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Abstract

As a music genre popularized by communities of color as well as queer communities, disco's unprecedented popularity came to form the cultural zeitgeist of the seventies. Although its success garnered wide mainstream approval, this success would be met with vitriol from disgruntled Rock DJ Steve Dahl, who led a charge against disco culture in response to its over-circulation. Dahl's anti-disco movement culminated on July 12th, 1979, as Dahl would host the infamous Disco Demolition Night, a baseball game promotion where patrons were granted discounted tickets in exchange for disco records to be denotated between innings. The night would end in riots and would be referred by many as the day disco "died". In this paper, I contend with the implication that disco's metaphorical death occurred on that very fateful day. I argue that Dahl's theatrics and optics are representative of broader homophobic and racist sentiments tied to the cultural dynamics of the seventies. Utilizing Jean Baudrillard's concepts of the "non-event" and "hyperreality" as well as counterpublic literature, this paper examines the ways in which the media, alongside the cultural faux pas that was Disco Demolition Night, worked together to both reify and manufacture the public's perception of disco. In analyzing the optics of the event itself as well as newspaper editorials covering the anti-disco movement, my research explores how the movement emphasized the use of symbolic imagery to design a narrative of cultural warfare, which carried connotations harmful to queer communities of

color.

Keywords: Disco, Rhetoric, Pop Culture, Counterpublic, Baudrillard, Hyperreality, Public Perceptions

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Introduction

Toward the end of the 1970s, public perceptions surrounding disco had begun to sour as its popularity pervasively defined the entire decade's dominating aesthetic. Disco would not come to encapsulate the decade's quintessential iconography without trouble; the genre and the culture associated with it disturbed and competed with opposing genre camps, forming a dialectical shift from mainstream rock music traditionalism to the masculine-redefining, sex-laden, raw scene that disco invited. However, on July 12, 1979, Chicago radio DJ Steve Dahl, who many disparagingly referred to as a "shock jock," ultimately manifested these public perceptions along with his own by curating *Disco Demolition Night*, a baseball promotion held during a Chicago White Sox game where guests were offered a reduced entry fee for bringing a disco record to be publicly destroyed. The night would notoriously be etched into history as one of the most disastrous events in sports history as riots ensued shortly after Dahl set a large crate of records ablaze.

This turn of events famously culminated in what cultural historians and scholars ominously brand "the death of disco"—however, this title certainly constitutes a provocation. Did disco *really* die after 1979? What does the metaphorical/symbolic murder of disco imply? Was this merely a calamitous, isolated case of hooliganism or the culmination of something

more “malevolent”? This paper investigates and evaluates how the proverbial war against disco undergirds a larger cultural war against specific identities that mainly occupied disco spaces and first created these spaces—this being LGBTQ+ people of color from urban settings. By doing so, I will interrogate how the spectacle or singular event of Disco Demolition Night became such a pivotal climax in anti-disco movements and how the rhetoric behind the spectacle only became symbolically reified through its controversy as opposed to what it seemingly represented (the “death” of disco). This paper will primarily emphasize reactionary responses to the growing hypervisibility of these historically marginalized identities.

Utilizing counterpublic theory, this paper also serves to delineate the process of rhetorical destruction in which a heavily commercialized subgenre of music was claimed to be “killed” through a singular symbolic event or spectacle. Through the lens of a singular moment, we witness the ostensibly complete negation and (an)nihilation of an established genre—a genre that had arisen from Black, Latinx queer spaces and made commercial and “acceptable” by the mainstream. By analyzing the racist, anti-queer subtexts and implications of the anti-disco backlash, I aim to illustrate foundational phenomena found in reactionary movements—the recurring “burning in effigy” trope, the universal co-opting through mass commercialization transitioning to the universal panning of a landmark cultural development. The movement anticipates and reacts to disco’s mainstream shift.

As the distinction of “mainstream” music serves an organizational force for identity politics and social linkages, demarcations become formed to define heterosexual and queered separations, fueling the marginally subordinated counterpublic’s vilification and the subsequent reifying of its disco’s “death.” To structure this analysis, I turn to topical articles covering disco

culture and the anti-disco movement, the optics of spectacle itself—the Disco Demolition Night. This focus will be accompanied by both pre- and post-Demolition articles channeling the anti-disco prejudice; as a previously and exclusively gay, Black, and Latinx scene finds its way into the mainstream, public fears of the queer counterpublic grows vitriolic and just as Baudrillard examines public perceptions bolstering phenomena, such articles arguably perform reactionary reservations and notions by characterizing the counterpublic in predatory or encroaching manner.

