

LINK SICK

by

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Abstract

Set against the backdrop of an ambiguous dystopia and eternal rave, *LINK SICK* is a tale about the threads that bind us together. The piece stems from research around oral traditions of storytelling, the transcendent framework of “erotic potential” and the ever genre-less stylings of “electronic punk music”. The project is a science-fiction exploration of the connective tissue of human experience as well as an experiment in sound art; blurring the lines between theatre, radio, music, fiction, essay, and internet art. Over 42-minutes, listeners are invited to gather round, close their eyes, and open their ears; submerging straight into this strange future peppered with blink-streams, automated protests, disembodied DJs, dancefloor orgies, and only the trendiest S/S 221 G-E two-piece club skins.

Keywords: sound art; audio-play; internet art; science fiction; new media; griot

This is for my grandmother, J.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all my friends, family, colleagues and collaborators that saw me through from the beginning to the end of this journey.

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Photography by Soloman Chiniquay
Design by DEBBY FRIDAY

starring

DEBBY FRIDAY as Izzi/Narrator
Chipo Amobi as Philo
Sam Rolfes as DJ GODLESS
Hanna Sam as ABC Inc. Announcer
Storm Greenwood as Diana Deviance
Alex Zhang Hungtai as Weaver
Allie Stephen as Numee
Soukayna as Katz
AI Voice Generated Protesters via Replica Studios

Cover Photography by Soloman Chiniquay



Photography by Soloman Chiniquay
Design by DEBBY FRIDAY



Photography by Soloman Chiniquay
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DEFENCE STATEMENT

BACKGROUND

I remember: rooms with no windows, smoke in the air, sweat soaking through black mesh, bass vibrating up my entire body, dancing until sun rise, outside of time, messy and entangled with others. The club, the rave, the show - ever shifting square footages of pure liminality and “zones of intensities”¹. I often talk about these sites as places where I came of age and spent many of my formative years, becoming a person.

In 2017, I was a DJ, playing shows in abandoned warehouses and secret lofts. I traveled around the world, mixing underground and experimental club music to rooms filled with young people who moved and swayed and screamed and cried together, everyone bursting at the seams. I witnessed, up close, the catharsis and pure magic that takes place when we gather together, just for the night. That experience shaped the trajectory of my life in ways unseen at the time and brought me to where I stand today in my career as a musician, filmmaker and writer.

I have always wanted to capture those turbulent nights somehow, to put this part of my past into some tangible thing. First as a way to honour the contexts that have shaped me, but also to lay these ghosts to rest, finally.

In 2018, I left everything I knew behind and moved to Vancouver. That fall, I started the MFA program at SFU. I was unconventional in the sense that I had never been to art school or received any kind of formal arts education. I was and still am an autodidact, dedicated to experimentalism and following my instincts first. These instincts led me to research into oral traditions, where I drew upon the reserves of my cultural background. In large swathes of West Africa, we have what is called the *griot* - one who is historian, poet, storyteller and musician all at once. The griot functions “as a keeper of the oral tradition”, as the link between “the individual and his or her community”² - transmitter, mirror, conductive material. I think that all artists are the griots of their times,

¹ Introduction to Music, Sound and Space: *Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, ed. Georgina Born (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

² Madhu Krishnan, “The storyteller function in contemporary Nigerian narrative,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 49, no. 1 (2013): 30, doi: 10.1177/0021989413510519.

linking past to present to future, me to you to we. The truth of this statement, I feel in my bones, every time I get on stage and perform, every time I enter a club, a rave, a show - that, wet, electric dark.

In order to make sense of these experiences, I built frameworks for myself. I wrote about shouting as an aesthetic practice, I dubbed the genre of electronic punk music and I waxed poetic about erotic potential. These were the three keystones of my research over the last two years and they all heavily inform my work - both academic and otherwise. Looking back, I now understand it as an act of science-fiction, of world-building.

My original intent for my thesis project was to create a live, audio-visual performance piece that would have incorporated music production with projection mapping, video art, and movement. This project required the use of a large space and interactions with an audience. I had sketched out a rough draft of my ideas for the piece and planned to put it together once I got back from tour during the summer of 2020 but then, like an act of god, the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world and all plans were thrown in the air and laughed at.

At first, I was discouraged because my original project was now impossible and therefore, so was graduating during that summer. Under the uncertainty of lockdown and social distancing, I began to feel the itch of longing, a brutal desire for a closeness that was now prohibited. As two-weeks stretched into three, into four, into months, into more, an idea bubbled to the top. And thus, LINK SICK was born.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

STORY-TELLING

Three months into the pandemic and I found myself missing the club dearly. I had hung up my club kid outfits two years before but the longing for connection was strong. A pang for guest lists and four on the floor beats arose within me. The impact of the lockdown on the psyche was everywhere. As we sat around and watched the case counts rise, every day life felt smaller and smaller, so small it could fit into the palm of your hand. The lack of viscerality was maddening.

After all, it is when [I] bumps up against [U] that experience arises.

After all, the “sacred ground of our being...is none other than our power to connect.”³

After all, “intrinsic interrelatedness” is the meaning and vehicle of life, “literally I am nobody without you.”⁴

And so I decided to tell a story about a future. Narratives, as we know, carry a “mimetic function”, as they not only “allow us to locate cultures through common topoi that define their norms” but they also “pervade every aspect of human experience”⁵. Though my project is not about the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience of the lockdown and the pandemic itself can be felt as part of the ambient historical thread throughout the story. There is a sense of something both foreign and familiar about the structure of every day life: increasing levels of alienation, paranoia and what I call the “podification” of existence, all underscored by layers of VIRTUAL and techno-neutropia.⁶

In the After, we are forever logged in and locked down. History is no longer a linear line but a complex digital network birthing sub-After at every capillary. This is just one of them. With that in mind, as griot, this meant I had to find new words, a new oration and orientation. I chose to create LINK SICK as an audio-play precisely because of this.

I had the memory of being in high school, sitting in a dark classroom, listening to the teacher introduce Orson Welles’ 1983 adaption of *The War of the Worlds*, which we had read the week before. She played the recording over a boombox. Or maybe it was a CD Player. Or maybe it was on the classroom desktop, beaming through a USB or Youtube link. A crackle. A pause. And in came the orchestra. Then a voice, clear and steady. There is something so magical about the act of listening.

I wanted to capture this feeling, to continue in the tradition of engaging emotion and imagination. The current cultural landscape is visually heavy, as most of our

³ Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The erotic as Power and the Love of God* (USA: Harper Collins, 1989), 21.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Daniel O. Awodiya and Yvon Joseph, “Troubadour, Griot and Evangelist: The Complelling Narrative Rhetoric of ‘Erujeje’,” *The International Journal of Public Theology* 8, (2014): 53, doi: 10.1163/15697320-12341329

⁶ The technology in LINK SICK is presented talis qualis: such as it is, neither utopia nor dystopia.

technologies have been melted into one device.⁷ The act of closing one's eyes and tuning in is powerful then not only because of its feeling of novelty but also because it forces us to develop a sensitivity, to "listen...with slow, thoughtful consideration"⁸, to paint pictures in the mind. After all, "it takes no more than the sound of a bathroom shower to make us visualize rain in a tropical forest."⁹ This is because sound "undermines the quiddity of things"¹⁰ and as such allows us to open up and go both Nowhere and Everywhere.

This leads me to my previous work around shouting as an aesthetic practice.

SHOUTING AS AN AESTHETIC PRACTICE

In my first semester essay, *There, A Sound: Shouting as Aesthetic Practice*, I wrote about punk performance and the "enfleshment of the incomprehensible."¹¹ In that essay, I explored my shout as a "reaching-towards"¹², as "a psychic re-orientation...[in the direction of] the metaphysical."¹³ Traditional aesthetics (and within this term I include all art forms and practices) demand a legible form and beauty. As Toby Shorin writes, the majority of aesthetics and culture that we encounter on a day to day basis fall within a "zone of normalcy."¹⁴ This zone is comfortable, acceptable, and recognizable. In my essay, I posited that shouting, which exists on the other end of the spectrum, in the zone of the experimental, acts as resistance to the demand for legibility. To shout is to be

⁷ Leslie Grace McMurtry, *Revolution in the Echo Chamber: Audio Drama's Past, Present and Future* (United Kingdom: Intellect, 2019), 4.

