Dance Your Way Home: A Journey Through the Dancefloor

Emma Warren

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At the time of writing, in August 2025, London's Southbank Centre, which is arguably the epitome of UK "High Culture" is running a month-long summer programme of free events inspired by Emma Warren's book *Dance Your Way Home*. Depending upon one's perspective this can be seen as an act of "gallerification", in which folk/popular/working class cultures are recuperated into a canonical presentation within elitist institutions, or part of an evolving movement of genuine recognition of social dance as an inclusive expression of human joy. Either way, the Southbank's programme represents a hugely significant impact for a contemporary written word text.

Dance Your Way Home is not an academic treatise on the act of dancing, but a very accessible, and at times deeply personal autobiography outlining the vital importance of moving to music for oneself and for societies. Structured in three parts, the book is steeped in UK dancefloor history. In part one, Warren traces the initial foundations her dancing is built on. From domestic bopping to television music show *Top of the Pops*, to her Irish heritage and late seventies UK sound system cultures from whose roots blossomed much of what *Dancecult* examines. The second part highlights Warren's progression onto dancefloors from school discos, her underage clubbing in London, to her right-place, right-time at Manchester university in the early nineties. Through these back drops, the story of dance's cultural global explosion is set and illuminated with personal reminiscences, interviews with contemporary luminaries and scattered with explanations of academic studies from a breadth of disciplines which support the range of arguments Warren lays forth on dancing's importance.

Dancing is lovingly set, not as subservient to, or a side effect of music and musical styles, but as having its own primacy. Hence dancing threads its way throughout the book, in various locations and spaces, and in different social and racial cultures, functioning as cross-generational ever-presence in twentieth and twenty-first century eras.

The part memoir nature of the text acts as a constraint to the potential span of the subject matter. The book's focus on social dance as presented in the Global North, most specifically in the British Isles predominately in the last fifty years could be considered a limitation. However, in adopting this position, Warren recounts dance movement emergences with a lived experience sincerity. In telling her tales of house, techno, drum'n'bass, and later grime histories, she includes reference to so-called legendary UK clubs such as Shroom, the Hacienda, Phenomenon One and Plastic People, not because these were definitive, but because she danced there herself at those times. She clearly articulates the legacies of numerous less renowned but no less significant nights and venues from her past and recognises many other "nerve centres" (181) operating beyond those she attended, of having parallel prominence and vitality.

When the book does narrate histories that are not her own, Warren ensures she does so with care, placing these as part of a lineage her own dancing is scaffolded on. This is especially evident within the important chapters on the hitherto neglected spaces of the school disco and youth club, where so many British adolescents, to varying degrees, learnt how to dance. The latter aspect is expanded on in Warren's (2025) latest work, *Up the Youth Club*. Chapter Three's detailed account of strangling church repression of dancing in Ireland which contributed to an exodus of young women from the country, including her own grandmother; and eighties Chicago gymnasiums recounted through interviews in Chapter Seven are similarly approached with recognition that these are not Warren's direct experiences.

Like walking, dancing is presented throughout as a fundamentally human activity, if you dance, you are a dancer (33), and dancefloors are situated wherever we make them (307). In this sense the book stands alongside the equally brilliant but more historically comprehensive *Dancing in the Streets* by the late Barbara Ehrenreich (2006). In both books, social dance finds a voice celebrating non-specialist everyday dancing, joining the still surprisingly recent emergence of social dance texts within the dance academy. There is much resonance here with the historically situated concepts of dancing as community expression found in Malnig's (2009), and Dodds and Cook's (2013) collected works. What is fresh in *Dance Your Way Home* is the drawing of more personal connectivity between the performative club dancing, by crews and individuals in the eighties, to direct involvement in DJing, and promoting club nights such as A Guy Called Gerald's recollections of their professional dancing lessons and aspirations (225–26).

In the final part of the book, Warren herself participates in a studio dance class, with the academy setting transformed into a place of therapy as she becomes aware of her dyspraxia. The restorative and healing power of dancing is a recurrent theme throughout the text.