While examining public perceptions of disco leading up to the event grants a cohesive picture of what Dahl and his followers attempted to "kill," a parallel focus on how disco held a potential to obfuscate and blur the boundaries set by race, gender, and sexuality also provides an intriguing argument for displays of male effeminacy, hypersexuality, and popularity amongst people of color signaling political disruption; the general public's failure to comprehend the true nature of the counterpublic attests to how disco's political disruptions received backlash from white, hypermasculine "rockists." To explore this, I will incorporate articles written after the event that speak on Disco's "death" due to its decline in sales and overall profitability—equating the counterpublic's allure to something expendable by means of its economic value or made solely for the public's consumption. In detailing public perceptions rhetorically "destroying" disco, a statement on dual complicity in destruction from both media outlets and Steve Dahl himself will be made.

With an emphasis on terms of militancy and violence—such as "demolition," "death," "takeover," and especially "destruction"—these terms primarily shape the public memories of the time as reflected by both retrospectives and written pieces of the time. Baudrillard's idea

on the public spectacle falsifying or obscuring memories assists us in detailing how the public rhetorically "transforms" disco into a disposable novelty, while also interpolating images intertwined with homophobia and racism into the phenomenon of "discophobia."

Disco's Queer, "Underground" Beginnings

Behind the glamour, glitz, and kitschy aesthetics, disco draws from different international music traditions as well as Black-originated rhythm and blues (R&B) and its more fast-paced, "danceable" relative, funk. As the Love Unlimited Orchestra's 1973 track "Love Theme" became the first disco track to be a top number one hit, local deejays found success in circulating these tracks through clubs as opposed to utilizing radio airwaves[1]. With its circulation becoming ever present amongst clubs located in close proximity to urban living situations, Alice Echols proposes that disco presented new expressions of sexualities, masculinities and racial politics in tandem with the high-charged, rhythmic sounds of disco. With these new expressions becoming more palatable through commercialization, legendary Motown Records founder Berry Gordy sought to prioritize a largescale, zeitgeist-forming "sound" over singular "songs", focusing on utilizing an "aural template" for Motown releases through a producer-driven process[2]. Black music, which had been unanimously defined by the "Motown Sound" of the mid to late 1960s, adopted a more mechanic, "assembly line" approach through its "violins, propulsive bass, and pounding beat"[3]. For pop music that especially also appealed to those outside communities of color, such an approach would soon become an industry standard in the streamlined process of music

[1] Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture.* 38
[2] Ibid. 45-46
[3] Ibid. 46

production. While the patented "Motown sound" came to form the cultural identity of the previous generation, the lines between the R&B, Funk, and soul became blurred as disco appealed to individuals across racial lines and boundaries—and even across the realms of gender, class, and sexuality.

While disco had marked a pivotal shift for communities of color, both musically and culturally, the sonic backdrop of social movements also characterizes an intermeshing between these aforementioned realms of gender, class, and sexuality. Before disco found mainstream peak interest from the iconic costumed ensemble Village People, Barry Gibbs' distinct falsetto with The Bee Gees, and box-office hit films such as John Travolta's 1977 *Saturday Night Fever*, disco—as a culture beyond sounds and cadences—held a strong "queer potential" as a post-Stonewall LGBT community co-opted the genre's traditions to counteract dominant conceptions of sexuality and gender. New York City clubs that geared towards disco dancing such as The Loft and The Sanctuary acted as safe spaces for both straight women and gay men who felt alienated by the intimidating nature of city's nightlife and the socially restrictive ideas behind heterosexual partnerships.[4] The audiences to which disco resonated with channel notions of what Michael Warner famously refers to as *counterpublics.* As the public sphere serves to appeal to dominant culture and the discourse surrounding it, the counterpublic disturbs its larger counterpart through addressing its "indefinite strangers," recognizing its estrangement and establishing their subjectivity as the focus of their own discursive space in respect to the wider public.[5] Specifically in regards to queer counterpublics, their members are influence disco culture itself. For the sake

[4] Lawrence, "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor". 232
[5] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics". 424

of interrogating the public sphere's reaction to these "worlds" or spaces, this idea of a "disturb[ance]" is something to be examined closely as the focal point for its outrage.

