

Introduction

It's almost 2 A.M. I've now been sitting at the bar for over two and a half hours. My back is sore and my bladder is full of Mexican beer. For the last half hour or so I've been watching a muscular young man in a red t-shirt. He looks familiar. Perhaps he's a university student? He walks around the perimeter of the dance floor, stopping intermittently to talk to acquaintances and generally eyeing other men with scowls of discontent. He's not happy. His steps are exaggerated as he moves slowly about the bar. Already he has intentionally bumped into three other men. I'm convinced he's looking for a fight. I've been inside Halifax nightclubs long enough to identify a prospective pugilist as he fuels himself with alcohol, and I'm sure the bouncers have noticed him too.

Sure enough, two burly doormen begin to creep towards him. Their timing is impeccable. The angry young man has strutted his way onto the dance floor and bumped, jostled, and nearly knocked over another three revellers. He also hasn't put down his beer, which is a dance-floor violation.

The doormen don't stop to explain their actions to their intended target. They immediately seize him by both arms and begin dragging him towards the door. One of the bouncers actually manages to pull his pint of beer away and set it on a table. The man in the red t-shirt seems stunned and compliant as he is dragged away. He was taken by surprise. Some of his "friends" notice but only slowly move over to watch. They are intercepted by another bouncer and an animated discussion ensues. One of the group throws up his hands and shakes his head, smiling as he talks to the bouncer and pats him on the back. It looks like his associates are distancing themselves from any involvement in the fracas.

By the time the bouncers pull the young bodybuilder to the door, he begins to kick and wrench away, trying to fling himself from their grasp. He succeeds in getting his right arm free and flails his fist wildly at the bouncer holding his left arm. He gets off two punches ... In the meantime two other bouncers have come across the dance floor to assist. One of the bouncers, a shorter fellow, crashes into the fray with an elbow to the head of the young man. “Calm down!” he orders through his clenched jaw.

Another bouncer, who is also holding onto him, adds his own admonition: “I told you, we’re not putting up with your shit anymore!” as he wrenches back the young man’s right arm with force.

The melee is next to the exit, so the majority of the nightclub crowd hasn’t a clue what is happening, obliviously hopping and swaying to the Go-Go’s “We’ve got the beat, we’ve got to beat, we’ve got the beat, yeah, we’ve got the beat ...”

I slide wearily off my sweaty bar stool and slowly make my way over to the exit following the tangled pack of doormen now completely smothering the red T-shirted man from my sight. Closing time is at hand, and I know there is more of this to come. (fieldnotes)

The original purpose of this book was to examine the subculture and surveillance practices of nightclub doorstaff as an addition to the expanding literature on private policing. After all, bouncers are the last vast unregulated, unsupervised, and pugnacious form of security provision in North America. For social scientists and policing theorists, bouncers lurk in the nighttime shadows as the state and respectable civil society slumber (Melbin 1978, 210–18). More and more, city centres are inviting this form of transgressional nighttime consumption towards creating a twenty-four hour urban buzz (Hobbs et al. 2003, 19–36). It made sense, therefore, to view bouncing and its concomitant safety concerns through the lens of security provision. What forms of surveillance are in operation? How are populations being ordered? What are the technological manifestations of these surveillance practices, and how are these resisted? Good questions, I thought, and I make every effort to answer them in this book. But my experience in the Halifax nighttime economy and numerous observation sessions in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal opened my eyes to broader issues about the overall maintenance and effect of nighttime culture: those who inhabit it, those who police it, and the way these two facets interlink to make nightclubs important sites of consumption.

So, while this book is still very much about security, surveillance, and the organization of risk in the nightclub setting, it is more importantly about coming to terms with how a nightclub operates as a site of consumption. Specifically, I establish a theoretical nexus between “consumption,” “security,” and “risk” in order to comprehend the dynamics of order, desire, and surveillance in nightclubs. This is the fundamental theoretical contribution of this book: establishing through empirical analysis and observation the consumption-security-risk nexus for understanding the nightclub as a site of aesthetic and experiential production in late capitalism.