Warren employs a meticulously researched array of scientific study findings to describe everyday dance's benefits for physical and mental health. Another of the book's themes Warren is at pains to point out is that dancing is always historically situated, and many of the dance movements she has experienced have emerged as a response to specific, frequently harsh, social circumstances. She encapsulates this most succinctly in quoting the title of Alice Walker's (2013) collection, *Hard times Require Furious Dancing* (223). The sense of community and resilience in the face of repressions, that finds expression through collective everyday dancing and a sense of temporary belonging or embraced by what Mary Fogarty described as a sense of an alternative "family" (2015: 247), is at the core of *Dance Your Way Home*'s message and that we can all dance our own histories.

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Black Music in Britain in the 21st Century

Monique Charles (ed.) with Mary W. Gani

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Following her work on grime, cultural sociologist Monique Charles edits a collective volume that brings together researchers and practitioners to explore, from multiple approaches, Black music in Britain in the twenty-first century. With the editorial collaboration of Mary W. Gani (a lawyer specialising in the music industry), the book offers a panorama that combines academic papers, interviews, and visual essays. Published in the series "Liverpool Studies in the Politics of Popular Culture", the volume seeks to analyse musical scenes in relation to the regimes of power that shape their emergence, circulation and reception.

The book is clearly situated within the lineage of Black Atlantic studies. This characterises the transmission, unfolding and interconnections of Black cultures around the Atlantic, as well as the cultural hybridisations resulting from the long history of forced removal of Black populations from their territories and cultural milieus (Gilroy 1993). It is therefore a welcome contribution that deepens and extends analysis of this continuum from the vantage point of contemporary Black British musics. Notably, it expands the classic roots/routes dichotomy (Gilroy 1993) by emphasising the role of digital infrastructures and networks—what the editors term "routers"—in the contemporary formation of genres and publics. The book's richness—and, potentially, its limitation—lies in the multiplicity of genres examined and the diversity of problematisations, contexts and methods mobilised.

The centrality of sound system culture, dub and reggae is nonetheless clear, as many of the forms under study partly emerge from these matrices. In this respect, the book already helps to capture the resonances and contemporary traces of sound system culture within new musical assemblages. The entire first section is devoted to these contemporary articulations. Whether in Hyacinth's study on Roots Manuva's album "Dub Come Save Me", Charles's attempt to systematise a "sound system sensibility", Gani's interview with Lawrence "L.J." Johnson, or Télémaque's photo-essay "Trap Atlantic", each contribution shows the extent to which the musical objects under scrutiny are marked by the circulation and hybridisation of techniques, technologies, sounds and melodies. Each case also demonstrates how these cultural productions—actualising the Black Atlantic continuum—braid together the global and the local, and past with present and future.

The second section, which examines genres that emerged or persisted into the twenty-first century, likewise includes an interview with a music industry professional and a photo essay. These two formats depart from conventional research articles and allow readers to inhabit different standpoints and perspectives. Charles's interview with Ugwu traces the personal trajectory of an industry professional within the circulatory contexts already outlined, particularly between Nigeria and London. Charles and Facey's photo essay likewise offers a direct view of the places and the spatial organisation of steel pan practice in East London. More broadly, these chapters press further on the role of cultural industries in the recuperation, transformation and marginalisation of Black musics and musicians. In particular, the chapters by Palmer and Toppin on the Lovers Rock scene and the jungle genre, respectively show how racism and patriarchy have jointly contributed to the invisibilisation and reshaping of scenes and musics in favour of certain audiences, industries and male and/or white musicians. The other two chapters in this section trace two very different pathways through which artists and musical forms (re-)emerge. Muir examines Black Majority Churches as sites that—through their locations, relational networks and Pentecostal habitus—enable the development of musical competences convertible into the field of popular music and thus into economic capital. Melville, by contrast, shows how contemporary information and communication technologies facilitate the circulation of techniques and recent tracks and contribute significantly to the revival of jazz in England among a new generation representative of contemporary urban British life.

