

The Booth, The Floor and The Wall

Dance Music and the Fear of Falling

Will Straw

“Is there something wrong with Torontonians’ bodies?” inquires film editor Anne Henderson, visiting from Montreal. “Why are they so stiff all the time?”¹

— Fred Blazer

In 1977, an article in *Billboard* magazine set out to compare the disco music scenes of Montreal and Toronto. One revealing difference, it claimed, lay in the spatial organization of dance clubs in each city – in the common patterns by which the space of the disc jockey was demarcated from that of the dancers and customers. In the typical Montreal disco of the 1970s, we are told, the DJ booth was positioned low, close to the dance floor. Customers could walk freely in and out of the booth, to talk to the disc jockey or look at the records being played. In Toronto, in contrast, DJs “were locked away in sealed booths,” high above the dance floor and inaccessible.² One effect of this, apparently, was that sales of dance records were much lower in Toronto than in Montreal. The inclination of Toronto DJs to conceal the secrets of their craft meant that customers, however much they might like a record, could only with great difficulty learn what it was.

Imagined or real distinctions between Toronto and Montreal have long served as the deep structure of a Canadian moral geography. And, accurate or not, this comparison concretizes my own sense of the difference between these two cities in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when I began going regularly to dance clubs. The chaotic populism of the Montreal disco scene ensured that club culture in that city, however lively, would only partially detach itself from the signs of debasement in those years which followed disco’s decline. In contrast, the removed diffidence of the Toronto disco DJ served as a strategic, long-term investment in credibility, and would prove to be part of what made the Toronto club scene, at the beginning of the 1980s, the coolest in the country – at least for those of

us who lived in Montreal. Arguably, while in the wake of disco certain Toronto dance clubs built their post-punk legitimacy upon this diffidence, in Montreal the trappings of disco were less disruptively reconfigured within the colourful garishness of New Wave.

Re-reading press coverage of Canadian disco culture in the 1970s, one finds a persistent moral unease, fixated less on images of sensual abandon – there is little sense of a moral panic – than on a concern over mindless investment and the risky exploitation of fleeting fads. Disco culture took shape against the backdrop of a recession, the Western oil boom, and the Anglophone exodus from Montreal, and became a prominent example, in press accounts that mapped the relations between work and play, of a reckless extravagance characteristic of those times. Fiscal inflation, high levels of investment in night clubs and disco's own "whirl of sex and self-expression" were condensed within descriptions of disco culture as a bubble about to burst – an analogy that has persisted within accounts of disco music ever since.

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The pessimists are predicting the death of dance music. We are now at the same stage in our musical cycle as they were in the late 70s when the disco bubble burst. There are too many record companies releasing too much product, trying to cash in on the 1990s chart dance boom. None of them know what they're doing or what makes a hit but they're all hoping that if they release enough one of them is bound to stick. It won't work. DJs are drowning in seas of vinyl.³
— Alex Constandinides

Histories of disco culture typically suggest that in the late 1970s it fell down a deep hole of vulgarity. Whether this in fact was the case is unimportant; for the image of disco's chaotic unravelling would nevertheless linger on within dance music culture throughout the 1980s. It would persist throughout the current boom's formative years as that perpetual danger against which, in a variety of ways, dance music culture has had to shield itself. This remains the case despite the obvious ways in which disco has been rehabilitated over the last five years. For even in current moves of reCanonization, there is typically a fixation on moments just before the fall: on early 1970s jazz-funk, for example, or the well-crafted tastefulness of the Philadelphia sound. Although cheesier moments in 1970s disco have in the past been reclaimed through that predictable process by which connoisseurship fills the gap left in the wake of disappearing belief, the current broad embrace of the 1970s has required of such moments that they assume a kind of forced coherence as a gar-

ish urban baroque, fixed in the greens and yellows which saturate 1970s films on late-night television. What is at stake, in any case, is not the reading of disco music itself, but the way in which its decline produced a set of moralistic imperatives which have shaped the development of dance music ever since. In 1993, of course, all sorts of dance music are seen as highly credible and oppositional. What remains to be traced is the elaborate conceptual labour that was required to make this so.