In urban and cultural studies there is often a tendency to embrace the liberating, the transgressional, and the edgework (e.g., Lyng 2005) that surround the urban nighttime economy and rave scene (Malbon 1999), within a celebratory understanding of spectacle and “carnival” (Presdee 2000). Nightclubs are seen as spaces of transcendence – usually fuelled by drugs like Ecstasy – opening up the night to sensual and freeing expression, even if in the form of violence (e.g., Thomsen 1997). Indeed, one current of thought suggests that the nighttime economy somehow breaks the bonds (the everyday habitus) of daytime order, risk management, and policing (see Ferrell 2004; Jackson 2004; Palmer 2000). This is to an extent undoubtedly true, since the forms, directional flows, and rhythms of population and order maintenance start to change after the sun sets.

What I discovered, however, also challenges this rather cheery post-modern rendition of nocturnal movements. Albeit bleary and sexually voyeuristic, the panoptic eye remains vigilant well into the night. This is one aspect of difference between the objectives and theoretical arguments of this book and other literature on nighttime consumption.

Another point of divergence – in this case with the majority of private policing studies – is my critique of this literature’s limited engagement with the fundamental aspects of capitalist relations. Up to now it has seemed largely sufficient to state that private policing provision is on the rise (Jones and Newburn 1995; Sanders 2003; Swol 1999), that private security employees serve clients in spaces that are part of burgeoning tracts of mass private property (Jones and Newburn 1999; Shearing and Stenning 1983), and that state fiscal planning under neoliberal regimes has caused a crisis of policing (South 1984; Spitzer and Scull 1977). Rarely have analysts turned their attention to understanding the specific dynamics behind how security is sold (Loader 1999), commodified, and valorized (Rigakos 1999a; Spitzer 1987), and how seemingly chaotic spaces are made

to look ordered for the purpose of translating ephemeral, immaterial security labour into a tangible, marketable consumable (Rigakos 2002b). In the context of a nightclub, such analyses become indispensable, because in their absence we would be embroiled in an endless spiral of uncertainty trying to catch up with the latest in subcultural capital (see especially Jensen 2006; Thornton 1995), free-floating signifiers, music genres, and beats per minute. These are all intriguing facets of the nightclub in and of themselves, but we would risk misapprehending the experiential lustre of the nightclub as a site of production and profit that is actually manufactured through the negotiation of security. I argue, in fact, that security provision most obviously manifested in the presence of the bouncer actually helps *produce* the nightclub.

By now it is hardly an exaggeration to say the concept of risk has become an important part of the analytic lexicon of many social scientists in fields ranging from psychology to philosophy. It is a ubiquitous idea, multifaceted in its application, but nonetheless directly connecting to the problem of order, government, and even “knowing” the social world, at least in an instrumental sense (Mythen 2004). For criminologists and sociologists, risk has played an increasingly important role in theorizing about all aspects of social relations ranging from everyday morality (Hunt 2003) to governmental thinking (O’Malley 2004) and even world ecological disaster (Beck 1999). But with few exceptions (e.g., Chan and Rigakos 2002; Coleman 2004; Engel and Strasser 1998; Hannah-Moffat 1999; Mythen 2005; Rigakos and Hadden 2001; Rustin 1994), the deployment of risk as an analytic concept has been uncritical and disengaged from the capitalist production process. And in certain cases, risk theorists have even deliberately exorcized notions of class, gender, and race from their analyses (Beck 1997; O’Malley 2001) or have purported that risk thinking now transcends these rather dated modernist notions. Deploying a Marxian perspective, the concept of *risk markets* reveals rather than obfuscates the connections between risk and axes of race, class, and gender within the context of the nightclub setting. It is through this sensibility that we may have a concrete and realistic grasp of the complexities of potential violence mediated by representational strategies that make a nightclub possible. Nightclubs attract populations based on whatever form of material, social, or subcultural capital they are able to muster, inviting certain people in while vetting out dangerous populations. Those who are in circulate the unquenchable desire to be desired, to be included; those who are out actually spatially reinforce this desire, this exclusivity.

Methods of Inquiry

This project employs multiple methods in an attempt at triangulation: a methodological notion (Denzin 1978) that seeks to analyze as many sources of data as possible about the same object of analysis. If one source of data is deficient or is able to capture only a particular “angle” or part of the lived experiences and setting of those it seeks to understand, then data gleaned from other sources can help round out, indeed amend, our understanding. This book is based on an ethnographic analysis of the nightclub setting, a standardized survey of fifty-five bouncers, and in-depth interviews with twenty-six bouncers employed by over half a dozen nightclubs in downtown Halifax.

