



Epilogue: Decolonising Disco— Counterculture, Postindustrial Creativity, the 1970s Dance Floor and Disco

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As the recent passing of the 40th anniversary of the July 1979 “disco sucks” rally at Comiskey Park draws attention to one of the earliest manifestations of the Middle American revolt against any group perceived to have made gains at its expense, it has become possible and even necessary to reach new conclusions about that population’s favourite point of attack. If the late 1970s backlash established disco as a phenomenon that needed to be defended, temporal distance from its formation, uptake, overproduction, collapse and recuperation allows for a more nuanced and far-reaching understanding of the culture that has three significant implications.

First, the re-historicisation of disco enables and even requires a reconceptualisation of punk and hip hop/rap, the two other music-based movements that came to dominate 1970s and early 1980s New York City (NYC). All three genres have been figured by historians (Chang 2005, Cooper 2004, Echols 2010, Fricke and Ahearn 2002, Gendron 2002, George 1988, Goldman 1978, Haden-Guest 1997, Hager 1984,

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Holmstrom 1996, Lawrence 2003, McNeil and McCain 1997, Mieziitis 1980, Savage 1991, Toop 1984) as unfolding as discrete and stable entities that emerged in opposition to one another, with each additional discursive reference to “disco,” “hip hop”/“rap” and “punk” attributing these sounds with a singular coherence. Yet a methodological approach that prioritises city-wide cultural developments above demarcated scenes leads to the conclusion that the cultures that gathered around these sounds were much more fluid, open and democratic than has been supposed. This, in turn, requires not only a new historicisation of the formative years of “disco,” “punk” and “hip hop”/“rap” in the 1970s and early 1980s, but also, given the way these sounds have influenced so much music that has circulated globally since that halcyon period, a broader re-reading of the history of music genre during the last 50 years.

Second, the reconceptualisation of disco along with hip hop/rap and punk sheds new light on the progressive potential of the early postindustrial economy before it assumed its neoliberal character. The dominant reading of the history of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005) posits that the embrace of individualism, freedom and flexibility proposed by the loosely contemporaneous advances of the countercultural movement, the anti-state demonstrations of 1968 and the emergence of the Italian autonomist movement coincided with and supported the emergence of a corporate agenda that sought to introduce economic reforms that would undermine collective power and liberate capital via the slashing of welfare spending, the rolling back of corporate regulation and the lowering of taxes for the wealthy—reforms that the proponents of neoliberalism claimed would enhance individualism, freedom and flexibility. A counter-reading (Negri 1979; Negri 1991; Hardt and Negri 2001) maintains that the countercultural movement, the protests of 1968 and *autonomia* came about through the desire of citizens to free themselves from the social and economic restrictions of the postwar settlement by embracing new forms of autonomy, flexibility and creativity that channelled new collective desires. Far from instigating the shift towards individualism, freedom and flexibility, capital reacted to the demand for change. However, the popular resonance of this post-Fordism form of collectivist proto-politics has been underestimated, with disco amounting not to a regressive form of narcissism, hedonism and materialism, as has been regularly argued on the Left (Dyer 1995), but instead a dramatic expression of the new sensibility.

Third, disco histories should acknowledge not only the culture’s definitively diverse social and sonic roots (Echols 2010; Lawrence 2003; Shapiro

2005) but also the way the international contribution to the early development of the sound came to be marginalised and eventually erased. Having integrated African and Latin recordings into their sets during the first half of the 1970s, New York City's pioneering DJs became almost entirely detached from these historic sources of dance music, in part because disco successfully co-opted African and Latin motifs into its matrix, in part because US disco became such a successful commodity that other production centres that lay beyond Western Europe became almost entirely obscured. What were the global roots of disco and how did these musical lineages evolve as New York, the United States and, to a certain extent, France and Germany claimed disco to be their own invention? What might an anti-colonial history of disco look like if it was written from within Africa or Latin America or another part of the world?

REWRITING THE HISTORY OF DISCO, PUNK AND HIP HOP/ RAP IN 1970s NEW YORK CITY

Running up to the late 1990s, books dedicated to the history of disco characterised the culture as existing on an axis that, at one end, featured the elitist, hedonistic, narcissistic, individualistic, fashion-conscious, sexually polymorphous practices characteristic of midtown discotheques such as Studio 54, and at the other revolved around a working-class, stylistically less sophisticated culture that revived straight hustle dancing and enjoyed widespread uptake in the suburbs, as depicted in the movie *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham 1977; Goldman 1978; Haden-Guest 1997; Mieziitis 1980). Inasmuch as it was acknowledged, punk was figured as disco's aggressive, commercially less successful antagonist. Hip hop/rap didn't feature, either because it had yet to enter public consciousness or because it was deemed to be irrelevant to the history of disco. For example, Haden-Guest's *The Last Party*, the most extensive history of disco at the time of its publication, dedicates a single phrase (Haden-Guest 1997, 216) to the history of hip hop/rap during the 1970s.

More recent histories of disco (Echols 2010; Lawrence 2003; Shapiro 2005) draw attention to the culture's socially diverse and sonically progressive origins, which shaped a less visible yet ultimately more influential form of disco that took root in private parties, downtown discotheques and independent record companies, shaping contemporary DJ culture, remix culture, sound system culture and the practice of inclusive partying

along the way. This revisionist analysis was necessary given that, ever since the “disco sucks” backlash peaked in the summer of 1979, disco’s reputation for crassness, commercialism, exclusivity and superficiality dominated public discourse. This extended to the wave of histories that established the basic parameters of punk and rap/hip hop (Chang 2005, Cooper 2004, Fricke and Ahearn 2002, Gendron 2002, George 1988, Hager 1984, 1986, McNeil and McCain 1997, Moore and Coley 2008, Savage 1991, Schloss 2009, Toop 1984). All figured punk and/or hip hop/rap as existing in direct opposition to a reductionist version of disco that revolved around midtown exclusivity, suburban bad taste and mindless music.

To varying degrees, these histories figure disco, hip hop/rap and punk as cohesive and mutually exclusive music cultures that existed in opposition to one another, with the hip hop/rap and punk scenes alone in establishing dialogue in the early 1980s (Hager 1986). Yet more recent studies (Lawrence 2016; Reynolds 2005) highlight the degree of interaction that occurred between the disco, hip hop/rap and punk scenes during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Having punctured the sweeping assumption of mutual antagonism, these histories raise two questions. First, if these cultures were much more obviously collaborative than antagonistic during the late 1970s and in particular early 1980s, then when did the idea that they were grounded in opposition take root? Second, if the disco, hip hop/rap and punk scenes became less discrete and more interactive during the late 1970s and early 1980s, might their assumed opposition during the major part of the 1970s also be open to question?

The answer to the first question lies in the divisive character of the 1980s, and in particular the second half of the decade, when the combination of AIDS (which reached epidemic proportions in 1983), crack consumption (which became a national crisis during the middle of the 1980s) and the embedment of Reagan’s neoliberal reforms led groups that had been collaboratively minded to become defensive and distrustful. This milieu formed the backdrop for the emergence of a discourse that depicted disco and hip hop/rap as being especially antagonistic, including the publication of George’s (1988) *Death of Rhythm and Blues*, which held disco responsible for the whitening of R&B and hailed the rise of rap as the anti-disco saviour of black music—this from a writer who in 1981 co-authored an article with disco columnist Brian Chin (George and Chin 1981) that welcomed the way that the “barriers” between post-disco dance music and black music had “crumbled.”

