

INTRODUCTION TO EDM AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THE CONTESTED MEANING OF “ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC”

— GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION —

ANITA JÓRI

LEUPHANA UNIVERSITY LÜNEBURG (DE)

ANITA JÓRI is a postdoc research associate at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg. Jóri's research and publications focus on the discursive and terminological aspects of electronic (dance) music culture. She is one of the curators of CTM Festival's Discourse programme. She is also the author of the monograph *The Discourse Community of Electronic Dance Music* (transcript, 2022) and one of the editors of the books *The New Age of Electronic Dance Music and Club Culture* (Springer, 2020); *Musik & Empowerment* (Springer, 2020); *Musik & Marken* (Springer, 2022) and *Living at Night in Times of Pandemic: Night Studies and Club Culture in France and Germany* (transcript, 2024).

I believe many readers of *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* have experienced, at least once, being questioned about their research subject, particularly by scene actors such as musicians, promoters and fans. How often have we found ourselves in conversations where we had to defend “our electronic dance music” and articulate what that means? The theme of this special issue arises from the realization that the phrase “electronic dance music” and its acronym “EDM” have acquired contested meanings, especially among scholars, journalists and various actors involved in the field, including musicians, fans and industry professionals.

Researchers (e.g. Holmes 2020; Jóri 2021) and journalists (e.g. Glazer 2014) have sought to trace the evolution of this nomenclature, yet a consensus regarding their definitions remains elusive and debated among practitioners, journalists and academics. In research, both terms are generally used interchangeably as overarching labels for a diverse array of electronic musical styles and genres.

However, it has become evident that “electronic dance music” and “EDM” can carry distinct connotations. Specifically, EDM has developed into a contentious term within underground electronic music scenes, often associated with mainstream, profit-driven genres and artists. This shift began in the early 2000s, when electronic music and dance cultures underwent a process of mainstreaming. This association is further reinforced

Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Music & Dance Culture 17(1): 2–5

ISSN 1947-5403 ©2025 Dancecult <http://dj.dancecult.net>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2025.17.01.01>

dancecult
JOURNAL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC & DANCE CULTURE

by the music industry—particularly in the US—not only through the release of widely marketed music but also by organizing megafestivals like the Electric Daisy Carnival and Ultra Music Festival, as well as through awards such as the American Music Award for Favorite Electronic Dance Music Artist (Jóri 2021).

In an effort to differentiate these meanings, Holt (2017) introduced the category of “EDM pop”, which provides a useful distinction from EDM as a mere acronym for electronic dance music. Over the last few decades, alternative collective terms such as “dance”, “dance music” (Thornton 1995; Bennett 2001), “rave music” (Reynolds 2013) and “techno” (Sicko 1999) have also emerged in the literature. These umbrella terms do not carry the same negative associations among their users and are often preferred by journalists.

Hence, it is high time for researchers in this field to critically examine why scene members opt for alternative terms like “dance music”, “dance” or “club music” instead of the genre names commonly used in academic discourse. Thus, this issue of *Dancecult* provides an opportunity to discuss how scholarship can contribute to more widely accepted terminology.

To address these questions and explore the discursive and cultural or regional conflicts surrounding this terminology, this special issue has encouraged researchers to share their experiences, perspectives, suggestions and findings regarding the controversies surrounding electronic dance music and EDM. We have also welcomed discussions on the debate concerning “EDM pop” and the broader “EDM pop industry”. Ultimately, this issue aims to foster open lines of inquiry and promote inclusive dialogue on these and related topics. Our goal here is not to perpetuate binary thinking, such as underground vs. mainstream or authentic vs. commercial, but rather to see EDM pop as part of electronic music and dance cultures. It is more interesting to analyse what it adds to (or perhaps takes from) other communities within this vast cultural milieu.

This discussion extends beyond mere terminology; it encompasses the power dynamics inherent in these language choices. For many individuals, the ability to “know how to use” specific terms serves as a form of gatekeeping, reflecting an internalized knowledge. For instance, when someone inquires if I research “electro” (often referred to as “electro music”), I recognize from experience that they may not be referencing the genre that emerged in the early 1980s. Instead, they might be asking whether my focus aligns with electronic dance music cultures more broadly. This awareness provides insight into the questioner’s familiarity with the subject, informing me about how in-depth our discussion can go. Importantly, this recognition is not a judgment of the other person’s knowledge; rather, it serves as a signpost for our conversation. Conversely, if someone identifies “my field” simply as “dance”, it may indicate a deeper level of understanding regarding the complexities of the genre and its associated cultures.

