WILDERNESS & SENSATION

ANTHROPOLOGY OF SINISTER AND SENSUOUS REALMS

ROB VAN GINKEL & ALEX STRATING
EDITORS
THE SENSATION OF DANCE EVENTS
Ritual and Sensory Experience in Entertainment
Irene Stengs

The view from the platforms in the main stage hall is overwhelming. As far as the eye can see, dancing people fill the huge, dimly lit space. From above, they seem an organic entity, rhythmically responding to the predominant beats of Trance/Techno. Smart light and laser effects enhance the emphatic atmosphere. Most impressive are the moments when the music is about to reach a climax; just before the raising beat ‘breaks’ the public shouts and whistles, raising thousands of hands on the rhythm of the beat, in tribute to the DJ but also in physical support of the move to the next track. These are also the moments to switch on the intensely white flashing lights of the stroboscopes, not only to reinforce the effect of the moving arms, but also to provide sufficient lighting for the public to see each other doing the same, and to create a visual experience in support of the general sensation of being an inextricable part of an immense whole.

This brief ethnographic impression of my visit to the 2004 edition of Innercity – the world’s largest indoor dance event – sketches dance as a totally embodied, sensory and ritual experience. The beat is heard and felt; the body cannot resist moving; the hand-raising and the cheers follow the beat ‘naturally.’ Vision is vital too; the light effects reinforce the rhythm of the beat; the sight of other moving bodies; the immediacy and scent of other bodies strongly engage the tactile and olfactory senses, all adding to a sensation of the boundaries between the self and the collective moving body being in a floating state.

The music, the light-effects, and the enormous crowd absorb everybody present, including the researcher. Presence at a dance event enforces a bodily engagement that makes classic ethnographic practice, such as conducting interviews or taking notes, virtually impossible, even without the sheer volume of the music. The research cannot rely on visual observation either, since the visual effects – a central feature of dance events – require a basically dark environment. If anywhere, the appeal made by anthropologists like Bendix (2005), Herzfeld (2001), Howes (2003), and Verrips (2002, 2005) to bring more sense in ethnography, applies to ethnography of ‘dance events’ or ‘dance culture.’ For sensing is what people come for. Dance events are designed to affect all senses in unison (see Verrips 2005:33), and understanding the popularity of dance is understanding the place of this integral affection in the life of the participants. At the same time, understanding dance requires the acknowledgement that dance events are commercial projects, products of ‘technocracy of sensuality’ par excellence (Haug quoted in Howes 2003:211). Finally, dance events may be explored as ritualized practices, orchestrated to evoke collective sensations.

Electronic dance music constitutes a significant part of present-day Dutch leisure culture (and elsewhere, see for example Malbon 1999; Reynolds 1997). In the Netherlands, out of a population of more than sixteen million an estimated two million people go out on a regular weekend, half of them visiting at least one, larger or smaller, dance event or club. A 2002 report on the social and economic meaning and impact of dance on Dutch society speaks of 2.3 million teenagers and young adults (half of all people aged between fifteen and thirty-five) who are interested in dance, 650,000 of whom actively take part in dance culture. Two hundred thousand of them, according to the report, describe dance as their way of life (see KMPG 2002:7). What does this actually mean, however: ‘dance as a way of life’?

It is my argument that participating in dance culture is a contemporary way of ‘being in the world,’ of connecting with a wide circle of social and personal life worlds. Its meaning therefore is much broader than ‘enjoying dancing.’ Dance is a form of sociality which is experienced and shaped through the praxis of collective dancing, or, at least, by collectively visiting a dance event. This ‘togetherness’ of the people dancing on the floor makes the event take shape, irrespective of whether it is a weekly dance night at a local club or an annual mega-event like Innercity. However, these people are connected in a wider sense than in just the transitory moments.
of actively dancing; they share a 'culture.' Its members distinguish themselves through a shared lifestyle and shared taste. They may be understood, in the words of Michel Maffesoli (1996), as postmodern tribes: 'little masses' that are unstable and ephemeral, but nevertheless take shape and time and again. Maffesoli's approach opens the possibility of thinking of modernity in terms other than increasing individualism, allowing us to see 'social configurations that seem to go beyond individualism' instead and to switch our focus from individuals and self-contained identities to persons and their roles within such configurations.