Since the early 1980s, broad currents within Western dance music have been shaped by the impulse to install rationality and militancy as protective walls against the possibility of collapse into vulgarity. This has most noticeably been the case within that dance music culture which flirts regularly with rock music – the audiences of which are predominantly white. A whole tradition of rockist militancy has elaborated a sense of dance as deploying the postures of a hardened resolve – the dancer's body held within and against the dense solidity of musical textures. More generally, dance music has found credibility in the implicit claim that its own history is all about a carefully controlled progress through time. Out of the deeply ingrained sense that disco's unravelling resulted from its dispersion into a stagnant pluralism, arises dance music culture's efforts to surround its logic of historical change with both an aura of secrecy and a sense of relentless movement – a teleology of sorts.

It is worth remembering that the collapse of disco music in the late 1970s did not come from a withering of popular interest in dance clubs themselves; for clubs continued to open, and people went out to dance in ever-increasing numbers. This popularity – which took dance music into suburban bars and high school dances, where people wanted to dance to songs they recognized from Top 40 radio – did, however, over time, disenfranchise the culture of professional urban DJs by limiting their ability to enact and register shifts of style. In large cities, the problem of disco became defined, symptomatically, as that of people liking it for the wrong reasons. For large numbers of urban club-goers, disco music was an unending and undifferentiated soundtrack to city life rather than a succession of carefully and expertly chosen distinct recordings. The truly revealing moment in disco's decline came when researchers found that people who listened to disco radio stations shared the same dispositions as those who listened to Beautiful Music stations: both wanted an unobtrusive, unchanging soundscape as the backdrop to their daily lives.⁴

Disco's collapse into an imagined vulgarity represented the dismantling of a particular relationship between DJs, record companies and audiences. When this relationship worked, the ability of DJs to produce order out of the abundance of records released every week made them strategically important within a record's trajectory of success. Moments

of crisis within dance music's history have generally been marked by the sense of confusion which results when this relationship is dismantled: that is, when DJs and record producers prove unable to constrain that music's social value or use within a sequence of finely calibrated collective moves, when it threatens to disperse into a decentred pluralism. Since disco, the most ominous threat to dance music has thus been seen as the tendency towards musical chaos, cast in moralizing terms as the failure of record companies or DJs to exercise control or restraint.

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For a whole tradition of quasi-anthropological thinking, the experience of the dance floor is taken to be all about bodily release and expression. Dance clubs themselves are seen as sites of collective ritual in which pre-existent communities come together in communal celebration. Alternately, as in *Saturday Night Fever*, they are the space in which an extravagant individuality comes to life. Accounts such as these have never adequately acknowledged the problem populism poses for dance music culture. A dozen people living the experience of dance as one of a transcendent fullness will each do so in ways that reveal the most precise and relative of individual tastes. One of the persistent dilemmas of dance music culture grows from the recognition that popular enthusiasm on the dance floor may bear no necessary relation to the DJ's level of cultivated knowingness. It may stand, just as easily, as a sign of a capitulation to uninformed popular demand.⁵

Like jazz band musicians before them, dance music professionals construct protective walls against vulgarity by insisting that the meaningful processes are those which go on out of sight, off the dance floor itself. What dance club culture turns around, in large measure, is the gap between the open display of physical movement and the cautious unveiling of secret knowledges, the tension between the dance floor and the DJ booth. Throughout much of dance music's recent history, the spatial relationship between floor and booth has stood metaphorically for the gap between Low and High – for the distance between a populism which might at any moment become vulgar and a connoisseurship which imagines itself the custodian of historical rationality.

