

Editorial Introduction

Synergies between Game Music and Electronic Dance Music in Cultural Context

ABSTRACT The issue's guest editors provide an overview of the intersections between video game music and electronic dance music in their cultural contexts, situating the issue's articles within this landscape. **KEYWORDS** electronic dance music, sampling, games, virtual clubs, chip music

May 2022. Beats boom through the cavernous halls of La Capella, a former chapel of a fifteenth-century hospital located in Raval district of Barcelona's city center. On the dance floor a crowd of DataVamps, CyBORKs, Virtual Elfs, Agi-Faes, and ProTROLL-gens excitedly swipe their smartphones, while the red-haired DJ with the tentacle mouth, pointy ears, and the large spikes growing out of their shoulder, the green-faced troll, and other artists deliver their live sets. While the multispecies crowd occupies the physical space, their avatar counterparts go wild in the virtual version of the club, named Club Cooee, which can be seen on the screen located behind the DJs. All these beings are participants in *NeuroXcape: The Role Play Game* created by the Spanish electronic music and art collective NeuroDungeon. NeuroDungeon describe themselves as "a conceptual umbrella that encompasses a speculative art movement, a fictional music genre, a potential urban tribe, an interdimensional club and a sci-fi fantasy corporation."¹ In *NeuroXcape*, clubbing and gaming are fused in order to reflect "on networked connectivity, online relationships (AFK, Away From Keyboard) and personal interconnectedness."²

In addressing the multifarious synergies between video game music and electronic dance music as well as their respective cultures, this special issue marks the current articulation of a technoculture that brings together diverse cultural forms, practices, discourses, and spaces to make sense of our current fast-moving digital world, just as NeuroDungeon attempted with their project. With electronic dance music, we refer to the legacies of house and techno music, electronic music made by and for DJs who work the dance floors of nightclubs, raves, and other dance events, such as festivals. Taking a global view, within the technocultural context of electronica and home computers, video game and electronic dance music cultures developed more or less synchronously,

1. "NeuroDungeon, NeuroXcape: The Role Play Game," LaCapella (Barcelona Cultura), May 15, 2022, <https://www.lacapella.barcelona/en/neuroxcape-role-play-game> (accessed September 29, 2022).

2. "NeuroDungeon, NeuroXcape."

apart yet together, as these became intertwined within the lived experiences of various players, dancers, music producers, and game developers.³

While the coronavirus pandemic that hit the world in early 2020 has been oftentimes assigned as *the* reason for club cultural actors to look for new ways to continue the party in game spaces, club culture and gaming started to converge in manifold ways decades before. Projects such as Club Matryoshka, which opened its virtual doors on a private *Minecraft* server in 2019 in order to offer otherwise marginalized artists the main stage, or commercial titles such as the successful Facebook social game *Nightclub City* (2010) that explicitly served to promote artists, explored the opportunities of online gaming for that purpose.⁴ In addition, simulation games such as *Disco Tycoon* (2010) put players in the roles of club managers, and VR games such as *Personal Disco VR* (2017) were created to offer players the physical experience of dancing while being in a virtual club.

Dance clubs have long been presented in video games as settings that signify passion and danger. For example, Data East's arcade game *Disco No. 1* (1982) puts players into the roller skate shoes of an unnamed male predator. The task is to collect "disco girls" and "beauty queens" in a roller disco to score points while at the same time avoiding "ruffians" and a miraculous "witch."⁵ In other games, clubs fulfill a narrative function of shady demi-monde hideouts for gangsters, collecting information, or finding important NPCs or items; see, for example, the *Spider-Man* series (*Mysterio's Menace*, 2001), *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (2011), *Mass Effect 3* (2012), the *Hitman* series (*Hitman: Blood Money*, 2006, and the recent *Hitman 3*, 2021), or *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* series (such as *Grand Theft Auto: The Ballad of Gay Tony*, 2009 add-on for *GTA IV*). In these cases, the music is not the pivotal point; rather, discourses, topoi, and stereotypes from other media, such as TV series or movies, determine how clubs and club culture are perceived in order to have these locations fulfill a specific narrative in-game function.⁶