Clearly enough, 'dance' is not one-dimensional and homogeneous, but encompasses a wide variety of (genre) circuits, sub-cultures that are delineated along ethnic or other lines. This chapter will take as its major focus the thematic mega-dance event as one particular practice of evoking and undergoing sensational experiences. Although thematic mega-dance events only comprise a fraction of Dutch dance culture, they are significant moments of the Dutch dance calendar. This contribution will be mainly based on ethnographic material drawn from two important yearly dance events, namely Innercity 2004, and Sensation 2005. In addition, I will direct my attention to a group of friends - calling themselves playfully 'the Funmates' - who, in my opinion, exemplify the idea of participating in dance culture as a way of being in the world. I met the Funmates first on the internet, where they maintain their own website that is all about going out and dance. The Funmates have not only visited Innercity 2004 and Sensation 2005 together, but share an entire history - and future - of 'dance.'

INNERCITY, FABULOUS LAS VEGAS

In 2004, forty-five to fifty thousand people participated in Innercity, a mega-dance party lasting from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. Innercity, annually held in the huge RAI Exhibition Halls, takes up six to eight different halls, each dedicated to a specific style of electronic dance music like Trance, Techno, Minimal, Hardstyle, Clubhouse, Progressive or to a 'theme.' Whether dedicated to a style or to a theme, each hall has its own, carefully selected and scheduled 'line-up' of DJs. Innercity attracts mainly white Dutch, who come from all over the country by special buses.

Innercity as a whole used also to have a theme: 'Lenin' in 2002; 'Brasilia' in 2003; and 'Fabulous Las Vegas' in 2004. A theme helps the organizers of the event - in this case ID&T, the largest commercial player in the world of dance entertainment in the Netherlands - in designing suitable and consistent decorations and acts. A theme like 'Fabulous Las Vegas' evokes images from the world of gambling, glamour, big money, 'poshness' and conspicuous consumption. The white, six-door limousine on the stage in the main hall, dubbed 'Lucky Number 7 Casino,' served as a material interpretation of this 'style of affluence.' The hall was decorated as a casino, with huge images of roulette tables projected on the walls and gambling machines on the various viewing platforms along the sideline, together with a Wheel of Fortune and a real croupier for those who wanted to actually play. Las Vegas-style performances - such as show girls dancing to 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' and fireworks - alternated every now and then with the DJs, to enhance the Las Vegas experience. On the whole, however, it had been difficult to pursue the theme convincingly in every hall.

A substantial part of the visitors - one fourth maybe - was more or less dressed up in accordance with the theme: men in Elvis-outfits, or groups of friends with (brightly coloured) Texan hats; scantily dressed girls, sometimes in combination with cowboy boots and hats, and also quite a few 'brides,' another well-known Las Vegas theme. The organizers of Innercity had gone as far as organizing a real wedding at midnight in the sweet, white, Las Vegas style wedding-chapel placed at the Fair (the entrance hall), to be followed by party-goers staging mock marriages. The Fair also comprised attractions such as a 3D projection of a performing Elvis with the possibility of stepping in and taking over the performance, a (one-room) Motel of Love, and a cakewalk.

In Innercity, midnight

A small number of people have gathered around the Wedding Chapel, where the bride and groom, their friends and some family members are seated for the marriage to be executed by a registrar of the Amsterdam Oud-Zuid borough council. The registrar, dressed in her formal black wedding attire, contrasts sharply with the wedding chapel, where everything is white; the chapel, the couple and most of their acquaintances. As a whole, the chapel looks like an island of light in a sea of darkness.
It is chillingly cold in this huge (eighteen thousand square metres) hall. The temperature does not appear to be much higher than outside, where it is a few degrees below zero. After about twenty minutes the ceremony is over, the invitees throw rice, and bottles of champagne are opened. We need to move about to warm up and leave the scene to see what is going on elsewhere, if anything is going on anywhere. Until now, Innercity has not really taken off. It is too empty. The approximately five hundred people dispersed over the 12,250 square metres Lucky Number 7 Casino (this was around 1 p.m.) only emphasize the place’s emptiness. This general ‘emptiness’ and the related feeling that ‘it must be happening somewhere else’ – whatever the exact nature of everybody’s expectations – kept us, and many other ‘early’ arrivals walking from hall to hall through corridors that were endlessly long, horribly cold and blazing with light.