⁸ Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, "Slowing Down to Listen In the Digital Age: How New Technology is Changing Oral History Practice," *The Oral History Review* 44, no. 1 (2017): 105, doi: 10.1093/ohr/ohx016

⁹ Tim Crook, *Audio Drama Modernism: The Missing Link between Descriptive Phonograph Sketches and Microphone Plays on the Radio* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Deborah Micho, "There, A Sound: Shouting as Aesthetic Practice," (CA811, Simon Fraser University, 2018), 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ Toby Shorin, "Report: The Diminishing Marginal Value of Aesthetics," Subpixel Space, September 14 2018, <https://subpixel.space/entries/diminishing-marginal-aesthetic-value/>

intentionally “out-of-tune”¹⁵ and thus to refuse the enclosures of normative culture and indeed, even the very idea that one must be embodied in a single set space and time.

Originally, my emphasis had been on racial and gendered identity categories, specifically myself as a Black woman. However, as time has progressed, I feel that my ideas have detached themselves from any notions of identity. The framework of critical race theory and gender/feminist studies is useful in many instances but increasingly, it has begun to feel too stifling, pandering, and incomplete for what it is that I am trying to articulate. The requirements that I insist on my oppression as an axis of investigation is, in my personal case, a fragment that becomes un-truth when it becomes the whole story. Yes, in the After, there is race, gender, sexuality, and class but it is all different, somehow. So we have to imagine differently.

And so now, I propose my shout as a practice of freeing the imagination and unmooring that which is inexpressible (heart and soul) from the shackles of the body, of blood, of land, of nation, of culture, of every facet of identity. A shout is a shout is a shout, across all space and time. I touched upon this briefly at the end of the aforementioned essay, where I wrote, “my shout...it destroys meaning. This does not denote a meaninglessness but rather, an “absence of meaning...[that is] the presence of all meanings...a construction outside meaning...a black hole...”¹⁶

When we detach from the meanings imbued within identity, we do not float around aimlessly. Rather, we enter the void before the sun rise - we exist in liminal space, together in In-Between.

In *LINK SICK*, every single person exists in In-Between, having a body but no true Real Life, only VIRTUAL. Every kiss, every hug, every bump, every nudge is made up of code and algorithms. Memos replace verbal communication; “thought waves moving through the ether.”¹⁷ It begs the question, can code shout? If “[a] body could not

¹⁵ Micho, 7.

¹⁶ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷ DEBBY FRIDAY, *LINK SICK*, (Vancouver: 2021), audio.

think and come alive by virtue of its sociopolitical arrangements, would it still pray and bray?"¹⁸ Perhaps.

These ideas around shouting influenced my work outside of school, particularly my first two EP releases: 2018's *BITCHPUNK* and 2019's *DEATH DRIVE*.

On "INDULGE ME"¹⁹, I howled: "Fuck the silence! I love this violence!" Vulgar and loud, my shout demanded a witness to the "frightening force of human expression"²⁰.

On "GOOD AND EVIL"²¹, I screeched: "Surrender! Break open! Go deeper!" Pressing the listener to enter the In-Between with me.

And that we did. Once we arrived, we found that all this shouting, all this noise, did in fact have a name and it is what I now call electronic punk music. Not necessarily a genre and not necessarily a philosophy but somewhere in the middle.

ELECTRONIC PUNK MUSIC

In my second-year essay, *Together, Always Together: On the Erotic Potential of Electronic Punk Music*, I elucidate that electronic punk music is sonic chimera, where the "rawness of punk expression" becomes injected with the "*sonus ex machina* of electronic production."²² At this juncture, an experimentalism erupts.

In *LINK SICK*, this experimentalism canvases the project. I made the very specific choice that the musicality of the story would be at the forefront, acting as another part of the cast, a character in itself. The music takes on a soul but no body, a sound both diegetic and non-diegetic - in the very same way that the characters of the story both exist in their world and also do not; everything and everyone dead, alive, logged in. This is a commentary on the world of *LINK SICK* and increasingly our very own world, where there is no separation between that which is IRL and that which is

¹⁸ Micho, 9-8.

¹⁹ Track 3 off of *BITCHPUNK*.

²⁰ Micho, 3.

²¹ Track 4 off of *DEATH DRIVE*.

²² Deborah Micho, "Together, Always Together: On the Erotic Potential of Electronic Punk Music," (FPA812, Simon Fraser University, 2019), 6.

VIRTUAL. Listeners are immersed into the boundlessness that the characters exist within. We all become one with the story, with the internet, with VIRTUAL - “[tumbling] out of (mind) reason [and] into (embodied) emotion.”²³ This is the special power of electronic punk music; that of transmission, of vibration.

Like all electronic punk music, the music of LINK SICK is genre-less (or rather hyper-hybrid-genre) - reflecting the contemporary blurring that music technology has made possible. Now, with a fibre-optic connection and the click of a trackpad, you can make a sound that has never before existed in all of millennia. And with another click, you can make another one! This was the stuff of speculative fiction merely 30 years ago and we now exist in that future. And said future is still shifting, still changing, still becoming. It is alive. Electronic punk music captures this aliveness in time, by not only acting as “cultural reservoir” but also because its very machinations require that we “respond and re-sound”, that we “make noise and take shape.”²⁴

In my second year, I completed a directed studies project titled, *THAT WET, ELECTRIC DARK*. It involved the creation of my very own wooden, 6x3 foot tall “sounding instrument” and was loosely based on *Together, Always Together*. My intention with this project was to explore sound as a storytelling device. I was interested in conduction, in the ways our bodies interact with the ephemeral and make meanings. The music in *THAT WET, ELECTRIC DARK* morphed and changed in response to my touching of the container and in return the visual projections also reached out and touched me; an audio-visual feedback loop.

Following this line of thought, I wanted the music in LINK SICK to be similarly transforming in response to the happenings in the story. This is where I got the idea to dub the creations/art in this world as *algos* and the creators as *architects*. Similar to the ways in which the act of observation affects particles at the quantum level, algorithmic art is shaped by that which it observes and that which observes it. The music in LINK SICK was not algorithmically created but the way it functions in the story is as if it is being “touched” by the characters, the listeners and myself as the producer/author. Every new voice and narrative break elicits a reaction from the score. Different notes are heard and felt upon first, second, and third listenings by the audience. There are multiple

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 7-8.

samples and sounds that occur in the play that were the result of freak chain-of-events-plugins-and-automations. These are sounds that I will never be able to reproduce exactly but they exist now in the work, in that world and in this world, forever.

Electronic punk music is the “engagement of...transmutation”²⁵, of the wild, of that which is In Between Me and You. And what is this stuff, rising between us?

EROTIC POTENTIAL

LINK SICK opens at the site of the rave, the epicentre of the story. We are brought immediately into this centre where bodies, “slicked with sweat”, are jostled together and “electricity circles the heavy air.”²⁶ Izzi is dancing with Philo and she tells us:

“I lean back into his open hands, lower my lids and enter the “wild zone”. In this dark room, I become something else.”²⁷

This *something else* is what I have spent the past two years forming into the framework I call erotic potential. As I wrote in my essay, *Together, Always Together*, erotic potential is “a becoming, a liminal space between what we were and what we will be.”²⁸ The erotic invokes the body, the soul, that place where desire resides, where longing sings in a corner. It breaks it open. It pushes forth what is within and In Between towards the promise of the horizon, of the future, of togetherness. When we reach towards one another and meet at various axes of tension - at the rave, at the club, at the show - we become *something else*. The self becomes “imagined not as a point, but as a membrane...a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel, a stream of a shared consciousness.”²⁹ And indeed, that is what we are - all this shouting and electric music, this “shiver”, this “resonance”³⁰, this “sound which is in me and also in you.”³¹

²⁵ Ibid, 9.

²⁶ DEBBY FRIDAY, *LINK SICK*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Micho, “Together, Always Together”, 9.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 7.

³¹ Ibid, 9.