Finally, the third and last section, "Socio-political and economic issues", interrogates contemporary Black British musics critically through their contexts of emergence and diffusion. The opening chapters—by "Hussla D" Johnson and Wallace, on the one hand, and by Lambros Fatsis, on the other—are particularly illuminating for understanding the processes of invisibilisation, criminalisation and thus marginalisation that unfold across Black music scenes. The former provides an exemplary analysis of how cultural industries select and profit from particular cultural trajectories over others. Sketching the contours of a political economy of reggae authenticity that marginalises British artists in favour of Jamaican artists or labels, even though these musics are disseminated and consumed in England. Fatsis, for his part, shows how ambient Western racism materialises around Black sound and forms of gathering, further criminalising and stigmatising these populations and their cultural productions. These two chapters are especially productive for night studies, as they help to grasp how the neoliberal capture of festive and musical forms that once placed society "in crisis" proceeds both through their whitewashing and through the criminalisation and marginalisation of their Blackness. The final three chapters by Scott, Bushay and Madar consider, from distinct perspectives, the role of music and its representations for artists and audiences: grime as a practice of refusal *vis-à-vis* expected social and racial positions; hip-hop as pedagogical practice by and for Black women; and the ways Black men receive the dominant images and aesthetics associated with them and negotiate them.

Overall, this collection edited by Monique Charles offers a rich and nuanced panorama of a field too seldom examined in its complexity, given the tendency to treat Black musics monolithically under the rubric of the "urban". Although the approaches vary, the shared emphasis on sound system culture as a constitutive matrix, the Black Atlantic continuum and a critical race approach provides the book with strong internal coherence. That said, greater parity between conceptual labour and empirical precision would have been welcome. Moreover, while some chapters—especially in the third section—foreground the cultural industries, several analyses would benefit from engaging more directly with industry-specific processes of appropriation and whitewashing. Doing so would sharpen a highly fertile line of critique that reads the marginalisation of Black cultures and their re-undergrounding (a promising avenue) as among the conditions of possibility for contemporary "nightlife cities". Finally, the near-exclusive focus on London invites the question of how Black musics are configured elsewhere in Britain.

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PLATFORMED! HOW STREAMING, ALGORITHMS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ARE SHAPING MUSIC CULTURES

TIZIANO BONINI AND PAOLO MAGAUDDA

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Earlier this summer, Spotify's CEO and co-founder Daniel Ek, led a €600 million investment into a start-up named Helsing, specialising in artificial intelligence military software. Deerhoof and a number of other indie bands withdrew their catalogue from the music streaming platform, baulking at having their music accessible via a platform who shares a CEO with a military startup. Deerhoof described the company as "creepy" and a "data-mining scam masquerading as a 'music company'" (Green and Strauss 2025). In this now well established digital economy, Deerhoof point to the complexity of digital platforms such as Spotify's business model—are they a music company, data broker, advertiser or something more sinister?

In *Platformed!,* a work by Tiziano Bonini and Paolo Maguadda, the authors seek to tease out the social factors and historical conditions that have allowed Spotify to become an almost monolithic presence in the mediation of music, the influence its having on contemporary music culture and the anxieties that come with a company using data profiling as a means to ascertain the taste of a listener. The story is complicated and brings with it hardline opinions on the effect streaming culture is having on music. The authors are attentive to such qualitative judgements; that streaming platforms have ruined the music experience of a younger generation by dematerialising the music product, that such platforms have encourage a disengaged listening curated by the machine rather than a human, or that musicians are now writing music tailored to the algorithm and its penchant for instant hooks. For the authors, such judgements afford streaming platforms such as Spotify too much agency, while at the same time, ignoring the impact that social practices had on the development of online music sharing, streaming and datafication prior to Spotify's arrival.

Instead the authors, drawing from the work of Science and Technology scholars such as Latour, argue that the evolution of technologies do not follow "a single, coherent logic" (6) but respond to the distinct conjuncture of social, political and economic pressures—conditions that are informed by the agency of social actors, and not primarily by the technology itself. To illustrate such, the authors provide a historical account of music's circulation as a commercial artefact, its transition from an analogue artefact to a digital

one and the impact new online peer-to-peer networks had in the late 1990s on normalising the consumption of digital music. At each stop on this whirlwind tour of music's evolution as a commercial product, driven by the demands of industry, there is a counterpoint proposed, the disruption by non-industry actors, early hackers such as Shawn Fanning of Napster, or music researchers such as Karlheinz Brandenburg and his work on developing the MP3 format and the anonymous role that hordes of music fans had in making use of new technologies like peer-to-peer file sharing in distributing music for free. By presenting the various technological breakthroughs that allowed for music streaming to come into existence, the authors are reminding the reader at each moment that technology is consistently implicated within its social moment. In other words, just because a technology exists, does not mean it will be adopted.