To address the second question, perhaps because history is written backwards and with a knowledge of where the narrative will end, there has been a marked tendency within music histories to argue that, even if they aren't born whole, genres and their pioneering participants display two elements from the moment they are conceived: they aggregate original aesthetic values, and they understand these values to exist in opposition to parallel practices. However, if the widespread practice of assuming and imposing a retrospective generic coherence on the histories of disco, punk and hip hop/rap is suspended, all three scenes can be seen to have engaged not in a three-way battle for subcultural supremacy, but instead in a subtler series of encounters that witnessed them emerge as nameless movements that sought out space in which to explore innovative, expressive cultural practices that ultimately shared more connections than has been assumed. Moreover, the imagined early divisions could have barely existed given that disco and punk didn't acquire their names until 1974, rap didn't receive its first release until 1979 and hip hop—as the term that figured DJing, MCing, breaking and graffiti as a cohesive movement—didn't come into formation or parlance until 1981 (Lawrence 2016). While moments of competition and hostility inevitably followed, even these were, on closer examination, rooted in caricatured depictions of disco and punk rather than any deep-rooted antagonism.

To begin with disco, the DJ-led dance culture that started to unfold at David Mancuso's Loft as well as Seymour and Shelley's Sanctuary from early 1970 onwards wasn't straightforwardly received as disco because the sound of disco didn't fully coalesce or come into public consciousness until the middle of 1974. As late as the autumn of 1973, for example, Vince Aletti published an article in *Rolling Stone* that noted the way in which rising popularity of discotheques, juice bars, after-hours clubs and private lofts was exerting a "strong influence on the music people listen to and buy" (Aletti 1973), but that that music lacked a name. Disco started to circulate in public consciousness when the Hues Corporation and George McCrae enjoyed successive number one hits during the summer of 1974, yet those releases and the coalescing disco genre already amounted to a reduction of what was happening musically, never mind socially, in New York City's party spaces. Quite simply, although the 1970s are frequently labelled the "disco decade" and although disco is routinely believed to have broken through at the beginning of the decade, the genre didn't exist until the decade was almost halfway over. Whatever came

before didn't sound like straight-up disco and didn't acquire or need a single name.

Rather than label the diverse range of sounds selected by New York City DJs during the opening years of the 1970s as "disco," the music selected by DJs during the early 1970s can be more productively understood as a form of countercultural music that was more radical in aesthetic and social terms than the music that is more commonly associated with the countercultural movement, namely, rock, acid rock and progressive rock (Greene 2016; Macan 1997; Whitely 1992). In contrast to many, although by no means all, aspects of rock culture, early 1970s DJ sets were improvised, unrepeatable and impossible to commodify. Whereas rock concerts separated musicians from the crowd, DJ sets were explicitly democratic thanks to the manner in which DJs and dancers entered into an antiphonal, call-and-response conversation. Unlike just about any other musical performance of the era, save for the all-night loft jazz sessions that also unfolded in New York's downtown ex-industrial spaces, DJ sets would routinely last for several hours, and for 12 hours or more if the party was being staged in a private space rather than a public discotheque. In other departures, party DJs integrated music that cut across space as well as time, and also foregrounded female, African American and international musicians. Forming a much more notable presence in early 1970s dance culture than they did in late 1960s rock culture, queers went on to exert a formative influence on the musical aesthetics that followed, from the introduction of DJ mixing (Lawrence 2003) to the prominent role attained by African American female recording artists on the New York City dance floor (Echols 2010; Hughes 1994; Lawrence 2003). Sonically open, demographically diverse, collectively minded, egalitarian and committed to social transformation, early 1970s party culture amounted to the most complete and compelling articulation of New York City's often cited but never straightforwardly realised melting pot.

To continue the comparison, if acid consumption was prominent in rock as well as in early 1970s dance culture, at the Loft, David Mancuso selected music according to the shifting intensities of an acid trip, as identified by Timothy Leary (Leary 2000), with the 12-hour journey enhanced through the introduction of specialist sound equipment, party decorations/lighting effects and expansive music selections, with the latter providing a sonic structure that supported social diversity and coalition building. The music selected by Mancuso and other DJs often included breaks and crescendos that encouraged crowds to express a form of

liberationist energy as well as explore new forms of bodily movement, expression, sexuality and desire, and this combination set the early 1970s dance floor apart from the somewhat asexual, isolated swaying that characterised countercultural gatherings. DJs also made a point of picking out long cuts from albums because these foregrounded more explorative structures that encouraged dancers to lose themselves in the music and enter into an alternative dimension. The introduction of the 12-inch single supported the spread of this form of immersive, transformative “journey music.” Meanwhile, party DJs challenged the corrosive marketing hegemony of their radio counterparts, the rise of the relatively unprofitable 12-inch single challenged the music industry’s album-driven profit model, supposedly unskilled DJs became the primary innovators within remix culture thanks to their knowledge of dance floor preferences, and DJs even organised collectively in order to demand free promotional copies of new releases, establishing the Record Pool, soon known as the New York City Record Pool, as their vehicle (Lawrence 2003). Disco’s malleable four-on-the-floor bass beat enabled it to self-consciously integrate gospel, funk, R&B, orchestral, African, Latin and even rock elements into its mix, which added to the impression of it being a music that existed to forge a rainbow alliance between diverse communities.

But if the rock end of the countercultural movement of the 1960s was at least partially blind to the concerns of women and people of colour, which groups found themselves, if not excluded by disco then, unable to embrace its ethos? The obvious answer lies in the coalitions that formed around punk and hip hop/rap. In contrast to disco’s embrace of racial diversity, early punk embraced a form of ethnic whiteness that mocked rock hipsters who embraced elements of black style; indeed, there were times when the embrace of white ethnicity tipped into racism (Bangs 1988). Punk prioritised aggressive, short bursts of noise over disco’s immersive, seductive groove. New York City’s two main punk hangouts, CBGB and Max’s Kansas City, didn’t even have dance floors. Holmstrom’s punk magazine declared that disco amounted to the “epitome of all that’s wrong with Western civilization” (Holmstrom 1996). Meanwhile hip hop/rap historians note how disco whitened, depoliticised and commercialised the terrain of black music, excluded Bronx partygoers from its exclusive dance floors and even embraced a form of polysexuality that was foreign to black male identity, all of which established the conditions for rap music and hip hop culture to emerge as the authentic new voice of young, working-class dancers and musicians of colour. Yet although

differences existed between disco and punk and disco and hip hop/rap, these have been exaggerated by, on the one hand, subsequent historical developments that dramatically intensified the differences that existed between the ultimately complex demographic coalitions that were attached to these scenes, and, on the other, deep-rooted subcultural and musicological assumptions that understand scenes and sounds as being rooted in difference, distinction and opposition to one another, as well as, as Sarah Thornton (Thornton 1996) argues, a partly imagined mainstream.

To begin with the partly imagined hostility that existed between disco and punk, the two scenes were barely conscious of one another's existence or their own internal coherence as they began to take root. When punk musicians began to congregate at CBGB during 1974 and 1975, disco still only existed at the outer margins of the popular imagination, so in reality there was little to oppose. Holstrom started to pen anti-disco editorials during 1976, yet the vitriol was partly an affect, while his target turned out to be a specific strand of disco that was taking root in midtown and the suburbs, which was judged, not entirely without foundation, to be commercially driven and socially regressive. Very few, if any, CBGB regulars were aware of the more radical form of dance culture that was taking root in the city's subterranean downtown scene (Lawrence 2016); had they been, they might well have identified with its DIY, organic underpinnings. When asked they declare the lack of a dance floor at the Bowery venue to have been a source not of anti-disco celebration but profound frustration (Lawrence 2016). Lurking beneath the culture clash headlines, the New York punk scene understood itself to be in opposition to much more than the most obvious signs of commercial disco, with pivotal figures such as curator/scenester Diego Cortez drawn to the Bowery venue as an alternative to the more obviously privileged scene that had settled in SoHo, where, he notes (Davis 2010), white people drank white wine in gallery rooms that displayed art mounted on white walls. Although the black presence at CBGB was minimal, the scene understood itself to be international, polysexual, driven by art and creativity more than anger, and definitionally renegade. The nascent disco and punk scenes also shared an interest in minimalist and post-minimalist music, and, in particular, sought to explore how the physical and emotional impact of music could increase as its content was stripped away, with punk's limited chord structures matching disco's obsession with the break. If a degree of headline hostility between punk and disco gathered momentum during 1977 and 1978, just as the slick/midtown/Studio 54 and the conformist/suburban/*Saturday*

Night Fever articulations of disco reached saturation point, those years also saw entrepreneurs plan for and open the first of several influential punk discotheques, with Hurrah and the Mudd Club leading the way. Musicians delivered mutant music that combined disco, punk and other sounds to feed the converging scenes (Lawrence 2016).