I've explored these ideas in many different ways, in particular in my experimental writing practice. The script for LINK SICK was the first thing to arise. Initially, I attempted to approach it as if I was writing a traditional story and then as a traditional script but neither of these methods were working nor did they make me feel very connected to the story. I felt as if I was standing on the outside of the room I was trying to enter. So instead, I began to write as if I was writing one of my blog posts.

In 2019, I began a blog, called CRACKINGCLOSER.COM. I use this online space to challenge myself to write intuitively and to share my thoughts publicly. Over the years, my writing began to take the shape of hybrid fiction/nonfiction-essay-script-poem-letter-type pieces, many of which employ a citational practice. I cannot pinpoint why but the act of quotation comes to me naturally when I am writing and in fact, it is an important part of my work flow. It feels like a reaching-towards the collective You - to say the things I cannot say as accurately, to bring pieces of the Other into Me, to make noise and to speak together - erotic potential at play.

And looking at it now, of course this was the gestational space that LINK SICK was born from. I had to reach towards others both logistically (by recording all my voice actors entirely over Zoom due to distance and the pandemic) but also psychically. I was trying to tell a story about a future and in order to do so I had to summon memories not-yet formed from the collective consciousness - the parts of a story I could not speak with my own lips or see in my mind's eye. And so I pulled from beyond me and brought in the words of writers and artists such as Simone Weil, Rumi, Dr. Ana Mozol, Carter Heyward, Nietzsche and more. This practice runs parallel with the convention of "sampling" in music, where fragments of sounds from songs are used in other songs. And in turn this runs parallel with the psychic space that DJing occupies, where the master of ceremonies borrows pieces from several tracks to create a mix, a blend. These are all acts of pastiche, of collage, of synthesis.

I understand the script for LINK SICK to exist as a work of synthesis. It is an art work in itself - pieces of a piece of the whole. The citational practice I employ not only acts as its own form of musical notation and rhythmic instruction but it also acts as a way of bridging past/present/future and Me/You/We. Further, an interesting thing happened to this melange when the script was taken off the page and brought into space-time via my music production and recording in Logic: the distinctions and differences melted

away. Paragraphs peppered with footnotes and annotations became a singular voice. This was not necessarily a flattening but rather a *gathering*. The transformation of the written words into sound turned the many membraned strings of thought into a cohesive, living thing.

A One, A We.

ON THE FUTURE

I wrote the following words: these are the “threads that bind us together.”³² This statement is repeated by Izzi in the moments when she is confronted with her own inextricability from everyone and everything around her. I have often felt this feeling, in moments of heightened emotion and experience, whether blissful or horrific. Yes, we are bound together. Always and in all ways.

And this is the point, or at least, one of many points. Of both the story of LINK SICK and that of my research. There is something that exists in the throng, a note that is held by the crowd, a oneness, “propagated by resonance.”³³ With LINK SICK, I have attempted to explore this connectivity that exists intrinsically between us as human beings. Every day, in every way, we are always merging, always fusing, disjointed and re-joining - a mess of wires and sounds and nerve-endings.

What kind of future is this?

In this world, it is one where we Facetime, Zoom and Skype, bridging the gaps of oceans and timezones. It is a future travelling at hyperspeed, a sticky, decentralized world wide web brimming with every kind of thought and thing imaginable. It is darknets, mouse clicks, live-coding, Google, crypto, automation and Neuralink - heavy head of the new millennium, cloudy horizon closing in.

What kind of future is this?

In LINK SICK, it is one where the most popular drug at the dEMOfests is BLEND, an unlicensed code that gives the user the experience of merged consciousness. It is a

³² Ibid, 2.

³³ Ibid, 12.

future where The Vow has become a reality - the ability to upload one's mind into VIRTUAL forever. It is inter-VIRTUAL travel, blink-streams and algos, Tier 5, The Store, the heads of ABC Inc. It is DEDHEADS and NUMBskulls obliterating their sensory inputs, moving through VIRTUAL never feeling a thing.

Again, what kind of future is this?

I'm not sure yet. But what I do know is that as keeper of history, as griot, as an artist, I am interested in continuing to find out.

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LINK SICK

An Audio-Play by DEBBY FRIDAY

Philo's got his hands around my waist and he keeps giving me fuck-me eyes. The bass is so heavy that I can feel my teeth quivering in my mouth, my brain jostling in my skull, my blood vibrating in my ears. I smile at him. In this dark room, our skin is slicked with sweat and his fingers feel almost cool on my frame. A thousand pairs of feet stamp in uneven unison, palms reaching through shards of light towards the ceiling. Electricity circles the heavy air, clinging to loose hair and fingertips - we are surrounded by bodies. I lean back into his open hands, lower my lids and enter the "wild zone."¹ In this dark room, I become something else.

My beautiful boy presses his thumb into my pelvic bone, the same way he did four seasons ago, when we first met. It was the annual Solstice dEMO and it was raining outside the dome, fat yellow droplets of a wet, yellow planet hitting the glass walls of the warehouse. I was zoning out by myself, in a corner post-protest, coming down off the BLEND, trying to re-integrate into these hands, this head, this body.

A tap on my shoulder - a stroke, a scratch, a loaded gun. I remember turning around and seeing his beautiful, brown eyes for the first time. There was a yellow light, a warning. There, "the sick animal"², "the Empire of Death"³. We kissed and the plunge into oblivion was immediate. I became a cellular memory, an ancient and painful recollection of separation and reunion. Again and again. And again, forever more.

He looks at me now with those eyes and they are full of him and his love - cold things. My pulse quickens.

"Death all around us," he mouths.

"In the void and in the ether," I answer.

He pulls me even closer and brings his lips to my ears.

"You are a wilting flower, 'you are granite'⁴" and it sounds like an accusation.

"Perhaps," I kiss his neck. "And you are an "empty wine glass"⁵, a vacuum sucking the life out of me."

He laughs.

"Perhaps."

A trumpet sounds. The tempo picks up. In this dark room, we move to the beat.



PHILO

"I don't get tired of You...

All this thirst equipment
must surely be *tired* of me,
the waterjar, the water-carrier.

I have a thirsty fish in me
that can never find enough
of what it's thirsty for!

Show me the way to the Ocean!
Break these half-measures,
these small containers.

All this fantasy
and grief.

Let my house be drowned in the wave
that rose last night out of the courtyard
hidden in the centre of my chest.

...

A fire has risen above my tombstone hat.
I don't want learning, or dignity,
or respectability.

I want this music and this dawn
and the warmth of your cheek against mine."⁶



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GODLESS

What is love if not violence?



The floor rumbles and I sway my hips to the rhythm. Philo is doing a two step and waving his outstretched arms vertically. Groups of people move through our bubble, pushing into us and us into them. We rise together like foam to the surface. In moments

like these, words are difficult and no one speaks. Instead, we memo - a poke, a prod, "thought-waves [moving] through [the]...ether."⁷ I open myself to receive from all and so much feeling floods over and into me.

I am deep in this rhythmic loop when Weaver memos me, breaking the cycle. His ping reaches through space and time, a concentrated hit of dopamine shocking me out of the shared reverie and bringing me back to the room. "The pulsing heartbeat of the music [ripples] through [my] body like a shiver and [I am] awakened by it."⁸ A message: come.

I know Philo has received this message too because he opens his eyes and gazes out into the crowd, towards the signal. In this dark room, there is only a sea of shape-shifting shadows and plasma. Another memo. Weaver again. He is calling us to him. Excited, I grab Philo by the hand and we begin to make our way through the crowd. There are feet and fists and hips and elbows and hats and bags and smoke and glitter. I glance up briefly and try to catch sight of the dome ceiling. Liquid nitrogen clouds dot the sky and sparkle like disco-balls. Someone bumps into me then and I almost lose my grip on Philo's hand. An electric guitar sings. Two yellow braids whip past like lightning. A NUMBskull.

"There are laws to the universe: archetypal patterns!"⁹ Watch it, link!" I yell at them.

"This isn't happening! You watch it, link!"

I am shouting: "Whatever! Whatever! Whatever!"

I am shouting: "There are a thousand - no, ten hundred million thousand people in this room!"

Philo grips my hand tighter and we keep moving.

PHILO

Salad days can't last forever.

IZZI

What do you know about anything?

