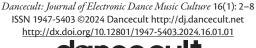# Introduction to "Spaces of Dancing"

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With the dance floor at its core, spaces of dancing are integral to electronic music and dance culture (EMDC). On a micro level, these are unique social and sonic spaces, produced through music, bodies and an array of sensory and chemical technologies. Zooming out, dance floors are embedded within the architectures of nightlife venues, including nightclubs, informal rave spaces and an expanding range of spatial and temporal types. These architectures are entangled in wider dynamics of urban (and rural) space, in which conflicts over noise, disorder and cultural value impact the production of nightlife scenes. Spaces of dancing are also increasingly mediated by digital technologies, which blur distinctions between online and offline space.

This special issue of *Dancecult* considers spaces of dancing across these multiple, overlapping scales. It draws on a range of approaches to issues of space in EMDC, inviting readers to think about the ways in which different spatial dimensions shape and inform one another. As such, this issue comprises wide-lens analyses of urban nightlife and digital ethnographies, as well as more poetic explorations of spaces of dancing. Taken together, they demonstrate not only how spaces of dancing need to be understood within wider physical and online geographies, but also how such geographies may be enriched when placed in dialogue with the social and aesthetic textures of the dance floor. I hope for this special issue to participate in an ongoing conversation involving not only EMDC and nightlife scholars, but also architects, urban planners, promoters, DJs and nightlife activists, as well as the partygoers without whom spaces of dancing would cease to exist. Before presenting the contributions that make up this special issue, I will first introduce some of the key themes that inform spatial approaches to EMDC.

Much of EMDC studies has sought to understand the unique social space of the dance floor. This has ranged from the study of spatio-temporal, bodily and emotional practices (Malbon 1999); to the pursuit of the ever-enigmatic "vibe" (St John 2008); as well as the varieties of "stranger intimacy" that characterise many dance floor socialities (Garcia 2023). Spaces of dancing have the potential to reimagine normative modes of interaction and belonging along lines of gender (Pini 2001), sexuality (Buckland 2002) and race (Melville

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2020), but at the same time, the utopian discourses that frame many spaces of dancing conceal their reproduction of exclusions and inequalities (Saldanha 2007). In recent years, many EMDC communities have distanced themselves from vaguer promises of togetherness, focussing on more specific questions of identity, access and safety, situated within explicit political framings and activisms. Though rarely acknowledged, spaces of dancing are also spaces of labour, produced by an often invisible and precarious workforce (Rennela 2021; Prashar-Savoie 2023).

Another approach to issues of space in EMDC is to focus on the material architectures of nightclubs and other spaces of dancing (Rossi and Eisenbrand 2018; Rietveld 2022; Gillen 2023). The physical spaces of EMDC are typically divided into the formal and informal venues of club and rave culture. Nightclubs generally follow a purpose-built design directed toward music, social dancing and multisensory experience. They can function as infrastructure for the emergence of genres, scenes and communities, as well as the spatial nodes through which EMDC is entangled within the lucrative yet highly regulated structures of the night-time economy. No less important are the temporary spaces of rave and free-party culture, which repurpose locations including disused office blocks, urban brownfield sites and farmland on an informal and often illegal basis. Definitions of informal nightlife spaces can also be expanded to include the spectrum of transitory and domestic spaces that form part of many nights out. Such spaces have particular significance for queer communities, who have historically been excluded from many formal nightlife spaces (Adeyemi et al. 2021).

Beyond the more traditional infrastructures of club and rave culture, recent years have witnessed transformations to spaces of dancing, as demonstrated by the proliferation of electronic dance music festivals (St John 2017) and audiophile and listening bars, meanwhile use venues (Kolioulis 2018) and other iterations of temporary urbanism in nightlife (Assiter 2024). To this growing list of emergent spatial and temporal types we can also add art galleries, museums and other institutional spaces, which increasingly host electronic dance music as part of late events, exhibitions and other hybrid cultural forms. These emergent spaces of dancing draw attention to reinscribed processes of commercialisation, institutionalisation and gentrification, while simultaneously affording—as Magdalena Fuernkranz's contribution to this issue demonstrates—the possibility of new social and aesthetic formations.