An overlapping series of observations can be applied to the supposed enmity that existed between disco and hip hop/rap. Widely, if not universally, credited as hip hop's pioneering DJ and party host, Herc can't have consciously opposed disco when he started to put on parties in the autumn of 1973 because disco didn't yet exist and, besides, Herc had no experience of partying outside of the Bronx. Herc is also said to have embraced funk only after his crowd didn't respond to his early dub-reggae selections, as if that indicated that something novel unfolded in that space, rather than the opposite, which is that funk-oriented dance music was spreading through the city like wildfire, with many records being played in Bronx and downtown party spots alike (Lawrence 2016). Hip hop/rap historians cite Herc's Jamaican upbringing as influencing his innovations in sound system construction, yet more advanced experiments in bass reinforcement were being explored by Richard Long, whose innovations were introduced in the Loft, the SoHo Place and eventually the Paradise Garage, where members of the Zulu Nation would eventually head to take notes (Lawrence 2016). Herc is also credited with pioneering the technique of mixing between the breaks during the summer of 1974, yet discotheque DJs were deploying the same technique in Boston, as was the NYC-based DJ Walter Gibbons, whose skill and precision outstripped that of Herc (Lawrence 2008).

The overstated disagreement between hip hop/rap and disco extends to the claim that funk-driven Bronx DJs didn't play disco, as if disco couldn't be funky. In fact, Bronx DJs only became disillusioned with disco when the sound reached its commercial peak during 1978, by which point downtown DJs had also started to question the direction the sound was taking (Lawrence 2003; Lawrence 2016). Much has also been made of the way discotheques excluded Bronx partygoers, but while it's true that Studio 54 admitted very few dancers of colour, that highlighted the limits of Studio's door policy rather than a rupture between borough dancers of colour and disco. Scores of discotheques were located in the Bronx; queers of colour who didn't feel comfortable in those environments had since started to head to queer-friendly venues in Manhattan before midtown became a home for flashbulb discotheques; and several Manhattan venues

catered to African American dancers. In any case, many of the Bronx dancers who partied with Herc and other pioneering Bronx DJs such as Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash were underage, and wouldn't have been admitted to any public discotheque, never mind Studio 54. Above all, just as disco didn't exist in anyone's mind until 1974, so rap didn't consolidate as a genre until 1979, with hip hop only breaking through conceptually during the latter part of 1980 and 1981. Indeed, it was only during the 1980s that Bronx DJs and MCs started to come into contact with the pioneers of downtown party culture and disco (Lawrence 2016). If territorialism came to the fore it was experienced not between the two scenes but within the two scenes.

The noise created by clashes between disco, hip hop/rap and punk, some of which occurred during the 1970s, much of which has been amplified subsequently, shouldn't obscure the extent to which New York City's grassroots music scenes embarked on a path to interaction and even convergence during the 1970s. If aesthetic preferences overlapped and crowds became more fluid, then disco should be refigured not as a singular movement that briefly overhauled rock as the bestselling genre in the United States during 1978 before it collapsed during 1979, but instead as an open-ended plurality that intersected with other semi-permeable scenes. If the radical underpinnings of punk and hip hop/rap are taken for granted, it has taken much longer for disco's radicalism to be recognised, so powerful has been its association with commercialism, mindlessness and hedonism.

Even the ambitious overview provided in *The Downtown Book* (Taylor 2006) remains almost entirely blind to the contribution of DJ-led discotheque/disco/dance floor culture. Yet participants in New York's DJ-led party/disco scene agreed with protagonists in the city's parallel grassroots music and art scenes about the need to place music at the centre of their activity; to explore new forms of bodily experience and communal transformation; to refocus political expectations following the denouement of the 1960s countercultural movement; to move towards practices and lifestyles that prioritised flexibility, creativity, openness, participation and a basic DIY orientation that broke with the social norms and hierarchies of the postwar era; to prioritise democratic and antiphonal forms of music-making, from DJ culture to forms of playing and performance that de-emphasised virtuosity; and to explore the sonic and social potential of minimalist and post-minimalist forms of artistic expression.

DJ CULTURE, DISCO, CREATIVITY AND THE EARLY POSTINDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

The 1970s are widely judged to have marked the turning point in the transition from industrial to postindustrial capitalism. For many on the Right, the decade evidenced the breakdown of the postwar settlement, the need to roll back the bloated and inefficient state in order to liberate the individual and market competition, and the corrosive moral impact of the countercultural movement. For many on the Left, the decade was marked by state's failure to manage the faults that were emerging within industrial capitalism as well as the onset of a new form of individualistic narcissism that either passively or actively enabled corporate capital to engineer the introduction of a series of budgetary and legal reforms that paved the way for the shift to a neoliberal economy. New York City provided both sides with evidence to support their critique, its declining public services and rising crime rates offering proof that market forces either needed to be unleashed or reigned in. The Right and Left seemed to agree on one thing: disco encapsulated the economy's collapse into a form of inefficient, hedonistic, morally degenerate wastefulness. Whether in the plot lines of *Saturday Night Fever* or the representations of Studio 54's dance floor and basement shenanigans, the culture encouraged abstinence from work, declining productivity and new levels of amoralism.

David Harvey's influential analysis (2005) of the decade is of particular interest here. Harvey points to President Ford's refusal to provide bailout money to a bankrupt New York as being key to capital's strategy to "move decisively" (Harvey 2005, 15) to test-run a new form of neoliberal governance as a response to the declining profitability of industrial capitalism. Meeting with city officials, the corporate banking sector demanded the introduction of a wage freeze, cuts to government services, new institutions to manage the city's budget, new user fees (including tuition fees), a requirement that municipal unions invest pension funds in city bonds, and punitive interest rates in return for bailout money. Their strategy, which aimed "to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (Harvey 2005, 19), crystallised around the project of persuading sympathetic national and international governing bodies to liberate finance by valuing the individual above the collective, markets above regulation and tax cuts for the wealthy above spending on welfare. Ronald Reagan won the presidential election of November 1980 by promising to introduce such a project while restoring

Christian values and defending the interests of white working-class families.

Harvey maintains that these developments might have been forestalled had creative workers not descended into individualistic modes of expression and work that led them to become complicit with the shift to a new neoliberal conjuncture:

The narcissistic exploration of self, sexuality, and identity became the leit-motif of bourgeois urban culture [...] Artistic freedom and artistic licence, promoted by the city's powerful cultural institutions, led, in effect, to the neoliberalization of culture [...] and [...] erased the collective memory of democratic New York. (Harvey 2005, 47)

He adds that “the city’s elites acceded, though not without a struggle, to the demand for lifestyle diversification (including those attached to sexual preference and gender) and increasing consumer niche choices (in areas such as cultural production),” and concludes that as a result “New York became the epicentre of postmodern cultural and intellectual experimentation” (Harvey 2005, 47). The argument that cultural workers started out as passive onlookers before embracing the opportunities that came their way through shifting economic circumstances received an earlier articulation when one of Harvey’s protégés, Sharon Zukin (1988), detailed the way SoHo artists became complicit with the real estate investment sector when they mined the rising value of the area’s ex-industrial infrastructure. It has subsequently been popularised by figures such as the renowned documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis, who alleges (Curtis 2016) that a new form of self-absorption prevented artists and punks—whom he correlates with the Left—from focusing on the advances of capital. In an improbable capillary motion, just as elements of the traditional working class blamed queers, women and people of colour for their declining living standards, switching their votes from Democrat to Republican in the November 1980 election, so a significant part of the Left has blamed the countercultural movements of the 1970s for facilitating the revival of capital in return for self-discovery and limited sectional gains.