Given that the intended focus of this project was to examine bouncers, the largest of the nightclubs operating in downtown Halifax were strategically selected because they typically employed the highest concentrations of security personnel. I use the terms *doorstaff*, *bouncers*, and *security personnel* interchangeably in this book. Most nightclubs in Halifax (and elsewhere in Canada) also use these terms interchangeably, although *bouncer* was sometimes seen as a derogatory term. In cities such as New York, some nightclubs make a formal distinction between doormen and bouncers. The former deal with patrons, lineups, and VIPs – a form of nightly public relations – while the latter deal with violence. Like my respondents, I make no such distinction. Bouncers, therefore, are paid by nightclub owners to conduct access and egress control, protect VIPs and other persons in the nightclub, ensure nightclub policies are enforced, and use force or the threat of force to foster compliance by removing or threatening to remove unsuitable, disorderly, drunken, threatening, or violent patrons. Moreover, they help produce the nightclub insofar as they act as guarantors of its social makeup, ambience, and aesthetic.

The minimum requirements for selection were that the research sites employed six or more doorstaff and that the bar had been in operation for at least three years. Not only did this allow me to focus on the more densely populated nighttime spots but it also ensured that there was a stable management team in place so that I was able to query both staff and managers about their past personal experiences and general developments in the downtown Halifax urban nighttime economy. Six nightclubs in downtown Halifax qualified and agreed to participate in the overall research project. These clubs allowed me access to their security personnel so that standard questionnaires could be administered and their doorstaff interviewed. Two nightclubs declined to participate, despite my

attempts to negotiate their inclusion. In both cases these clubs had recently undergone managerial changes.

There are no gay or lesbian bars included in the sample. This is the case for three reasons: first, because only fleeting familiarity confirms that these sites are markedly different in their organization, level of violence, and security procedures from the rest of the Halifax nightclub scene. Second, and relatedly, these clubs did not employ the minimum number of six bouncers for inclusion. Third and finally, when we did approach the manager of one gay bar in downtown Halifax, she declined to participate because the club had recently changed management and because, as she put it, "We don't have those types of security concerns here." Thus, it is important to keep in mind that the sites of analysis included in this study are actually large, heterosexed, Halifax nightclubs in existence for three or more years and employing six or more doorstaff.

From these six nightclubs a subset of another three nightclubs were chosen for comprehensive observational research. As part of my negotiation with managers for access, I promised confidentiality for their place of business, employing the pseudonyms the Galaxy, the Mansion, and the Beacon.¹ Generally speaking, while it is true that each of these three sites had something distinctive to offer by way of the provision of security, aesthetics, music played, and types of clientele frequenting them, they are drawn on interchangeably and do not govern the organization or arguments in this book. In-depth descriptions of each club would easily compromise confidentiality and potentially expose their identity to most Haligonian readers, so in order to honour my agreement with proprietors, I am careful not to specifically refer to where acts of violence or other illicit activities took place. Moreover, in my attempt to establish a general theoretical understanding of nightclub operations from a risk markets perspective, it is far more useful to think about and discuss nightclubs generally while making use of specific aspects from each.

The primary source of data for this book, shaping most of my theoretical insights, is a long-term two-staged observational study: first, of a structured ethnography of Halifax area nightclubs between February 2001 and 2002, and second, additional intermittent visits to nightclubs in Halifax, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal up until January 2004. The second phase of the observational research, unlike the first, was largely unstructured. I did not employ research assistants, made no prior arrangements with nightclubs I visited, and did not conduct interviews or collect other data beyond natural observation. While it would be tidy for me to report that this second phase was part of my general research plan, I would be disingenuous in doing so. These additional natural observation sessions

were for the express purpose of rounding out the theoretical notions I had developed based on the Halifax field research. It was simply useful to visit additional venues as the scope of my project developed, and I aimed to produce a more generalizable analysis of the spectacle of the nightclub beyond the localized analysis of Halifax nightlife.² Despite my many trips to nightclubs in other Canadian cities, it is nonetheless important that the reader understands that the nightclub clients I encountered were predominantly white, current or former university or college students in their twenties, with all the liminal, transgressional, and coming-of-age sensation-seeking that such a group would be culturally expected to embrace. Any theoretical elucidations I make or future research that may find such theorizing useful must keep this context in mind.