PHILO

I know about as much as I can.

IZZI

Oh, what thick skin you have.

PHILO

Not much skin. Shallow veins. Heart smaller than the size of my palm.
And shrinking by the day.

IZZI

And me? What about me?

PHILO

You have two hearts. One is here, in my hand. The other is in a Pod somewhere in IRL, pumping blood into your twitching limbs and closed eyelids.

IZZI

Pause.

You don't know anything about anything.

And at that moment, we arrive.

There, in the centre of a circle of onlookers are two men, entangled. One of the men, tall and dark-haired, is wearing head to toe designer G-É skins. A blue monogrammed scarf hangs over his shoulder and his monogrammed pants are down around his thick ankles. He is leaning forward, thrusting violently, his face strained and slicked with sweat. The other man, shorter and more muscular, is bent over on his hands and knees. His entire body is painted blue from head to toe, including his hair, his earlobes, his nails and the crevice of his asshole. He is wearing a gold chain and black boots. The G-É monogram dots his painted skin like tattoos, glistening under strobe lights. The two of them move together, like a wave-form, like a pendulum, like some oscillating, polyphonic mass of flesh. Everyone in the circle is watching and dancing around them. Philo starts up his arm-swinging, his eyes trained on the spectacle before us, his mouth open - his dick hard. The painted man arches his back and twists his neck around to look directly at me then. We lock eyes.

Weaver. My best friend.



DIANA

Hello everyone and welcome back to my blink-stream, it's your link Diana Deviance. Link! Link! I'm here today with a v.SPECIAL guest, one of the hottest and trendiest architects of the moment - DJ GODLESS. Link! Link! Now, as we all know, DJ GODLESS took The Vow earlier this season. I know, I know! v.CRAZY right? I don't know about you but I have been following his blink-stream for months now and I am just v.fascinated, I mean, it's just v.COOL and v.HOT, you know? Makes you really think about your own life and all the time you're wasting in your Pod when you could be free from the illusion of reality and the suffering inherent in flesh. I, for one, would love to be "born again."¹⁰ Anyway, here he is, everyone. Pings for DJ GODLESS! Link! Link!

GODLESS

_ Hello. _

DIANA

So, you're the hottest architect around right now. Your algos are absolutely everywhere! You've achieved Tier-5 and are well on your way to Tier-6. Tell us, how does it feel?

GODLESS

_ "What have they done to you, my poor child?"¹¹
_ laughing_
_ Just kidding. It's all v.GOOD. v.GOOD. v.GOOD._

DIANA

v.COCCCCOOL.

Rumour has it that you've personally met the heads at ABC. Is that true?

GODLESS

_"Telling the truth is a release, a liberation in and of itself, that sets one outside of such banalities, dualities, and negativities even unto one's death...mystery has multiple meanings." _¹²

DIANA

v.COCCCCOOL.

So of course, there's the big question on everyone's mind, what we all want to know...
What's it like? Taking the Vow? Did it hurt? Are you happy now?

GODLESS

_There is a memory. A day where the sun was shining through a window portal IRL. One hundred and sixty hours in VIRTUAL. A glitch. Piss and shit and vomit all over, all over my body. Black fingers. Dead feet. Dry tongue.
I was alone._

_"The mightiest men have hitherto always bowed reverently before the saint, as the enigma of self-subjugation and utter voluntary privation - why did they thus bow? They divined in him...behind the questionableness of his frail and wretched appearance - the superior force which wished to test itself by such a subjugation: the strength of will, in which they recognized their own strength and love of power, and knew how to honour it: they honoured something in themselves when they honoured the saint...In a word, the mighty ones of the world learned to have a new fear before him, they divined a new power, a strange, still unconquered enemy: - it was the "Will to power" which obliged them to halt before the saint.
They had to question him." _¹³

DIANA

That is...well...v.v.v.COOL.

Okay, last question, the ladies and the gents want to know, are you single? Are you seeing anyone right now?

GODLESS

_Why do we suffer? Why do we dream? Why be One when there is All?
I see everyone all the time._

DIANA

v.Wicked. Anyway that's it everyone! Don't forget, DJ Godless will be spinning at dEMOfest-444 on October 221st. I've heard rumours that it's a blue planet and judging by GÉ's latest skins at The Store, I think the rumours are true! Who's got their tickets?
I know I do! See you all there!
Link! Link! Link!



In the midst of multitudes, I watch Weaver, my dear friend, open his drooling mouth and stare at me with blank eyes. His face says euphoria but the eyes never lie. He's off the BLEND, lost in DEEPFEEL.

He once said, "There is literally no where else to be."

He once said, "to '[permit] oneself to be deeply moved and changed by experience'¹⁴ is to die."

In this dark room, at one point or another, everyone is disintegrating. As without, so within, so below, as above. And in this state, in this place, Weaver beckons me to him. I feel Philo push his erection into the soft flesh of my lower back, nudging me forward and so I move past wriggling, bouncing, sweaty flesh and cross the threshold, into the eye of the circle. Reaching my friend, I kneel down to face him. His dark-haired partner slows his thrusting but doesn't stop. Weaver smiles at me.

"Link!!!" he shouts.

"Link!!!" I shout back. We descend into laughter and ecstatic memo bursts.

WEAVER

Have you come to witness my "participation in the universe"?¹⁵

IZZI

You called me here.

WEAVER

You're right, I did...Now, why did I do that? I...I don't remember.

IZZI

Because you are not merely an architect, like the rest of us.

You are an artist. A real one.

WEAVER

If I am an artist then you are my lover.

IZZI

You have so many lovers. One hundred million thousand of us.

WEAVER

And you have all come to witness me?

IZZI

Yes.

If you perform, I will witness you.

If you live, I will die.

If you die, I will live.

WEAVER

And if I should lose myself?

IZZI

I will “pour myself into those moments with [you].”¹⁶

WEAVER

And if you should lose yourself?

IZZI

“The place of women in this chaotic world is one of toil and trouble”¹⁷ and so I will suffer,
I will be silent.

WEAVER

Impossible! Look at me!
You are a living thing. You fall and you make a sound.

IZZI

What do you know about anything?

WEAVER

I know enough.

The shrill cry of a modulated synth pierces through the crowd, the kick drum changes patterns and the dancers change direction. I can feel their eyes against the back of my head, probing, burrowing, looking. Weaver breaks my gaze and beckons to Philo, who I notice is now dancing with Katz. She is wearing a blue-black striped cat skin with nipple cutouts and a turquoise tail, a G-É chain dangling at the tip. He is waving his arms in front of her yellow eyes. The two of them come over promptly and kneel down on either side of us. Weaver’s partner inhales heavily and revs up his thrusting. We watch our friend shake and shiver, flared nostrils, lulling his head back, gasping.

He is shouting: “Link! Link! Link! Link!!!”

He is shouting: “My friends, open your mouths! Let us “[become] ourselves!”¹⁸

And he kisses each one of us on the lips, leaving slivers of raw code on our tongues. We swallow the BLEND and follow him into the void.



In a dream, my mother tells me about the Before.

Of water, blue and wide.

Of green so deep, alive.

Then dust like smoke, like vapour.

Then drought like sand, like crater.