Electronic dance music made similar inroads into the gaming experience. For example, the Japanese beat-'em-up fighting game series *Streets of Rage* (1991–94) features an, initially, LA dance club-inspired soundtrack directed by Yuzo Koshiro, joined by Motohiro Kawashima for *Streets of Rage 2*, and 3, that throughout its first three versions developed into an original contribution to techno music, taking their cues from Detroit techno, German techno, Dutch gabber, and the English breakbeat dance music form of

3. Hillegonda C. Rietveld, "Dancing in the Technoculture," in *The Routledge Research Companion to Electronic Music: Reaching Out with Technology*, ed. Simon Emmerson (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 113–134.

4. Jacob Mendoza, "Welcome to Club Matryoshka, a Virtual Club for Music Mutants or Anyone Who's Ever Felt out of Place IRL," *Mixmag Asia*, September 17, 2020 (accessed September 29, 2022), <https://mixmagasia/feature/welcome-to-club-matryoshka>; "Nightclub City: Uniting Music Lovers and Helping Them to Connect Directly with 'Hot New Artists,'" *Gamesindustry.biz*, July 14, 2010 (accessed June 30, 2022), <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/nightclub-city-uniting-music-lovers-and-helping-them-to-connect-directly-with-hot-new-artists>.

5. Museum of the Game, "Disco No.1," International Arcade Museum, accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.arcade-museum.com/game_detail.php?game_id=7593.

6. Melanie Fritsch, "Playground Disco: Playing with Clubs and Aspects of Club Culture in Digital Games," in *The Oxford Handbook of Video Game Music and Sound*, ed. William Gibbons and Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

drum 'n' bass.⁷ A later example can be found in racing game *Sonic R* (Sega, 1997) with songs composed by Richard Jacques with the Sega Sound Team that sound like accelerated (140–165 beats per minute, or BPM) pastiches of club anthems,⁸ signifying the speed and optimism of game character Sonic the Hedgehog. Also in 1997, Konami introduced *Beatmania*, a DJ simulation arcade game. This game was a major success for the company and caused its music game department to be named Bemani, an abbreviation of *Beatmania*,⁹ which creates music game titles until today, and was an important catalyst for the start of the Japanese music game boom in the second half of the 1990s. Its design inspired rhythm action music games that followed, including DJing games such as *DJ Hero* (2009). In particular *Beatmania* features a set of buttons plus a turntable for each player, and a screen on which one or two active players can see bars moving toward the hit zone, indicating that they need to hit a button or use the turntable to trigger a scratch sound.¹⁰ Other music games, such as Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Rez* (2001) and its successor *Child of Eden* (2011), explore how game technology can be used to create new musical experiences based on 1990s techno culture and philosophy that its Japanese designer encountered when visiting the Zurich Street Parade,¹¹ an annual techno party attracting up to one million participants. In this special issue, Cyril Délécraz shares insights from a practitioner's perspective on how a soundtrack inspired by electronic dance music and related club culture can be fused for the development of a physical game experience of an escape room game as part of the retro-futuristic theme of its plot. In this escape room game, (2021), players not only hear electronic dance music forms but also enter a club named Transylvania at one of its *stages*.

Rave culture has done much to tickle the popular imagination about dance culture from the end of the 1980s onward. Raves are large, sound system–driven dance parties, mostly held in makeshift dance spaces, such as disused industrial buildings or farm fields, which gained popularity in the UK and spread further across Europe and the rest of the world during the 1990s. The Love Parade, initiated in Berlin in July 1989 and subsequently developed into an internationally popular street festival drawing up to one million participants by the end of the 1990s, has done much to promote the sound of electronic dance music in Europe, particularly techno music. While much of dance club

7. Andrew Lemon and Hillegonda C. Rietveld, "Strutting with Streets of Rage," in *Music and Sonic Environments in Video Games: Listening to and Performing Ludic Soundscapes*, ed. Kate Galloway and Elizabeth Hambleton (London & New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

8. Club anthems are usually slower, clocking between 117 and 128 BPM.

9. Konami Amusement Co., Ltd., "Announcing BEMANI PRO LEAGUE ZERO, a Livestreamed Pre-competition Competition!" September 2, 2020 (accessed September 29, 2022), <https://www.konami.com/amusement/corporate/en/news/release/20200902/>. We wish to thank Stephen Tatlow for pointing us toward this source.