Ethnographic study is perhaps the most basic, unfettered, yet nuanced form of data collection (Lofland 1974). I utilize a critical ethnographic approach that centres power and its associated dialectics of social control (Thomas 1993) as a focal point from which to understand social relations. I undertook the initial Halifax phase of the project with two research assistants³ trained to look for certain aspects of nightclub security and surveillance and its organization. I supplied my research assistants with an observation template they referred to as they made observations and took copious notes in the field. I accompanied both of these ethnographers on their first few visits to the nightclub and gave them additional instruction. Of course, as field research continued, all of us relied less and less on the template as we became familiar and practised with the instrument and because the objectives of this study grew to encompass more than bouncers, risk, and surveillance. In the end, this book relies on over 250 hours of observational study, producing over two hundred pages of typed reports from fieldnotes.

On any given Saturday night in downtown Halifax, there are approximately one hundred doorstaff working in various pubs, nightclubs, and bars. We interviewed twenty-six bouncers, six of them supervisors or managing security operators for the nightclubs. All but three were men. Indeed, we made a particular attempt to seek out as many women who were working as bouncers as we could, because they would add insight into the bouncer culture and how gender, and particularly masculinity, might play a role in their negotiation of occupational tasks.

The interviews were conducted early on in the research process by a team of research assistants⁴ under my supervision. Once again, I accompanied each of them during their first interview and provided them with feedback immediately thereafter. I conducted key interviews with respondents (mostly managers) who had been working in the Halifax nightclub

scene for some time. The interviews were semi-structured, and respondents were encouraged to discuss their experiences as they saw fit. A series of open-ended questions focused on (1) general workplace and personal experiences of violence; (2) perceived attitudes towards bouncers by members of the public, police, media, friends, etc.; (3) relations with nightclub managers and police; (4) negotiation and use of electronic surveillance; and (5) connection to fellow bouncers and bouncer culture. Towards the end of the interview, respondents were urged to give their own account of their jobs, any concerns they might have about the future, their career goals, and generally what they liked and disliked about being a bouncer.

Interviews ranged from twenty-five minutes to over an hour and a half in length. In one case, I had to return to complete an interview the following day because one particular respondent was such a rich source of information. Of course, as in all interview situations, some respondents preferred monosyllabic answers and had to be cajoled repeatedly to add further insight.

An important part of the interview process was making ourselves known to potential respondents for the later survey and ethnographic work. My previous experience with conducting research on policing agencies – public or private – confirms much of the established ethnographic wisdom that advises researchers to spend some time in the field before presuming they are getting at the most candid representation of reality possible. Social groups of all sorts are reticent to allow outsiders into their inner circle, and bouncers are no exception. Indeed, two of my research assistants complained that some respondents were being evasive and needed to be re-interviewed. On more than one occasion the gender of the interviewer played a role. In some cases female interviewers were not taken seriously or were kept waiting for up to an hour, yet in other cases they managed to get some fascinating accounts of workplace violence. I suspect both of these tendencies could be attributed to what I will later consider as macho posturing and the masculine subculture of bouncers. In another case a male interviewer had difficulty with some bouncers because of his own history in the nightclub culture. Wherever possible these tensions were avoided by either substituting research assistants or conducting the interview myself.

The interviews allowed me to map out the social terrain before deciding on what sites were best for more in-depth observational study. Moreover, in order to save time and money, we took the opportunity of meeting with security managers and bouncers during interviews to introduce quantitative surveys that were distributed to fifty-five doorstaff. This procedure yielded quite a remarkable rate of return, given that there

are approximately one hundred doorstaff working in a downtown Halifax nightclub scene.⁵ Indeed, after some initial reservations, most respondents were quite energetic about participating. Managers and bouncers were concerned about their depiction, especially after recent media reports had portrayed them in an unflattering light. Managers and doorstaff were able to put a face to the research project; we also provided those who completed the survey with five dollars in cash.

The survey consists of a few demographic questions followed by a series of standardized scales related to interpersonal conflict at work (Spector and Jex 1998), job affective well-being (Van Katwyk et al. 2000), job satisfaction (Spector 1985), work locus of control (Fox and Spector 1999), right-wing authoritarianism (Altmeyer 1988; Altmeyer 1996); belief in a just world (Rubin and Peplau 1975); and alienation (Perrott 1991; Perrott and Taylor 1994; Perrott and Taylor 1995). Most importantly, for this section of the project, Perrott and Kelloway (2006) administered identical scales to other occupational groups during the same data collection period under a reciprocal data-sharing arrangement. In chapter 3 I discuss these quantitative findings and relate them to the general observational and interview data as well as comparing downtown Halifax bouncers to RCMP and Halifax regional police officers across these measures.