There are, however, grounds to refigure the DJ-led party culture of the 1970s, its disco and hip hop/rap manifestations, the punk scene, the wider art scene and the convergent, mutant forms they assumed in combination with one another as an original, epoch-defining form of postindustrial expression that sought to hold on to the collective and egalitarian values

of the postwar settlement while seeking to explore new forms of expression, creativity and participation that broke with the constraints of industrial capitalism. New York became the pioneering epicentre of the movement in the first place because it was the most diverse city in the world, its population defined by millions of stories of flexibility, mobility and openness. Downtown industrial buildings, many of them empty or emptying, were converted into postindustrial spaces for social congregation and creative work, with dance venues rivalling art galleries in terms of sheer numbers. The form of dancing that took root replaced the convention of couples dancing with something that was both more individualistic and more collective, as dancers embraced a style of freeform dancing that enabled them to move individually while also becoming part of a physical and psychic “crowd.” DJs might have lacked the conventional instrumental skills of other musicians yet demonstrated themselves to be experts in a new form of information gathering, processing and communicating. Rooted in the goals of the liberation movements and counterculture, participants exchanged the structures, hierarchies and rituals of the nine-to-five working day and conventional domestic routines with new forms of work and sociality, switching the daily grind for nocturnal release. Far from failing, New York’s population navigated the decline of industrial capitalism by giving birth to a new form of creative, collective, postindustrial activity.

The goal, in short, was to explore a new form of being that navigated a pathway between the limits of industrial capitalism and the not yet visible competitive individualism that would define neoliberal capitalism. If economic exploitation remained an ongoing concern, the social movements of the 1960s and the protests of 1968 asserted that the fight against class exploitation should no longer automatically override the equally important need to end inequalities around gender, race and sexuality, with the state understood to be as likely to constrain as to support. A new form of politics was required, one that could connect the disparate yet connected interests of the rainbow coalition and the working class in a way that appeared to be alien to the established practices of the Democratic party and the trade union movement. A new form of praxis was also required, one that could demonstrate how these new social relations could offer an escape route out of the existing repressive practices.

Sylvère Lotringer, a younger contemporary of French poststructural theorists Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Félix Guattari and Paul Virilio, went further than any contemporary in his analysis of the

way these emerging forces were finding a new form of articulation in 1970s New York City. Based in Paris before he started to teach in the French department at Columbia in September 1972, Lotringer believed that the failure of the Communist Party to support the student uprising of 1968 “had been a clear signal in France that the old revolutionary machines had outlived their purpose” (Lotringer 2013a, 11) and made it his mission to introduce European/Italian political theory into the United States, co-founding the journal *Semiotext(e)* in 1974 and organising a schizo-culture conference at Columbia University in 1975. Opening the conference, Lotringer envisioned the forging of a “libidinal fluidity” that would extend beyond the person, replacing the existing “neurotic model” that emphasised “difference between the sexes” with a “transpersonal and transsexual process where desire could be directly coupled to the *socius*” (Lotringer 2013a, 43–45). The aim, he added, was to produce a “nomadic entity, an irreducible multiplicity” (Lotringer 2013a, 45). The conference agreed that the traditional Left was too authoritarian, too centralised and too beholden to the idea that progressive change could only be achieved through working-class organisation. However, the conference was also marked by fierce arguments, shifting formats panel and breakdowns, with Guattari booed off the podium during the final panel when he criticised the audience for wanting to participate in a conventionally structured conference. The event ended in an atmosphere of discord.

Lotringer found solace in the downtown scene. He had already absorbed Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopia” (Foucault 1984) and the argument that heterotopic spaces either “create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory,” or “create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault). He had also come to view New York as an expression of unconscious desire that escaped wider repression in the United States and that exposed the contradictions of the wider system, so concluded that what he was “looking for in art would involve in some way the experience of living in New York” (Lotringer 2013b, xi). William Burroughs, who spoke at the schizo-culture conference, introduced Lotringer to SoHo’s thriving art scene, where figures such as John Cage and Merce Cunningham were introducing “chance operation’s into their work and resisted “the seduction of narrative, which always imposes an order of progression and climax” (Lotringer 2013b, xi). In particular, Cunningham’s presentation of heterogeneous elements side

by side offered “a different idea about how people can coexist together” (Lotringer 2013b, xi). The critic concluded that the downtown scene’s aesthetic paralleled French theory without knowing it.

By the time Lotringer organised the Nova Convention in late November/early December 1978, he had also become acquainted with the art-punk end of the downtown scene that gathered at CBGB and the recently opened Mudd Club, and for the most part lived in the crumbling tenements of the East Village rather than the grand lofts of SoHo. Staged at the Entermedia Theater, Irving Plaza and NYU, the event featured no wave film screenings, performances, concerts and talks by Laurie Anderson, Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, Patti Smith, Robert Wilson and Frank Zappa as well as by William Burroughs. After the convention Lotringer moved into a raw loft with Cortez in the Fashion District, having met the downtown scenester, one of the co-founders of the Mudd Club, after the Columbia conference. “It was so loud that no one could ever talk with each other,” Lotringer recalls of the venue: “just dancing among this crowd was meaningful enough. We all knew each other and there was a sense of togetherness” (Premmeur 2014). A late twentieth-century heterotopia, the Mudd Club staged regular immersive parties that were inspired by the Fluxus happenings of the 1960s. Owner Steve Mass recalls how “the parties took American institutions and parodied and destroyed them in one way or another,” adding that “all kinds of unexpected things would happen” (Lawrence 2016, 19). The network of venues that routinely included combinations of DJing, live music, performance art, art shows, film and video screenings in their offering expanded exponentially in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The sheer level of activity was remarkable. “Downtown was like this kaleidoscopic, smorgasbord of activity” recalls Club 57 organiser and performance artist Ann Magnuson: “all of these ideas were out there. It was like Halloween every night” (Lawrence 2016, 19).

If anything, the scale and the scope of activity was underestimated by Lotringer, Magnuson and friends, who inevitably experienced the expansion in real time, and who, through the definitional limits of their own immersion, were only able to grasp shards of an explosion that not only deserves to be credited as one of the most influential cultural renaissances of the twentieth century but also for its then unique rootedness in multi-media spaces and cross-scene interactions. Participants in the art-punk and Bronx party scenes discovered a mutual appreciation of cut-up, the manipulation of found objectives, DIY, collaboration and ephemeral

performance, with these exchanges core to the opening of downtown venues that showcased Bronx talent as well as the conceptualisation and deployment of hip hop as a cultural phenomenon that encompassed the differential discrete practices of DJing, MCing, breaking and graffiti. A little more gradually, art-punk and Bronx party protagonists came to appreciate the organic, funky, communitarian ethos of the city's DJ-led downtown and downtown-inspired dance spaces. Easing into the moment, the DJ-led downtown dance scene was able to more or less seamlessly embrace the mutant/hybrid/interactive era because in many respects it echoed and intensified the eclectic mix of early 1970s DJ-led party culture. The Loft and the Paradise Garage arguably reached their creative peak during the early 1980s. Musicians adapted to provide all three interacting scenes with sounds that ambitiously brought the sonic preferences of the scenes together, which in turn encouraged participants to move beyond their usual hangouts and bring into being an increasingly integrated social milieu. The composer, instrumentalist and songwriter Arthur Russell came to embody the period as he moved between scenes and sought to bring previously separate elements together (Lawrence 2009). Hybridity, mutation and convergence came to define everyday cultural practice, with participants generating new forms of collective, flexible, project-driven work.