10. Scratching is a DJ technique that developed from hip-hop into turntablism, in which the turntable needle is rhythmically moved to and fro on a vinyl music recording.

11. For an analysis of *Child of Eden* and its use of techno culture and philosophy, see Melanie Fritsch, *Performing Bytes. Musikperformances der Computerspielkultur* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2018), 198–221; Lewis Gordon, "Rez: Infinite. How a Techno Street Parade Inspired Tetsuya Mizuguchi's Pioneering Music Video Game," *FACT*, January 10, 2017, <https://www.factmag.com/2017/01/10/rez-infinite-tetsuya-mizuguchi-interview/> (accessed September 30, 2022).

music offers a steady four-on-the-floor (beat) kick drum pattern of 122 to 130 BPM, other subgenres embrace accelerated breakbeats at around 160 BPM or four-on-the floor tempos of 170 BPM and faster, in acknowledgement of accelerated culture.¹² Such furious engagement with speed during the 1990s eventually led to excesses of almost undanceable tempos.¹³ In this context, it is not surprising that racing games like *WipEout* (1995) and *Slipstream* (2017) resonate with such musical forms as addressed, respectively, by James Millea and Michael Bridgewater in this special issue.

Similarly, game culture influences electronic dance music and its derivatives. Inter-relationships and touchpoints can be direct in varying degrees. Examples of direct influence from game music can be found in the work of a range of dance producers, such as Aphex Twin as Power-Pill with “Pac-Man” (1992), an homage to the same named game, or J Majik’s drum ‘n’ bass remix of Hatira’s “Spaced Invader” (2001), which integrates references to fighting game sound effects. In addition, Rob Gallagher notes a close link between the *Street Fighter* fighting game series and grime music (a competitive rap-based electronic music that arguably developed from London’s UK garage dance club scene) as partly related to the competitiveness in grime that seems to resemble *Street Fighter* arcade battles where the winner of this two-player game stays on the machine to battle the next Player Two.¹⁴

The influence of games on electronic dance music was also due to the use of computer technologies at home, both for gaming and composition. As Jonathan Weinel notes, “For the burgeoning rave scenes of the late 1980s and 1990s, these computers—together with drum machines, synthesizers, digital samplers and workstations—provided inexpensive solutions that were adopted by many underground music producers.”¹⁵ Important precursors from the 1980s, used second-hand in the early 1990s, were home computers that could be used for both gaming and music making. The Atari 520 ST introduced MIDI connections in 1985, enabling it to drive external sound modules with sequencer software such as Notator. Commodore 64, an innovative 8-bit home computer that arrived on the market in 1982, was popular for gameplay and offered a particularly recognizable sound due to its, for its time, advanced Sound Interface Device (SID) chip, which was subsequently made popular with the chip music and demoscenes, as addressed in this special

12. Chris Christodoulou, “Bring the Break-Beat Back! Authenticity and the Politics of Rhythm in Drum ‘n’ Bass,” *Dancecult* 12, no. 1 (2020): 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2020.12.01.08> (accessed October 23, 2022).

13. Hillegonda C. Rietveld, “Machine Possession: Dancing to Repetitive Beats,” in *Over and Over: Exploring Repetition in Popular Music*, ed. Olivier Julien and Christophe Levaux (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 75–88.