After a brief intermezzo in the Clubhouse hall, we go back to the corridor, where we suddenly get caught in a jam-packed crowd. Apparently, the average Innercity goer arrives between 03:30 and 04:30 a.m. We can neither move forward nor backward. It makes me nervous, people are pushing from behind. Some noisy boys walk into the crowd at a high pace, apparently intending to continue their course. Somewhere in front a person faints and there is great difficulty in getting this person out of the crowd. Very slowly, inch by inch we move forward. A man next to me starts complaining, not to anybody in particular, about the quality of the organization and this waste of time. After about half an hour we are able to leave the walkway to enter the ‘Luxorlobby,’ or hard style hall, again an enormous location (nine thousand square metres). We cannot bear to stay, however. The convulsive beats fill the entire space, from floor to ceiling, pervading the body through every pore. Although vision is part of the experience (strobels), the hall is scantily lit and hardly decorated; all we see is a dark wall of moving bodies. We join the crowd in the walkway again to search for something more to our taste.

This is exactly what Innercity is meant to be. Innercity may be described as a festival of electronic dance music, almost a theme park since all attractions are synchronically present. Depending on one’s mood or preferences one may move from style to style, or from DJ to DJ, each hall offering a different ambience defined by its distinct music, celebrities, decorations and, consequently, also by its own particular audience. For the outsider, Innercity is a sampling of contemporary dance culture. Although the event gives a good impression of the praxis of dance, the ways in which dance is incorporated in the everyday lives of the participants remains hidden. The Funmates offered me a view on what ‘dance as a way of life’ can mean.

THE FUNMATES

The Funmates are a group of six young men, between twenty and twenty-two years old. Except for Lex, who plans to continue his education next year, all follow higher vocational education; and, except for Danny, they all are single. Four Funmates know each other from secondary school; three met at college. Robbie was a member of both groups, and made the eventual connection by inviting both groups of friends to the same occasion: the Zandvoort Formula 1 races, near the beach. Since then, the six have become close friends, and spend much of their leisure time together. This means that the Funmates hang out together in discos or similar smaller dance facilities on ordinary weekends; organize a weekend in a hotel or a midweek in a holiday park occasionally; enjoy a ten-day Mediterranean beach-and-party summer holiday together, and make sure they attend four or five of the leading annual dance events in the Netherlands. In the meantime, they visit some of the lesser, but nonetheless significant dance events. They can afford this lifestyle of partying, dance and leisure because they all still live with their parents. That is also their own perception: once they have to find (and finance) a place of their own – a transition that they strongly associate with ‘when you get a girlfriend, party life will be over,’ or at least reduced to a much less intensive level. This perspective of the future is confirmed by the lifestyle of Danny, the only Funmate who has a girlfriend already. Danny and his girlfriend live together and therefore – according to his friends – this Funmate is often unable to join the group, particularly during the summer holidays, and regularly misses one of the main dance events. His girlfriend and budgetary restraints hamper ‘full-time participation.’
Summer holidays and dance events may seem rather different kinds of leisure activities, but for the Funmates and many others the two worlds are strongly connected. Tour operators organize cheap beach holidays for young people up to the age of twenty-five. Popular holiday destinations are Spain (Ibiza, Lloret de Mar, Rosas), Greece (Crete) and Turkey (Antalya, Alanya). For most young holidaymakers these holidays are all about dancing, drinking and dating, and recovering on the beach or at the swimming pool during the daytime. In the summer months, a range of famous and lesser-known DJs will spin at local beach clubs and beach parties. Many (local) DJs begin their careers in these beach clubs. In July or August famous DJs, such as the aforementioned Marco V or even the world phenomenon Tiësto will spin a few evenings in the most prestigious clubs on Ibiza.

A Funmates summer holiday can actually be understood best as a ten-day culmination of regular weekend nightlife activities in Holland. In 2002, the Funmates selected Chersonissos, a Cretan seaside resort with hundreds of discos and bars – 'the Walhalla for the young tourist,' according to a tour operator advertisement – as their holiday destination. They went to Chersonissos for four years in succession. Every night they would either go dancing in a disco – depending on the DJs spinning that evening in, for instance, the Dutch disco Bio Bio – or they might go to the Dutch place 't Hof van Holland, with Dutch staff and an overall Dutch public, or another place where the DJs or bands – 'the KretaBoyz' – provide Dutch-language party music. Later, back in The Netherlands, 't Hof van Holland will organize a reunion for its regulars, where the holiday experience may be relived once more in the popular après-ski format. Likewise, the KretaBoyz tour the Dutch young people's winter holiday destinations all over Europe.

