

Sean Leneghan, *The Varieties of Ecstasy Experience: An Exploration of Person, Mind and Body in Sydney's Club Culture* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011)

Lambert Academic Publishing (LAP) is a subsidiary of VDM Verlag, a German publisher with an opaque relation to Amazon. I periodically look up my own dissertation topic on Google Books, and a few years ago one search in particular returned twice the number of titles than I had previously ever received. I found that the new titles were Wikipedia articles “published” by an imprint of VDM; VDM will send you a copy of Wikipedia entries in print for a fee. There is nothing illegal about this, but it is perplexing. When doing literature reviews, naïve researchers will order from VDM to be thorough, not realizing that the “books” are available for free online and may be of negligible academic worth. VDM specializes in cannibalizing the academic publishing process, and LAP is a manifestation of a strategy intended to exploit a weakness of this process.

LAP will send a recent B.A., M.A. or Ph.D. recipient an email saying that the company is interested in publishing his or her work, a dream come true for a novice academic. The resulting “book” is published on-demand, meaning that a copy is created and shipped only on request. LAP receives the publishing rights to the book without the upfront costs, and the aspiring academic, presumably on the job market or looking at graduate school, gets a precious book publication line on his or her C.V. If someone orders the book—and the fact that the title gets an ISBN and will therefore appear in literature review searches ensures that there will be at least a few orders—LAP prints a copy and collects a fee, and the author gets a royalty cheque. Everyone is happy. The problem is that LAP neither reviews nor edits its titles, and publishes regardless of quality. The result is that the assurances that once came with publication collapse, and the academic book market becomes flooded with all sorts of texts. Apart from it being an integral part of an academic's résumé, publishing could become meaningless.

LAP, VDM and publishers with similar business models defend themselves by saying that they provide a valuable archiving service. Wikipedia articles are fluid things, which are thermometers of the contemporary understanding of a topic. If a researcher wants to know what was thought about a topic, let's say George W. Bush, at a particular time, let's say between 911 and the invasion of Iraq, then VDM's articles would be useful. And with LAP, their titles have been approved by thesis advisory committees, which were ostensibly to have

Sean Leneghan, *The Varieties of Ecstasy Experience: An Exploration of Person, Mind and Body in Sydney's Club Culture* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011)

ensured that the work constituted a genuine contribution to an academic field and that the writing met high standards. LAP saves these contributions from being lost forever. If the thesis is not worth publishing, then why was it approved?

While LAP offers a clever dare to academia (admit that you pass garbage, and we'll admit that we publish it), and while what they do is legal, their business model is questionable. At bottom they are vanity press looking to profit by taking advantage of the naïve and desperate.

The reason I looked at LAP while preparing to review of *The Varieties of Ecstasy Experience* is that my initial reaction to the book was concern that it was able to earn its author a doctorate, let alone to be published by an "academic" press.

The methodological claim of the author is that those who reduce ecstasy to a chemical and the effects it has on the brain miss an essential aspect of the drug, which is the experience of those who use it. The experience is an intentional object constituted by a group, so only interviews with a variety of users could convey a sense of the drug's meaning. Unfortunately, this is where methodology ends.

The interviews are almost exclusively conducted with the author's fellow graduate students and friends, and rather than a rigorous account of the ecstasy experience, what is given is weekend partying stories loosely organized into a narrative running from entry to the rave scene to exit owing to boredom. On the back sleeve, this is called a "processual morphology." The conclusion is that ecstasy use in Sydney, Australia is about "narcissistic hedonism" (215). In other words, the author and his mates went to raves and got "fucked" (a

Sean Leneghan, *The Varieties of Ecstasy Experience: An Exploration of Person, Mind and Body in Sydney's Club Culture* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011)

definition of “fucked” is kindly provided in the book’s glossary) on ecstasy on weekends to get their rocks off. Eventually they became bored with it and stopped. Here’s an excerpt to give a sense of the typical interview:

I know that when the feeling does come on, it is an instant reaction; like if anyone has ever spewed off pills, like you don’t go “Oh, I think I’m going to spewarrr...”-it just comes out. Pills are more like projectile vomit. It’s like ARRRGRR. A tiny little bit of spew as well, it’s frothy and disgusting. Like I always plan for it and I never ever, spew on fucking anyone or, or I don’t spew in fucking sinks, or on the dance floor. (126) [I checked and there are no glossary entries for “spewarrr” and “ARRRGRR”.]

It’s true that there is more to drug use than chemical effects on brains and that a serious phenomenological study of the ecstasy experience is needed, but I recommend sticking with physicalist accounts if you’re after an understanding of ecstasy use, rather than pay \$112 for 200 pages of that. Frankly, no amount of phenomenology jargon could make the six-degrees-of-separation association made by Leneghan with his work and Husserl’s (31) anything but delusional.

The backdoor to a Ph.D. is wide-open somewhere in Sydney, which is an unfortunate situation that “innovative” publishing companies like LAP now exist to exploit.

Share this:

- [Share](#)