

But I want to emphasise that there is also a great deal more at stake here. In Sydney, there is currently a critical focus on the cultural consequences of changes in recreational environments, specifically the role of sites of live music performance and of gambling. The regulation of leisure connects these debates with issues raised by the 2000 Olympics, the symbolic weight of the millennium and more recently the attacks on the Trade Centre towers in New York and the 'Bali bombing.' To assert such a connection might once have seemed to be pulling a long bow, but the current global political El Nino is very much a factor in current anxieties about who we are in the world and what liberties we may enjoy. At the national level, these anxieties are manipulated by the culturally conservative Howard government with the stealthy fascism of its 'ASIO Bill,' its increased scrutiny of the protocols of the governance of popular recreation, and the surveillance of everyday life.

At the state level, there are major confrontations taking place over the relationship between gaming revenue flowing into pubs and clubs, and community welfare projects. In New South Wales, the confrontation has a virulency proportionate to the massive funds at stake. As the antagonists become overheated, prevarications, anecdotes, mythologies, caricatures and deceptions become part of the propaganda battle, which itself is intensified by the larger anxieties I have referred to. These are all becoming entangled with larger issues of local and national identity, crystallised in such primitive archetypes as the ocker and the egghead. The former has massive historical momentum, a bullying version of the pragmatic no-nonsense 'if-she-ain't-broke-don't-try-to-fix-it' attitude that gained purchase in the early years of a colony directing all its resources to physical survival. But if we may speak of the banality of evil, we are also witnessing the potential evil of banality. The recent revelations of corporate self-interest, incompetence and impropriety are on such a massive scale that it is becoming clear that behind the benevolent 'she'll be right' of corporate management, and the 'relaxed and comfortable' image of John Howard's vision of Australia, there is a profound dissonance which reverberates through everyday life, labour and recreation. Carelessness with the truth is becoming a public issue. It just might be that our growing disillusionment with our public institutions will produce a new public respect for the kind of lucid but rigorous analysis that Shane Homan brings to a field usually littered with casual anecdote and prejudice.

Phil Jackson, *Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiments in the Art of Being Human*

Oxford and New York: Berg Publications, 2004.

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Reviewed by Adrian Renzo

Electronic dance music and club cultures have been the subject of a rapidly growing body of literature, particularly since the explosion of rave music in the United Kingdom during the 1980s. Many texts about this culture are anecdotal, relying on producers, DJs, and dancers to celebrate the magic of losing control on the dance floor. However, there is also an expanding body of scholarly work that attempts to make sense of club cultures, theorising dance music

and the context in which it circulates. Phil Jackson's *Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiments in the Art of Being Human* attempts to combine the former approach (first-hand descriptions of clubbing) with the second (a theoretical argument about the wider significance of clubbing). Jackson's contribution is especially promising because he devotes a chapter to music, something lacking in many existing studies of dance music and culture. However, *Inside Clubbing* is more effective as a journalistic celebration of club culture than as a work of scholarly research.

The key argument of this book is that clubbing teaches people new ways of experiencing their own bodies, and of interacting with one another. As Jackson puts it, 'the knowledge found in clubs is an embodied knowledge that you can feel deep in your guts and it must be lived if it is to be truly comprehended' (p. 1). Later in the book, Jackson argues that clubbers take this knowledge—an appreciation of difference, and a set of new, more equitable gender relations, amongst other things—with them into everyday life, radically changing the fabric of social relations in the process.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, larger section, includes seven chapters, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of clubbing, such as music, dancing, sex, and fashion. These chapters draw on Jackson's fieldwork, and are full of evocative quotes from his respondents. His own commentary accurately captures the 'buzz' of being on the dance floor. At one point, he maps effectively the various stages that a club night typically passes through—from 'pre-dancing' to the 'warm up' to the intense 'critical mass' of bodies dancing (17 to 20). The following extract from his diary provides an apt example:

Another lull, half-past seven in the morning, everybody's looking wasted, DJ changes again. I don't hold out much hope for resuscitation, but I am wrong, deep funk this time, another stampede and away we go. Eventually crawled out at ten o'clock. Brain a bit blistered from the whizz and the E, but without the music the drugs wouldn't have been enough on their own to keep me going (p. 25).

The author has clearly spent considerable time collecting data, and this makes for fascinating reading, particularly for readers not acquainted with the British club scene. His scope is also wider than many histories of dance music cultures. For example, along with more traditional nightclub settings, *Inside Clubbing* documents the ethos and practices of sex clubs and private post-party gatherings. Jackson is willing to reflect on his own experiences in these clubs, at one point describing what he witnessed (and performed) during a visit to a sex club. In the second part of the book, Jackson elaborates on his broader argument, drawing chiefly on the work of neuro-cognitive scientists Antonio Damasio and Joseph LeDouz, and French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

Jackson's fieldwork could have resulted in a richly detailed ethnography of certain British club scenes. However, the first part of the book is frustratingly light on detail. Often, it is not clear which part of Britain Jackson is visiting, what type of club he is dancing in, and what kind of door policy the club has. Consequently, many of his statements seem generalised and vague: he often refers to 'the dance floor,' 'the club,' and 'the dancers' rather than this dance floor, this club, or these dancers. It may seem pedantic to insist on these details, but when respondents contrast their party lives with the 'petty power games' and 'bullshit office politics' of their work lives (p. 123), it becomes important to know whether we are talking about middle-

class male professionals or young working class women. The 'liberation' (p. 141) of being on the dance floor could mean radically different things to these different groups. The format used in Maria Pini's *Club Cultures and Female Subjectivity* or Ben Malbon's *Clubbing* would have served Jackson very well. Both of these books included background information on key respondents that helped to contextualise the data generated during interviews.