However, we witness *a* counterpublic becoming *the* public. While Warner pitches for a seemingly positive dialectical transition from the counterpublic to the public, resolving issues fostered by exclusion may work against the goals that inclusionary visibility in the public sphere attempts to (re)claim. Tim Lawrence admits disco's transition into the public through commercialization and commodification set the stage for the reactionary critics to vilify the culture. With *Saturday Night Fever*'s warped and subordinately hyper-masculine depictions of disco and the rise of the notorious celebrity hangout, Studio 54, clubs formerly founded on the premise of inclusion for unheard voices now became exclusive social societies[6]. Arising in a parallel manner to disco's commercialization, Lawrence speaks on how the rise of the New Right echoed a need for a resounding reaction to disco's seductive and sexually expressive nature. As the 1970s came to close with the election of Ronald Reagan out of a precarious recession, disco represented both a disengagement from the acceptable morals championed by the New Right's white conservative traditionalists and the general public's need for class equality—an issue that disco formerly aimed to address at its beginnings.

Weaponizing the slogan "Disco Sucks," Steve Dahl and his anti-disco movement not only acted adjacently to cultural critiques of disco's "superficiality," perceived hypocrisy, and "mindless[ness]"—they coded their own rhetoric with pseudo-"everyman" ideals in order to

[6] Lawrence. "In Defense of Disco (Again). 130

"tap[] into the homophobic and racist sentiments that underpinned the rise of the Anglo-American New Right."[7]

The Death of Disco Did Not Take Place: Rhetorically Destroying Disco

While Dahl and other affiliated promoters express regret for Demolition Night's turn of events and the ensuing aftermath, most—especially Dahl himself—vehemently deny the event's racist and homophobic motives and dismiss the accusations as mere revisionism. "Most of the people calling it racist and homophobic are younger and have come out of college predisposed to think that thanks to identity politics," Dahl expresses his disdain for modern-day interpretations, "There's not even any discourse. You're wrong if you don't ascribe to exactly the way I think. I say more on the podcast, but on the radio I don't talk about politics."[8] As this quote demonstrates, depoliticization functions like the way he presents how one views the past. We view, we discuss, we critique, but how does a movement's war against a culture amount to something more symbolic? In other words, what does something—ostensibly devoid of political implications—attempt to become through morbid allusions to "death" and an "end"? Did Dahl really "kill" disco on this very fateful day in 1979?

Jean Baudrillard grants a strong framework for examining how public perceptions transform and invent the spectacle as a symbolic moment. While "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" audaciously suggests that the 1991 counterstrike against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait did not constitute a war, he presents the ascribed term "war" as an absurd assumption; Operation Desert Storm (or the Gulf War) was never a "war"—rather, through media presentations and

[7] Ibid. 131
[8] Dahl et al. *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died.* 119

interpellating images, a narrative is rhetorically formed to establish it as a "war" as opposed to being viewed as a paternalist Western reaction. For Baudrillard, the American public and the Western world invented its heroism through hyper-fixating on the Global South's perceived evisceration; the "war" existed to rhetorically demoralize its enemies while public perceptions geared by and towards the West created the enemies, the heroes, the victims, and the narrative as a whole. He asserts that there are "no images of the field of battle, but images of masks, of blind or defeated faces, images of falsification. It is not war taking place over there but the disfiguration of the world."[9] For those observing the events that transpired during Disco Demolition Night, the metaphorically "world-disfiguring" images of disco's demise through militancy and chaos corresponds with these falsified images of triumph against the imagined enemy—disco culture; for Baudrillard, one "disfigures" the world through falsifying images and promoting a singular historic narrative for those to subscribe to.