These groups were political although steered clear of mainstream politics, the democratic party and the trade union movement. Theirs was a new form of engagement that didn't consist of mere navel-gazing but explored new modes of expression, both individual and collective. They also carried out their activity during the tenure of Carter's relatively benign if disappointing administration, and when Reagan came to power they maintained their core beliefs while hoping that New York's long-standing island status would enable them to maintain their direction of travel while the nation went into reverse. While a minority of artists benefited from the rising value of loft spaces and opportunities that came as Wall Street brokers sought to spend some of their income on art, most struggled to maintain their foothold in the city and struggled to come to terms with the mixture of increased surveillance and commercialism. To suggest otherwise is one-dimensional. Yet a further question raised by Harvey remains: did capital lure New York's apolitical creative class into its neoliberal turn so seamlessly because its advocacy of individualism, flexibility, creativity and materialism appealed to the city's artist community, or did that community and other like-minded groupings independently initiate the

emergence of new forms of flexibility and creativity, with capital co-opting its philosophy only later?

Although Harvey's analysis of capital's exploitation of New York City's fiscal crisis of 1975 is compelling, an alternative reading of the underlying shift to postindustrial capitalism has been proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001, 2006), who note that the countercultural movement of the late 1960s, the anti-authoritarian protests of 1968, and the Italian autonomists of the 1960s and 1970s fed into an international grassroots movement that rebelled against the hierarchical structures, social exclusions and systematic inequalities of industrial capitalism as well as the wider postwar settlement, with its critique including the state, the family, the church, the trade union movement, the corporate sector and other elements of the ideological establishment. Whereas 1968 ultimately produced often ineffective declarations of intent, argues Negri (1979), by 1977 the movement had affirmed itself as a social force, turning the words of 1968 into a reality, at least in Italy. Negri and Hardt add that during the 1970s *autonomia* "succeeded temporarily in redesigning the landscape of the major cities, liberating entire zones where new cultures and new forms of life were created" (Hardt and Negri 2006, 82). The movement called for the social sphere and the workplace to become more flexible, more participatory and more creative while depending the values of democracy, equality and inclusiveness. As Jeremy Gilbert has argued,

[T]he dream of 1968 had always been that the hedonism that the new consumer society made possible, and the right to self-expression, which was one of the demands of the new social movements, need not lead only to such a selfish individualism. [...] However, the mainstream communist and socialist Left [...] tended to adopt a rather censorious stance towards the new pleasures which consumer culture made available. (Gilbert 2008, 42)

It follows that capital hijacked rather than initiated the discourse of flexibility, expression and creativity, and did so as part of its drive to rollout neoliberal ideology, policy and associated management practices (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Gilbert 2017).

The case study of New York City doesn't merely affirm an argument advanced by Negri and others. Brimming with examples of citizens seeking out new forms of participation, creativity and freedom far in advance of capital's call for the breakup of the state regulation, the city's creative scenes of the 1970s and early 1980s also suggests that the kind of

breakthrough Negri attributes to the Italian autonomist movement enjoyed a far greater uptake in the United States than is assumed. Participants in their thousands, many of them self-identifying suburban refugees, resolved to abandon the regulated work and social patterns followed by their parents in order to pursue a new form of freedom that placed very little value on wealth creation and the reproduction of the nuclear family (Lawrence 2016). They also understood themselves to be engaged in birthing a new form of cooperative society that sought to breakdown the separation between work and pleasure. Glenn O'Brien, *Interview Magazine* editor and co-founder of the cable TV show *TV Party*, argued:

The party is the highest expression of social activity—the co-operative production of fun. The party is the first step in organizing society for mutual interests. *TV Party* believes that social affinity groups will provide the foundation for any effective political action. (Fantina 1980)

Although Lotringer would have been familiar with *TV Party*—a punk-style cable TV show that was heavily intertwined with the Mudd Club scene—the critic's conference interventions, his *Semiotext(e)* journal and his more recent reflections on the downtown scene understate the power of the movement in part because the breadth and depth of the gathering inter-scene coherence was only fleetingly grasped at the time and has remained under-analysed until recently, as already argued. The belated insertion of the DJ-led party/disco scene into the wider analysis of New York's organic creative movements of the 1970s adds exponential weight to the importance of that movement, because the city's DJ-led party/disco scene predated and ended up enjoying far greater popular support than the movements that would manifest themselves as hip hop and punk, at least during the 1970s, before the three scenes became increasingly intertwined. On a qualitative level, disco also contributed to class, gender, queer and sexual diversity of the grassroots creative movement, compensating for omissions and blindspots that could be found in the more contained demographic scenes that coalesced around punk and hip hop. The point isn't to create a hierarchy of inclusiveness but to point to the way new conceptions of coalition-building can be understood if dance/disco is understood to have contributed to the broader urban-wide movement towards creativity, collaboration and community.

The extended period of convergence began to fracture during 1983 before collapsing during 1984 and 1985. The AIDS and crack crises contributed significantly. Although AIDS was first reported in 1981 and reached epidemic proportions in 1983, Reagan didn't mention the virus in a public address until the autumn of 1985, preferring instead to uphold the kind of normative "family values" that resonated with the Christian fundamentalist Moral Majority faction within his electoral coalition (Kaiser 1997). In the meantime Ronald Reagan, having launched his "War on Drugs" in 1982, harnessed the crack epidemic to increase the policing and imprisonment of users of colour as well as justify cuts to programmes that could have helped alleviate the crisis (Reinarman and Levine 1997). Facing an existential threat, black and queer communities that had become increasingly open to forming collaborative and social alliances assumed a new body language that revolved around defensiveness and survival. Hank Shocklee explains how he and rapper Chuck D took it upon themselves to put the celebratory party aesthetic of the 1970s and early-to-mid-1980s to one side when they began to record as Public Enemy and instead record incendiary music that addressed the crisis in the black community (Shocklee 2008/2009). It was a short step for Nelson George to publish a book on the death of rhythm and blues that blamed disco for whitening the sound, with the late 1970s breakthrough of rap positioned as the solution to disco's supposed abandonment of black music—a move that conclusively eclipsed his co-authoring of the 1981 article that welcomed the crossover that was occurring between the black and dance charts. Meanwhile the AIDS crisis engendered a "new spasm of fear" (Clendinen and Nagourney 1999, 517) in the queer community as participants dropped like flies, the media fed a moral panic around the disease, and the city government dramatically intensified its surveillance of queer-identified venues and bathhouses. Masculinist voices in the black community were perceived to be implicitly if not explicitly homophobic. The queer dance floor became a place of refuge.

Changes in the New York economy, many of them traceable to Reagan's first budget of 1981, also contributed to the era of division, with real estate and Wall Street values jumping significantly during 1983 before rising by approximately 20% per year for the next four years. New York became more competitive, more unequal and more estranged, with the art and music scenes caught up in the neoliberal conjuncture. It was during 1984 that Basquiat started to receive \$20,000 for his canvases, which enabled him to paint in spattered Armani suits. Meanwhile artists and

musicians who had contented themselves with living cheaply and doing minimal paid work in order to cover the rent now needed to chase the dollar in order to remain in the city. Their modus operandi shifted from one devoted to forming collaborative relationships that produced participatory, ephemeral, gestural art to one that was necessarily competitive and individualistic. Paying less tax, corporations started to commission art and sponsor exhibitions in order to improve their brand image. The minority of artists who won these commissions didn't demonstrate a consistent willingness to critique the system that was feeding them. Basquiat wasn't the only winner—short-term winner because by 1988 he was dead—as an increasingly visible strata of elite artists-cum-celebrities headed by Jeff Koons started to charge spiralling fees for their works. If these artists weren't already among the relatively small number who had profited from purchasing a SoHo loft space, they soon had the money to join that group.