In a dream, she is holding me close and kissing the top of my head. She smells like salt. I kick her - hard, in the stomach and then I turn and run away. There is no light here but there is a sound. A whistle, a whisper, a horde of bees, following me. My legs move through zero gravity until I have flipped myself upside down and I am hanging haphazardly among space junk. My feet are in the air, arms swimming below my head. Everywhere, a thick, dizzying darkness. I look to my left and I see Earth, a cloudy grey

orb in the distance - shrivelled, dull and ugly. I look to my right and I see a VIRTUAL log in station, lonely flower, gleaming jewel. Something hot is stinging my face, all the way from here and the sound is in my head, now. The screaming is coming "from always, inside the body."¹⁹



GODLESS

"Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems!
She is like a woman rising from a tomb.
She is like a dead woman.
One might fancy she was looking for dead things."²⁰



*INTER-VIRTUAL TRAVEL TO BACK2IRL dot COM IS NOW BANNED.
REPEAT: INTER-VIRTUAL TRAVEL TO BACK2IRL dot COM IS NOW BANNED.
ANYONE FOUND TRAVELLING TO BACK2IRL dot COM WILL BE LOGGED OUT
IMMEDIATELY AND SENT TO CAMP.
REPEAT: ANYONE FOUND TRAVELLING TO BACK2IRL dot COM WILL BE LOGGED
OUT IMMEDIATELY AND SENT TO CAMP.
IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS THINKING OF TRAVELLING TO BACK2IRL dot COM,
REPORT THEM ANONYMOUSLY VIA THE EMERGENCY MEMO CHANNEL.
REPEAT: IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS THINKING OF TRAVELLING TO BACK2IRL
dot COM, REPORT THEM ANONYMOUSLY VIA THE EMERGENCY MEMO
CHANNEL.*

*THIS ANNOUNCEMENT IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
THE PEOPLE'S COALITION OF ABC INC.*



I look at Weaver and hold his heavy head. I become the sweat of his brow, the ground beneath his knees, the pleasure taking over. I am his flexed spine and violent lover. I am the push and pull, "heat and fusion", "gripping vice"²¹, the gravitational force that radiates from the centre of their lovemaking. In this dark room, I am every eye and sensory input, every shiver and shaky breath.

And I am shouting: "It is [your] responsibility to recognize what is destructive and extricate [yourself]!"²²

I am shouting: "You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!"²³

I am shouting: "If love is not an animal, then what is it?"²⁴

Philo's got his hands around Katz' waist and he is fucking her. I watch him, with his chest pressed up against hers and his cold eyes staring at me. Everyone is staring at me. And I am making noises I do not recognize. Howling at the pregnant vapour in the sky, I pull out chunks of hair and dig my nails into the soft flesh of my throat. I rip the gold G-É tassels on my dress to shreds. I fall and roll over onto my back. Every cell in my body contorts itself and spasms. The bass booms, my heart breaks open, the BLEND floods in.

The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in.
The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in.
The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in.
The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in. The BLEND floods in.

Threads flow from my fingertips to the person beside me, pulsing red. I cannot see their face but they are kissing my neck. Another suckles at my nipple. Another massaging my feet. Another with their hands up my dress and between my thighs. Red threads flow like cobwebs, vibrating all over, all over, all over us. So much sweat. So much heat. So much breaking into me.

Light, so blinding and unbinding.

One and - "there was The Word"²⁵ and The Word was Sound.

Two and - in this realm of day and night, I have no body but all bodies.

Three and - that which enters me is what I have given and so on and so forth forevermore.

Four and - "We shall no longer exist. But in that nothingness which is at the limit of good we shall be more real than any moment of our earthly life."²⁶

And the music goes on, and the Motherbeat²⁷ carries me away. No longer one, but All, in all ways and always.

It is true, "we can only handle so much reality"²⁸ and so I turn my head and watch my beautiful boy give his love to another.

PHILO

"[Your] lips [look] like fresh blood."²⁹

IZZI

Because you have killed me, oh deceiver.
You have destroyed me completely.

PHILO

Don't be dramatic. We are the same and we've been here before.

IZZI

"For a demon to enter, a door must be opened."³⁰
You are the drain, the pipe and the sewer. You are the door and the door-opener.

PHILO

Izzi...

IZZI

This is the truth: You sing my name and you are wicked!

PHILO

Izzi...Stop it...

IZZI

You are a cheat and a liar!

PHILO

Izra!

IZZI

What?

PHILO

Stop it. Feel me. Link.

And I watch him bow his head and kiss Katz. I become his inhale and exhale, his stiff dick. I become Katz' open mouth, her bare chest. I become the moistness between them, the friction that separates, the fever that clings. A wave rises, a neuro-sonic crescendo, the sensation of his lips hot on my own. Something endless within me breaks through tissue and bone and fluid. In this dark room, I lean back into DEEPFEEL and I am shouting: "Out! Out! Out! I said come out!"

And at that moment, a cry from the other side of the room, "bend[s] and stroke[s] matter"³¹ - a voice ringing through the sky.



HEAR ME, HEAR ME!

ALL WHO VENTURE FORTH INTO THE FALSE MATRIX OF VIRTUAL!

*DO NOT FORGET THE MUD FROM WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN MOLDED
DO NOT FORGET THE SUN THAT SHOWERED YOU IN LIGHT
DO NOT FORGET THE WATER THAT MADE YOU WHOLE AGAIN
DO NOT FORGET THE WIND THAT KISSED YOUR SACRED SKIN*

*IT IS TIME TO RESIST! TO REPENT! TO REFUSE!
IT IS TIME TO RETURN TO WHAT IS REAL! IT IS TIME TO GO BACK TO IRL!*

*LINK! DO NOT SUBMIT TO YOUR DEHUMANIZATION!
LINK! DO NOT LAY DOWN YOUR FREEDOM!
LINK! DO NOT ALLOW THESE MAGNETIC FORCES TO POISON YOUR DESTINY!*

*WE CAN MAKE THE GRASS GROW AGAIN!
WE CAN CLEAR THE SKIES OF SOOT AND ACID!
WE CAN BRING BACK COLOUR!*

*WILL YOU ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE "FILLED WITH EVIL CODE OR GOOD
CODE?"³²*

*LINK! LINK! LINK! IT IS TIME TO LOG OUT! LOG OUT! LINK DO YOU HEAR ME?
LOG OUT!*

*BACK2IRL DOT COM! BACK2IRL DOT COM! BACK2IRL DOT COM! BACK2IRL DOT
COM!*

—————

REPEAT: INTER-VIRTUAL TRAVEL TO BACK2IRL dot COM IS NOW BANNED.

—————

Writhing and oozing, it is Katz who grabs my hand and lifts me from the floor. I tumble into her open arms and rest my head on her shoulder. She lays a kiss on my cheek.

“Wake up, the protest has arrived,” and just like that, Weaver and Philo appear beside us; glowing, radioactive. I look at Philo. He smiles at me. I smile back. We all hold hands and merge with the cluster of bodies no longer in a circle, but becoming a single, solid mass, bracing itself against the booming crackle of the ANTI-VIRTUAL protesters.

“HEAR ME, HEAR ME!”

Hordes of code congregating, thunder rumbling beneath our feet, the clouds above us are heavy. Flashes of blue light flicker and reveal the swelling.

To the left, a pack of dEMO-girls spazzing wildly. To the right, a gang of DEDHEADS flinging themselves against each other. Up front, a parade of NUMBskulls facing off against the protesters. The kick drum morphs into a snare; the ticking of a sonic weapon. I spot my sister, Numee, and her two yellow braids. She is out in front, zipping among the NUMBskulls, a G-É jewel sparkling in the centre of her forehead.

“HEAR ME! HEAR ME!”

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” she yells back. She is cackling now, a surge of energy encircling her and her friends. I feel the intensity of their memo blasts towards the protesters, condensed thought blasting off like fireworks. The protesters faces contorting in pleasure and pain. In this dark room, emotion gives way to sensation. In this dark room, a shot of dopamine is a shot of dopamine.

“YOU ARE ALL LOST IN THE FALSE MATRIX OF VIRTUAL! LOG OUT! LOG OUT!”

I watch Numee shake her head to the beat, braids swinging left and right. I go to her, my friends in tow, single file through a petri dish of cellular activity and dancing feet. She catches sight of us and raises her hands to the sky before holding them out to me.

She is mouthing, “A promise, a vow.”

She is mouthing, “What’s a body, anyway?”

I understand immediately and like an instinct, a drive, I memo her from the depths of my two hearts.

“THE PEOPLE’S COALITION? A v.SICK JOKE DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU COMPLACENT AND TO ATROPHY YOUR WILL!”

IZZI
Sister. Link.

NUMEE
Yeah?

IZZI
What do you see? What do you hear?

NUMEE
Nothing. Never a thing.

Hot tears fall down her blank face.

“YOU HAVE BEEN FED LIES AND YOUR BODIES HAVE BEEN PURPOSEFULLY WEAKENED! NONE OF THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING!”

NUMEE
Sister. Link.

IZZI
Yes?

