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# Reviews

***DIY House Shows and Music Venues in the US. Ethnographic Explorations of Place and Community*. By David Verbuč. New York, Routledge, 2022, 282 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-04917-5**

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Little is left unwritten about the hyper influential pop cultural machinery that is the US West Coast. From the Whiskey a Go Go in West Hollywood to the Paramount Theatre in Seattle, the extolment of a few US music venues with regard to the history of popular music has been rehashed and reiterated countless times, ultimately elevating them to their prevailing larger than life status. Across the pond, a recently Disney-produced documentary about Abbey Road Studios in London titled *If These Walls Could Sing* (McCartney 2022) takes the same line: a catchy, yet blatant misattribution of cultural relevance. After all, walls don't sing by themselves but only through the people housed inside them, so that the significance of music emerges at the intersection of place, space and community. David Verbuč's book *DIY House Shows and Music Venues in the US* skilfully demonstrates in this regard that novel and insightful writing about US West Coast music is feasible if one dares to stay off the beaten path.

Verbuč explores the cultural significance of house shows for do-it-yourself (DIY) music scenes that takes shape through grassroots appropriations of suburban domestic spaces such as living and bedrooms as well as kitchens, backyards and basements for concerts (p. 39 and following). In particular, the book traces how the use of private spaces for live music creates a shared intimacy between musicians and audiences that is unreproducible in the sterile and gaudy surroundings of professional music locales. Structurally, this exploration of intimacy transpires through the interplay of 'physical place (architecture, design), geographical place (local, translocal) and social space (spatial policies)' as well as 'physical matter, political–economic material forces, and everyday material social interactions (interlinked with ideology and discourse)' (p. 3). Essential for Verbuč's assessment of intimacy are the public and private dimensions of DIY house projects or their 'private/public vibe' (p. 91) that embodies the rejection of liberalist performativity expectations within late capitalism in favour of forming 'counterpublic site[s] of politics' (p. 92) that momentarily host 'inclusive subversion[s] of normative privateness' as forms of 'counterprivateness' (p. 97). Within DIY house projects where people are 'living publicly' (p. 95) in 'a living room of the city' (p. 93), at least according to the communal ethics of an 'open door policy' (p. 93) for likeminded individuals and travelling artists, the synergy of the domestic dwelling spaces' material agency and people's bodies actively expresses affective social intimacies through quieter 'mingling' or kinetic dances like moshing (p. 94). As the title reveals, the book primarily discusses these aspects within the realm of DIY music scenes that conflate genres such as punk, folk, noise and experimental music. It is laudable that Verbuč abstains from using DIY as a prefab socio-political buzzword, and critically contextualizes it within an ongoing academic, artistic and activist discourse by discussing its systematic



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extensions through 'DIT ('doing-it-together')' and 'DIA or do-it-anyplace' (p. 8) in reference to Jeffrey Debies-Carl (2014), Erik Hannerz (2015) and Michael Azzerad (2001). Also, his use of music community and scene concepts, that he contextualises based on Mark Olson's (1998) critique of Will Straw (1991) as 'two extremes on a larger continuum of aim-directed sociability' (p. 180). offers a refreshing opportunity for reconsidering these concepts. His equation of scenes displaying 'weak affective ties and strong spatial component[s]' (p. 180), and communities having 'strong affective ties and [a] weak spatial component' (p. 180), however, appears confining rather than facilitating in this context. Likewise, the incorporation of social media and music platforms like *Bandcamp* shaping what Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (2004) have framed as virtual music scenes, aptly discussed in other chapters in reference to gig promotion and activist organisation, would have been helpful to further illuminate the structural potential of both music scenes and communities.

Verbuč's book is partitioned into three sections that expand the analytical scope from local to translocal music scene dynamics: after an introduction that presents the theoretical and methodological scope of the study's emphasis on place, space and material agency, part I introduces the microlevel constituents of physical place and its interrelation with 'socio-spacial tactics' (p. 64) that, through material alteration, create housing structures featuring, for example, fusions of music, sleeping and laundry facilities (p. 46), as well as DIY door, curation and safer space policies (pp. 72–83). Part II contextualises these relationships through a meso-level exploration of DIY music scenes, sequentially expanding the perspective from the small college towns of Davis, CA and Olympia, WA via the mid-sized cities Portland, OR and Oakland, CA to the urban sprawl of Los Angeles. Part III presents a hybrid of spatial considerations by discussing the local communal structures of DIY music scenes through the lens of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) assemblage theory in the first half, and the 'dialectics' (p. 213) of DIY touring in the second.

This structure appropriately demonstrates the multi-layered dimensions of the interplay between domestic urban space, DIY practice and communal cohesion. That being said, I do not share Verbuč's view that DIY house shows in the US are per se unique owing to their being 'not only distinct from other music scenes, but also from any other types of house concert scenes' (p. 37). This is because the material and socio-spatial structures of US DIY house shows demonstrate significant imbrications with their contemporaries in countries that feature similar suburban configurations based on colonial Anglo-European settlement, as in so-called Canada, Australia and Aoteroa/New Zealand. Although Verbuč's project places a well-balanced focus on variously sized areas of the US West Coast, the book would have profited from engaging in greater detail with the 'translocal forces' (p. 69) and international connections of music scenes touched on in Chapter 8, especially when considering that phenomena such as *OP* magazine in Olympia have historically demonstrated that local grassroots practice was highly influential in fostering international gigging and creative exchange of DIY musicians.

My critique, however, does not imply that Verbuč one-sidedly champions US DIY house shows as the epitome of communal music practice, but critically illustrates how DIY venues always operate under the risk of recreating the very same socio-spatial dynamics they reject by becoming '"distorted" and "damaged" semi-private alternative worlds' that display contradictory tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity as well as 'homogenous and heterogenous sociability' (p. 104) and fragmentation (p. 152 and following). This entails a necessary critical assessment of how DIY

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music venues navigate, contest and transgress the intersectionality of white, male heterosexual dominance in physical places and social spaces (see p. 97). Furthermore, Verbuč covers the intersectional disparity of DIY houses as largely white 'bohemian communities' associated with the gentrification of the low-income and ethnic-minority neighbourhoods they are located in. To offset or even subvert the structural damages of gentrification and segregating policies, some of the DIY house projects featured in this book organise benefit concerts directly aimed at supporting their local neighbourhood community. Considering that most of Verbuč's data stems from the early 2010s and that the value of DIY house projects' value for music scenes is partially shaped through their social and structural fragility, there is a hint of nostalgia woven into the book's narrative which leaves me wondering what the former residents of Glitterdome house, Grandmaz house or Robot Rocket Residence house are up to now, and how the new generation is carrying on the torch.

Verbuč has written an insightful and timely book that excellently counterpoints the insider's view from a borrowed sleeping bag on a sticky carpet with analytical considerations on the significance of place, space and material agency for DIY music practice. Readers intrigued by the project and Verbuč's dedication to extensive fieldwork can explore more on the topic in his interview with Jessica Schwartz featured on *The Punkast* (2022).

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***How Hip Hop Became Hit Pop*. By Amy Coddington. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2023. 226 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-38392-0**
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For those of us who teach US rap music history, its first few decades are often characterised by a slow but steady mainstreaming of the genre through various media formats. However, as Amy Coddington's new book teaches us, a moment like 'Walk this Way', the oft-touted rock-rap crossover track by Run-DMC and

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