When at home, the Funmates mix their own tracks in their rooms, and they spin at school parties or similar events occasionally. It is never long before another major happening is coming up: they participate in at least five big dance events a year. The most significant of all – they are all very firm on this – is Sensation White. This annual dance event takes place in the Amsterdam soccer stadium the ArenA, on the first Saturday of July. Sensation White 2002 took place on July 2. The Funmates had bought their entry tickets (sixty Euros each) immediately after they went on sale at midnight on April 1; a vital move, since the forty thousand tickets were sold out within two hours. Knowing that one is going to Sensation White is already very exciting, for, as one Funmate said: 'the event is comparable with other high days of the yearly calendar celebrations, like one's birthday or Queen's Day.' But Sensation entails more excitement. The Funmates count down the weeks, and when there are only two or three weeks to go, they start counting the nights. In these weeks, on their regular gatherings for a few drinks in preparation to go out, they play the so-called 'anthem,' the previous year's Sensation White special mix. Actually, they cannot wait. So, what is so sensational about Sensation?

SENSATION

The Sensation concept was developed, again, by 1D & T. The first Sensation, in 2000, was not 'white.' It was just a very large dance party organized in a recently opened, rather special and prestigious location: the Amsterdam football stadium, the ArenA (van Veen 2004:474-75). The location means that Sensation differs fundamentally from Innerness. Although, on the one hand, Innerness is one big event (something its organizers – again 1D & T – attempt to stress by dedicating every Innerness edition to a covering theme or 'slogan'), the concept is constructed around the idea of offering a variety of experiences to choose from. Sensation, on the other hand, takes place in one, single, large space, a covered stadium; Innerness is the Fair, Sensation is the Cathedral. The construction of the Sensation experience is therefore rather different. The music, for instance, must be accessible for forty thousand people for an entire night, and therefore cannot but be mainstream (mainly trance). In addition, the stadium enables, and asks, the public to choose between two options. One may either take an 'audience' position on the stands to watch the crowd dancing on the floor laid out on the football pitch, or one may join the crowd below as a performer. In the course of the night – Sensation lasts from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. – people switch continually between the two modalities.

It was the introduction of the dress code 'white' that 'did it,' that made Sensation the unsurpassed dance sensation. The success was unintended, since the organizers had not really foreseen the effect. A closer look at the dress code, its effects and its origins might bring us further in understanding both the idea of 'dance as a way of being in the world' and the dance
event as a particular format of ‘tuning’ people’s states of consciousness (see Verrips 2005:32).

The idea of the dress code ‘white’ actually comes from a rather unexpected origin: the organizers initially meant it as a tribute to the younger brother of one of the ID&T founders, who had died almost a year earlier in a car accident at the age of twenty-five. This brother (Miles) had been a well-known figure in the dance world, in particular as the man behind the ID&T hardcore parties. In accordance with his wishes – the then ID&T website invited ‘everybody’ to attend the funeral with the text: ‘Miles likes white and happy!’ [sic] – the funeral dress code was ‘white.’ At a later stage, the dress code white for Sensation 2001 was decided as an extra tribute to Miles (see van Veen 2004:179-187). Hence, the tickets for the second edition in 2001 invited the audience to dress in white with the slogan ‘be part of the night, dress in white.’ As it turned out, most of the public complied with the request. The ‘enchanting’ effect of tens of thousands of people dancing in white was so strong that the organization not only decided to maintain the code, but also to make it compulsory.15

UNITED IN WHITE

In the June 2005 issue of Release, ID&T’s monthly magazine, a Sensation White visitor is quoted saying:

Sensation White is the event I look forward to for months. I don’t go there for the DJs, but to be part of that vast white crowd, because of the fantastic show and because of the feeling the party gives you. On the trip to Amsterdam it has already started. The closer one gets to the Arena, the more white there is on the road. It’s cool to see all these people in white at the petrol stations (my translation, 16).

