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GUEST EDITORS TRACE REDDELL AND GRAHAM ST JOHN
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COVER: DISCO BALL IN SUBHARMONIC MYCELIAL SPACE.

ARTWORK BY TRACE REDDELL.

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This edition arrives hard on the heels of the first in-person Dancecult conference (DC23) which was held at, and with the support of, the Department of Music and Design Arts at the University of Huddersfield, 19-20 October 2023. The event convened 40 presenters from around the world speaking on a vast range of subjects broadly connected across the field of electronic music and dance culture. The final programme is available on the DRN website, and videos of presentations (including keynotes from Profs Trace Reddell and Alice O'Grady) will soon be available on Dancecult's YouTube channel. This event could not have been held without the support of many people. As DC23 Chair, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all participants and performers, and notably members of the DC23 organising committee, which, besides myself, included Anita Jóri, Dave Payling, Rupert Till and Botond Vitos, along with other volunteers, including PhD students Pierre Griscelli and Jake Mehew. DC23 pursued the vibe all the way to Sheffield for the afterparty where a busload of 20 delegates made their way to Jabbarwocky, where there were performances from Euan Pattie, Bot Cocktail, Matt Annis, Nicolas Bougaïeff and Lila Hart. As a networking event, DC23 was designed to encourage further Dancecult Research Network conferences and symposia organised by local committees in different locations worldwide. Given the success of DC23, there are great prospects for such future events.

In this 20th edition of *Dancecult*, I have the distinct pleasure of welcoming Anita Jóri to the team as Reviews Editor. The broad and fascinating range of book and event reviews Anita has compiled for this edition are listed in the Guest Editors' Introduction that follows. Also, over the past year, DRN Editorial Assistant James Cannon made a thorough update and overhaul of references listed on the Dancecult Research Network page. Thank you James! This is now a very significant up-to-date resource. To keep these lists updated, please remember to add relevant content and update your own biographical information under "People".

Finally, a matter that brings me no pleasure at all. On October 7, 2023, tragic events occurred in Israel, part of a series of coordinated attacks which have triggered a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Hamas-led massacre of attendees at the Supernova Sukkot Gathering (also known as the "Re'im music festival massacre"), a psychedelic trance festival celebrating "friends, love and infinite freedom", was among two dance parties that were affected in the region (at which approximately 400 people were either murdered or abducted). Words don't come easy, not least because these events took place within a savage mise-en-scène that has precipitated an unfolding disaster and a new low in Israeli-Palestinian relations. My comments below are limited to Nova, and reflect my humble vocation as a perennial

student of the vibe. In my recent talk at DC23, I was moved to reflect on the tragedy of Nova and beyond, for which words felt as inadequate as language long deployed in struggles to articulate the vibe, that secret sauce present across dance scenes, cultures and movements in the history of electronic music. The vibe is multi-sensorial, enigmatic, precarious. The closer one attends to it, the more invisible it seems to become. No vibe is the same, and yet all share a socio-sonic sensibility. In Israel, the vibe seems unrecognisable outside what *trancistim* (psytrance enthusiasts) know as *ha'matzav* ("the situation"). The vibe, however we come to define it (and that is not my intention here), was assailed in unprecedented ways at Nova, the lives of hundreds of partygoers violently cut short within the precincts of that realm with which many of us are intimate regardless of "the situation", or the style of music amplified.

As inadequate as my efforts were, at DC23 I reflected upon this dark hour of cascading violence and heartbreak through the refractive mechanism implicit to the rotary mirrored orb iconic to electronic music and dance cultures since the days of disco. The mirrorball may seem like an incongruous object of contemplation in this context, but let me draw my bow. The mirrorball, or as it is more often known, the "discoball", is among the most alluring yet elusive fetishes in modern history. A familiar object and a veritable enigma, the ball of a thousand mirrors has radiated beams of light across countless dance floors over the last century. Romantic accessory in ballrooms of the 1920s; queer fetish in underground clubs of the 1970s; and a prolific icon in the world of clubbing, raving and dance festivals into the present. With its many reflective mirrors, the discoball is both multifaceted and a singular unit. While enjoying a pervasive presence as a symbol of unity amid difference, the omnipresent mirrorball is also a perfectly fraught symbol of freedom.

Recently, independent research led me to the proposition that, if the mirrorball is a multifaceted mirror to life on the dance floor, the revolving mosaic of mirrors surely reflects loss, pain and suffering, as much as it does freedom, love and happiness. The mirrorball's omniscience, as such, is not a novel subject. It's metaphorical freight as an all-seeing-eye, as witness, a kind of universal camera, was a fictive novum scripted into Sydney Pollack's acclaimed drama *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Set during the Great Depression, the film depicts a grueling dance marathon that serves as an allegory for oppressive conditions faced notably by women and people of colour in the US, then and in the present (the film was released in 1969). A mirrorball is shown throughout the film occupying a commanding position above the goings-on in the dancehall. In a near final scene, the viewer ascends to a mirrorball perspective on suffering. This spectacular panoramic on tragedy—where the mirrorball grew indistinguishable from a surveillance dome—is remote from its otherwise iconic role as a rose-coloured reflector.

This motif of silent sentinel returned in the wake of a tragedy that unfolded on another dance floor fifty years after the production of *They Shoot Horses*. Phoenix Lindsay-Hall's ghostly galaxy of queer stars, "Never Stop Dancing"—installed at Victori + Mo's, Brooklyn, in the wake of the 2016 Pulse Nightclub Massacre in Orlando, Florida—is a remarkable testament to the versatility of the discoball. Representing each victim, the

work's forty-nine hanging sculptures—motionless discoballs of varying size and drop length coated with white porcelain—transformed animate glitterballs into sepulchral golf balls. What once sparkled with light now cast long shadows. Likened to a charm for an exiled (here, queer Latinx) community, a beacon of safe haven, a deflector of threats, the mirrorball was recruited as a witness to tragedy. That the discoball, long embraced as a captivating pleasure dome, continues to spin while mirroring an unprecedented hate crime is a shocking image.

This capacity for the mirrorball to serve as witness to events over which it appears to hold an imperious perspective assists my searching reflections on events for which no words can be adequate. In Israel, where psytrance is almost popular music, and where dance parties have long been operated in the context of regional tension, mirrored orbs strategically positioned above the dance floor may actually be surveillance domes. Discoballs might not have been endogenous to the topography of the (outdoor) dance floors at Nova. Still, it is not impossible to imagine the international enigmata of the vibe suspended over broken campsites, glittering in the morning sun, at once freedom fetish and vigilant orb. Finally, as a title, “Never Stop Dancing” seems more than apt in this context, prompting what feels to me like a true algorithm: light begets dance begets hope.

Graham St John (Executive Editor, *Dancecult*)

22 November 2023.