While the term "streaming" might now be predominantly associated with listening to music or watching videos on demand, streaming technology was not originally intended for such. Originally developed in the 1990s, during a period when transmitting sound on the web faced "almost insurmountable technological constraints" (24), streaming was explored as a means to mirror radio's capacity for broadcasting live events, using the internet instead of the airwaves. Experiments with streaming technologies followed a "variety of different trajectories" (29), from internet radio experiments to webcasting of parliamentary debates, and through its myriad uses, often outside of dominant commercial industries, became normalised as a broadcasting tool. Yet it was only with the transition towards what Srnicek (2017) has termed "platform capitalism" that streaming became commercially viable. In chapter three, the authors provide an accessible overview of the rise of the platform society, detailing the multifaceted computational infrastructure they rely upon in order to operate; datafication of user behaviour, data analysis of music (in the case of music streaming platforms), algorithms for personalised recommendations, guiding the reader through the complicated industrial business practices of what can appear to be merely immaterial websites. It's a necessary detour that situates Spotify's business model within wider economic and technological trends and illustrates the structural shifts that have been impacting the cultural industries over the past decade or so.

Streaming technologies may have been with us for over three decades, yet it is their implication with algorithmic processes and artificial intelligences that are currently provoking the most unease. Whether it's the development of artificial intelligence that can automatically produce a song in a sonic style according to various user prompts, or the increasing appearance of AI music in Spotify playlists, such transitions again inflame anxieties around the nature of human creativity and its replacement by machines. In chapters four, anxieties around the role that algorithms have in music selection are examined, particularly in the fear that the human curator has been sidelined by automated processes. The authors draw from Bonini's own ethnographic research with Gandini (2019) on curating playlists to illustrate the continued presence of real live humans in the editorial offices of streaming platforms, even if the authors here warn that a small number of playlists are increasingly influential in determining the viability of a musician's career.

Taking on such a large scope as the transformation of music cultures as a result of music streaming platforms means there will inevitably be a considerable amount of shifts left unaddressed in the work. While there is much focus on individual tactics of resistance, it would be interesting to understand more about how various music scenes and non-corporate streaming initiatives are enacting algorithmic resistance, a term the authors use for listeners who attempt to "circumvent, control, or mislead the data collection mechanisms enacted by platforms' algorithms" (115). Despite this, *Platformed!* provides a valuable primer for anyone wishing to get their bearings in the ever-shifting landscape of music's situatedness in digital media ecologies and a reminder of the power that artists and fans have in shaping music cultures.

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Dance Music: A Feminist Account of an Ordinary Culture

Tami Gadir

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Welcome to the Club: The Life and Lessons of a Black Woman DJ

DJ Paulette

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Over the past two decades, dance music studies have shifted meaningfully from celebratory accounts of subcultural resistance to more critical, intersectional appraisals of labour, space, power and politics. Two recent books extend and deepen this shift: *Welcome to the Club: The Life and Lessons of a Black Woman DJ* by DJ Paulette and *Dance Music: A Feminist Account of an Ordinary Culture* by Tami Gadir. Although distinct in genre and methodology—Gadir's book is an academic monograph, while Paulette's is a memoir—both texts challenge the idealized narratives that have dominated scholarly and popular accounts of DJ culture. Together, they offer a much-needed recalibration of what it means to make, live, and think through dance music in the twenty-first century.

Gadir opens her book with a thesis that is almost deceptively simple: "dance music is ordinary" (1). By this, she means that dance music culture is not necessarily mundane (although it often is, as she demonstrates), but socially and structurally embedded; indeed, dance music is shot through with the same exclusions, hierarchies and contradictions as any other cultural practice. This assertion is a direct challenge to decades of scholarship and fan writing that frame DJ culture as inherently emancipatory, utopian or exceptional. For Gadir, origin stories about Detroit, Chicago, Berlin and New York may have been politically useful in early subcultural theory, but they have since become canonical and limiting: "What has happened since," she argues in the conclusion, "is that such interventions have become the accepted stories of dance music culture. As such, they no longer serve their original function, and their politics are no longer radical." (168)

Paulette (who is mononymous) presents a similar critique from a different angle. Her memoir, *Welcome to the Club*, tracks over 30 years in the industry—from early gigs in Manchester's queer nightlife scene, including her role as a resident at the Hacienda's

Flesh, through corporate PR work at Mercury Records and eventually to international stardom. Yet despite her longevity and acclaim, Paulette reflects repeatedly on how her contributions—like those of many Black women DJs—have been marginalized or omitted entirely from mainstream dance music history: "The winners in dance music have mainly been men," she writes, quoting Carl Loben, "and men are more likely to push themselves forward and take the credit" (128).

