

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East London (UEL)		
Unit of Assessment: 34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Historicising and promoting 1970s and 1980s New York City music, social dance and art culture		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004 – 2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Tim Lawrence	Professor of Cultural Studies	1999 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 – 2020 (ongoing)		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Lawrence's three monographs on the history of New York City's music and art scenes during the 1970s/early 1980s have transformed the understanding of the period within the United States and beyond. The research narrates and analyses neglected forms of expression largely produced by a cross-class coalition of people of colour, the LGBT+ community and women, explaining the culture's importance. The research significantly shaped three key areas: creativity, culture and society; commerce and the economy; and understanding, learning and participation. In particular, it has stimulated the widespread uptake of party practices associated with David Mancuso's Loft.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The three monographs by Professor Lawrence amount to a comprehensive, unparalleled 1,500-page study of music, party and art culture in late twentieth century New York City. Early into researching a history of dance music intended to begin in mid-1980s Chicago, Lawrence interviewed Loft party host David Mancuso, unrecognised and out of time, for background information, only for Mancuso to introduce him to the unnarrated, subterranean history of downtown party culture. Responding to the lack of scholarship on the city's rich history, Lawrence published a 500-page book on the evolution of dance/disco culture during the 1970s that pivoted around Mancuso's transformative contribution, followed by two more books on New York music, party and art culture during the 1970s and early 1980s. His research repositions New York City 1970-83 as the most influential centre for cultural production in the 20th century—and not the dysfunctional failure it is routinely claimed to have been.

Love saves the day: a history of American dance music culture, 1970-1979 (R1) established the unparalleled, pioneering contribution of David Mancuso and the Loft to the emergence of DJing as a new form of democratic musicianship, the introduction of high-end 'audiophile' components into public sound systems, and the refiguring of the dance floor as a utopian space of community, expression and refuge for a rainbow coalition of dancers made up of people of colour, the LGBT+ community, women and their friends. The monograph also confronted the popular belief that disco amounted to a crass, tasteless culture deserving of ridicule by detailing and analysing its sonically and socially progressive contribution. *Hold on to your dreams: Arthur Russell and the downtown music scene, 1973-1992 (R2)* amounted to an 'anti-biography biography' of the then little-known yet significant composer-musician Arthur Russell that tracked his nomadic wanderings to excavate and map previously overlooked connections between downtown's compositional, disco, hip hop and punk scenes. *Life and death on*

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the New York dance floor, 1980-1983 (R3, G1) argued that the unprecedented output and interaction that took place within and between the city's downtown art, music, party and performance scenes amounted to one of the most important cultural renaissances of the 20th century.

Lawrence's sweeping analysis is rooted in comprehensive research that focuses on the marginalised, intersectional, countercultural voices of the city's creative communities. He interviewed 267 protagonists (R1 89 interviewees, R2 82 interviewees, R3 99 interviewees) plus constructed a unique archive from disparate, often ephemeral sources featuring niche publications, fanzines, flyers, playlists and technical information. Including more than 270 illustrations and 40 discographies, the monographs have established a form of community history writing that is as accessible as it is rigorous. Lawrence's re-historicisation of 1970s/early 1980s NYC as an epicentre for collective creativity—from the social impact of audiophile dance floors to the prolific alliances forged within and between the art and party scenes—has instilled the history with a new cultural vitality and relevance.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. 2004. *Love saves the day: a history of American dance music culture, 1970-1979*. Duke University Press. Translated into Italian and Japanese.

R2. 2009. *Hold on to your dreams: Arthur Russell and the downtown music scene, 1973-1992*. Duke University Press. Translated into Italian and Japanese.

R3. 2016. *Life and death on the New York dance floor, 1980-1983*. Duke University Press.

G1. Tim Lawrence, Research Leave for *Life and death on the New York dance floor, 1980-1983*, AHRC, 2009, GBP26,258.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Audiophile dance parties and creative practice