The excitement of this Sensation White enthusiast on his way to the party is comparable to what the Funmates experience. Mark: ‘joining that growing stream of people in white, knowing that you’re all heading to the same event: that gives you a thrill.’ Rob: ‘The party actually starts when we gather at Daan’s, for a drink, and then go to the ArenA together. It’s a fantastic sight, all these people in white. It’s really impressive; in the train, at the petrol stations, all those people in white.’16

To return to the idea of dance events as temporary emotional communities, Sensation White has evidently an added value to offer: the sociality to be formed already exists prior to the eventual event and far beyond its actual venue; another unforeseen effect of the dress code that adds to the total experience that Sensation White promises. Once all the trains, cars and buses have delivered their passengers, the excitement builds up further when one joins the white crowd gathering at the entrances. Even ‘going there’ and ‘arriving there’ have become events of their own, a dimension also intrinsic to religious rituals as pilgrimage – associations with, for instance, the Haj seem inevitable – and other kinds of secular mass gather-
ings such as protests or important sport events. In his writings on pilgrimage, Victor Turner describes this aspect of awareness of affectionate interconnectedness or 'communitas' in pilgrimages as a characteristic of 'both the journey, and the goal (the latter is in itself a source of communitas)' (Turner and Turner 1978:253). It is not my intention here to romanticize or over-simplify the communitas experience as the momentary breakdown of all social differentiation and hierarchy. It is my aim to highlight the importance that people attach to the experience of 'flow' that this being-together evokes (Turner 1982:48). The colour white, a religious symbol in many societies, enforces this sensation of interconnectedness. White signifies purity, and its 'modesty' - simplicity of dress is intrinsic to pilgrimage - adds to the sense of unity (Turner and Turner 1978:253-54).

These significant parallels between 'the working' of an occasion like Sensation White and that of a pilgrimage invites us to pursue the comparison a little further. One other aspect that Sensation White and pilgrimage share is that people have voluntarily chosen to participate. Voluntariness distinguishes both pursuits fundamentally from activities or rituals in which people are obliged to participate:

Optation pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal. One is all play and choice, and entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory ... (Turner 1982:43).

Thus, although pilgrimage shares some of the liminal phase attributes of passage rites, such as, for instance 'communitas,' it is basically a liminoid (quasiliminal) phenomenon in the sphere of leisure. Turner and Turner proceed by arguing that the opposition between voluntary and obligatory participation actually characterizes post-industrial society as a whole: Our time and activities are determined by the strict division between the obligatory condition of work and the voluntary condition of leisure. In such societies

... religion generally has been moved into the leisure sphere, more and more subject to individual option (a person's free time is his to do as he likes with). Even weekly attendance at religious service is becoming increasingly voluntary; failure to attend no longer a sin (Turner and Turner 1978:35).

Engaging in religion or religious practices has thus become more or less similar to, for example, people's engagement in sports, hobbies or tourism. An event like Sensation White, however, almost seems to hint at a reverse process, namely, to paraphrase Turner, to 'leisure moving into the religious sphere.' Although Sensation White definitely belongs to the sphere of leisure, people seem also to seek and undergo experiences that might be described as religious. Uninformed spectators watching the event might even believe themselves to be watching a religious ceremony of a certain cult. Meyer's recent argument that, what she calls, 'sensational forms' are essential for understanding the existence of religious feelings is also relevant for our topic of discussion. In Meyer's words: 'religious feelings are not just there, but are made possible and reproducible by certain modes of inducing experiences of the transcendental' (2006:8). 'Sensation,' she adds, 'has a double meaning: feeling and the inducement of a particular kind of excitement. This inducement is brought about by what I would like to call sensational forms that make the transcendental sense-able' (ibid., italics in original). The form, thus, is crucial to the experience itself. We may say that Sensation is a well-chosen name: the Sensation format is a sensational form.

Knowing the expectations of the crowd that arrives fired-up at the stadium, it is now time to 'enter' the space itself and to see how Sensation White fulfils its promises. I will return to the Funmates once more. What exactly are their expectations, how do they express themselves?

Mark: 'Nothing is comparable to Sensation White, it's just ... how can I say it, the atmosphere... especially that moment when you have just arrived... it's a total experience.'