While the socio-sexual dynamic of dance turns around bodily display, the prestige and credibility of dance music's professional culture have been built upon an investment in secrecy. The material culture which surrounds disc jockey work has produced a whole set of relations to information which are, to varying degrees, intentionally concealed. For instance, while the introduction of the extended remix in the mid-1970s allowed DJs to

segue smoothly from one song to another, it eliminated the breaks between records in which they might previously have announced the title of songs. Thereafter, record companies were forever pleading with DJs to place the covers of dance music singles against the window of their booths so that customers would learn the titles. For DJs, this was, in many cases, an undesirable disclosure of knowledge; it also, according to some accounts, disrupted the normal circulation of bodies on the dance floor as people moved in to note a record's title. From the extended single through the non-commercial DJ mix and white label release (which carries no identifying marks, partly to conceal its title from other DJs), the intensification of secrecy has gone hand-in-hand with an escalation of dance music culture's claims to credibility.⁶

Many of the dynamics of dance music culture are condensed in the figure of the 12-inch single, which is simultaneously the most fetishized and the most disposable of musical commodities. (The Pet Shop Boys were astonished, when they began collaborating with Liza Minnelli in 1989, to find that she had never seen a 12-inch single, despite having spent much of the 1970s in New York discos.) The 12-inch dance single is fetishized for the special knowledge encoded upon it and for its capacity to crystallize (in the combination of styles offered in its various mixes) very precise moments in the unfolding of dance music history. To those encountering it for the first time, it appears to lay bare the secrets of DJ work. At the same time, it is the most disposable and ephemeral of textual forms in that its value depends entirely on the emergence of consensus. In the absence of this consensus, it is dumped on the market as one of the most genuinely abject forms of cultural refuse.⁷

As with the distinction between High and Low, it is in the divide between floor and booth that the gender relations characteristic of dance music culture also assume their distinctive forms. Much of dance culture's political credibility has rested on its links to disenfranchised sexual communities and on its distance from the modes of performance and affect posited as typical of rock music. It remains the case, nevertheless, that there are more women in heavy metal bands than there are female producers or mixers of dance records, and that virtually all of the club DJs in the English-speaking world who exercise influence are male. The masculinist character of dance music culture is easily glimpsed in the homosocial world of the dance record store on Saturday afternoon, where the dispositions of nerdism are regularly reborn as those of hip connoisseurship. Like that of sports, the culture of dance music embeds the most blatantly physical of practices within elaborate configurations of knowledge and information.

In the gap between dance floor and DJ booth we may grasp, as well, the divergent

senses of the term “hip,” as outlined by José Piedra. Anatomically, the hip is that aggregation of bones and flesh most visibly involved in dancing and in the ordering of territory upon the dance floor. At the same time, and in a sense which builds on the first but relocates it, hip designates a relationship to knowledge from which the physical is absent: “Brains rather than brawn, up-to-dateness and style, information and sophistication keep a mind over the hip.”⁸ Both these senses of “hip” require that the skills and knowledges which underlie them appear instinctual rather than cultivated. For the dancer, the significance of an acquiescence to rhythm which appears effortless is easily grasped. The display of conspicuous instinctuality in the DJ booth is a more complex affair. Club DJs typically draw upon an unending barrage of information in deciding what records to buy and play: on tip sheets, specialty magazines, record store try-outs and a variety of other channels through which critical consensus is produced. Nevertheless, the sense that this information may be acquired as the product of a quantifiable labour must be disavowed. The most predictable comment by DJs in interviews is that which stresses the importance of relying on your ears and instincts rather than slavishly following reported trends. Of course, as is the case with any self-defined hip community, what is at stake here is the extent to which connoisseurist knowledges may be codified for easy acquisition.

The genesis of hip normally unfolds across two moments. One is attached to cultural practices (jazz music, dress, dancing) which are, in a variety of culturally specific ways, eroticized and transformed into the objects of disembodied knowledges and terms of judgement. In a second move, hip reinscribes knowledge and judgement back onto the body where they settle into the postures of an elusive and enigmatic instinctuality. As a result their possession is only ever implied; in fact, hipness flounders when the knowledges upon which it rests appear too obviously cultivated, or when instinctuality fails to suggest an underlying knowingness.

Hipness and nerdishness both begin with the mastery of a symbolic field; what the latter lacks is a controlled economy of revelation. Hipness requires that the possession of knowledge be made to seem less significant than the tactical sense of how and when it is to be deployed. Cultivation of a corpus (of works, of facts) assumes the air of instinctuality only when it is transformed into a set of gestures enacted across time. For the figure of the dance club DJ to be invested with enigmatic authority, an easily cultivated, spatialized knowledge (a sense of the present musical field) must appear secondary to another, more elusive skill (the ability to follow one song with another which seems its inevitable successor).