When Paulette became the resident DJ at Flesh, the club's legendary and first queer night, she was one of only two women DJs to hold down a Hacienda residency. She describes how her residency at Flesh "enabled [her] to join a boy's club which changed [her] life" (5) and "was unarguably the catalyst for [her] career" (32). Still, Paulette stresses that Hacienda was not the only "thing" in Manchester–remember, dominant narratives dominate history. Paulette stresses that, as important as the Hacienda was, "if history is to be correct, we have to acknowledge the other stories that have been squashed down and pushed out" (35). She emphasizes that a "vibrant underground DJ scene" (33) existed at the time that hasn't been awarded historical prominence, "inhabited by a cluster of Black music promoters" (33). Despite this, "Black people weren't invited into the city centre–any city centre–in England and the early nineties were not a 'Black creative' friendly space" (33). Her reflections offer lived evidence to support Gadir's claim that historiographic gatekeeping and cultural memory are structured by race, gender and power.

Gadir's research spans a decade of fieldwork and interviews conducted across the UK, Tel Aviv, Zurich, Oslo and Sydney, with a focus on how gender, race, class and regulatory frameworks shape dance music environments. Her methods include participant observation and critical discourse analysis, with a particular emphasis on mythologies of meritocracy and postfeminism. If Gadir's work serves as a feminist audit of the dance music studies field, Paulette's memoir functions as a counter-archive: a first-person record of scenes and struggles often left undocumented.

Paulette's memoir is rooted in her singular but deeply intersectional experience as a queer Black woman navigating predominantly white and male spaces. Yet her storytelling is far from anecdotal. She consistently situates her experiences within broader systems of exclusion—whether confronting the "lead-lined" glass ceiling while working in PR for Mercury Records (54), being told she'd never get booked as "a Black, female DJ with grey hair" (122), or having samples of her autobiography dismissed by male colleagues such as Frank Broughton for not having enough sex and drugs to make it interesting. Thankfully, Paulette ignored his advice when Manchester Press approached her to write the book in 2021. One of the many strengths of *Welcome to the Club* lies in Paulette's insistence that embodied experience is not separate from theory—it is theory in motion.

Paulette stresses that her book is neither a complete history of EDM nor her definitive biography; rather, it's "a series of snapshots that follow a chronological arc from the start of [her] DJ'ing career to the present day, bending this through the prism of other people's histories to acknowledge the wider picture. After all, ten people at a party will never tell

the same story." (2–3) Here, Paulette introduces a theme both glaringly obvious and yet somehow still ignored: history is subjective and favours hegemonic subjects. Acknowledging her intersectional positionality within what bell hooks characterizes as "white supremacist patriarchal" culture, Paulette states, "I have the unique perspective of an outsider with insider knowledge and an insider with outside knowledge" (3).

Both Paulette and Gadir foreground the ongoing struggles women face in DJ culture, though with different emphases. In Chapter 5 of *Dance Music*, Gadir dissects how gender operates not just at the level of representation, but in sonic codes, gatekeeping, and audience perception. Female DJs are often marketed either as "sexy and incompetent" or musically credible but non-conforming to beauty norms (121–123). These binaries echo in media representation and club booking policies, and Paulette's narrative personalizes these structural forces. She documents the repeated erasure of her skills, the scrutiny of her appearance and the exhausting dance between authenticity and acceptability. Her story makes visible the emotional and economic toll of navigating these contradictions alongside unpredictable, irregular employment —what Gadir names as "precarity in informal economies" (140) and Paulette describes more viscerally as "losing your mojo" (121).

Both Gadir and Paulette extend their analysis into ageism, showing how dance music's obsession with youth further marginalizes women. Paulette, now in her fifties, writes candidly about facing dwindling bookings and backhanded compliments. Yet she refuses invisibility: "Remind yourself that few white men have a problem with celebrating their wins... you too should remember and feel pride in yourself and your achievements." (139) Her memoir becomes a feminist act of citation—of herself and of the women who built the scene alongside her. In Chapter 2, Paulette describes how she "started to build a network of female supporters" (47–48), and this is key to her narrative. Throughout *Welcome to the Club*, Paulette shouts out the amazing women she encountered, including but not limited to: Smokin' Jo, Dulcie Danger, Caroline Prothero, Jamz Supernova, Marcia Carr, Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy, Judy Griffith, Gladys Pizarro, Jaguar, Erica McKoy, NIKS, Lakuti, Naomi Pohl, Anz, Sherelle and more. If you don't know these women, you should look them up.