Rob: '... and then, we enter into the stadium. In fact, the most impressive moment is when you have reached the upper stairs and have your first glance inside: far away you see all those people standing there, in white. The lasers... the splendid decorations. In addition to all this, white has something special of its own, I like the colour. And then, once the spinning has started, and the music is about to climax, and everyone gets out of their mind: that's fantastic, a real high point. The lights and lasers also have a very nice effect on all that white. Actually, it is as the trailer shows ... that's how it really is. The music, the colour white, the atmos-
No other structure can be conceived that is better fitted to contain a fully inwardly oriented crowd than an arena. Perhaps, moreover, no one describes the relationship between an arena and the crowd within better than Elias Canetti in his book *Crowds and Power*:

Outside, facing the city, the arena displays a lifeless wall; inside is a wall of people. The spectators turn their backs to the city [...] they have left behind all their associations, rules and habits. Their remaining together in large numbers for a stated period of time is secure and their excitement has been promised to them. But only under one definite condition; the discharge must take place *inside the arena* (1962:31, italics in original).

Canetti then continues with a description of how the arena channels the experience of the crowd:

The seats are arranged in tiers around the arena, so that everyone can see what is happening below. The consequence of this is that the crowd is seated opposite itself. Every spectator has a thousand in front of him, a thousand heads. As long as he is there all the others are there too; whatever excites him, excites them; and he sees it. They are seated some distance away from him, so that the differentiating details which make individuals of them are blurred; they all look alike and they all behave in a similar manner and he notices in them only the things which he himself is full of. Their visible excitement increases his own.

There is no break in the crowd which sits like this, exhibiting itself to itself (ibid.).

A closer look at Sensation White requires taking this analysis a step further. Unlike Canetti’s sitting spectators of the sport events and concerts usually taking place in the ArenA, there is no differentiation between performers and audience. When it is watching the performance on the field, the watching crowd is still watching itself, and remains in a sense undifferentiated from that moving whole below. Within this unity, one place and one figure attract special attention of the public, however: the DJ in his or her temple-like structure on a high platform in the centre of the field, and displayed on the giant screens all around the stadium. The DJ steers the
collective moving body without being absorbed into it. Unlike any other participant in the event, the DJ is connected to the others via a medium: music. The music is a shared language, as it is said in the dance world, but the DJ speaks and the dancers answer with their bodies.

MAKING SENSE?

During my fieldwork at Sensation White 2005, reality proved to be more disorderly than the above considerations suggest: diversity remains within the apparent unity. I was surprised to learn how often people 'step out' from the unifying processes to engage in personal relationships and concerns. All the time, everywhere, people were exchanging text messages with friends somewhere in the crowd and outside the stadium. To give a concrete example, three people I met in the entrance queue, and who had invited me to join them, had planned to meet some friends at a point decided in advance. The situation (twenty to thirty – maybe even forty – thousand people on a dance floor is beyond imagination) meant, however, that we never met in spite of their continuous text message contact. On our way, of course, we met numerous other chains of friends, passing by on their respective 'quests.' For me, the 'quests' through this endless 'sea' of people in white were a dreamlike experience that gave the whole event a timeless, other-worldly dimension, as if I had become part of someone else's story or had stepped into a bizarre science fiction scene.

These observations evoke the question as to what extent single individuals are actually united in such crowds. Or is the sociality of the dance event rather built upon the continuous interacting of groups of people, irrespective of whether such groups are spatially together or fragmented all over the place? For me, sensations of togetherness alternated with feelings of being 'drowned' or lost, mainly depending on the momentary experience of synergy of the music and the bodily response of my direct environment. My experiences, though, are those of the uninformed and may therefore differ significantly from those of the connoisseur.

The statement 'dance is my way of life' implies that, at least for someone who says so, the way one spends one's leisure time is the basis of one's self-perceived identity, rather than the formal side of one's societal existence. Given the nature of most work today, this may point to a primacy of the sensorial in the construction of identity. Our rationalized working and education conditions demand, apparently, a shift of the full sensorial side of our lives to the realm of leisure. The study of leisure, therefore, requires anthropologists to respond to Verrips's call for a renewed appreciation of bodily experiences as a source of knowledge and to include in their research tools senses other than hearing and sight.

NOTES

1 This chapter is an elaboration on a paper presented at the Leisure Studies Association Conference July 6-8, 2005, Festivals and Events: Beyond Economic Impacts, Edinburgh. I want to thank Jeroen Beets for his useful comments.