NUMEE
Someone told me that ‘there’s a tradition that God can be seen in the colour red.’³³

IZZI
Are these not the “threads that bind us together”?³⁴

NUMEE
They are. Bright red, bright light “Intense light, difficult...to bear.”³⁵

IZZI
Is that why you’re doing this? Why you went NUMB?

NUMEE
I was born NUMB. I was born in glass and empty room.
We’ve been here before. And again. And again.

“YOU ARE SLEEPWALKING! IT IS TIME TO WAKE UP! LINK! IT IS TIME TO WAKE UP AND GO BACK TO IRL! LINK, DO YOU HEAR ME? BACK TO IRL!”

IZZI
Yes, but not like this. This is v.drastic, you know, a...v. uhhhh...malfunction...

NUMEE
Maybe.

IZZI
And who will you be? What will you become?

NUMEE

Repeat: Nothing. Never a thing!

IZZI

And what about your friends? Your skins? Your jewels? Your BUX?

NUMEE

“It does not matter whether what one is possessed by is good or bad - “it is the state of possession itself that [is] destructive.”³⁶

IZZI

And me? What about me? What about your life?

NUMEE

“Human lives are brief and trivial. Yesterday, a blob of semen; tomorrow embalming fluid, ash”³⁷, a string of code.

IZZI

You know too much.

NUMEE

Repeat: Nothing. I’ve never felt a thing.

“HEAR ME, HEAR ME!”

A bomb goes off. A splinter of lightning. We are outside of Time. A NUMBskull, impossibly tall and green-haired, charges into the congregation of protestors head first. He collides into one of them, her petite frame flying to the ground. I watch as he kicks her in the chest with his heavy boot. Blood flies from her mouth and splatters across the glittering mob. She logs out. Another - a dEMO girl, dressed in a S/S 221 G-É two-piece, digs her steel-cut nails into the skull of a protester. He collapses in agony, his wail melting into the rising melody. She is laughing, burrowing the heel of her shoe into his body until he too, logs out. One by one, the protesters fall. Violence swirls - all encompassing.



GODLESS

“The search for meaning - what a vicarious notion! Is it here? Is it there, lying about waiting to be discovered? The pearl of great price and the treasure hard to attain are delusions...at the end of a rainbow which keep us locked into a quest for things which don’t exist, but must be invented. Reality is our own creation. That is the bitterest pill - the toughest eucharist - to swallow, but it is also the most medicinal and transubstantiating.”³⁸

TAKE THE VOW. CREATE REALITY.



I look at Philo. I look at Katz. I look at Weaver. I look at Numee.
I look at my hands.
Blood, bright and brutal - all over, all over us.

We are shouting, "These are the threads that bind us together!"
We are shouting: "Link! Link! Link! Link!"
We are dancing and screaming and twirling and touching and maxed out and
logged in.

Philo puts his hands around my waist and I lean back, close my eyes. The tempo
picks up, the bass booms, the sky breaks; nitrogen raindrops sizzling on the way down.
In this dark room, we move to the beat.



ENDNOTES

¹ Daniel Martin, "Power Play and Party Politics: The Significance of Raving," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 4 (1999): 83, doi: 10.1111/j.0022-3840.1999.00077.x.

² Frey-Rohn as quoted in Ana Mozol, *A Re-Visioning of Love: Dark Feminine Rising* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 34.

³ Mozol, 101.

⁴ Rumi, *Like This*, trans. Coleman Barks (United States: Coleman Barks, 1990), 47.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 11.

⁷ Catherine L. Albanese, "Historical Imagination and Channeled Theology: Or, Learning the Law of Attraction," *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* 9 (2015): 485, doi: 10.1163/9789004264083_023.

⁸ Martin, 91.

⁹ Mozol, 71.

¹⁰ John 3: 3-7 (KJV).

¹¹ This sound clip is from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Mignon, Kennst du das Land?" and the specific phrase: "Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?" which generally translates to "What have they done to you, my poor child?"

¹² Mozol, 3.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good & Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), 37.

¹⁴ Mozol, 147.

¹⁵ Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, (United States: Harper Collins, 1989), 25.

¹⁶ Thomas Moore as quoted in Mozol, 81.

¹⁷ Heyward, 45.

¹⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹ Deborah Micho, "There, A Sound: Shouting as Aesthetic Practice," (CA811, Simon Fraser University, 2018), 5.

²⁰ Mozol, 151.

²¹ DEBBY FRIDAY, "FATAL", *DEATHBOMB ARC*, track 2 on *DEATH DRIVE*, 2019.

²² Mozol, 129.

²³ Herodias as quoted in Mozol, 154.

²⁴ DEBBY FRIDAY, "Togetherness and Its Contradictions," *CRACKING CLOSER* (blog), September 12, 2019, <https://crackingcloser.com/blog/togetherness-and-its-contradictions>.

²⁵ John 1:1 (KJV).

²⁶ Lissa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction* (United Kingdom: I.B Tauris, 2014), 196.

²⁷ This is a reference to musician Eris Drew's concept of the "motherbeat".

²⁸ Marion Woodman as quoted in Mozol, 113.

²⁹ Chino Amobi, *EROICA* (London: Koenig Books, 2020), 126.

³⁰ Amy DeRogatis, "Born Again Is A Sexual Term: Demons, STDs and God's Healing Sperm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2: 289, doi: 10.1093/jaarel/lfp020.

³¹ Deborah Micho, "Together, Always Together: On The Erotic Potential of Electronic Punk Music," (FPA812, Simon Fraser University, 2019), 7.

³² DeRogatis, 292.

³³ Rumi, 27.

³⁴ Micho, "Together, Always Together," 1.

³⁵ Heyward, 30.

³⁶ Marie Louise von Franz as quoted in Mozol, 133.

³⁷ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond (USA: Penguin Classics, 2006).

³⁸ Greg Mogenson, *God Is A Trauma: Vicarious Religion and Soul-Making*, (United States: Spring Publications, 1989), 88.

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APPENDIX A.

RESEARCH PAPER

Together, Always Together:
On the Erotic Potential of Electronic Punk Music Performance

Deborah Micho

FPA 812 Interdisciplinary Graduate Seminar II

Friday, December 13, 2019

First, a story:

A microphone. A crowd. A woman in a dark room. She walks to the centre of the stage, palms turned upwards. It is the beginning and it is silent. We are nowhere. A door closes, a circle forms and the air cracks in two. We breathe in. We breathe out. Suddenly and out from the void: a scream and a shout. There; a woman in the wild.

Can you feel it? That wet, electric dark, “born of Chaos”?¹ That dangerous and “provocative force”², rising to the surface? These threads that bind us together? It is the erotic and its potentiality - the hot current that runs through every room, every moment, and Everything. Can you feel it?

A moment arrives and as I look out towards the crowd, it changes shape. Touching me, touching you, touching All. There is something happening that I cannot hold in my hand but I can feel it in my throat and on my tongue and so I will speak its name.

This is a familiar scene, one that I have borne witness to increasingly over the course of my music career. It is the space of electronic punk music performance and what happens when “two or three gather together in my name”³ and I there, with them. Time and space collapse in on themselves and in the middle of it all, “something else”⁴ arises. I call this something else erotic potential and in this paper, I want to lay it bare, open it up and delineate its framework. To begin this work, I must first lay out what I mean when I invoke *the erotic*.

It would be easy and obvious to equate the erotic with the sexual and leave it at that but to take such a position is only a partial sketch. Like a lover whose cold and calculated maneuvers can easily coax out the desired physiological response but leaves our soul and the “person within...untouched”⁵, the erotic cannot simply be that which is purely sexual. That is not enough. We must engage with it more fully, more vis-a-vis. Of course, there is resistance due to the fact that on a societal level, “it is taboo to name and claim”⁶ the erotic openly. To speak it into public, every day conversation is a social no-no met with uncomfortable silences and red-faced embarrassment. We suppress and vilify it, meet it with suspicion and abuse.⁷ We turn away. No wonder then all this estrangement and alienation! No wonder then that “we know very little,...about the

farther reaches of human erotic potential.”⁸ And still the question remains, what exactly is the erotic?