One of Gadir's most provocative contributions is her critique of "transcendence" as a central value in dance music discourse. In Chapter 4, she questions whether the romanticized peak experience—of becoming one with the dance floor, the lights, the crowd—is truly emancipatory or simply another consumerist ideal dressed in subcultural clothing, stating "[t]he popular discourses on utopianism in dance music culture leave little room for addressing problematic gender dynamics" (164). For Gadir, transcendence is often an individualist fantasy that displaces collective political action.

Paulette's memoir complements this critique with realism and wit. While she recounts moments of joy, connection and artistic mastery, she never glorifies the scene. Instead, she foregrounds its labour: lugging records, facing hostile sound techs, staying professional in the face of condescension and recovering from burnout: "The glamour is fleeting, the graft is real, and the sacrifices are many" (74), she writes. Paulette's story echoes Gadir's insistence that even the most exceptional spaces can be host to ordinary experiences.

Both books reject dance music exceptionalism in favour of something more politically grounded. Gadir's final chapter critiques the field of dance music studies itself for clinging to outdated narratives of resistance and transcendence. She asks, "What function does dance music writing whose main goal is advocacy or defence serve now that there is no longer an orthodoxy to challenge?" (170) In its place, she calls for a post-utopian, anti-capitalist feminist praxis that acknowledges the limitations of dance floors while mobilizing their collectivist potential toward structural change.

Paulette's conclusion, subtitled "A Manifesto", similarly balances critique with hope. She doesn't romanticize the past, but she insists that club culture can still be a site of joy, community and creative resistance: "Community is the foundation. Collaboration is the future. Alliances reinforce the chain." (195) She reminds readers that love—for music, for people, for the party—is not apolitical; it is the engine that keeps us going.

In sum, these two books—one a rigorous academic intervention, the other a vital work of cultural memory—deserve to be read in tandem as both disrupt the PLUR mnemonic. Paulette and Gadir challenge scholars, DJs, promoters, fans and all stakeholders in dance music to move beyond myth and toward accountability. Whether we encounter DJ culture in lecture halls or on dance floors, in archives or behind the decks, *Dance Music* and *Welcome to the Club* remind us that the work of rethinking dance music culture is far from finished.

Live Spielen: Liveness in Performances elektronischer Tanzmusik

Josef Schaubruch

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As I write this review I am looking at an old ticket stub on my desk for an event in July 2025 in Leeds. The stub includes all the usual information you'd expect from the gig ticket: venue, time, price, promoter, etc. The headline of the stub displays the name of the artist, followed by the following text in bold: "Live DJ Set". To some, this may be paradoxical; how can a DJ set where an artist is playing pre-produced records one after the other be "live"? Some may even see such a claim as audacious if the artist is not playing their own work using acoustic, amplified and/or electronic musical instruments and employing a level of mastery or even virtuosity. Some may take a more sympathetic view. Surely the presence of the artist and audience and some sort of interaction between the two is enough to make the performance "live". Debates around what a live performance involves are pervasive in electronic dance music cultures. Views are manifold, and long have ravers, artists and enthusiasts debated the nuances of liveness in electronic dance music performance. If this is a debate you have had or are preparing for your next heated discussion on the topic, perhaps you might want to come equipped with some robust arguments. And if robust arguments on liveness are what you are looking for, look no further than Josef Schaubruch's *Live Spielen*.

Live Spielen is a comprehensive and critical review on notions of liveness in electronic dance music performances. Rather than attempting to provide an absolute definition of the term, Schaubruch highlights the theoretical and practical complexities and vagueness bound up with it. The work is convincing and presents a solid theoretical background around liveness in dance music genres, before undertaking empirical study and analysis on electronic artists who perform live and have a variety of different perspectives on what that means to them. Schaubruch considers a number of positions on the notion of liveness, spanning from more common (mostly electronic) instrumental performances to the understanding of the DJ set as a "live" practice (or not, as some argue), and the importance of corporeality, embodiment and an audience's presence and interaction with the artist to a live performance.