Spaces of dancing need also be situated within wider dynamics of urban space, and a growing body of literature is exploring how EMDC and nightlife relate to the production of cities (Nofre and Eldridge 2018; Stahl and Bottà 2019; Darchen et al. 2021). Recent decades have witnessed the closure of nightlife venues across a range of urban contexts—including Dublin, as Caroline O'Sullivan explores in this issue. Financialised property markets, restrictive licensing legislation and the compounding effects of COVID-19 have contributed to conditions of intensifying spatial precarity, with disproportionate impacts on venues serving BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and working-class communities (Oloukoï 2018; Campkin 2023). Where nightclubs are often positioned as the passive victims of urban displacement, it is imperative to note the ways in which gentrification works both "with

and against nightlife" (Hae 2012: 8). Such dynamics are shaped further by new modes of nocturnal governance, as well as nightlife industry bodies, grassroots campaigns and calls to democratise the night (Kolioulis et al. 2021). On a wider geographic scale, spaces of dancing are entangled with the flows of the creative and tourism industries, and they play an increasing role in neoliberal city branding metrics.

As with other popular music cultures, the physical geographies of EMDC exist in ever-closer relation with the mediations of online space (Baym 2018; Jones 2021). As Ivan Mouraviev argues in this special issue, EMDC's digital and physical spaces are perhaps best conceived together, as part of an "online-offline geography". During the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, EMDC communities used digital media to reimagine the co-present intimacies of spaces of dancing (Vandenburg et al. 2020). Though exceptional, these circumstances accelerated the longer-term ascendance of livestreaming in EMDC, as popularised and standardised by platforms including Boiler Room (Heuguet 2016). In conjunction with social media platforms, livestreaming has the capacity to fragment and repackage dance music events as content, with short video clips of DJs forming a key currency in economies of promotion, distribution and attention. Online mediations also shape stylistic developments (Haworth and Born 2022), as demonstrated by the emergence of so-called "TikTok techno". Where social media is often criticised for recentring the visual in EMDC, it simultaneously makes space for additional expressions of identity through fashion, dance or the simple presence of bodies on screen. Digital technologies can also widen access to electronic dance music events, presenting opportunities to expand the imagined communities and modes of interaction that comprise EMDC. Though contemporary online spaces raise new social, cultural and aesthetic questions, they must also be situated within a longer history of EMDC's technological remediation, including London's jungle pirate radio stations of the 1990s (James 2020), or the "SFRaves" mailing list that networked the emergence of the West Coast US rave scene (Matos 2015).

Spaces of dancing might also be discussed in terms of acoustics and sonic space, more abstract notions of discursive space or questions of temporality including the distinctions between day and night-time spaces, as well as the rhythmic distribution of EMDC events. Crucially, this special issue seeks to stimulate discussion as to how spaces of dancing are formed at the intersection of multiple spatial dimensions. As Lefebvre (1991) famously argued, space is not simply an empty container or context—it is an evolving social production. This reveals how spaces of dancing are shaped by prevailing spatial, economic and political forces, but also how new spatial forms have the potential to initiate new social relations. How, for example, do notions of safe(r) space relate to the physical, sonic and digital architectures of spaces of dancing? How do planning and licensing regulations impact what spaces of dancing are possible in different urban contexts, and to which communities they are accessible? What is the relationship between EMDC's online and offline spaces of dancing, and what hybrid spatial forms may be afforded by the development of VR and AI technologies? Given the ongoing transformation of urban and online space, how do we imagine future spaces of dancing, and how can we work to make them more inclusive, equitable and joyful?

Summary of Content

In "The Steady Decline of Club Culture in Dublin: Neoliberal Policy, Touristification and the Pandemic", Caroline O'Sullivan examines the loss and transformation of Dublin's nightlife spaces in contexts of urban, economic and regulatory pressure. Where Dublin's nightclubs were impacted heavily by Ireland's lengthy COVID-19 lockdowns, O'Sullivan argues that the pandemic intensified the longer-term precarity of the city's club culture, which had been in decline since the early 2000s. Along with Ireland's historically restrictive licensing legislation, O'Sullivan attributes this decline primarily to the recent neoliberal expansion of Dublin's tech and tourism sectors. Such changes have led to the direct displacement of nightclubs by hotels, as well as broader disruptions to the city's housing market and cultural infrastructures that are vital to sustain music and nightlife scenes. Where all of this might determine an overly pessimistic outlook for the future of Dublin's club culture, O'Sullivan emphasises that the pandemic also served as the catalyst for the emergence of activist projects including "Clubbing is Culture", "Give Us the Night" and "Temporary Pleasure", which campaign through various means for novel and sustainable approaches to nightlife.