In November of 1989, I was invited to Humboldt University in East Berlin to deliver two lectures on popular music. My trip had been planned, several months in advance, so that I would arrive on the evening of November 9th. Three or four hours after I landed, the Berlin Wall opened up. I spent the next day wandering around and observing the general confusion and excitement, unable to cross over to the West because of my visitor's visa. In the early evening of November 10th, in need of a drink, I went into a bar near Alexanderplatz: the Press Bar, a gaudy place with neon and fancy drinks. As I sat down, a DJ walked onto an open space on the floor, pushing a little booth on which cassette tapes were piled. He began playing from these tapes, moving from one to another as a song ended, and a few people got up and danced. What struck me, first of all, was the open vulnerability of the DJ's set-up. Every technical detail and hesitant gesture were visible as he rushed to comply with an unending stream of requests. (For the first time in many years, in a dance club, I heard Imagination's "Just An Illusion.")

Eventually, I left the bar and wandered much further up Schönhauser Allee, where I found a neighbourhood dance bar. Here, the set-up was similar to that of the Press Bar: the DJ stood at a podium and moved between two tape recorders. I learned, days later, that 12-inch dance records were not available in the German Democratic Republic, so DJs taped songs from Western radio. This required that they talk between songs to cover the transitions, and the DJ's patter here consisted of brief, rather sleazy phrases, spoken in a faulty English. ("Hey Ladies!" was the most common.) While I was there, he played Technotronics' "Pump Up The Jam," Holly Johnson's "Americanos," Lil Louis' "French Kiss" and Liza Minnelli's "Losing My Mind," all of them in their shorter radio mixes.

There was a certain amount of sad charm in this set-up, and in the DJ's ongoing attempts to elicit approval and reassurance from the customers. What was most striking, however, was his failure to invest his role with an enigmatic, knowing authority. When I told students at Humboldt University about going to these clubs, they were embarrassed that I'd witnessed such vulgarity. Their feelings about dance clubs recapitulated a reading common in the late 1970s: "discos" were the social space in which young workers and uncultivated, upwardly mobile professionals came together. More importantly, dance music had nothing to do with a militancy these students found most obvious in the jazz-rock fusion or progressive rock they themselves were likely to play.

This response is common enough among graduate students in music. In the GDR, it was bolstered by the absence of those mechanisms through which the credibility of dance

music is normally produced. It was impossible, given the reliance on radio broadcasts from the West, to create the sense of records breaking out from credible subcultures, or to create the tension between obscurity and popularity central to the functions of dance culture here. Lacking, in part, were those complex systems of differentiation which dance music culture has set in place against the threat of vulgarity. These systems produce shifts in a record's value across the trajectory from discovery to mainstream popularity and require that the DJ be highly attentive to these fluctuations. They require, as well, strategic negotiation of the line between one sense of club culture as producing moments of collective celebration and another which insists on the fleeting fragility of any such moment within an unfolding history.

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In the early 1980s, virtually every left-leaning cultural studies academic I know bought a record called "The Politics of Dancing" by the group Reflex. It was, by almost all standards, a terrible record; but, its title crystallized the conviction prominent within post-punk culture that dancing was to be politicized, that punk's militancy might be joined to the populism of the dance floor. This project emerged against the backdrop of disco's fragmentation and a high level of pluralism within dance music overall.

For broad sections of dance music culture, it should be remembered, the early 1980s was a period of withdrawal into more circumscribed communities, within which a logic of historical progress might be recovered. In one of the most important of these, the culture of hip-hop took shape. In the early 1980s many ex-disco DJs spoke of rap as having restored a sense of continuity to African-American music which had been disrupted by disco. It was not simply that rap had pulled black dance music back from the risks of crossover, but that it had given it new terms within which its own historical progress could be conceived: as the exploration of new technologies and contexts for producing music. This period was, as well, the golden age of gay disco and of that genre of dance music (Hi-NRG) whose anthemic function is most obviously inscribed within its formal structures.