The first chapter is centred around the ambiguity of live performance in electronic music. It elegantly outlines the anxieties of electronic dance music artists around whether something might be live, as well as introducing the various constellations of live performance in electronic music, including turntablism, live coding, hardware performances and more. In this theoretical introduction, Schaubruch also emphasises that his reflections on liveness often stem from less tangible phenomena like practice and affect as well as technologies, placing artists and audiences as critical to his discussion. Chapter 2 presents a solid and

comprehensive literature review. This chapter is particularly strong and is a useful resource for those working in or interested in the blooming academic discussion around liveness and electronic dance music. Notable in the chapter is linguistic analysis of genre and musical role (e.g. DJ/producer) across English and German, and the assertion that providing a single binary definition of "liveness" (i.e. "live" and "not live") is no longer possible. In doing so, Schaubruch mostly avoids falling into traps around defining what may or may not be authentic, again focussing on the multiplicity and vagueness of the terms he explores. Following the rigorous review of literature, he provides a brief outline of his methodology which is clear and addresses gaps in field, particularly in the empirical study of liveness in electronic dance music. His discussion around reflexive Grounded Theory is both engaging and goes some way in addressing the perpetual complexity of aligning the specificities of Dance Music Cultures with research methodologies. At the same time, there is a clear engagement with the author's positionality as researcher, artist and participant in the dance music culture.

The fourth chapter plots Schaubruch's findings and his own theoretical reflections on them, extracting broader themes stemming from the empirical work with artists who professionally engage with live electronic music performance. The outcomes are expansive, supported by informative diagrams. One particularly striking observation, albeit one that might be predictable to the reader, is the cultural capital that liveness holds for the artists interviewed. There is an inherent tension among artists' reflections on what "liveness" is, with some focussed on the practice of using live instruments itself, while others with more of a focus towards creating moments of presence with audiences. Not one to shy away from the complexity of these arguments, Schaubruch explores where these tensions intersect, extending notions of subject and object to body (artist) and equipment, as well as artist and audience, exploring the relationships between musicians and instruments as an illustrative comparison.

Overall, *Live Spielen* presents a thorough, rigorous and engaging analysis on the role that liveness has in the performance of electronic dance music. He leans into the diversity and conflicts in both the literature and the points of view of the artists he interviews to illustrate the richness and potential in various definitions of live performances of electronic dance music. There are a (very small) handful of instances where it might be inferred that value judgements around live performances being "better" than DJ sets, particularly in the "*Grad an Liveness*", are being made. Although these appear to emerge from the author's empirical work, their absolute presentation may be seen to negate the vagueness in terminology that Schaubruch so effectively builds throughout most of the text. While not necessarily within the scope of this work, an exploration on the role of liveness in studio production, and how live performances translate to the composition and production of fixed media is missing in the book and perhaps presents a gap for future work.

Admittedly, when I first received the ticket for the above-mentioned event in Leeds, I scoffed at the absurdity of a "Live DJ Set". I was convinced that the headline description of the event was wholly paradoxical, perhaps a marketing ploy that plays into Schaubruch's assertions on the cultural capital of the live set. Having read *Live Spielen* and considered the vagueness of the notion liveness in electronic dance music however, I am not so sure, and this is one of the great successes of this text; it questions as much as it answers.

Assembling a Black Counter Culture

DeForrest Brown, Jr.

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DeForrest Brown Jr. is a musician, media theorist and curator who has been an essential voice in questioning the current state of global electronic music and framing it within the radical black perspective. In *Assembling a Black Counter Culture* (2022), he traces the "black secret technology" centering Detroit techno meanwhile covering black vernacular cultures, racial capitalism, industrialization and black resistance. Combining both academic and underground knowledge, Brown visits the black labor, ingenuity and futuristic desire, questioning techno's later depoliticized and dehistoricized reception within various discursive and practical realms among the global electronic music industry. More than a linear musical timeline, this book is rather a counter-archive; interviews, artist biographies, scene insights and media archaeology are constant while Brown digs further into the direction of techno's cybernetic essence and creative drive. Doing so, the book references valuable literature at the intersection of racial capitalism, cybernetics, and black desire, citing authors like Cedric Robinson, Paul Gilroy, Kodwo Eshun, Fred Moten, as well as frequently referring to the Afrofuturist heritage and diasporic Myth-science.