As with the wider economy of the 1980s running through to the present, the gains were enjoyed by the few, not the many, leaving the vast majority of artists to struggle to pay the rent. As Magnuson comments:

When I got to New York [in 1978] my feeling was the most uncool thing you could be was rich. Then what started happening was the most uncool thing you could be was poor because being a struggling artist became unsustainable, and it sort of switched like that very dramatically. It shifted for me when Reagan got into office for the second four years [in November 1984]. (Magnuson in Lawrence 2016, 470)

An increasingly disaggregated creative scene both mirrored and contributed to the wider shift towards competitiveness and inequality, with a small number of participants enjoying exponential financial success while the vast majority made do or struggled. “The context quickly changed and New York soon became a financial capital and a showcase for the entire world,” recalls Lotringer (Premmereur 2014), who stopped publishing *Semiotext(e)* in 1985 after concluding that the collectivist impulse of the downtown scene had given way to a more individualist formation:

Artists who had been occupying huge downtown lofts with cheap rents had to relinquish them. Our 5,000 square foot loft in the Fashion District, for which we paid \$300 a month suddenly went up to \$2,500 and we had to give it up. Uptown and downtown, until then separate, started mixing at night in the clubs. The Soho group of artists lost its centrality with expressionist art proliferating in the East Village and fashionable shops replacing

rough lofts. The No Wave, neo-punk scene with a lively production of no-budget films didn't last for much longer. Art galleries multiplied and being an artist became an enviable, parent-subsidized profession. (Lotringer in Premmereur 2014)

By 1984 the collective, collaborationist impulse of the New York music and art scene had given way to something more individualistic and more competitive, because by then the economy had started to assume its neo-liberal shape while the nation's president's response to the AIDS and drug consumption crises amplified rather than resolved divisions. Yet the embedment of competitive individualism and the material successes enjoyed by a minority of artists and musicians during the new epoch shouldn't obscure the distinctive nature of the period that preceded it, as it has been allowed to do in arguably the most popular account of the rise of neoliberalism. Nor should the mythology that during the 1970s New York amounted to a failed city in need of repair pass without critique, for while cuts to public services and associated social problems shouldn't be romanticised, the challenge of shifting from industrial to a postindustrial economy indicates that New York was in need not of repair but support. Even though the response of the White House and Wall Street was harsh, the city nevertheless hosted an explosion of culture that was rooted in community and pioneered new forms of expression and living. Far from seeking to escape a city that is routinely depicted as amounting to an unlivable hellhole, participants in its art and music scenes were reluctant to leave for even for a weekend in case that would lead them to miss out on some essential gathering.

The challenge, then, is to understand the 1970s and the early 1980s not as a time characterised by urban decline that paved the way for the inevitable introduction of neoliberal reforms, but as one that broke with the postwar settlement in order to generate new forms of flexibility, creativity and collaboration. As Maurizio Lazzarato argues in his discussion of the French "intermittents," intermittent workers in the entertainment industry who went on strike in 2003 to contest cuts to benefits introduced by the French government,

[T]he assertion that subjectivity is first of all a collective assemblage, even when it is expressed through an individual, is essential to the dismantling of the neoliberal ideology of the "creative class" or the theory of the "cognitive worker", which maintains belief in the creativity of individuals or social

groups defined by certain socioanthropological characteristics. (Lazzarato 2017, 195)

Libertarian, antiessentialist and rigorously anti-individualist, the intermittents recognised the creative nature of collectivity and the collaborative dynamic inherent in all real creativity, as Gilbert has also observed, adding that “it is these facts that neoliberalism is predicated on attempting to refute at all costs. It is their irrefutability that remains neoliberalism’s—and perhaps capitalism’s—greatest point of vulnerability” (Gilbert 2017, xliv). If arguments made for the intermittents can be applied to the earlier activity of New York City’s intersecting creative movements of the 1970s—movements that almost certainly inspired a visiting Brian Eno to formulate the idea of the “scenius” as “the communal form of the concept of the genius ethos of the genius” (Lawrence 2016, 462)—then claims already made for the Italian autonomist movement can be forcefully extended.

DECOLONISING DISCO

While large swathes of the United States believed New York to be unsalvageable precisely because of its multiracial, polysexual, cross-class population, the channelling of that coalition onto its dance floors enabled the city to achieve its pioneering role in the development of DJ-led dance culture. Drilling down on this development, Francis Grasso and David Mancuso moved ahead of Kool Herc because the crowds that gathered at the Loft and the Sanctuary were more diverse and included a far higher proportion of queers than was the case at Herc’s Sedgwick Avenue parties. Diverse crowds also encouraged diverse DJs to draw on records from a diverse range of sources, as identified by Vince Aletti in his pioneering article on the rise of private party and public discotheque culture. Aletti described the music that could be heard in these venues as often “Afro-Latin in sound or instrumentation, heavy on the drums, with minimal lyrics, sometimes in a foreign language, and a repetitious chorus” with the most popular cuts “usually the longest and the most instrumental, performed by black groups who are, frequently, not American” (Aletti 1973). A Loft regular who was heavily influenced by Mancuso’s selections, Aletti added that Manu Dibango’s “Soul Makossa” amounted to “a perfect example of the genre.”

The coalescing sound included African and Latin elements at its core, yet during the second half of the 1970s the supply lines for imported

records narrowed markedly, so while West European disco flowed into the United States freely, shaping much of the output of the era's bestselling label, Casablanca Records, little African and Latin music made the same journey. The development received little attention, perhaps because the spiralling success of Eurodisco soon threatened to overwhelm not merely African and Latin imports but African American disco itself, leaving the proponents of African American disco to argue for the ongoing importance of what could be loosely described as the *original disco sound*. In the process, disco became a US invention that inspired a European subgenre, with the non-US and non-European elements that contributed to the shaping of the original disco sound subsumed within a colonial narrative that buried its colonial status. In this respect, too, the history of disco requires further thought.

To elaborate, the early years of DJ-led dance culture integrated European, Latin and in particular African imports into the open-ended yet interlinked soundscape that could be heard in private parties and public discotheques across New York and in particular in the city's downtown neighbourhoods. A sign of the changing times, Grasso only started to play Olatunji's "Drums of Passion" when new owners took over the Sanctuary in early 1970 and opened its to queer dancers, a first within public discotheque culture. Mancuso went further as he integrated records by the Congolese Troubadours du Roi Baudouin, the Bahamian-led Exuma, the Bahamian Funky Nassau, the multicultural UK band Cymande, and the UK-based Ghanian-Caribbean line-up Osibisa. Records that displayed a strong Latin element, even when recorded outside of Latin America, also received heavy play, including cuts by the Spanish group Barrabás and the US/multicultural rock band WAR. Meanwhile African records such as Manu Dibango's "Soul Makossa" and Fela Kuti and the Africa '70s "Shakara" became iconic Loft selections. Many of these records went on to gain local and national notoriety because, first, Mancuso's audiophile sound system and electric party atmosphere enabled his selections to emit in the best-possible situation and, second, because his private party status enabled him to stay open long after New York's public discotheques were required to close, which in turn encouraged the city's discotheque DJs to head to the Loft once they were finished working for the night. Indeed "Soul Makossa" became the first record to enter the Hot 100 without radio play precisely because of the rising power of New York's dance floor network (Lawrence 2003).