When I say *the erotic* I am not speaking about one singular event, one singular feeling, one singular *thing*, but rather, I am speaking about a cornucopia, a many, a “[multi]-layered phenomena”⁹ that functions at the crossroads between worlds, at the intersection of the tangible and intangible. Named after Eros, the ancient Greek god of lust, love and sex, here we can find the network that makes up what is known as the erotic.

In lust, we have desire: the dangerous, creative and transformative act of wanting, that “natural force”¹⁰, the will to live and be alive.¹¹ Lust is an insistence on more-than the present and the already realized, it is an insistence on excess. It is the first stirrings of imagination, of possibility, of what *could be*.

In love, we have intensity and intimacy intertwined, that “unconscious” and “hidden” drive for the Other¹², a reaching towards in the spiritual and “emotional dimension[s].”¹³ Love is the subconscious taking shape, the expansion of the heart and of the self. It is the appetite of desire and the yearning for the “[transformation of] who we currently are.”¹⁴

In sex, we have the body and the material; the appearance of brick and mortar and flesh and blood and bones. Sex is a meta/physical realizing that offers us not only the sensations of touch, taste and sound but also of penetration, “the possibility of transference”¹⁵, the expression of and a witness to our existence. It is a unification, a prayer, a togetherness that goes “beyond one’s self.”¹⁶

Yes, indeed, the erotic is a togetherness, found in the “the body, desire, love and the spiritual”¹⁷, in the spaces between you and I.

A tone, a noise, a ringing in the ears.

We erupt and we come alive together, always together.

I shout and they shout back.

I move and they move with me.

I lose shape and what is inside of us spills onto each other until we melt together:

sweat and heat and sound and meat.

Music has always been imbued with erotic energy, from the prehistoric polyrhythms in Africa to the poems of *les trouvères* to our modern day plethora of genres and scenes. What is erotic is musical and what is musical is erotic. There is an inextricability here, a binding together¹⁸ that is characterized by patterns and irrationality, peaks and valleys, “tension and release, pulse and rhythm.”¹⁹ Music involves a “yearning for consummation”²⁰ and this yearning is *felt*: physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

What am I trying to get at when I sing and shout? I am trying to reach you and through you, reach myself. Yes, indeed, “whoever penetrates into his self perceives human music.”²¹

Taking a Jungian approach, the totality of the human psyche, aka the Self, is said to be “a bipolar structure made up of two complementary sides: the conscious and the unconscious.”²² The former is associated with the masculine, with logic and what is known while the latter is associated with the feminine and “all that [we] do not know about [ourselves].”²³ Audre Lorde describes the erotic as “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.”²⁴ Her insistence on the female and the unexpressed is important here because it affirms that there is a connection between our unconscious, the feminine and the erotic. That which takes shape in the dark is seen as feminine and the feminine is always that which is below the surface; murky, subliminal, and “from, always, inside the body.”²⁵

I contest that the erotic then necessarily belongs to the feminine dimension which is also the dimension of our inner workings, of our dark and of our wildness. It is both born out of the unconscious of our Self while also being a manifestation of this unconscious.

If we take this to be true then it follows that in this unconscious is where we find the wild, erotic potential of electronic punk music performance. The rawness of punk expression injected with the *sonus ex machina*²⁶ of electronic production gives birth to an experimentalism, a transcendence that “awakens [and] disrupts as it is uttered...making audible that which has been relegated to the...dark.”²⁷ To engage in this kind of performance is to embrace danger and joy. It is to participate in “musical

riot”²⁸ and to speak openly and brazenly of the erotic. It is to tumble “out of (mind) reason into (embodied) emotion.”²⁹

This emotional embodiment, this “deep and non-rational knowledge”³⁰ is yin, it is Kali, it is the womb space, it is “chaos, instinct”³¹, and a site of simultaneous creation and destruction. And this is what I mean when I speak of the erotic’s *potential*.

Power is the ability to change that which we touch. It is our ability to engage the life instinct and the death drive together, one after the other and at the same time. The erotic, in all its feminine, emotional and subconscious dimensions, is thoroughly charged with the power to “agitate the mind, the soul and to disrupt order.”³² As a force of Change, it is “negotiated and mobilized”³³, it is enacted and applied and pressed up against the skin. The erotic’s potential lies in its ability to “push back the boundaries of what is known...[and to provide] the opportunity to access, explore and become that which is deep within.”³⁴ Erotic potential is power, it is Change.

The erotic power of sound can be found in its ability to change space-time, to bend and to stroke matter, reaching through and around a room. A venue becomes a show when “sound masses collide.”³⁵ The vibrations and reverberations spill over and through the walls and ceilings and concrete floors, and “the phenomena of penetration or repulsion [seems] to occur.”³⁶ Atomic fusion. Varèse calls these “zones of intensities”³⁷ and in the realm of electronic punk music, the intensity is exponential, the potential is unfettered. Frenzy rising, a transmission happens and a deep feeling calls us by name.

I want to take a moment to emphasize the role of the body in this framework. The erotic potential that arises at the site of electronic punk music performance is felt through the body: mine and yours. This is largely due to “music’s distinctive ability to stimulate and enliven the human body...”³⁸ It animates us. It moves us. It fills us up, making us “lose [our] mind and come to [our] senses”³⁹, back to the flesh. And at the same time, the body is “[re-invested] with the miraculous potential to burst forth in sonorous melody at any moment.”⁴⁰ Heavy breathing and heart beating with every drum kick and synthesized howl, “...the auditory self is also an embodied self that responds and re-sounds...”⁴¹

A shiver. A resonance. We touch and we are touched back.

Indeed, Tia Denora describes how “bodies come alive and are configured through culture” to the point that sometimes the former can only act or exist with the help of the latter.⁴² Music is a cultural reservoir that tells us how to feel, what to think, and what to do.⁴³ It imposes a “disciplinization” of the body and a “body conduct” that shifts according to “local circumstances of use.”⁴⁴ When we listen, gestures arise and performances ensue. Stretching and spreading, the body opens itself to music and we respond and re-sound. We make noise and we take shape.

Microphone in hand, I say to them, “I need you to repeat after me.”

Nodding, understanding, they ripple and they wait.

I go, “fuck the silence!”

They go, “fuck the silence!”

Again, I go, “fuck the silence!”

And again, they go, “fuck the silence!”

Once more, “fuck the silence!”

And once more, “fuck the silence!”

A deep inhale, right hand on my heart, I shout, “I love this violence!”

Denora goes on to state that “musics may conspire with or against particular bodies, they may constrain and or enable particular desires and forms of conduct.”⁴⁵ Electronic punk music and its performance acts upon our bodies by compelling us to gather together. Whether it be in cobwebbed virtual internet communities or the physical manifestations of festivals and basement shows, we are pulled towards one another and we heed the call because the activation of erotic potential requires community. It requires all of us. The erotic is not an “isolated practice”⁴⁶, it is a “communal project”⁴⁷ that recognizes “the power within as well as that which is in others.”⁴⁸

My shout is mine but it is also for you. It is made whole through the sharing, amplified in the throng and it fills in the space between our atoms. Electronic punk music performance and its erotic potential is the engagement of an ecstatic surrender and transmutation, a “transcendental experience of union”⁴⁹ between performer and witness. It “demands no less than the soul of the lovers themselves”⁵⁰ and in return it changes us. A gift.

Borrowing briefly from Halberstam, I propose a parallel between his conception of “the wild” and erotic potential. Just as the wild functions as a “process of making, imagining and inhabiting”⁵¹, so too does the erotic. Erotic potential is a becoming, a liminal space between what we were and what we will be. When we assemble together in noisy congregations, what happens then is that our singular, individual perspective “gives way to plural, permeated space.”⁵² Me and You becomes Us, “a self imagined not as a point, but as a membrane...a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel”⁵³, a stream of a shared consciousness. Once again, “that sound which is in me”⁵⁴ and also in you.

But I want to go deeper. What will we become?

I think it has something to do with the way we are living these days. It may be a cliché statement at this point but the fact remains that there is a sense of isolation, despair and loneliness that permeates every day life. I know this because I experience it myself and because the many people I encounter at my shows and in my journeys tell me they feel the same things. I cannot say for sure what exactly is wrong because I cannot say for sure what exactly is even going on. It is the feeling of forces more sinister than my imagination can comprehend circling overhead, throwing stones and ready to pick at our bones. Or is the rock in my own hand? That is an essay for another time. But what I do know is that we do not have to look far to see that we are “[living] outside ourselves”⁵⁵, unmoored and on shaky ground. Life is organized in a way that strips our waking moments of colour, of wildness and of sensuality. We are lost and we do not know how to be together.