2 In this respect my approach differs radically from that of Simon Reynolds who, writing about rave culture, asks rhetorically whether the notion of 'rave culture' (which can be read as 'dance culture') is a contradiction in terms. Is it possible to base a culture around sensations rather than truths, fascination rather than meaning, jouissance rather than plaisir (1997:109). With this moral stance and narrow conception of 'culture' he entirely misses the point that dance (rave) culture is about people's everyday life, not to be reduced to a - hardly insightful notion of - 'hedonistic,' 'nihilistic' and 'escapist' intransitive decadancy ('the celebration of celebration') (ibid.:104).

3 For reasons of privacy, 'Funmates' is a fictitious name, as are the names of the individual Funmates. I am grateful also for their willingness to meet me in person, and for allowing me an inside view of the significance of dance in their lives.

4 The Amsterdam RAI consists of twenty-two halls with a total surface of 87,000 square metres and is never used in its totality for a single event. Innercity is usually organized in six to eight of the larger halls on the first floor.

5 At Innercity 2004, the most outstanding example of a 'themed' hall was 'Ex Porn Star.' Ex Porn Star is a dance party format which also exists independently from events like Innercity, and aims at people who, as the Ex Porn Star website announces 'like to dress up and act famous,' and which 'is all about suggestion with a big lean to porn and bad taste.' Quoted from www.expornstar.com (accessed March 2007).

6 Due to disappointing ticket sales in 2004, the organizers have abandoned the concept of exotic themes for the connecting slogan 'music is the answer.'
Each hall is now 'themed' in a colour, which, of course, has its own sensual effects.

The Lucky Number 7 Casino, referring to that year’s event being the ‘lucky number seven edition’ of Innercity. The hall was advertised with the text: 'Inside the Lucky Number 7 Casino you will feel a winner all night long. Poker, Black Jack, Slot Machines and Roulette all available.'

There was a clear discrepancy between women and men. Relatively, many more women had dressed up. Of the men, most looked very similar: aged eighteen to early twenties, T-shirt, jeans, short haircut.

The ID&T website describes the Innercity 2005 experience as follows: 'Innercity 2005 promises to be a true melting pot of everything the frontline of the international dance community has to offer, in an intimate atmosphere. Expect new and cutting edge sounds in a wide variety of electronic dance styles, from techno, minimal, electro and nu [new] acid to house, hip hop, breaks and urban eclectic.' Quoted from www.id-t.com (accessed March 2007).

Unless indicated otherwise, all information refers to the Fundmates' personal circumstances of 2005.

In 2006 they went to Portugal.

This year’s sale (2007), starting on Saturday March 10 at 10 a.m., was also sold out within two hours. See www.id-t.com (accessed March 2007).

Queen’s Day (April 30) is a Dutch national holiday, officially celebrating the Queen’s birthday (which actually is on January 31), but mainly an opportunity to party on the streets and to engage in all kinds of playful activities and performances, in Amsterdam in particular. Flea markets and fairs are another important dimension throughout the country.

In the week of his death in many discos and clubs a commemorative minute of silence was held. On the website in commemoration of Miles (www.milesstutterheim.nl) one is welcomed with the track that he designed in the weeks before he died. Apparently, many people in the dance scene felt connected with Miles, ID&T and its parties. This initial emotional connection helps us to understand the immediate success of the dress code. Although Miles Stutterheim died more than six years ago, the website is still visited regularly, prompting people to leave messages like: 'Miles... I do not know you personally, but I do know many people who know you! From the stories I know how special you are! Every Sensation makes me shiver all over at my first step into the Arena (…)' (February 28, 2007) (accessed March 2007).

Inspired by the Sensation White success, ID&T introduced Sensation Black one year later. The Sensation Black style is louder and rough ('hard style'), representing a 'dark' experience of dance. In my opinion the introduction of a theme for Innercity (Lenin in 2002; dress code red/yellow) was also inspired by the Sensation White effect. Another commercial spin-off of the Sensation White success is the Sensation White Tour. Sensation White now has become an export product, and is reproduced annually in Belgium, Germany, Poland, Portugal and the Czech Republic.

In fact, my own interest in Sensation was triggered when I, still unaware of the event's existence, suddenly found myself in a train boarded by increasing numbers of people dressed in white at every station, all clearly heading to the same joyful event.

REFERENCES