The generalized pluralism of this period was shaped in part by the variety of ways in which clubs and their audiences disavowed their historical continuity with disco culture. In the slow elaboration of a post-punk dance club culture in the 1980s one sees revealed what, to risk a crude generalization, I see as a fundamental rule of white rock culture: if the militant credibility of that culture can no longer be grounded in a sense of itself as political agency, it will be installed as a set of constraints or expulsions set in place against

against the lure of vulgarity. One obvious and politically ambiguous feature of post-punk dance clubs involved the disavowal of any function of the dance club as an arena for sexual encounter. This disavowal condensed a number of related impulses: the post-punk project of de-eroticizing rock music in the name of a militant seriousness, and the political insistence that people in dance clubs not be subject to harassing come-ons, the unspoken sense that the initiation of sexual encounters was a crude violation of propriety. (These clubs remained, for many years, the only kind of dance club which did not include within their musical repertoires some provision for slow songs.)

The project of a post-punk dance culture has always turned around one of the most puzzling of questions: How might the militancy of dance music be conceived? In the aftermath of punk, the politics of dancing was almost never conceived in terms of a collective ethics of the dance floor or a transformation of the boundaries between different musical audiences. (Only later would hard-core culture endow the act of dancing with a strong ethical dimension.) Instead, throughout the early 1980s the political dimension of dancing was implicitly imagined as that which, within the experience of dance and dance music itself, was held back or constrained. How such constraint might be militant, except as the refusal to capitulate to the lure of vulgarity, was not generally specified. Virtually all calls for the experience of dance to be invested with a militant seriousness have boiled down to the insistence that, whatever else transpires on the dance floor, a kernel of self-reflexivity must be retained. In any number of interviews in the early 1980s, musicians spoke proudly of their music as being about thinking *and* dancing. (Post-punk culture's attachment to the project of a thinking person's dance music, with all that implies about other musics and their audiences, remains among its most guilty, unexamined secrets.)

In retrospect, of course, this seems silly and self-important, evidence of what Simon Reynolds has called the imperative to think your way back to the body.⁹ In fact, one did *think* on the dance floor of the early 1980s post-punk club; but, in thinking, one was mapping out the acceptable ranges of gesture and expression. Post-punk dancing was shaped in no small measure by the lingering and horrific memory of two precursors: the free-form obliviousness of late-hippy dancing and the extravagant displays of disco. The self-conscious control required of postures in order that they not recall these earlier moments lent itself easily to the conviction that dancing was now an activity with intellectual substance. Thus, there is a smooth passage from the sense of dance as that which involves a thoughtful constraint to the belief that it might embody a disciplined militancy.

The project of investing dance with militancy has much to do with the fear of falling: of giving in to gestures of expressive openness which would evoke other kinds of dance

clubs and other musics. One need not romanticize this openness to see in its refusal the sign of a boundary diligently maintained. Early in the aftermath of punk, as Simon Reynolds has pointed out, funk riffs become a privileged figure of this militancy. In a line of descent which runs from Talking Heads through Gang of Four and Shriekback, funk riffs cease being the material of a meticulously mapped-out groove; rather, their very tenseness is meant to suggest the resolve of the tightly-clenched fist.¹⁰ (I remember from two Gang of Four concerts the sense of dancing as shot through with the strain of earnest work, which, of course, bought into a reading that cast this as a practice of active self-realization.)

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Music should stop being a pale reflection and mutation of the blues music, agricultural slave music, and move into the age of industrial revolution and beyond. We are still slaves but our environment has changed, and business, corporations, mass production have superseded the earlier forms of serfdom.

— liner notes to *The Industrial Records Story*, 1984

*First of all, I was very surprised that people here in the States like what we do, because so much of the music you hear in clubs has a lot of black rhythms. Maybe we are seen as kind of exotic. We don't want to be influenced by the English or the Germans either: We've always wanted to do our music, from our country. We're so degenerated in Europe that we don't know what our roots are anymore. Maybe what makes us different is that we're trying to get back to our cultural instincts, to our primitive white rhythms.*¹¹

— interview with Patrick Codenys of *Front 242*, 1989.