14. Rob Gallagher, “‘All the Other Players Want to Look at My Pad’: Grime, Gaming, and Digital Identity,” *GAME: The Italian Journal of Game Studies* 6, special issue, “Hear the Music, Play the Game. Music and Game Design: Interplays and Perspectives,” ed. H. C. Rietveld and M. B. Carbone (2017): 13–29 (accessed November 15, 2022), <https://www.gamejournal.it/all-the-other-players-want-to-look-at-my-pad-grime-gaming-and-digital-identity-work/>.

15. Jonathan Weinel, “How Atari and Amiga Computers Shaped the Design of Rave Culture,” *OUPblog*, April 15, 2018 (accessed September 30, 2022), <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/atari-amiga-computers-design-rave-culture/>.

issue by Michael Bridgewater in the context of techno and the currently still active demo- and chip music scenes of Berlin. Importantly for electronic dance music, though, Commodore's 1987 Amiga 500 model introduced the internal ability to create simple sound and image samples with its custom-made Paula chip, a handy tool for game music composition through the use of tracker music software. As a relatively affordable option, secondhand Amigas and trackers were particularly popular during the early 1990s with producers of breakbeat dance genre jungle.¹⁶ Much chip-generated music in the chip music and demoscene sounds since the early 1990s like electronic dance music. For example, the metal-gabber¹⁷ crossover techno genre Amigacore, pioneered by groups and artists such as Nasenbluten, Patric Catani, Neophyte, and Atari Teenage Riot, make use of gaming equipment and software to produce their versions of electronic dance music.¹⁸ These examples illustrate how the techno-aesthetics of both electronic dance music and game music were partly shaped by the affordances of digital sound-generating technologies that developed simultaneously from the 1980s onward. The 8-bit and 16-bit sound chips offer recognizable sonic signatures, and limited memory storage offers limitations that require innovative solutions.

As the articles developed for this issue, it became clear how vast and how complex the intersection between game music and electronic dance music cultures can be. The challenge here is in the combination of the study of these two fields, which each offers an expanding archive of research publications. The articles therefore provide a start to this intersectional area of study. Two of the articles, by Bridgewater and Millea, address racing games with techno-inspired background music, while the third article, by Délécraz, addresses a game in physically embodied space, including an encounter with a dance club. A common thread is the understanding that electronic dance music is a genre that functions for its participants to keep on dancing, and how this translates in the embodied sense of excitement that affects the players of the games under discussion.

The articles here offer a West European perspective. The contributors to this special issue originate from the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and France, which together outline a territory where both electronic dance music culture and video game culture have been experienced intensely. Seeing how both electronic dance music and game cultures developed, it is noticeable that the manner in which its participants were recruited and enabled historically steered toward a male hegemony, which also seems the case for

16. For example, breakbeat DJ-producer Bizzy B. comments that "I wouldn't have been able to afford the money for a recording studio; I wouldn't have been able to practice music production and take my music to the next level if it wasn't for the Commodore Amiga. I'm sure there are a lot of other people who were in the same situation as me that actually used the Amiga to step up their game in the music industry." Bizzy B., quoted in Mat Ombler, "Video Games and Club Music Have Always Been Intertwined," Noisy UK, republished by VICE, October 29, 2018 (accessed September 29, 2022), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/a3pb45/video-games-club-music-history>.

17. Gabber is an industrial form of electronic dance music. See Alexei Monroe and Hillegonda C. Rietveld, "Gabber: Raising Hell in Technoculture," *Metal Music Studies* 7, no. 3 (2021): 399–421 (accessed November 15, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1386/mms_00057_1.

18. Anders Carlsson, "Amigacore," *Chipflip*, August 14, 2009 (accessed September 30, 2022), <https://chipflip.wordpress.com/2009/08/14/amigacore/>.

academic publishing. As editors, we are deeply aware of the need to rectify this imbalance in diversity, yet the existing framework of power relations has proven to be beyond our control. We therefore very much hope that the contributions to this special issue can be seen as a starting point that inspires future forays into the complexities, aspects, identities, and the manifold cultures and interrelationships of electronic dance music and gaming. ■

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