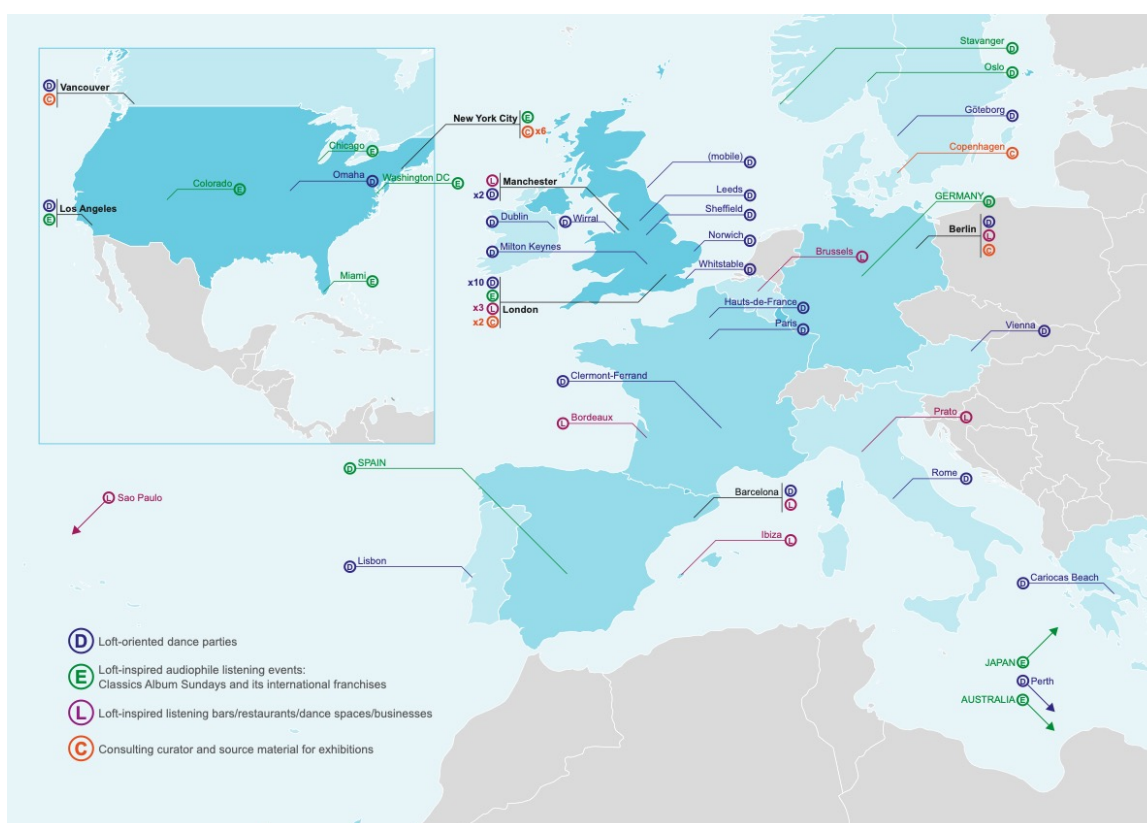


Figure 1 Map of Audiophile Events and Parties

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Lawrence's *Love saves the day* has **inspired, co-created and supported new forms of social expression** by becoming the inspirational reference point for a mushrooming, international network of audiophile dance parties that model themselves on the Loft. The research led David Mancuso to invite Lawrence to co-host Loft-style parties in London featuring a newly assembled audiophile sound system, unique in Europe.

Beginning in 2003, the London party is held quarterly (until lockdown 2020) and attracts 400 dancers per event. The London template has been replicated by 15 UK and 12 European parties, each **contributing to social and community regeneration (S1)**. Often referred to as a 'bible' by participants, the research also led to the opening of Classic Album Sundays, a London-based audiophile listening event that runs 13 franchises in 7 countries, as well as 7 audiophile bars that feature Loft-style sound systems (**S2**).

Lawrence's research has also **generated new ways of thinking that have influenced creative practice in art, music, television and film**. *Love saves the day (R1)* inspired New York artist Martin Beck to create a series of Loft-inspired works for his major retrospective at Mumok, Vienna, 2017; *Artforum* hailed the works in its end-of-year review. Musicians ranging



Figure 2 All Our Friends Loft-style audiophile party, 2018

from internationally-acclaimed Venezuelan electronic music artist Arca to lead vocalist for dance-pop act the Scissor Sisters Ana Matronic have cited Lawrence's research (**R1, R2, R3**) as a key inspiration (**S3**). It has been used as a source of information about NYC culture by the producers of *The Deuce* (HBO, 2017-19), *The Get Down* (Netflix, 2016-17) and *Empires of New York* (CNBC, 2020) as well as *Studio 54*, an official selection at the Sundance Film Festival (2018).

Public understanding of New York history

Lawrence's research has **reshaped public understanding of 1970s/early 1980s New York City culture**, enabling **library and museum professionals to enhance cultural heritage preservation and interpretation**. Underpinning the popular uptake of his research, Duke



Figure 3 Ana Matronic interviewing Lawrence for her new podcast, "Tales from the dance floor", 2020.

UP has sold 30,000 copies of Lawrence's books since 2014. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Centre relied on Lawrence's Arthur Russell biography (**R2**) to acquire and organise Russell's archive in May 2016 (**S4**). The research has underscored major international art shows at the Barbican, the Museum of Modern Art, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vitra Design Museum as well as numerous shows curated by smaller galleries (**S6**). The chief curator for MoMA's *Club 57: film, performance and art in the East Village* exhibition notes the research (**R1, R2, R3**) "mapped the terrain", "shaped our approach" and "became a spiritual guide"; MoMA invited Lawrence to host a panel discussion/screening of *Downtown*

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81 (attended by 400, viewed online by 9,000) (**S7**). The Barbican's *Basquiat: boom for real* show employed Lawrence as a consulting curator, workshop convenor, screening chair, writer and themed concert curator (**S8**).