I by no means intend to analogize the events that took place during the Gulf War itself. Instead, I utilize Baudrillard's analysis to illustrate the symbolic realm of the *reaction*. This refers to the parts of the reaction that stretch far beyond the literal actions constituting the reaction. While Steve Dahl views Demolition Night as an apolitical foray on a critically overpopularized genre, the symbolic death of disco had become willed into history through calculated gestures and actions performed in his rhetoric. Leading up to the night, Dahl informally founded a collective called the "Insane Coho Lips Anti-Disco Army" to garner attention from his Rock N' Roll audience.[10] Their comedic jabs targeted disco's queer potential by ascribing "effeminate" tropes,

[9] Baudrillard. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.* 40
[10] Frank, Gillian. "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco." 297

stigmatizing its male participants, and reinforcing heterosocial norms in relation to. From simulating explosions on air and equating disco fans to "animals" to creating parodies of popular disco hits, Dahl's masked critique of mass consumerism and inauthenticity relied on this element of destruction as a force of potent reaction.

In playing along with dialectical exchanges observed here, John Street interprets backlash to pop music as originating in response to rigidly defined power structure. As pop music, which disco had become perceptively translated into, disengages with subculture and forms of youth culture, he argues that narratives behind a loss of authenticity do not completely account for how popular music inhabits an inherently political arena. For Street, despite consumerism opting to exploit the public's base-level desires, authenticity is "a code for [one's] relationship to the music, which in turn [is] linked to wider political interests."[11] Similar to Baudrillard's findings, the language surrounding authenticity serves to mask political interests, depoliticize the counterpublic that has transitioned into the public, and isolate the spectacle from the symbolic acts of destruction at hand. While scholars such as John Drury warn against defining acts of "moral panic" and reactionary crowd behavior as "pathological" and driven by emotional impulses, challenges to reassert the authentic against the disco inauthentic are admittedly based in rationality.[12] The members within Dahl's movement consciously subscribe to the ideology of the authentic. However, the movement seeking to police what they perceive as "authentic" further presents itself as an ideological battle against aspects attributed to homosexuality, Blackness, and

[11] Street, John. "Shock Waves: The Authoritative Response to Popular Music." 312

[12] Drury, John. "'When the mobs are looking for witches to burn, nobody's safe'".

marginalized identities, not homosexuality itself or not race itself[13]; destruction or the panic to destroy occurs uncontrollable as the real enemy is truly unknown—hence social difference becomes the all-encapsulating enemy. Dahl invoking the death of disco marks a shift against social change—the reaction to the former counterpublic seeping into dominant culture.

As we once again begin to re-visualize disco as a discursively informed space, we can also begin to negotiate the complexities of its rhetorical destruction as well as understand its role in reactionary backlash. At its root, the anti-disco campaign was a campaign for destruction via erasure. Erasure, in the sense that a different reality overshadows another marginalized reality, serves to install privileged voices in the form of invented, "imaginary truths." Imaginary truths are not necessarily false or completely fallacious. Rather, they constitute a collection of artificially valid perceptions, only made valid through supplanting the othered reality of the counterpublic. With this concern in mind, Baudrillard and the strategically "heterotopic" or othered positioning of the counterpublic assist us in interrogating imaginary truths—this being something undoubtedly epistemic in nature.[14] Imaginary truths come by way of manufacturing consent to which the public unconsciously upholds established declarations, especially the teleological kind that indicates an end. Cultural erasure relies on undermining the clear barriers between reality and the fabricated, assigned narrative—a reality beyond reality fostered by media projections—a *hyperreality*, as Baudrillard defines.

The collective project to manufacture an end of an era can be attributed to how an event is produced. Arguably, the most overt way to produce perceptions lies in image production. On

[13] Hubbs, Nadine. "I Will Survive': musical mappings of queer social space in a disco anthem"
[14] Bishop and Phillips, "Baudrillard and the Evil Genius". 135

this idea of hyperreality, Baudrillard paints a "destabilized" picture of a society dependent on mediatization. The event and its representation through mediatized images present a dilemma between the "imaginary" and "real"; audiences are to rely heavily on projections to rally behind as a common truth:

> The facts, truth, and real events all become subject to production from preexisting media models and, moreover, to constant reprocessing and reediting to suit the needs of the moment. Events are no longer what they once were, having been transmuted by the apparatuses and procedures of simulation and media processing. As we proliferate ever more and finer mediating technologies for live, real-time, hyperspeed information delivery, as the old television adage "you are there" is taken to the -nth degree, and as we ramp up our immersive apparatuses of sound and image perfection, all of which claim to take us closer and closer to the reality of the event itself, that reality paradoxically recedes into hyperrealistic simulation.[15]