Organization of This Book

This book is organized into nine chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 sets up a theoretical lexicon from which to understand the nightclub as a site of consumption, security, and risk. Each of these concepts is considered in light of their common usage in the sociological and criminological literatures, how these ideas might best be deployed from a critical standpoint, and finally, how we might make sense of these concepts within the project of understanding the operations of a nightclub. Thus, chapter 2 outlines my notion of the nightclub as a risk market – a site saturated by aesthetic labour, consumption, competing subcultural capitals, and the negotiation of risk identities relating to race, class, and gender.

In chapter 3, “Policing and Bouncing,” I begin my analysis of the role of bouncers in the nighttime economy in the context of private policing and its relationship to public law enforcement. This is done not only at a conceptual and theoretical level but also through analyzing comparative data on police officers and bouncers across standardized measures such as workplace violence, job affective well-being, and even right-wing

authoritarianism. I provide empirical evidence that bouncers experience statistically significantly more workplace violence than local police officers and go on to compare this with other facets of public policing responsibility. Having set up conceptual and theoretical overlaps between public and private policing in the nighttime economy, the remainder of the chapter is devoted to a legal analysis of the status of the bouncer. General citizens' powers of arrest and detention and legal notions of trespass, defence of person, and defence of property are scrutinized through an analysis of judicial decision-making in both criminal and civil litigation relating to bouncer violence.

The theme of violence and its consequences is carried into chapter 4, which offers a systematic deconstruction of bouncer culture. The chapter relies heavily on observational research and interviews in order to glean how bouncers understand their work world and each other, and how this constitutes their awareness of risk, danger, violence, and masculinity in the nightclub setting. There are similarities and differences between bouncer culture and the general private security and public policing occupational cultures. These are discussed within the context of the central tasks of doorstaff, what I term *senry-dataveillance*, and how this relates not only to the formation of bouncer culture but also the formation of the nightclub itself as a production process.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 connect the theoretical and conceptual analysis provided up to this point to a three-stage chronological examination of the nightclub. Chapter by chapter, I ask the reader to consider the nightclub in three successive steps: getting in (chapter 5), getting noticed (chapter 6), and getting home (chapter 7). I utilize extended use of observational data and interview responses as well as careful consideration of the surveillance, enforcement, and vetting practices employed by bouncers. In chapter 5, we come to understand bouncers as part of the aesthetic production of the nightclub in their basic deployment as instruments of exclusion and inclusion and the vetting of undesirable populations based on risk identities that predictably bond to axes of age, class, race, and gender. It is in the process of "getting in" that material and social capital is tirelessly displayed to gain access, negotiate identity, and establish hierarchy. Chapter 6 deals with the internal dynamics of the nightclub as an engine of sex, desire, masculinity, and danger within the unceasing, unrelenting eye of surveillance. The panoptic impulse within the nightclub, I argue, is symbiotic with pleasure – it is voyeuristic – a veritable *synoptic frenzy* of seeing and being seen, which is intimately linked to the provision of security and the maintenance of risk management yet is essential

to the creation of the nightclub as a site of consumption and the promise of the indulgence of desire. In chapter 7 I invite the reader along on the long walk home. It is at this moment, at “closing time,” that the private spectacle of consumption, the synoptic frenzy, becomes translated into a public nuisance, and the predictable flows of population in the Halifax nighttime economy begin to organize themselves. Police vans idle outside the nightclub, revellers stagger towards the city’s infamous “pizza corner” – all predictable developments within the scripted expectations of the consumption-security-risk nexus. The urban landscape becomes reanimated by staggering steps and unintelligible groans and yelps. Thus, it is within these three chapters that the orientation I outline at the beginning of this book becomes most directly linked to the empirical data collected in the field.

The conclusions (chapter 8) focus on tying together the arguments made throughout the book, looking ahead to further research and making sense of the empirical findings presented in light of existing theory on surveillance and policing. I also include an epilogue (chapter 9) that I wrote long before the book was finished. This may sound like a strange practice but I hope it is understandable after one reads through it. Having written it in the form of an analytic *confessional*, I titled it “Confessions of a Playa Hata,” because it captures my sense of unease conducting research on groups that I wanted to understand but towards which I was increasingly developing an antipathy. Obviously, this may have been a serious impediment to my analysis that needed to be addressed – if not entirely overcome, then at least considered reflexively. I include it because I hope it may be useful to graduate students or other analysts interested in these normative aspects of the research process.