As I stated above, the most promising aspect of Jackson's work is his willingness to engage with the music. To be sure, there are many colourful descriptions of the sounds:

The emotional power of bass is derived from its material quality, which enfolds the listener within the tune. Sometimes it is heavy and dark like someone's creeping up behind you possibly with an axe clutched in their sweaty, psycho paws; at others it is exhilarating like the kick bass of techno that imbues you with instant energy and makes dancing feel like a form of sonic surfing (p. 29).

However, Jackson's description of the 'bass' arguably perpetuates the familiar complaint that contemporary dance music is little more than a relentless 'thump-thump.' He mentions that dance music has many 'different characteristics' (p. 31), but these are not really explored here. No tracks, DJs, or producers are mentioned in this chapter, making it difficult to link many of the claims with the music itself.

More interestingly, this chapter overlooks one of the key insights of Sarah Thornton's earlier book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Thornton challenged the common view that pitted youth subcultures against a dominant or 'mainstream' culture. Instead, she argued that club cultures themselves were stratified, with members of various scenes vying for superiority. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, she noted that clubbers constantly sought to distinguish their own leisure choices from those of other groups: our clubs are diverse whereas their clubs are homogenous; our music is non-commercial whereas their music is designed for the masses; we listen to vinyl whereas they buy CD singles, and so on. To expose these hierarchies within popular culture, Thornton treated the claims of her respondents not as 'the truth,' but rather as a set of 'ideologies which fulfil the specific cultural agendas of their beholders.'

In sharp contrast, Jackson treats the views of his respondents as 'the truth,' even though many of their claims blatantly carry the same kind of ideological baggage that Thornton identified more than ten years ago. The following example comes from a 26-year-old male respondent:

if you go to a house or garage club they're very much into the way they look. They have to look very neat, precise ... they don't want to drench it in sweat [...] Then you get House music ... mainly for people who are into the technical thing; they're listening for the mix, this bit, that bit; they're not really there to enjoy themselves. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred they're with the media, coked-out-of-their-brains ... [Then] you start getting into Hard House, Hard Trance ... that's my level ... That's when you can't care how you look; you're listening to the music; you're going-for-it. People are supposedly into Hard House this year. *Mixmag* defined Hard House as a bassier version of House, but anyone in London who knows Trade knows that Hard House is faster and less jangly, less piano more bonk, bonk, bonk ... (pp. 30–31).

In other words: we don't care how we look (unlike those poseurs in the house scene); we know what 'real' hard house sounds like (unlike the masses who read *Mixmag*); we know how to have a good time (unlike those who are obsessed with 'the technical thing'). As Thornton might have pointed out, these are not innocent descriptions of dance music scenes, nor are they 'just assertions of equal difference; they ... entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of others.' In Jackson's account, however, these ideologies are accepted without question. In fact, much of this book serves as an advertisement for club cultures rather than a scholarly exploration of them. The club world that Jackson encounters is a place where everyone is always smiling (p. 12), where all 'constraints' of the everyday world are abandoned, and where people are able to 'let themselves go and reveal themselves in an alternative social form' (p. 123). There is little talk of the ways that crowds are 'pre-sorted' to ensure that everyone will get along in the club, of racist door policies at certain venues, or of the continued segregation of clubs according to sexuality.

Thornton's work is not the only research that is casually swept aside here. To come to grips with club culture in all its glory, *Inside Clubbing* justifiably touches on a range of broader topics (gender, the body, identity, and so on), and there is little sustained engagement with the scholarship available in these areas. Judith Butler's theories about the 'performativity' of gender are replaced with an assumption of essentialised and unproblematic gender identities. More surprising is the omission of key texts about club culture itself, many of which have offered similar arguments to Jackson's but with more detail: Pini has provided a book-length study of clubbing in relation to gender; Alexei Monroe has provided a more nuanced discussion of how dance genres 'accelerate' and mutate; Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson have contributed a more theoretically rigorous discussion of dance music's politics; and despite its age and its informal tone, Simon Reynolds's *Energy Flash* remains a sharper critique of club culture in Britain than is *Inside Clubbing*.

As a result of these shortcomings, *Inside Clubbing* is perhaps best read by clubbers themselves—people who want to be reminded of those fantastic nights out. The customer reviews available from <Amazon.co.uk> aptly summarise this position. One of them is entitled: 'A must read for the clubbing cognoscenti,' and breathlessly exhorts clubbers to 'spread the word' about the book:

Dr Phil Jackson manages to put into words what we all know—that the body and brain merge to form a unique social space. One that allows us to share with complete strangers a sense of fun and escape that millions us [*sic*] carry with us into daily life. The examples and interviews bring to this book to life [*sic*—you just can't help yourself saying out loud ... 'I've been there—felt like that!'

This statement captures the strengths and weakness of *Inside Clubbing*. The book gives us a passionate endorsement of 'dancing, smiling, drugging, flirting, fucking, friendship, and having a ball' (p. 1). The author has been 'clubbing it up' (p. 3) for a number of years and his experience frequently shines through. If you have ever strutted on the podium of a glamorous club, this book will definitely trigger some nostalgia and perhaps even make you want to dance. However, if you seek a rigorous, scholarly treatment of club culture, you are advised to look elsewhere.