Here, Baudrillard illustrates an uncanny paradox; he describes how new media technologies bring us closer to historical moments while simultaneously moving us away from them by directing the public perceptions behind them. Regarding disco, a modernity issue also persists here. As its mainstream popularity dwindled, was disco just another trendy novelty to discard like consumerist excess? If so, then what *really* happened to the genre? Baudrillard's emphasis on simulation and media proves important to understand his concept of the *nonevent*. Contemporarily, as opposed to merely just occurring, (non)events are now "designed to happen" by mediatized societies or societies hyper-dependent on the cultural forces of media.[16] Dahl, as a very vocal radio figure, served to orchestrate and design destruction through spectacle. Through Baudrillard, who would famously pose the assertion that the 1991 Gulf War did not take place merely because it was advantageously designed as a war, one can insinuate the racialized

[15] Glynn, "The 2004 Election Did Not Take Place". 218
[16] Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil.* 41

and homophobic images of war, death, and destruction serve the fundamental purpose of validating reactionary crowd's vitriolic sentiments. The modernity issue is found in intimate subcultures and communities being condemned to the position of a decaying trend. The nonevent proceeds as an inevitability geared to manifest, reify, and design the happening, further demonstrating the hyperreal as a singular event dictating the fate of counterpublic.

For sake of the crowd's validation, the death of disco signaled not only the death of a genre, but the death of the queered counterpublic. As Warner asserts, the counterpublic is "constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public."[17] However, in its queered form, it constitutes more than its dichotomous existence; queered counterpublics are the discourses of marginalized narratives erased from the dominant narratives. Hyperrealities and dominant publics share this quality in that they both function as simulative narratives serving to erase specific voices.

Before the Death of Disco: Framing, Identifying, and Characterizing the Counterpublic

Along with various tabloids and exposés, Steve Dahl's earlier antics rely on sensationalism and the spectacle, the latter of which would undergird his oeuvre. Dahl, a rock enthusiast, was terminated from his former radio station WDAI after the station made an auspicious transition from broadcasting rock 'n roll records to concentrating on disco music. While this set the tone for his own sentiments on disco's popularity, the transition from an individual experience to collectively approved disavowal is foundationally laid. An image of his own dealings alongside the frustrations of the cis white everyman began to foster a vividly clear atmosphere. In tune with

[17] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics". 423

publicity stunts like burning a Van McCoy record in celebration of the singer's untimely death, Dahl's Insane Coho Lips would take inspiration for their name from the coho salmon, a salmon species introduced into the Great Lakes to combat lamprey eel infestations.[18] While Dahl's militarism and counterforce measures seem to be an isolated case, anti-disco as a virulent counterforce measure itself functions as a source of hyperreality. By focusing on authenticating an antagonistic image, disco's adherers become the "lamprey eel."

In an article lambasting the anti-disco movement's requests for an editorial endorsement, New York Times writer John Rockwell maps the hyperreal narrative at play:

> Rock [is] not only the true voice of the people, but our principal medium for personal expression in the realm of popular music. Disco represents a dehumanizing conformity, the imposition of a rigid, expressionless format. It has been imposed on the masses by a diabolical conspiracy consisting of people who always hated rock and who in disco see their best chance yet of reducing us once again to the musical pabulum that prevailed before the advent of rock.[19]

While Rockwell himself does not concede to anti-disco ideals, his analysis of the situation at hand suggests erasure and perfectly maps the movement's dogma. Completely opposing the unbridled expression disco was thought to permit, the genre is described as a "dehumanizing conformity" and "rigid." However, rigidity and conformity comprise of something more poignant. They evoke a dark framing of a "conspiracy" to thwart the dialectical achievement already set by rock music. However, it is a fear of returning to the previous paradigm that stokes the anxieties and fragilities of a reactionary crowd—a paradigm where rock music was the deplorable art form. Through this

[18] Shapiro. *Turn The Beat Around*
[19] Rockwell. "Can Rock and Disco Music Coexist?"

dynamic, a militaristic narrative guided by calls to revolt, *react,* and reclaim seems nascently inevitable.

Militarism also plays a large role in instituting the masculinist atmosphere underlying anti-disco sentiments. It is used to further the disconnect between the norm-departing counterpublic position that discotheques inhabit and the hypermasculine campaign structured by figureheads such as Dahl. The term "expressionless" situates the militarism. Expressionlessness rejects aesthetical value while in turn, justifying drastic action taken.

