

Hanks: Dig those crazy grooves, daddy-o

Anna Hanks, Local Contributor

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I spent a few days loitering on the fringes of the South By Southwest Interactive festival this past week. Every year the festival blows into town, bringing a cornucopia of digital goodies that promise to change your life for the better.

It also brings the whiz-bang advertising budget of companies fiercely competing for the eyeballs of the taste-makers descending upon Austin for the tech festival. To grab those eyeballs, they brought flashing lights, garish graphics and highly sponsored parties in their pursuit of the maximum market share. The SXSWi festival process is total bedlam, and the sensory overload is exhausting.

Given my exposure to the craziness of the SXSWi festival — and the digital excesses of my own life — I'm convinced that the newest, hottest trend in technology is going to be the widespread embrace of analog technology.

I admit I'm not the first person to see the upcoming embrace of the analog world in our increasingly digital, industrialized space. In hipster land, the cool kids have been embracing the analog for some time. Vinyl records are making a comeback, the hipster bike only has one fixed gear, and the entire NYC neighborhood of Williamsburg in Brooklyn seems to be built around the goal of allowing free-range hipsters to live a totally handmade, organic, and locally sourced existence.

This isn't the life I lead.

I freely own up to being a Type A plugged-in Twitter-aholic with a raging social media addiction. Yet, maybe it was the impact of being around so many other Twitter devotees that I suddenly felt the shallowness of all this digital sound and fury. (Having doubts about the importance of digital life during SXSWi is like having a crisis of faith at a sleep-away Bible camp.)

Maybe that's why at this SXSWi, the things that felt the freshest weren't the sleekest newfangled devices with the fanciest flashing lights; instead I was most drawn to the things with an old-timey, analog vibe.

This means that at SXSWi, I most enjoyed those parties with a smattering of vaudeville. From the western steampunk soiree of the "Big Bang Bordello" at Emo's on Friday night, to an AMD event at the Parish with tunes by the White Ghost Shivers, I really enjoyed the time I spent partying like it was 1929. While I enjoyed seeing the hip DJ Diplo performing at the Seaholm Power Plant, I was surprised at exactly how much more I liked those vaudeville-esque parties.

I was pondering my enjoyment of the "ye olde timey" events that had taken place during the first weekend of SXSW when I stumbled over some hand-drawn art on the fourth floor of the Austin Convention Center on Sunday morning. It wasn't the art itself that was surprising; rather it was the people who were crowded around and busily taking pictures of this storyboard art. Seeing the SXSWi crowd's reaction to the "Ogilvy Notes" was like being at the Louvre with people taking pictures of the Mona Lisa.

While I was observing this unusual human behavior, I struck up a conversation with the gentleman in PR who happened to be standing next to me. In my befuddled state on the Sunday morning of the time change, he kindly supposed that the people standing around looking at the art were primarily attracted to the hand-drawn art that was created on actual paper.

A few hours later, just before a Sunday SXSW screening at the Paramount, I saw a tiny cinematic bio of Austin rogue knitter Magda Sayeg, explaining that she started "yarnbombing" trees, buses and other items because of her desire to insert something warm and human into the industrial urban environment. (You might have driven by her temporary knitted exhibition at the Lamar Boulevard underpass at Fifth Street.)

Don't be surprised if the hottest SXSWi party next year takes place on a steam train with flapper hostesses and a sound system composed of a hand-cranked Victrola. Instead of a giant corporation sponsoring the drinks, the party will have homemade strawberry wine brewed by my great aunt Katherine.

The handmade, organic, analog movement is spreading way past Brooklyn.

Hanks is an Austin writer.

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