRRRR BRRRR' in your body. [...] The sound is going in you because from the buildings it come back to you".

Like Jerome, many other interviewers mentioned first the haptic power of the music during the carnival parade which differentiates the Notting Hill carnival from other diasporic carnivals. The sound waves bouncing off the close-set walls of the district allow a sensory experience of "being consumed by the sound" (Shabazz, 2011) in relation to the presence of the sound system, designed to move the person physically as sonic bodies (Henriques, 2011). This specific sensation of absorption is linked with the kinetic action of moving and following the carnival trucks with music and drinks. The emotional memory is emphasised thanks to the alternation between stillness and movement of the players during the parade.

Rachel, another interviewee who is a regular carnival player, continues:

> "Online, you can't recreate that feeling of running alongside the truck holding your bottle up trying to grab it as it's moving, as you're moving [chuckles]. You don't get that side on the couch watching TV, you just don't, you know"

And Wayne adds another motorial and memory line linked with the movement alongside the music trucks:

> "you know, try to get a drink off the truck and the guy can't hear you and every time you go, he's giving you the wrong drink and you have to come up with a mechanism to get that right drink. And then three weeks, later you're having a laugh about it with your friends"

What Wayne is telling us is that the actions during the carnival parade are synergistically individual and collective; these simple and regular embodied memories are linked to an important aspect of sociality that cannot be translated online in the same terms, that is extended even beyond the carnival period thanks to the memory sharing.

Another important point raised by Rachel is the sense of empowerment felt while wearing a carnival costume. She describes it as a power of transformation.

> "God, I'm getting goosebumps thinking about it... oh, the first year that I went, when I was in my costume, uhm it was the road that it starts on. We were walking out to the start point, and I just saw some of the trucks turning and it was uh God, what band was it; I can't remember, it was one of the big, big bands, and I just saw the trucks, and that was uh, [...] I just fell in love there, and then, you know, it's uh that was it just [she inhales] seeing that and knowing that something great was gonna happen."

The feeling of transformation experienced during Notting Hill carnival connects with the historical empowerment that conditions the traditional West Indian carnivals, which are inherited by its contemporary forms (Gugolati, 2018). What is interesting about Rachel's witness is her expectation of experiencing similar feelings while taking part in the carnival on the digitalscape. However, she stated that it was impossible to reproduce the experience, even when she tried wearing her costume and headpiece during some Zoom fetes in her home. She concluded by affirming that she felt a sense of deception that was partially

overcome by taking a picture of herself in costume, for her Instagram account. In this scenario, digital-carnival was a meaningful space when used for a personal mediatic self-representation.

According to our interlocutors, independently of the carnival costume, the act of parading united on the carnival roads is the most important aspect of playing in Notting Hill. Chocolate Nation was the most frequently mentioned band due to the use of chocolate as a kind of diurnal Jouvay[25].

Anne:

> "He [her ex-boyfriend] was doing Chocolate Nation; I sent him a text saying, 'where are you?', and uh as I hit send, I looked up and he was right in front of me. So, I gate-crashed the Chocolate Nation float [chuckles]. Uhm and I was hooked, I was absolutely hooked you know, its- that's something that you can't re-create online. You don't get the smells, you know this, the smell of the chocolates is disgusting to be fair, [chuckles] but you don't get the smell, the heat, the people, you don't get the sort of the bass reverberating through your bones, from the trucks, you just don't get that on TV, online, and it was- it was that that sort of drew me in"

The smell is another of the irreproducible senses most of the interviewers shared.

Wayne adds his memory:

> "I'm in a house in North London and my friends are in South London, but even if we're united in this digital platform it won't work. It just won't. You know, we need the smell of the glue. A lot of people don't understand the glue that puts the costumes together. They know how to smell about them and, you know, you may have worn one of those collar pieces that the men wear a lot with, you know, all the sparkly stuff and you still, you smell the glue. You know, you need that whole. The costumes sometimes scrape your skin because they have sharp edges, you know, they aren't tested and tried ten thousand times like other commercial items. [...] And you tie them with string, and they fall off, you pull the strings too tight, you get marks, you get marks on your skin, you know. All of these things happening, and your friends are there to tie it up for you, to make the alterations, to do a cut."