In another article titled "The Dialectic of Disco," Andrew Kopkind further illustrates the dialectical shift disco, as a formerly invisible counterpublic, experiences in its rise through consumerist networks:

> The rock critical establishment still treats disco music as an adolescent aberration, at best; many cultural commentators look on the whole sensibility as a metaphor for the end of humanism and the decline of the West […] History hardly stops. Disco in the '70s is in revolt against rock in the '60s. It is the anti-thesis of the "natural" look, the real feelings, the seriousness, the confessions, the struggles, the sincerity, pretensions, and pain of the last generation. Disco is "unreal," artificial, and exaggerated. It affirms the fantasies, fashions, gossip, frivolity, and fun of an evasive era. The '60s were braless, lumpy, heavy, rough, and romantic; disco is stylish, sleek, smooth, contrived, and controlled.[20]

The underpinnings of the "end of humanism" and "decline of the West" motifs correspond with historical notions that condemn cultures into birth-death cycles. Such rhetoric mirrors that of authors such as Oswald Spengler, who theorizes on the sociocultural trajectory of Western civilization in his magnum opus *The Decline of the West*. The themes associated with the text feed into philosophically pessimistic ideals of culture "pass[ing] through the age-phases"

[20] Kopkind. "The Dialectic of Disco"

while moving into its terminal civilization phase—a phase in which insincerity and artificiality prevail.[21] Spengler also turns to categorize Western civilization as "Faustian" with humanity adopting a "tendency towards the infinite."[22] In reference to the famous German tale where the titular character makes a bittersweet deal with the devil, civilizations become disillusioned in their cultural pursuits and attempt to acquire infinite knowledge to no avail. The reactionary establishment seeks to thwart perpetual cycles of dissatisfaction through marking the "end" or "decline." This temporal phenomenon is predicated on positioning and characterizing certain spaces as "authentic" or "true" while preserving "virtuous" traits such like sincerity; traits like these are made exclusive to preceding cultures. Instilling an aura of pessimism further recapitulates dichotomies that serve to justify militaristic measures.

As Spengler establishes an episode of "decline" as predestined, defeating dissatisfaction requires avoiding the "end of humanism" which requires upholding normative positions and enforcing the subordinate positions constituting the counterpublic. Since the established narrative limits and excludes Black, Brown, and queer voices, these voices are political in nature. Marginalized voices are continually deprived of claims to time, history, and culture. Instead, dominant discourses take precedence over other narratives. Who has the power to shape public discourses regarding aesthetical appeals? The *sonic* politics of time is political in that it is a racialized and queered conflict between rhetorical authorities. It is akin to the construction of Charles Mills' "white temporal imaginary." In critique of G.W.F Hegel's claims of Africa being devoid of history, Mills asserts that normative whiteness dictates who or what the "demarcator

[21] Spengler. *The Decline of the West*. 107
[22] Ibid. 75

of the appropriate use of time" is to be and strips the power to forge narratives away from oppressed identities.[23] On this note, the framing of terms like "adolescent aberration" presupposes acknowledging how issues of access undergird conversations surrounding legitimacy. From normative perspectives, disco was "unnatural," a cultural faux pas devoid of aesthetic integrity, whereas the genre itself simply arose from Black, Brown, and queer spaces, appealing to a multitude of demographics and even blurring the racialized/queered boundaries between spaces. In establishing a profile to antagonize as "unnatural", it is the racialized and queered boundaries that experience erasure.

The Optics of Disco Demolition Night: Visualizing the Nonevent and the Spectacle

When discussing temporalities and its usages in public memory discourses, focusing on the nonevent and its visual instantiations yields a promising basis for fully evaluating the spectacle. The spectacle here, referring to distinguishably memorable event or instance, is the cataclysmic Disco Demolition Night that was etched into public minds as "the day disco died." Disco Demolition Night as the nonevent occurs with various motifs working to justify its goals.

The rules for the night are presented to its attendants. Each attendant brings a disco record in exchange for a reduced entrance fee. The records are placed into a crate and after each game of baseball played, Steve Dahl is to trigger the explosives. If the event's undertones are not visible enough, the footage begins with a satirical performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" by a singer in disco-styled garbs and while the performance goes on, a homophobic

[23] Mills, "White Time"

slur is briefly heard being yelled from the rowdy crowd.[24] Accordingly, this would set the tone for what would subsequently take place throughout the broadcast.