I want to recall the beginning of this essay, where I talked about the resistance to speaking openly of the erotic. Undoubtedly, there is an insistence on keeping the erotic within an “exclusively private space”⁵⁶, within the disembodied and institutionalized sphere of the individual and the unconscious. A suppression and a denial. And what happens when the unconscious is denied? It overflows, it becomes excess, it screams and shouts.⁵⁷ When we contradict our true desires and “live out of synchronicity with the unconscious...[we damage] our inner lives, sometimes with deadly consequences.”⁵⁸ And I see this out there, in the world and in here, in myself. What I suppress within me is mirrored in what is suppressed outside of me.

And yet suppression can never destroy the erotic, it can only push it further down in the psyche, where it gathers energy and manifests in negative and ruinous spurts and explosions.⁵⁹ Indeed, “what is not let in through the front door merely comes around to the back”⁶⁰ and if we are hollow, we can never be whole. But this does not have to be the way we live.

Again, what will we become?

If music “channels action”⁶¹, then the sound of electronic punk music and its performance is a call to arms against the anti-eroticism and the “totalitarianism of silence.”⁶² It is a call towards a deepening and a thunderous reverberation, a political act of defiance in unity. If “bodily potentialities are made manifest through the ways they *interact with* the symbolic and material cultures that repress, liberate and otherwise discipline them”⁶³ then we must be vulgar and aggressive and excessive and emotional and erotic and together. We must open up.

To open ourselves up to erotic potential is to open ourselves up to the integration of the unconscious towards a more holistic embodiment. It is to open up “the realm of the impractical as a space of possibility and newness”⁶⁴, as a space of new life. This opening can be distressing and painful and too loud and too much and this is because erotic potential demands that we must be honest. We must be honest about our desires and fears and failures and shame. We must not look away from what is calling from beneath the surface because as Audre Lorde explains, “to refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience...”⁶⁵ The erotic is the life-force of honest bodies and honest bodies have the power to change the world.⁶⁶

Jacques Attali writes that “our music foretells our future.”⁶⁷ And what does electronic punk music say about the future? I believe that it tells of a future marked by a revolution in how we be and become together. Fuelled by the deep knowledge of the erotic, our collective potential becomes a “grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.”⁶⁸ We must shout together and sing a chorus of yes to more life, more play, more intimacy, more synergy, more lust, more sex and more love. More love! Erotic potential demands a “politics of articulation”⁶⁹ because “love is not silent but

thunderous.”⁷⁰ And this thunderous electronic punk sound is what brings us together to face ourselves and each other. Revolutions are propagated by “resonance.”⁷¹ What is in me “resonates with the shock wave emitted”⁷² by what is in you and this is how we Change each other.

Together, always together.

ENDNOTES

¹ Audre Geraldine Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 89.

² Lorde, 88.

³ Matthew 18: 20 (NIV).

⁴ "Diamanda Galás," in *Angry Women*, ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale (USA: RE/Search Publications, 1991), 9.

⁵ Peggy J. Kleinplatz, "Transforming Sex Therapy: Integrating Erotic Potential," *The Humanistic Psychologist* 24, no. 2 (1996): 197.

⁶ Aimee Carrillo Rowe, "Erotic Pedagogies," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 7 (2012): 1033.

⁷ Lorde, 88.

⁸ Kleinplatz, 197.

⁹ Rowe, 1032.

¹⁰ Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 2.

¹¹ Joanna Frueh, "The Erotic as Social Security," *Art Journal* 53, no. 1 (1994): 66.

¹² Lubomir Lamy, "Beyond Emotion: Love as an Encounter of Myth and Drive," *Emotion Review* 8, no. 2 (2016): 98.

¹³ Lamy, 101.

¹⁴ Lamy, 102.

¹⁵ Jane Thomas, "Sexual Desire and the Lure of the Erotic," in *Thomas Hardy and Desire: Conceptions of the Self* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 72.

¹⁶ Gina Ogden and Christopher M. Dent, "The Spiritual Quadrant," in *Expanding the Practice of Sex Therapy: An Integrative Model for Exploring Desire and Intimacy* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 60.

¹⁷ Rowe, 1032.

¹⁸ Bruce Wood Holsinger, "The Flesh of the Voice: Embodiment and the Homoerotics of Devotion in the Music of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)," *Signs* 19, no. 1 (2013): 96.

¹⁹ Andrew Lear, "Eros," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*. (Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Holsinger, 96.

²² Kaaren Hedblom Jacobson, "Where There is Power, There is No Eros: A Jungian Interpretation of the Weberian Legacy," *The American Review of Public Administration* 25, no. 1 (1995): 22.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lorde, 87.

²⁵ Deborah Micho, "There, A Sound: Shouting as Aesthetic Practice," (CA811, Simon Fraser University, 2018), 5.

²⁶ Alternately, *sonuere apparatus*. This may or may not be a real Latin phrase. I made it up as I was writing, playing on the words that make up the concept of *deus ex machina*. A quick search for references or previous use turned up nothing.

²⁷ Micho, 4.

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- ²⁸ Jack Halberstam, "Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos and the Wild," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 (2013): 125.
- ²⁹ Ellen Waterman, "Naked Intimacy: Eroticism, Improvisation, and Gender," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 4, no. 2 (2009): 1.
- ³⁰ Lorde, 88.
- ³¹ Jacobson, 22.
- ³² Lily Martínez Evangelista, "Hyper-Eroticism as a Source of Spiritual and Material Agency in «Trilogía sucia de La Habana»,» *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación* 19, (2018): 86.
- ³³ Rowe, 1033.
- ³⁴ Kleinplatz, 198.
- ³⁵ Introduction to *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, ed. Georgina Born (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Holsinger, 94.
- ³⁹ Kleinplatz, 196.
- ⁴⁰ Holsinger, 94.
- ⁴¹ Introduction to *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, 1.
- ⁴² Tia Denora, "Music and Erotic Agency - Sonic Resources and Social-Sexual Action," *Body & Society* 3, no. 2 (1997): 52.
- ⁴³ Denora, 54.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Rowe, 1033.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Tamara Lomax, "Theorizing the Distance Between Erotophobia, Hyper-moralism, and Eroticism: Toward a Black Feminist Theology of Pleasure," *Black Theology* 16, no. 3 (2018): 275.
- ⁴⁹ Rita Perintfalvi, "Eroticism and Mysticism as a Transgression of Boundaries: the Song of Songs 5: 2-8 and the Mystical Texts of Mechtild of Magdeburg," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (2014): 238.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Halberstam, 127.
- ⁵² Introduction to *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, 3.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ashon T. Crawley, *Black Pentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 18.
- ⁵⁵ Lorde, 90.
- ⁵⁶ Rowe, 1042.
- ⁵⁷ Jacobson, 22.
- ⁵⁸ Jacobson, 35.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.

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- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Denora, 53.
- ⁶² Micho, 3.
- ⁶³ Denora, 50.
- ⁶⁴ Halberstam, 125.
- ⁶⁵ Lorde, 91.
- ⁶⁶ Lomax, 276. This concept of *honest bodies* is borrowed from Joan Morgan, black feminist scholar, who writes about honest bodies being “those that are uncontrolled by the state, respectability, stereotypes, or the taboo.”
- ⁶⁷ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 11.
- ⁶⁸ Lorde, 90.
- ⁶⁹ Lomax, 277.
- ⁷⁰ Lomax, 274.
- ⁷¹ Halberstam, 123.
- ⁷² Ibid.

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APPENDIX B.

AUDIO DOCUMENTATION

Creator/Director:

DEBBY FRIDAY

Description:

Set against the backdrop of an ambiguous dystopia and eternal rave, LINK SICK is a tale about the threads that bind us together. This file contains the full audio-play.

File Name:

LINK SICK (An Audio-Play by DEBBY FRIDAY).mp3