As a close reading of the DJ lists that accompanied Vince Aletti's weekly "Disco Files" column published in *Record World* confirm, African and Latin elements became central to disco as the sound consolidated between 1974 and 1977 before peaking in 1978 (Aletti 1998). Recruiting many of Philadelphia International's key musicians, Salsoul became the first label to explicitly integrate Latin elements into its recordings. Lamont Dozier's "Going Back to My Roots" culminated with an extended break that featured African-Latin percussion and ecstatic chanting. Linda Clifford's "Runaway Love," Patti Jo's "Make Me Believe In You," Melba Moore's "Standing Right Here," Ozo's "Anambra," Vicki Sue Robinson's "Turn the Beat Around," Salsoul Orchestra's "Salsoul 3001," T-Connection's "Do What You Wanna Do," Anita Ward's "Ring My Bell" and Karen Young's "Hot Shot" variously foregrounded congas, talking drums, timbales and woodblocks to heighten the African-Latin component of disco, with DJ-remixers Walter Gibbons and Richie Rivera arguably the most progressive contributors to the development. At times the engagement assumed a more obviously colonial rhetoric, as was the case with the Ritchie Family's internationally themed albums, *Brazil*, *Arabian Nights* and *African Queens* (the latter featured the African drummers J.M. Diatta and Babatunde Olatunji). In short, disco continued to draw on many of the African and Latin sounds that had contributed to its formation, yet now did so as an organising force, with sounds that had previously enjoyed a form of chaotic equality now subsumed within its integrative coordinates.

Yet it is hard to pinpoint any African or Latin tracks that became dance floor staples at party spaces such as the Loft along with other cutting-edge private parties including Flamingo, the Paradise Garage, Reade Street, the Soho Place and 12 West, never mind midtown's more explicitly commercial discotheques. Although Mancuso's ear remained tuned to international sounds, he appears to have played maybe not even a handful of tracks that were recorded outside of the United States and Europe during the latter years of the 1970s, with Third World's "Now That We Found Love," laid down in Nassau, Bahamas, the location of Chris Blackwell's Compass Point Studios, the standout exception. Although Compass Point would remain influential for several years, the supply chain had shifted, in part because US record companies had belatedly woken up to the potential to sell music through party as well as radio DJs, turning the production of disco into an industry. The spiralling success of *Saturday Night Fever* took the disco market into overdrive, encouraging independent as well as major labels to release a disproportionate amount of substandard,

generic disco music. Whereas during the opening years of the 1970s New York DJs found themselves scouring record bins in search of music to feed to ravenous crowds, oblivious to the culture that was taking root, by 1978 they had become embroiled in a supply chain of increasingly variable quality, the sheer size of which diminished the range of sounds that were within easy reach.

There was no lack of danceable music being recorded in Africa, Latin American and beyond during the second half of the 1970s, and much of it was transparently influenced by disco as well as funk and jazz. To focus the discussion on Africa and to begin with one extended example, drawing on primary discographical information available at database and trading website Discogs (2019), a New York-based company based at 1755 Broadway, Editions Makossa, which later traded as Makossa and Makossa International, captured the unfolding exchange. Early into its run the label released music by the Lafayette Afro-Rock Band, a Long Island funk line-up that had relocated to the less competitive environment of Paris, where they worked as the in-house band at Pierre Jaubert's Parisound studio and performed regularly in Barbès, a centre for African immigrants living in Paris, which tuned them into African music. The group released the heavily percussive "Voodounon" on Editions Makossa in 1973; the record was distributed by the African Record Centre, located at 1194 Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn. Released in the United States in 1974, their debut album featured a cover of Manu Dibango's "Soul Makossa" as well as "Hihache," the latter registering more in the Bronx than Manhattan. The band's 1974 follow-up, *Malik*, included "Djungu," which featured four-on-the-floor bass beat and uptempo, grooving instrumentation—a combination that would soon define the early sound of disco. Indeed, the O'Jays classic disco record "I Love Music," a 1975 release, reproduced the bass line and keyboard melody in "Djungu."

Editions Makossa went on to license and release music from Fela Kuti as well as Georges Anderson, Ernesto DjéDjé, Gregoire Lawani and Buari. The latter, led by Ghanaian singer, dancer, percussionist, composer and co-arranger Sidiku Buari (1975), debuted with an eponymous album on RCA in the United States in 1975 that displayed many of the key components of the breakthrough disco-funk sound; the opening track, "Karam Bani," features sizzling four-four hi-hats, funky drumming, a four-on-the-floor bass beat, foreign-language chorus- and chant-led vocals, and jamming instrumentation. Buari went on to release *Disco Soccer*, an upfront disco-funk album released by Polydor in Ghana in 1977 and by Makossa in the

United States in 1979. In the text that accompanied *Disco Soccer* Buari explained:

I feel through my music—as waxed in this collection is a development [sic] which comes from the ingredients of the traditional music and culture of Ghana. There is a strong American disco beat to these heavy African rhythms. For it is my intention that my music gives pleasure to dancers as well as educate. (Buari 1977/79)

Featuring a tight disco-funk rhythm, swooping strings, lyrics that were limited to a soulful chorus and a trippy synthesiser, “I’m Ready,” the second track on *Disco Soccer*, came out as a 12-inch single on Makossa International Records in 1978.

African interaction with disco during the second half of the 1970s didn’t begin and end with Makossa. Foregrounding five African musicians, produced by white Belgian producers Ralph Benatar and Jean Kluger, recorded in Brussels and released on local label Biram, “A. I. E. (A Mwana)” by Black Blood (1975) received international distribution before Chrysalis (UK) issued a 12-inch version (1977) in a bright-blue-and-yellow cover featuring “DISCO DISCO DISCO DISCO DISCO” printed in circle formation. Pioneering Afrobeat drummer Tony Allen and the Africa 70 musicians provided evidence that disco had reached Nigeria no later than 1976 when they recorded “Afro-Disco Beat” at Decca’s 16 track Abule-Oja Vaba Studio in Lagos. Released by Phonogram in 1977, the track is straight-up Afrobeat, raising the possibility that Allen was minded to claim disco as being his and Kuti’s invention. Wherever invention lay, Teaspoon & the Waves were sufficiently familiar with Lamont Dozier’s “Going Back to My Roots” (1977) to release “Oh Yeh Soweto” (1977), a toughened, roughened cover of the song, in South Africa. Regarded as Cape Town’s answer to Earth, Wind & Fire, Pacific Express recorded “The Way It Used to Be” in Johannesburg before the record was released in France in 1978. Composed and produced by South African musician Hamilton Nzimande, the Nzimande All Stars released the 16-minute dance jam “Sporo Disco” on the South African label Masterpiece in 1978. Having settled in Paris, the 20-year-old Gabonese vocalist Ondeno recorded the pulsating Afro-disco track “Mayolye” (1978) after finding joy in the city’s Afro-disco scene, releasing the seven-inch in a colour cover that featured him sitting in front of the Eiffel Tower plus a “Super Disco” logo stamped in bright red on light blue. Meanwhile

Ghanian musician Dan Boadi moved to Chicago and as Dan Boadi and the African Internationals released 500 copies of the Curtis Mayfield-sounding “Money Is the Root of Evil” (1978) on NAAP. Eko recorded *Funky Disco Music* (1979)—including the title track plus “Ndolo Embe Mulema”—at Studios Barclay in Paris and released the result on Dragon Phénix.

The production of African disco continued through the tipping point year of 1979, when the overproduction of generic disco along with the slowdown in the US economy provoked a national backlash against the sound and a general reduction in its production. If progressive New York City DJs were becoming concerned about the lack of fresh-sounding disco, one wonders if they got to hear Ghanaian multi-instrumentalist and one-time Osibisa player Kiki Gyan’s shimmering “Disco Dancer,” the opening track on *Feeling So Good*, which was recorded and mixed in London before receiving a release on Nigeria’s Boom Records. Clément Djimogne’s “Money Make Man Mad” (released on Nigerian label Nigerphone) and Benis Cletin’s “Jungle Magic” (released on Nigerian label Afrodisia) foregrounded a more organic aesthetic and more obviously African accented vocals than any disco recorded in a US studio and were no less compelling for that. An example of the rich cultural exchange that flowed between Nigeria and the UK following Nigeria’s declaration of independence in 1960, and surviving the corrosive effects of successive dictatorships, Nigerian line-up Blo recorded the disco-funk number “Get That Groove In” in London before releasing the track on Afrodisia. Nigerian musician Orlando Julius, the leader of numerous bands and a collaborator with Lamont Dozier, merged disco and Ghanaian highlife for the recording of “Disco Hi Life,” released on the Nigerian label Jofabro (1979). Explaining the depth and energy of Nigeria’s contribution, John Doran notes that the indigenous club scene’s preference for live music over DJs meant local disco line-ups were in demand, with every city able to support “at least one world-class band” (Doran 2016).