As briefly mentioned before, the most salient features of Dahl's presentation exist in its hypermasculinist militarism and the grandiose, ceremonial displays. After arriving in a military-grade Jeep, Dahl, dressed in military fatigues, is publicly introduced as "Supreme Commander" and presciently announces to his crowd that the news surrounding (non)event will be "all over the newspapers, all over the television, and all over the country."[25] With Baudrillard proclaiming nonevents as a product of unchecked mediatization, Dahl's positioning is inherently strategic. Just as the "Gulf War" is ostensibly defined as a war through exceptionalist sensationalism, the spectacle exploits information network while assigning its actors—antagonists and protagonists. Its dramatist appeal simulates a "war" and by rallying for publicity, Dahl takes a propagandist stance to further his cause. In taking this stance, the masculinist undertones inevitably seep through. The imagery corresponds with masculine-(re)affirming gestures associated with ideological conceptions of "idealized masculinity." The role of militarism suggests that its adherents "valorize the notion of strong active males collectively risking their personal safety for the greater good of the wider community."[26] With these masculinist projections, we come to witness an attitude of paternalistic saviorism strategically designing the necessity of war.

Post-Disco: The Death of Disco Will Not Take Place

[24] FuzzyMemoriesTV. "Super Disco Demolition: The 40th Anniversary Compilation". 04:19
[25] Ibid. 33:40
[26] Higate, Paul, and John Hopton. "War, Militarism, and Masculinities". 434

Despite Dahl's garish theatrics and the unintended chaos that would ensue after the explosion, one cannot reject its successful execution. The Insane Coho Lips Army rallied behind their "supreme commander" and the nonevent of war became seen as "transparent" in that disco's decline would follow. Baudrillard explains how the nonevent's transparency relies on the masses to complicitly and sometimes unconsciously reify the event's symbolic stances: "By making transparent the non-event of the war, you give it force in the imagination - somewhere other than in the 'real time' of news where it simply peters out. You give force to the illusion of war, rather than become an accessory to its false reality."[27] The conditions set forth permit "illusions" and "imaginings" to transparently dismantle what precedes it. The nonevent is not merely a quasi-event. Rather, it is a happening materializing within the public sphere as a result of mutual recognition(s).

In an article speculating on the future of disco, Hugh Mooney concedes that disco and its counterpublic utilized reaction by responding to preceding societal mores. He admits that disco flourished as a repudiation of "1960s idealism" with LGBTQ+ cultures intermeshing with Black radio.[28] Outside of this fact, Mooney emphasizes disco's survival being contingent on an "updated synthesis of it[self]." The reality of this calculation remains accurate; the truth is that disco simply became sublimated into different genres and subcommunities. While the music charts would return to its segregated roots for years to come, its elements proved to spark innovations that garnered mass appeal across multiple communities and even laid the foundations for the technological advancements of the upcoming 1980s.

[27] Baudrillard. *The Illusion of the End.* 64
[28] Mooney. "Disco: A Style For The 1980s?". 90

In a 1990 article, John Rockwell poses a scintillating question: who really won the war? In response, he forwardly claims that "people want to dance" and embody a sense of "primacy" to express openly—an innate feeling communities left out of public discourse are to yearn for.[29] The power to manifest and employ such raw energy attests to the political nature of culture and aesthetics. They symbolize much more than personal choices or tastes. Contextualizing its symbolical and rhetorical dimensions invites us to scrutinize events like these and uncover the hidden realities structured by public perceptions and memories. Indicative of this, the "death" of disco provides a convincing case for a trifold, mutualistic relationship between culture, politics, and the poststructuralist phenomena expressed by Jean Baudrillard. Because public perceptions are malleable through its framing of cultural events, it is crucial to not only consider what the public collectively considers as truth, but also consider who is left out of the consensus reality in which truth is inseparably tied to. Steve Dahl and the anti-disco movement's crusade ominously demonstrates how cultural moments, characterized by their absurdity and satirical nature, also reflect the erasure of marginalized counterpublics.

[29] Rockwell. "Pop View: Rock vs. Disco: Who Really Won the War?"

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