In the dance music which emerged out of punk, the problem of militancy is very often bound to the question of electronics and their possible rehabilitation. The most common leftist critique of disco in the 1970s claimed that the monotonous rhythms of disco music enslaved the dancer, and that collective movement to these rhythms manifest a nihilistic shrinking of subjective freedom.¹² This reading had only fleeting resonance within North American post-punk culture, which, like rock culture more generally, would come to remember disco dancing (inaccurately) for its vulgar, undisciplined abandon. Disco, like the Hi-NRG and house music which followed, would be drawn to electronic rhythms for their pragmatic efficiency.

In the unfolding of punk, the embrace of electronics is accompanied by a more elaborate

and justificatory set of rationales. In large measure these rationales turned around the question of punk's minimalism and those sites where punk's reductive project might be most fully realized: in the punk guitar's muddy condensation of rock's affectual force, or in the synthesizer's hygienic evacuation of affect. One symptomatic early move cast the synthesizer as a cuddly domestic tool for the untrained musician, who simply has to turn it on. (Another image haunting punk culture was that of Rick Wakeman, running between his banks of keyboards in a display of hyperactive virtuosity.) Daniel Miller, founder of Mute Records, was one of several who early on in punk's history claimed that the synthesizer more successfully embodied punk's amateurist ethics than did the guitar. Ten years later, when Chris Lowe of the Pet Shop Boys condemned guitars as dirty instruments, the link between electronics and the thinking person's dance floor was complete.¹³

Beginning in the late 1970s, readings of technology are enfolded within industrial music. Here, the recourse to electronics – to synthesized textures and collages of “found” sounds – required that they be endowed with a referential function. Electronics are no longer simply a replacement for “human” instruments; rather, they reproduce the more general experience of life within technological, bureaucratic societies. The dense and tightly-woven textures of industrial music are meant to suggest the all-pervasive impenetrability of contemporary forms of social control.

Industrial music has not always been dance music, but at various points in its history it has required the dance floor as the space within which to convey its particular sense of electronic disciplining. It is here, I would argue, that the fear of falling is played out most revealingly. The programmatic statements which circulate within industrial music culture emphasize the necessary disciplining of the dancer's body – a body held firm and straight, in the postures of militant resolve against the oppressive weight of sonic textures. Nevertheless, the dancer's encounter with industrial music has always been marked by a certain symptomatic ambiguity. While the dense layering of industrial music is, from the perspective of its own self-understanding, meant to be struggled against, it also serves as well as a protective wall. Its tight solidity is installed as a hygienic defence against contamination by vulgarity, by the lure of stylistic hybridization or the soft groove. A soundscape meant to be felt as oppressive functions simultaneously as a refuge from those musics marked with the sign of seductive impurity.

Freud saw in the structures of paranoia the construction of a tightly knit, symbolic universe as protection against the homosexual urge. If the project of a militant dance music may so often be reduced to the tight solidifying of musical textures – the hardening of resolve against a fall – we may see within that project affinities with the philosopher's

camera obscura, as Kofman has described it.¹⁴ For like the camera obscura, the textures of a militant dance music install a solid flatness between the perceiving subject and a world of beckoning depth and unending ambiguity.

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One of the most well-entrenched fantasies of intellectualized popular music culture since the mid-1980s may be found in the claim that scratching and sampling embody the postmodern assemblage of random fragments. Interviews with rap musicians or producers invariably reveal the extent to which, on the contrary, these practices emerge from the careful and deliberate search for the efficient groove or the canonical reference. Their effect is not the withering of historical knowledges, but a privileging of these as the basis for forward-looking moves enacted in the present. Sampling has, across time, worked to anchor the contemporary within an historical lineage which it may be seen as up-dating – most recently producing a genealogy which links the postures of cool jazz to those of hip-hop. At the same time, as a practice founded in connoisseurship, it perpetually produces hierarchies of skill within the present and so recreates the basis for ongoing progress, with the most knowing or effective of borrowings received as clues to the directions most appropriate for future development.