These and other African disco records released during the second half of the 1970s didn’t appear in the DJs lists published in Vince Aletti’s “Disco Files” column save for Fela Kuti and the Africa ‘70s “Shakara Oloje,” first released in Nigeria (1972) before Editions Makossa licensed it in the United States in 1974. During the first months of the year Aletti made some references to African and Latin music, describing Buari’s debut album as “one of the most exciting African imports since ‘Soul Makossa’” (Aletti 1998, 58), and noting that

while [Latin music] may not be everyone's idea of discotheque music, [...] an increasing number of clubs in New York and other cities with large Latin, primarily Puerto Rican, communities are scattering records by Eddie Palmieri, Larry Harlow, Tito Puente and others in between B.T. Express, Carl Douglas and LaBelle. (Aletti 1998, 62)

Even if they were contained, these comments chimed with Aletti's groundbreaking account of the open-ended character of discotheque music, published in 1973, yet the rest of the year saw virtually no further references to African and Latin music save for a thumbs-up review of a Fania All Stars concert at Madison Square Garden. By the summer of 1975 the quick-succession release of the Ritchie Family's "Brazil," Banzai's "Chinese Kung Fu" and Van McCoy's "The Hustle" suggested that US and European disco outfits were becoming adept at integrating the signifiers of international music into their recordings. In August 1975 Aletti claimed that "the popularity of disco music hasn't prevented performers and producers in other styles from breaking through" (Aletti 1998, 110). Yet although he concluded in his end-of-year column in December 1975 that disco "remains unpredictable," his end-of-year lists of the year's best disco singles, albums and special pressings didn't include a single African or Latin track in its 160 entries (Aletti 1998, 152). A certain narrowing had taken place on the NYC dance floor, two years before disco would go into marketing overdrive.

The mutant, convergent period that followed the backlash against disco and the withdrawal of the major labels from the genre witnessed the reentry of African and Latin imports into the New York party scene, with Jamaican dub also establishing a new foothold. Having shifted towards an increasingly disco-driven sound, as exemplified by his straight-up disco selections for a chart submitted to *Record World* (Aletti 1998, 411) in July 1978, David Mancuso started to select recordings by artists such as King Sunny Adé and His African Beats ("365 Is My Number/The Message") and Hugh Masekela ("Don't Go Lose It Baby") as well as Black Uhuru, Jimmy Cliff and Eddy Grant. Mudd Club DJ Anita Sarko started to integrate music from Mexican composer Esquivel and His Orchestra, Peruvian vocalist Yma Sumac and Fela Kuti into her sets. French label Celluloid contributed to the reopening when it established an office in the city, making it easier for DJs to draw music from Errol Dunkley, Kassav, Nyboma Mwan'dido, Salif Keita, Touré Kunda, Kante Manfila and Osibisa into their sets, with Danceteria's Mark Kamins one of the first to cultivate a

“world music” sound. Produced, arranged and mixed by the trend-setting team of Arthur Baker and John Robie, “Funky Soul Makossa” by Nairobi and the Awesome Foursome, a 1982 release, linked the early 1980s back to the notably open period of the early 1970s. Michael Jackson went on to replay the chant from Dibango’s breakthrough release in “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin,’” the opening track on *Thriller*, without permission; in 1986 the US performer settled out of court with the Cameroonian musician (Gbadamassi 2009).

However, a significant number of African disco records continued to struggle to gain any traction, among them Ghanaian Okyerema Asante’s “Sabi (Get Down),” Nigerian N’Draman Blintch’s album *Cosmic Sounds*, the London-based Ghanaian outfit Kabbala’s “Voltan Dance,” Cameroonian Pasteur Lappe’s 12-inch release of “Na Real Sekele Fo Ya,” Martinique vocalist Mac Gregor’s “Nan Ye Li Kan” (recorded in the Ivory Coast), Boncana Maïga’s “Koyma Hondo” (recorded in New York), Ghanaian Rim and Kasa’s “Love Me for Real” (recorded in San Francisco), Ghanaian Pat Thomas’s “Yesu San Bra: Disco Hi-Life” and Ivory Coast artist NST Cophie’s album *Mon’Da Center*. Given that these recordings have gone on to circulate in Europe, the United States and beyond via a wave of reissues led by labels including Analog Africa, Awesome Tapes from Africa, Mr Bongo, Sofrito, Soul Jazz, Soundway and Strut, picking up significant DJ play along the way, it could be concluded that their initial failure to break through had little if anything to do with concerns about “quality.” Interestingly, these and scores of other African and Latin disco tracks have for the most part come to the fore following disco’s initial 1990s revival. As DJs and dancers exhausted the US and European disco archive, they turned to more obviously international archives, many of which hadn’t enjoyed widespread distribution prior to the backlash against disco or even after.

It is time for these and other disco-oriented recordings to be included an expanded definition of the disco archive. Their musical value suggests that if trading routes and cultural assumptions had been more equal then disco might have maintained the more obviously open and international aesthetic of early “discotheque music,” and might have found it easier to avoid becoming the two-dimensional product that made it vulnerable to the backlash. The expanded history of disco also enables the history of US disco to be better understood, for in addition to the sound emerging as an expression of marginalised, countercultural forces, it also came to assume a colonial logic that included US and European disco at the expense of

minority expressions of the sound. The very fact that disco assumed an international dimension also confirms disco to have been one of the first sounds to demonstrate that humans with connecting desires were ready to move to a common beat, irrespective of where in the world they were dancing.

Drawing attention to this can't be reduced to a desire to live in a recycled, nostalgia-tinted past (Reynolds 2011) or a wish that history had taken a different turn. Global sounds have come to the fore powerfully during the last 10 years, after all, with African, Asian and Latin sounds offering fresh directions for electronic genres including nu disco, house and techno that might otherwise have run out of ideas. Awarded label of the year at Gilles Peterson's Worldwide FM awards in 2018, the London-based label On the Corner exists as a cutting-edge newcomer to an evolving movement that combines a wild yet strangely cohesive array of international styles. Melding jazz, electronic music and field recordings from the archives of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Brussels—which was built to showcase King Leopold II's Congo Free State in the 1897 World Exhibition—DJ and electronic producer Khalab's *Black Noise 2084* provides a postcolonial platform upon which subjugated voices connect with black electronic dance music and jazz. Whereas disco c. 1974 smoothed out some of the rough edges and radically improbable connections that came to the fore in the discotheque mix of 1970–1973, recordings such as *Black Noise* maintain the rough edges and improbable connections of colonial and postcolonial transatlantic music to the fore. Flow and interruption are held together in a form of anti-imperial expression.

For a culture that has often been derided as being simplistic, disco nestles at the apex of contemporary complexity. Born out of counterculture and postindustrialism, the culture in its pre-named form became an influential example of community-driven creativity and connectedness. Paralleling other scenes, it provided participants not only with hope during challenging times but also with a new way of living that suggested a postindustrial economy could take root in ways that would enable citizens to lead lives that were more participatory as well as more flexible. And although US and West European disco eventually marginalised the culture's organic party origins and its international roots, those histories remain recuperable to the point where an oft-ridiculed cultural formation seems to offer strange hope for us to better understand a past in order to reconceptualise and reexperience the present and the future.

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