Magdalena Fuernkranz's article, "Being a DJ is My Form of Resistance": The Dance Floor as a Safer Space for Queer-Feminist Communities in Vienna", explores how four Viennese dance music collectives and event series produce spaces that challenge heteronormativity and centre the needs of FLINTA (female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender) communities. Building on the dance floor's potential as a site of (re)learning, Fuernkranz highlights the intersection of online and IRL strategies in producing spaces that blend nightlife with political activism. Fuernkranz also draws attention to novel collaborations between dance music communities and institutional spaces. Where such spaces often present architectural limitations for dance music events, she demonstrates how they provide alternate funding models, alongside institutional systems that can be deployed in the production of safer dance floors, oriented around an explicit politics of care.

In "Bass, Space, Place: The Mediation of London Dubstep Culture in an Online Discord Community", Ivan Mouraviev examines the online mediation of bass culture. Where the internet may appear incompatible with the material sonics and socialities of dubstep, Mouraviev situates an online Discord community, Real Heads, within a longer-term history of dubstep's online-offline geography. In this expanded spatial ecology, dubstep is constituted as much by pirate radio stations and internet forums as by record shops, nightclubs and in-person events. As Mouraviev demonstrates, the internet functions not only as an extension and reproduction of IRL performance, it plays an active role in shaping the development of DJ cultures and practices more broadly. Where such reappraisals might destabilise mythologised conceptions of physicality and felt vibration in dubstep and other iterations of bass culture, Mouraviev's article highlights the need for research on EMDC that takes seriously the diverse continuum of online and offline spaces of dancing.

The first half of the From The Floor section of this special issue considers global spaces of dancing in urban contexts. Ella Adu's "Reflections from the Frontlines of Grassroots Venue Design" offers an architect's perspective on producing more sustainable models for DIY nightlife spaces in London. In "Finding Shelter: Recollecting Shanghai's Underground Music Scene in the 2010s", Tianyu Jiang demonstrates the importance of oral testimonies in documenting the ephemeral legacies of a Shanghai nightclub. Phoebe Janssen's "Foraging Places and Spaces through Dance: The Mycelium-like Spaces of Post-1989 Berlin Affording its Ongoing Club Culture" explores how fungi may be used as a framework to understand the spatial and temporal distribution of Berlin's nightclubs. Natalia Figueredo's contribution, "Passinho Chronicles: Unveiling Urban Narratives Through Dance", turns to Brazilian funk, examining the role of dance in remapping the racialised geographies of the favela.

The remaining From The Floor contributions adopt more varied approaches to space. In her article "An Old School Stomper: Reflections on Place, Identity, and Drugs in the UK Hard House Scene and the Fluctuating Roles and Experiences of the Participating Ethnographer", Sarah Raine considers hard house events as contested spaces of memory, chemical mediation and ethnography. Daniella Antoinette Hidalgo's "Platformization and its Ongoing Impact on Dance Music Spaces" reflects on the role of online space in shaping EMDC within structures of platform capitalism. In "Reparative Raving", Emily Murphy offers a moving account of rave as a space of affect and queer grief. To round off the section, Ruth Hughes' multimedia piece, "Windows on the Dancefloor", contemplates the window as a portal between the internal and external spaces of the dance floor.

I would like to offer a heartfelt thanks to all the authors who contributed to this special issue, as well as to the peer reviewers and editorial team at *Dancecult* for all their hard work behind the scenes. A special thanks is also due to Executive Editor Graham St John, for trusting me with this special issue, and for all his patience and advice in guiding me through the process. I hope to share spaces of dancing with all of you some day.

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