Challenging conventional wisdom, the research's conclusions have been cited extensively as source material by journalists working for major outlets (including broadcasters BBC Radio 1, 2, 4 and 6, Channel 4, NPR and Sky Arts, and publications the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Post*, the *New York Times*, the *TLS*, *Vogue Hommes* and the *Wall Street Journal*) as well as scores of book authors, specialist publications and websites (**S9**). The research has also provided content for arts organisations, music/web-based SMEs and corporations to reuse in their own projects. For instance, the co-director of the award-winning NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project describes Lawrence's research as "an invaluable resource" for mapping LGBT spaces (**S5**). In 2018 the *Journal of the Society for American Music* described the research, taught in numerous Ivy League and state universities in the United States, as a "great service to US music studies" (**S10**).

Paying participants, employment and sales

The research has inspired the **creation of new businesses, fee-paying shows and products**. The parties, bars and events cited above have entertained hundreds of thousands of paying participants while creating employment. For example, the research-inspired audiophile bar/sushi restaurant/dance spot Brilliant Corners employed 20 staff and attracted approximately 15,000 customers a year pre-covid (**S1b**). The museum shows reliant on the research have generated substantial income through ticket sales. The Basquiat show attracted 216,389 visitors—a record for the Barbican—while Lawrence's themed concert drew a capacity crowd of 2,000. Reappearing Records, formed to re-release research-related music, has sold 5,000 albums.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1a. Chats Palace, a historical working-class theatre/community centre located in Hackney, receives c. £40,000/year from All Our Friends.

S1b. Brilliant Corner figures confirmed in an email from owner Amit Patel, 26 November 2020. Shortly before opening Patel wrote to Lawrence: "We might not have taken on this venue were it not for the music, sound systems and parties that have inspired us over the years. Your books and the [Loft] parties at the Light are very much part of that inspiration", 24 October 2013.

S2: Articles such as:

S2a. Frederick Bernas, "Listening clubs tantalise audiophiles in London", the *New York Times*, 31 October 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/31/arts/music/london-listening-clubs-spiritland.html>.

S2b. Tom Faber, "From the Loft to the sky: the story of Lucky Cloud Sound System", *Resident Advisor*, 19 January 2018. <https://ra.co/features/3123>

S2c. Nosheen Iqbal, "Shush... and enjoy the music: how listening bars have hit the right note", the *Guardian*, 8 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/dec/08/music-listening-bars-albums-high-quality>

S3a: Emilie Friedlander, "Arca Finds Xen", *Fader*, June/July 2017, recounts that after reading Lawrence's *Hold on to your dreams* (**R2**). "[Alejandro] Ghersi experienced something of an artistic breakthrough, and Arca was born."

S3b. Ana Matronic has a copy of *Love saves the day* (**R1**) hanging on her wall as a source of 'inspiration'.

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S4: Jonathan Hiam, curator at the American Music Collection and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, oversaw the purchase of the Arthur Russell archive in May 2016. He informed Lawrence that: "*Hold on to your dreams* has been an incredible resource for all of us here at NYPL as well as pretty much anyone who is interested in the life and legacy of Arthur Russell. Personally, I'm on my second copy having worn through the first." The Brooklyn Academy of Music staged a simultaneous show and linked event series, "Do What I Want: Selections from the Arthur Russell Papers", 1 March -14 May 2017.

S5: NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project website, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org>

S6: Barbican, *Basquiat: boom for real*, 21 September 2017-28 January 2018; Museum of Modern Art, *Club 57: film, performance, and art in the East Village, 1978-1983*, 31 October 2017-8 April 2018; Vitra Design Museum, *Night fever: a design history of the disco*, 17 March-9 September 2018; Brussels Design Museum, 21 November 2018-5 May 2019, Centro Pecci Italy, 17 June-13 October 2019; Design Museum Denmark, 25 January-1 June 2020; and Vancouver Art Gallery, *MashUp: the birth of modern culture*, 20 February-15 May 2016. Other exhibitions inspired by Lawrence's research include: The Red Gallery, *Creativity, collectivity, convergence: New York City party culture, 1970-83*, 31 May-14 June 2018; Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, *Paradise: underground culture in NYC 1978-83*, 12 October-13 November 2016; Howl Gallery, *The downtown scene photography show*, 8 October 2016; and Morrison Hotel Gallery *Disco at 50*, 14 February-15 March 2020. Lawrence provided consultancy for the Museum of Sex show *New York disco, 1977-79*.

S7: Video recording of MoMA's downtown panel, curated and chaired by Lawrence, 13 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D818wg1gVck&t=904s>

S8: Tim Lawrence, "Basquiat and Downtown", Barbican, 1 September 2017, <http://sites.barbican.org.uk/basquiatdowntown/>

S9: Three examples include: Jesse Jarnow, 2016, *Heads: a biography of psychedelic America* (New York: Da Capo Press); Julie Ault, "Steven Evans: if I can't dance, it's not my revolution", exhibition catalogue, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 29 June-13 October 2019; and Red Bull Music Academy's website <https://www.redbullmusicacademy.com>, which includes numerous references to Lawrence's research plus links to RBMA YouTube research playlists.

S10: Louis Niebuer, 2018. "Life and death on the New York dance floor, 1980-1983," *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 12(4), 511-13.