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Nightclub: Bouncers, Risk, and the Spectacle of Consumption (review)

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George S. Rigakos

Nightclub: Bouncers, Risk, and the Spectacle of Consumption. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008, 273 p.

The regulation of fun has become central to understanding consumption. Recent cultural histories on topics such as film censorship and yellow journalism have argued that the legal-bureaucratic realm underpins modern entertainment. In short, regulation is a tacit form of state sponsorship that ensures amusement is “harmless” for a general audience, thereby constituting the mass public through acts of consumption. Drawing upon a multidisciplinary range of methods, *Nightclub*, George Rigakos' ethnography of Halifax bouncers, fits well into this growing body of research. Its design is also handsome, with customized graphic-novel-style illustrations of the themes of each chapter. After his first book, *The New Parapolice*, on non-governmental (yet governing) security services, this focus on bouncers is a deft move. Beyond enforcing safety, bouncers quite literally compose the nightclub's crowd, and what a club sells is access—to its own customers. “*The subjects of surveillance and policing are themselves commodified . . . People attend nightclubs to be seen and see others, to consume others as aesthetic objects of desire and to elicit desire in others*” (p. 42).

Nightclub starts with the theoretical premise of the club as a “risk market.” The work of bouncers is presented as an essential catalyst in creating the right mix of consumption (via Baudrillard, Debord), risk (via Beck, Giddens), and security (via Lash and Urry, Valverde). Rigakos' definition of the risk market is a clever codification of the idea that consumers themselves become commodities at public spaces of consumption. Bouncers maximize the potential for a good time by balancing the risks of drunkenness (fighting, lewdness, vomiting) with constant security. Everyone is inspected. Surveillance is overt. Even as a nightclub encourages the crowd's uninhibited behaviour, the limit cases of violence, crudeness, and sickness lead quickly to ejection.

The next chapters are clear-headed reviews of the labour and culture of bouncers. There are statistical summaries of occupational hazards, descriptive passages of police–bouncer conviviality and tension, and a most important, concise review of court cases that define the legal status of bouncers (they are sanctioned to use force, because a guest becomes a trespasser the moment they are asked to leave; yet club owners remain liable for the consequences of that force even when it spills over into public space). The chapter on internal bouncer culture begins buttoned down, with significance tests of personality scales, but quickly loosens up with qualitative reviews of doormen's ethno-methods, ranging from training to the nightly work of getting paid to party and the myth (surely) of a “Door Wars” fight club among rival bar staff. Despite the presence of a few women in the job, the bouncers' paraprofession is hypermasculine, but these minimum-wage ruffians, many working at student jobs, are nonetheless sensitive about being dismissed as meatheads. Rigakos slips into a groove once he turns to the sequential trio

of chapters titled “Getting In,” “Getting Noticed,” and “Getting Home.” Bouncers regulate more than the usual suspects (drunkards, vandals, and users and peddlers of drugs); their rules ensure that the scene inside has a veneer of inclusivity, although only those deemed beautiful enough, well dressed enough, and affluent enough are admitted in the first place.

Nightclub is implicitly organized to match the “synoptic frenzy” and “managed mayhem” of its object, the drunken leering free-for-all of clubland. Gradually, the discussion becomes sexually explicit, drugs become central, and bodily fluids start to spew—sweat, spit, vomit, and piss. The methodology and written structure, too, become gradually inebriated. Quotations become lengthier, the editing less rigid, and the theorizing uninhibited. By the end, *Nightclub* is giddy revelling in the pleasure machine of the nightclub. Then comes a guilt-ridden coda. Rigakos ends *Nightclub* by confessing that after years of participant observation, interviewing, and surveys, his interpretations amount to little more than illumination of his own jealousy of all the players he watched from the sidelines. *Nightclub* treads a fine line between excitement and disappointment, mirroring the spectacle of consumption and the logic of the nightclub itself. The effect is curious. I wanted a more authoritative framework, a more strongly authored and consistent interpretation, but *Nightclub* is strangely stronger for providing all the elements of an analytical good time while leaving me craving more.

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Sherene H. Razack

Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics.
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2008, 240 p.

The War on Terror has gripped the Western world with internally discriminatory laws and policies, ranging from the denial of *habeas corpus* rights to restrictions on wearing *hijab* in public spaces. Sherene Razack’s new monograph demonstrates, however, that much more than discrimination is at work. *Casting Out* highlights how political community is being reconfigured through the socio-legal abandonment of “Muslim-looking” people who increasingly lack “the right to have rights.”³ Central to Razack’s analysis is Hannah Arendt’s concept of race thinking, a world view that differentiates between two orders of humanity, promoting the exclusion of one for the

³ Hannah Arendt, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 296–7.