Starting from Detroit, Brown later situates techno within the broader Black Atlantic, as well as its further branches through locations like Japan, Germany and the UK. While each chapter breaks down techno's timeline by focusing on different perspectives, locations or concepts, Brown eventually re-assembles all the information in the final chapter, "The Collapse of Modern Culture" a title that is very much self-explanatory. Brown merely hesitates to express his personal opinion, in fact, he clearly shows his position also on the very first page of the book with five different diagrams; the first one being a forecast of unbearable ecological load that inevitably leads to the "collapse of modern civilization", and the second one that maps out the timeline of the Black Atlantic that starts with the global slave trade that he indicates the inevitable future result, "the journey home". In that sense, Brown underlines the inescapable outcomes of a culture that is assembled through racial capitalism and neocolonialism, combining self-reflexive insights with the comprehensive research data he provides.

In the first few pages, the book cruises through the racialized history of the US and colonialism with their connection to current racial capitalism and the "rise of modern industrial complexes". While discussing the essence of black usage of media and machines

in the context of electronic music and dance cultures, Brown pays dues to early architects of Afrofuturism such as Sun Ra, Lee "Scratch" Perry or George Clinton, discussing their influence on later black electronic musics. He quickly sets its route to Detroit in the following chapter, zooming into the life of techno's originators in the US Midwest, where post-Fordist racial capitalism peaked post World War II. One of Brown's main arguments is that techno's emergence is inseparable from the conditions of post-Fordist America and the automation of black labor. He conceptualizes techno as an embodied and racialized extension of the workers' engagement with industrial machinery, adding that the music's futuristic desires are not merely stylistic but are direct reflection of the industrial environment, that he eventually refers to as "black secret technology." Brown positions Detroit techno pioneers like Juan Atkins, Jeff Mills and Underground Resistance as sonic engineers responding to industrial debilitation and using machines and rhythms to pursue new aesthetic forms and sonic fiction, while continously providing examples from Afrofuturistic heritage and Myth-scientific practice that points out to the everlasting connection between pasts, presents and the futures of the Black Atlantic Sonic Futurism.

Brown also goes over the world's changing economic and political climate and its impacts on the racialized, social and financial structure of the USA and beyond, zooming into cases such as US's post-civil war and more contemporary topics such as racial policies and riots, or state-driven violence in the 20th century as what equally shaped the conditions for techno to flourish. At the intersection of racialized structures and mainstream media, he constantly provides concrete examples of techno and other black music being whitewashed through media tools such as news narrations, charts or interviews to show the double-edged sword of British and American music market; where Britain has become a melting pot of different black music with enough financial stability to the US's, covering techno's expansion overseas and its results with another self-explanatory chapter called "Wake up America, you are dead!". Next chapter "Detroit-Berlin Axis" provides even more insights by revealing further connections of black musical cultures with racial capitalism and neocolonialism, focusing on the genre's second decade of existence and exportation outside of the US, under "a colonial project that white European crowds fetishize Detroit's sonic labor and whitewashing it"as Brown puts it, diving into stories from post-Cold War era Berlin with a hedonistic, neocolonial venture that simultaneously serves for the Western cultural hegemony. Exampling paternalistic assumptions of Kraftwerk and other Western-white influences on Detroit techno, or scholars such as Stockhausen and Adorno, Brown maps out the post-colonial multiculturalism that reappropriates the African American musical continuum on the 1990s and beyond, going over cases like Underground Resistance or Drexciyan Empire as black resistance in response.

Brown brings his focus to the present in the final chapters, interrogating how platform capitalism has restructured the global music economy and further marginalized black producers. He maps out the consolidation of power in media platforms, streaming services and corporate-backed festivals, showing how these infrastructures continue the exploitation and erasure of black creative labor. Here he reframes all previous chapters through the lens

of platform capitalism and questions its impacts on techno and beyond, going over the capitalization of the black body, mind, and labor through contemporary technological infrastructure. Yet, he already made the conclusion clear many times throughout the book, that blackness is always already in counter-position to the structures of racial capitalism that seek to contain it. If there is a central claim in *Assembling a Black Counter Culture*, it is that resistance, speculative imagination and reassembling are constant variables of the black secret technology.