A subsidiary fantasy has centred on the fracturing of the human voice. According to some cultural critics, we are meant to see in this common-place practice of dance music, an enacting of the fragmentation of a coherent subjectivity. More likely, these practices stand for what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has described as that “modernist aesthetic according to which sentimentality inheres less in the object figured than in a prurient vulgarity associated with figuration itself.”¹⁵ Arguably, the figurative element in dance music is the expressive voice, and the suppression of this voice has been a central enterprise of those forms of dance music which imagine themselves as militant – from industrial music through New Beat and forms of Techno. Again, we need not endow this voice with an originary authenticity to recognize the link between its suppression and a set of operations intended to resist vulgar accessibility.

Even in less avowedly militant forms of dance music, many of the most widely-hailed examples of studio mixing involve the fracturing or hysterization of the female voice – from Arthur Baker’s remix of Cindi Lauper’s “Girls Just Want To Have Fun,” through Lil Louis’ “French Kiss,” Black Box’s “Ride On Time” and a good deal of Techno. The extent to which these operations enact a metaphoric violence is open for debate. They

involve, nevertheless, the insertion of vocals marked with a tacky vulgarity into a knowing and wilfully transgressive context which serves to ensure a record's credibility within dance music culture. More generally, records such as these perpetuate one of the central aesthetic principles of dance music: that high-end sounds (vocals, strings and so on) represent the playful, outrageous moments within dance music, and that for the connoisseurist, credible exercises happen at the low end, in the bass and percussion. The former endow records with their novel singularity, the latter anchor them within an ongoing history of styles. (This is, in fact, the central purpose of dance mixes of Top 40 hits, which redistribute vocal lines across a low-end foundation.)

Dance music culture's association of the feminine with the commercial and debased is further evidence of that culture's status as one of the last modernist artworlds. A whole array of other modernist motifs continue their half-life within dance music, long after they have withered elsewhere. The insistence on historical movement as a defence against vulgarity, recurrent anxieties over sentimentality and decadence, practices of primitivist rejuvenation, and so on – all of these persist within dance music culture, organizing even the most minor of practices and acts of judgement.

181

NOTES

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1. Fred Blazer, "Montreal Moxie in Tidy, Tepid Toronto," *Maclean's*, 18 June 1979, 92.
2. "Mixed Reaction in Canada to 12-inchers; Quebec Receptive to Product; West Balks," *Billboard*, 16 July 1977, 73. The bad article on dance clubs yet to be written is the one which will discuss the DJ booth as Foucauldian panopticon.
3. Alex Constandinides, "Musical Chaos," *Jocks* 51 (January, 1991): 10.
4. This account of disco's decline relies on numerous accounts within music trade magazines; a much fuller version appears in my doctoral dissertation, *Popular Music as Cultural Commodity: The American Recorded Music Industries 1976–1985*, (McGill: unpublished dissertation, 1990).
5. Some of the ideas presented here are developed at greater length in my "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Scenes and Communities in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5.3 (October 1991): 361–75.
6. For a discussion of white labels and the significance invested in their exclusivity, see Tim Jeffrey, "UK Word," *Street Sounds* 46 (13 March 1992): 9.
7. The life-cycle which takes an unsuccessful 12-inch single from a release price of \$4.50 to the 10 cent bins in the Tower Sales Annex in New York is usually only a few months.

8. José Piedra, "Poetics for the Hip," *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 633. For a longer discussion of "hip," to which what follows is greatly indebted, see Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 65-101.
9. Simon Reynolds, "New Pop and Its Aftermath," *Monitor* 4 (October 1985): 13.
10. Simon Reynolds, "Funk's Fictional Threat," *Monitor* 2 (n.d.): 3.
11. Robert Doerschuk, "Front 242: An Interview With Patrick Codenys," *Keyboard* (September 1989): 57.
12. For a sustained critique of disco from these perspectives, see Nathalie Petrowski, "La démagogie dansante du disco," *Le devoir*, 3 March 1979, 19.
13. Quoted in Jayne Lanigan, ed., *Pet Shop Boys Special* (London, Grandreams Limited, 1988), 30.
14. Sarah Kofman, "Camera Obscura of Ideology," trans. Will Straw, *Public* 7 (1993): 153-70.
15. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 166.