There is a specific kind of sociality in the ambience described by both Anne and Wayne: the possibility of sharing the same space, improvised actions along with the feeling of moving with the flow, and mutual help with friends, who can be also relatives, family members, acquaintances, lovers, or simply contextual and regular encounters from all over the world.

Online platforms such as Zoom fetes, Facebook groups, and Instagram provide simultaneously a transnational opportunity to meet up in different worldwide events along with the contradictory feeling of a sense of being overwhelmed and of partial empowerment. The majority of our interlocutors who accepted compromising their "carnivalscape" with the digitalscape would never go back to the latter if the carnival and its regular performance on

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[25] Jouvay is the evolution of the French creole word Jour Ouvert, which refers to the opening of carnival in the early morning (before sunrise), on Monday, two days before Ash Wednesday. In Trinidad (TT) and on other Caribbean islands, this nocturnal parade is driven by live and recorded music and coloured pigments are dropped on the players' bodies.

the road is re-established. However, there was a minority that appreciated digitality specifically for the feeling of safety of celebrating in their domestic space. In fact, the majority of our interlocutors who play carnival concurred in complaining of a lack of shared non-verbal carnival habitus[26] mostly from younger audiences and its improvised unregistered players. The question of a lack of education on the West Indian performative culture of carnivalesque "bacchanalian" attitude[27] (Mason, 1983) was mentioned by many interlocutors as one of the major problems that could cause awkward misunderstandings that could generate a sense of insecurity.

Conclusion

The findings from our explorative research show that the digitisation of Caribbean Carnival during the pandemic has been experienced in varied and often contradictory ways by participants in Notting Hill Carnival. The concept of digitalscapes highlights the complex dynamics of the festival's manifestations in the UK as well as the plurality of Caribbean Diaspora within the carnival phenomena. In their negotiations of the possibilities of digitisation, interview partners contested notions of new technology as inherently progressive and consisting of a specific set of practices, implying their own agency in shaping digital space as well as making digital labour visible. Online platforms have been predominantly used by Carnival practitioners for archiving purposes and as a documentary repository. In addition, online workshops, advertisements, educational resources, and historical context serve to expand consultation and access to information. The potential of livestreaming is highlighted in terms of independence from hegemonic media outlets and broadcasting, which directly relates to the history of racially charged and stereotypical media representations, showing how social actors navigate imageries within underlying power structures that constitute the performative space of the digital. On the other hand, the potential impact of the advance in digitisation was also discussed in terms of reinforcing existing social inequalities and efforts to contain carnival. We found it striking how the effects of gentrification find continuity in their embedded relation of performance and space in a deterritorialization process, while at the same time a reterritorialization intervention is created through media. This is evident in the concerns about how forms of digital engagement could contribute to the gentrification of audiences as well as related imaginings of how 'new audiences' are constituted. As the discussion of limitations in the digitalscape demonstrate, sociality as well as the transformative power of performance are intrinsically tied to multi-sensorial and immersive experiences. Carnival as a performance functions as an epistemology of an embodied practice bound up with cultural practice; its in-situ condition is reformulated by digital technologies that diversify the notion of 'presentiality' essential to the performance. Moreover, it breaks the ephemeral temporal sense of carnival to an off time of recorded reproducibility, which is an aspect where further research is required.

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[26] The term "habitus" refers to the embodiment of cultural capital ingrained in habits, skills, and mannerisms (Bourdieu, 1979).

[27] The term "Bacchanal" during carnival in Trinidad (TT) refers to an enjoyable and vigorous drinking and dancing vibe; outside carnival it also means an event that gets out of control, or a confusion, scandal, and uproar over immoral behaviour (Winer, 2009).

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