Therefore, as the call for papers for this issue was published, the following suggested themes were anticipated: the evolution of the terms “Electronic Dance Music” and “EDM”; different meanings of “Electronic Dance Music” and “EDM”; other umbrella terms, such

as “dance,” “techno,” and “rave music”; regional variants in terminology; “EDM pop” and its industry; “EDM pop” events and audiences; trends and processes of genre (re-)naming; the political and cultural consequences of certain terminologies; and the power relations associated with these terms. The authors of this issue have succeeded in exploring these and similar topics, demonstrating the pressing need for further research on the subject.

I feel honoured to be the guest editor of this special issue at this milestone moment, as we introduce the change in the title of the journal to *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Music and Dance Cultures*, which also responds to the aforementioned debates.

SUMMARY OF CONTENT

In “EDM, Tech House, or Business Techno? ‘Trolling’ Inauthentic Club Music Through Social Media,” Gaute Barlindhaug takes a closer look at the tension between authenticity and commercialization in electronic music and dance cultures. By analysing a meme exchange between artists, the article critiques how the term “EDM” is often used derogatorily to label certain club musics as inauthentic. Barlindhaug’s findings reveal how this reflects broader debates about the roots of club culture and the potential cultural stagnation stemming from a protective stance or gatekeeping against commercialization. The article ultimately argues that while EDM’s popularization raises ethical concerns about inclusion, it opens avenues for reaching new audiences, suggesting a fluid understanding of authenticity within the community.

Devpriya Chakravarty’s “Negotiating Sonic Spaces: Exploring Urban Indian Youth and the Semantic Flux of Electronic Dance Music Culture” examines how urban Indian youth engage with Electronic Dance Music Culture (EDMC). Highlighting the interplay of local and global influences, Chakravarty positions EDMC as a platform for challenging traditional norms and fostering communal ties. This article illustrates the complexities of identity within the Indian context and underscores the unique adaptations of EDM that diverge from Western paradigms, emphasizing the fluidity of cultural belonging amid globalizations.

In “Beats on Airwaves: Radio, Electronic Dance Music Selection and Meanings”, Dennis Mathei investigates the challenges of categorizing electronic dance music on German radio. By proposing the term “e/dm” to create a broader spectrum of electronically produced music, Mathei highlights the diverse genres and styles that resist easy classification. The article calls for more precise definitions to honour the complexities of electronic dance music and EDM and their cultural contexts, reflecting ongoing issues of representation and genre fluidity within the field.

Manoli Moriaty and Nina Kehagia’s “Playing by the Rules? Genre Conventions in Contemporary DJ Performance” explores how genre influences DJ practices across drum and bass, house and techno. Their research shows that while DJs acknowledge genre conventions, they view them as flexible frameworks for innovation. This adaptability underscores the ongoing tension between traditional skills and modern expressions in

DJing, resonating with broader debates about genre and authenticity within electronic music and dance cultures.

Furthermore, this issue includes Kirsten Hermes's article, "Augmented Creativity: Using AI Collaborators to Make a Music Video", supporting emerging concepts and research in AI co-creativity, that is not related to the overall theme.

Additionally, the "From The Floor" section presents various perspectives on the special issue's theme. Guglielmo Bottin discusses the socio-historical evolution of the term "italodisco," while Dylan Davis, Mike Callander and David Haberfeld critique EDM's commercial nature, arguing that it stifles artistic freedom. Rose Dwyer links DJing practices to the gig economy, highlighting the implications for dance music culture in a neoliberal context. Finally, two ethnographic articles by the author team of Arsène Werlen, Cyber Shanahoy, Anonymous and David Verbuč, as well as tobias c. van Veen, while not directly related to the theme, provide further insights into contemporary club and dance cultures.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, Andy. 2001. *Cultures of Popular Music*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Glazer, Joshua. 2014. "Etymology of EDM: The Complex Heritage of Electronic Dance Music". *Cuepoint*. <<https://medium.com/cuepoint/etymology-of-edm-the-complex-heritage-of-electronic-dance-music-d3e3aa873369>>, (Accessed 2 June 2020).
- Holmes, Thom. 2020. *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music, and Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Holt, Fabian. 2017. "EDM Pop: A Soft Shell Formation in a New Festival Economy". In *Weekend Societies: Electronic Dance Music Festivals and Event-Cultures*, ed. Graham St. John, 25–43. London: Bloomsbury.
- Jóri, Anita. 2021. "The Meanings of Electronic Dance Music and EDM". In *The Evolution of Electronic Dance Music*, ed. Ewa Mazierska, Tony Rigg and Les Ginnon, 25–40. London: Bloomsbury.
- Reynolds, Simon. 2013. *Energy Flash. A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Sicko, Dan. 1999. *Techno Rebels. The Renegades of Electronic Funk*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Thornton, Sarah. 1995 *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity.