

# MISSED CONNECTIONS: AFFECTIVE ANATOMY OF A NIGHT OUT

Sofia Di Gironimo  
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

This project tells the story, hour-by-hour, of a night out at a techno rave in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal). It starts with us at 9:30pm the night of and follows us, staying up through the night until the sunrise, and riding home with a feeling of something. The aim of this project is to retain the feeling of lostness that a loud room and a sea of—chemical, organic, energetic—bodies impart. In recounting the various encounters, starts, transfers, that made up the night, it explores the circulation of affect through and around the dance floor. What happens in a dark, loud, crowded room, when experience meets its fringes? Where does the self go when it joins the community? Inspired by Kathleen Stewart’s attention to the circulation of public feelings, motions, shock, banalities, the ‘ordinary affects’ which constitute a life on a personal and collective level, I trace the night through moments, both brief and durational, which point to something else. Working through a Deleuzian framework for affect, I account for the bodily, rhythmic, and interpersonal resonances that make up an affective environment. The collaborative elements of the underground music scene mirror the unity of bodies in synchronous motion. The processes of attunement between dancers and DJs are models for an alternate mode of being in relation. From dancefloor ethics to dancefloor, from dancefloor to organising practice, the project traces the ‘affective anatomy’ of a night out and imagines new social arrangements beyond the limitations of discrete selfhood.

## KEYWORDS

affect, techno, Gilles Deleuze, Baruch de Spinoza, ethnography

## Setting the Groundwork

With *Missed Connections* comes a slew of encounters, sensations, destabilizations, incomplete thoughts, conflicts, movements, both jerky and fluid, looks, aversions, gestures, self-transgressions—and their failures. My experience of the night, and of writing the night, are experimental. The difficulty here, in writing, is that the experiment is always outside and beyond the theory. Double-blind tests, pipettes, lab mice, objects of study, good parties, the subaltern, the death drive; these all are written (read: domesticated) into existence from the endless slew of interactions and traces which constitute them outside of our field of vision. How to meet the experiment on its own terms? How to retain or transmit the Weird, the incomprehensible, the unspeakable, the Real, the entropic, the unassimilable, as it ricochets past us in moments we barely have time to grasp?

This project tells the story, hour-by-hour, of a night out at a techno rave, starting at 9:30 pm the night of, staying up through the night with it until the sunrise, and riding home with a feeling of *something*. That *something* is what this storytelling attempts to move towards. The night is hosted by the collective *Missed Connections*, based in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), at an office space under construction in Mile-Ex. It is a fairly small event; the space holds no more than 100 people at a time. The crowd ebbs and flows from lounge to bathroom to smoking area to dancefloor, taking turns at the very front, setting the energy for those who dance behind. Bodies, exes, strangers, badly dressed people, freaks, one (very) old woman, my girlfriend, our next week's date, someone who won't stop talking, fantastic dancers, an old friend all fill the room. I don't know what we are here for; slowly I think that maybe that is the whole point, then the thought drifts away from me again.

This project aims to retain the feeling of lostness that a loud room and a sea of—chemical, organic, energetic—bodies impart. In recounting the various encounters, starts, confusions, transfers that made up the night, it explores the affective anatomy of a night out. Anatomizing affect means tuning in, giving our attention to the small happenings that make up big happenings, tracing flows, movements, gazes, rhythms. Put simply, this is an account of the 'things that happen' on a night out. Inspired by Kathleen Stewart's (2007) attention to the circulation of public feelings, motions, shock, banalities, the "ordinary affects" which constitute a life on a personal and collective level, I trace the night through moments, both brief and durational, which point to *something* (2).

Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* is an exercise in attunement; it syncs and resonates with its objects of analysis. Anna Gibbs proposes *Ordinary Affects* as a model for an affective methodology of writing, which is both dialogic and deeply personal. Writing, for Gibbs, is research in itself, it finds the form suitable to what it is describing, it births and shapes its objects into existence. This process is rhythmic: the writing subject "risks itself, finds itself, loses itself, and remakes itself in its dialogic relations with the worlds to which it attunes" (Gibbs 2007, 227). Risk, return, attune, try anew, risk, return, try anew: this forces the body into communion with its object, the threat and possibility of knowledge or description that it poses. Gibbs works through Henri Lefebvre's (2004) 'rhythmanalysis' to expound this mode of writing, which turns the researcher into a kind of metronome, "integrating the outside with the inside and vice versa" (20). A metronome works to bring the interpreter into the score, birthing rhythm from outside the piece and importing that rhythm into its measures. It provides an entry point through which sight-reading becomes sound. It brings rhythm as quantity, or speed and repetition, but also as quality, giving an allegro its jumpy brightness and a largo its measured broadness.

Employing time as a rhythmic rather than structuring element, I move through the night using clockhand hours as flashbulb memories.<sup>1</sup> Time, here, is not rhythmic in its duration, but in its measure, its cyclicity, its *fort-da*.<sup>2</sup> Time *lasts* differently, as we will see, according to BPM, to spatial distortions, to who we are kissing, what we have consumed. It measures, rather than minutes and seconds, pulses, moments of pause, thirst, towardness and backwardness, the barricades we build up against oncoming waves of sleepiness. Like checking the time, say inappropriately on a date, or irritatedly, halfway through a long shift, accounting for time brings us out of our project. Accounting for time cycles us away from our narrative analysis, out of sync with the night we are anatomizing, breaking continuity in the name of moving forward. In drawing us out, though, it allows for return, for jumping into moments and for sitting in them, stopping them in their tracks as they try to slip away with the seconds that pass. As Stewart (2007) describes the still life, which is at once static and vibratory, these moments are rife with potentiality, the "charge of an unfolding" (19). We tune in, affectively, corporeally, attentively, to the track, the conversation, the moment, listening to it, sitting with it, lining up our pulse and breath with it, taking it seriously, only to cringe, laugh, feel nothing, draw out, and dive in anew.

## Storytelling by the Numbers

*It's 9:30 pm,*

on the first cold Saturday of September. My girlfriend, her roommate, and I are all *eating pasta e fagioli* at the dinner table. I am nervous about getting out of the house on time. We are meeting a friend for a beer at 10:30pm.

*It's 10:50 pm,*

and we are late for drinks. As we arrive, the friend is on the phone with someone she is dating, telling them the story of the first time she got drunk, with her lacrosse team in the basement in an affluent suburb. One splash from every bottle so no one would notice. She puts a bookmark in her livestreamed podcast for one. We laugh—the last time I saw her, I played translator between her and her ex-date, my best friend, the two of whom manage to talk at each other without ever getting a thought across. I imagine a three-dimensional graph containing two sinthomes,<sup>3</sup> their respective knottings of nothing, sense-making, and symbol, doomed to stay in their separate quadrants and never to make meaning through contact (Lacan 1976). When I acted as psychoanalyst, unknotting them towards finding a common thread, I co-existed with them in that three-dimensional space, netting from one quadrant to another, offering alternate phrasings, assuring of a love-still-present despite the lack of its mention.

The image quickly fades.

If we want to make it in time for tea, we had best head out soon. Before leaving, we each eat a single magic mushroom, out of a little bag from British Columbia labelled “Penis Envy.”

*It's 11:30 pm,*

we make it in time for tea. A little table has been set up, mugs provided. A slideshow of Craigslist's ‘missed connections’ plays on a projector nearby. Missed connections are queer in that they are out-of-time. These missed connections in particular are queer in that they are gay and totally odd: “you were a leather-clad

bull dyke. we fucked in the bushes behind kinky cowboy night. you spit in my eye. never got your name, would love to meet again xx.” I have never been to a rave that provided tea before. The music is atmospheric, not-too-loud-to-hear-you-speak. We acclimatize. I think that is what this is for. Everyone who arrives early enough, incentivized by sugary tea, has the time to get acquainted, to chat (mostly sober) with people you usually meet in the loudness, darkness, and chemicalness. I sense something slowly shifting in the room, and mention this to my friends. We are experiencing, I believe, the intentional eliciting of a “lived duration that involves the difference between two states” (Deleuze 2001, 49), an attunement, a getting-to-know, a getting-to-feel. More on this below. Tea enters throat and warms belly. Name enters one ear and exits another. Preliminary glances are exchanged, momentary crushes are formed. Gender circulates in the form of mini purses carried high on two fingers and black fanny packs worn strapped across a chest.

Not in order to be exerted, but rather to be diffused, power is amassed amongst the group. This is the power of bodies in relation, relations of sameness, relations of becoming-entwined. We are looking for stable ground on which to cultivate *joy*, sowing little possibilities for encounters of agreement, form for matter, matter for form. At events like these, I often speak with people who share my affinity for negativity. Negative theologians, Afropessimists, bolt-cutter owners, masochists, meditators, hypnotists, sculptors playing with negative space. When we meet it becomes clear that we are *all talking about the same thing*. The formal resonances between my life work (so far) and theirs brings us *joy*. *Joy* brings us closer to *action* (Deleuze 2001, 27–28). In *action*, we reach towards *something*.<sup>4</sup> The room reaches a stable temperature. An itching to dance creeps up our legs and into our rib cages as the volume and pace of the music rises.

*It's 12:30 am,*

as we enter the dancefloor. Above it hangs a complex net of trailing plants and LEDs, pulsating with the music, as if transporting nutrients by way of light from one vine to another.<sup>5</sup> Light and sound envelop. Spatial or immersive art forms like these invite participants to enter and resonate with the environment. Aesthetic objects, interactions of sound and light, become atmospheres in which the centrality of the sonic or visual aspects is diminished. Instead, the affective quality, the *something*, takes hold inside and above the bodies in atmosphere, collectivizing, interlinking, formed by and forming temporary or durational subjectivity through collective experience (Anderson 2009, 78). Madison Moore (2016) describes nightlife as a formal setting, staged and curated as would be the set of a theatre production. This theatrical or creatively productive space encour-

ages the production, or perhaps transformation, of selves, as the night plays out. For Moore (2016), “nightlife is a time for storytelling,” (53) for environments to craft subjects and for living spectacle to take shape (50–51). Form follows form, feeling follows feeling, as the dancefloor reproduces the symbiotic energy-sharing modelled by the pulsating plants.

A friend of mine has developed a system for grouping people and music into two categories. Of course, as good post-structuralists, we are wary of binaries, of their violent powers for reduction and exclusion. Bear with me, though, for the purpose of painting the scene. According to her, there are positive and negative dispositions, in people and in music. Bright, clear sounds, upbeat rhythms, danceable beats, are contrasted with minor scales, eerie vocals, dark repetitive rhythms, synth, echo. Optimists, activists, and people who go to bed early are contrasted with critics and cynics, nihilists, edgelords. The rule meets its exception in the Phrygian mode, and in everyone struggling against capitalist hegemony despite there being no easy ‘way out.’ During this first DJ set, though, by NAP, the polarity between positive and negative dispositions is accented and manipulated, flexing the crowd’s muscles of attunement, measuring and expanding its propensities for these poles of the positive–negative disposition binary.

Techno that would most appropriately be played in a burning garbage heap in the end stages of apocalypse<sup>6</sup> is interrupted by a hyperpop remix of Rosalía’s *Bizcochito*.<sup>7</sup> The crowd is transported rhythmically from pole to pole, in a manner which is not so much disruptive as it is challenging; each collective movement from positive to negative disposition and back again forces a re-appraisal, a tuning-in to the sound and energy being transmitted. A good DJ guides a collective sensory experience, reading and suggesting motions and energies. The crowd is harmonious, expectant. This is what Luis-Manuel Garcia (2020) describes as the “affective attunement” of electronic dance music scenes. A shared sensory experience, a set of cultural knowledges, an intention to be transported elsewhere, constitutes a kind of wholeness, a synchronicity (31–34). Bodies are affected by the haptic dimension of sound, moving in conversation with one another, desiring to be brought further into the singularity being collectively generated.

*It's 2 am,*

and ketamine is *weird*. At first it giggles as it tickles down the back of your throat. Then it distorts the space around you, making strange the familiar contours of the known in the shape of stair, couch, wall, and floor. Time stretches and shrinks, as it becomes more and more difficult to tell one's present from one's past; ketamine makes experiential what Leo Bersani (2013) argues is always true, psychoanalytically, of time: "Our futures are relooped, spiraling pasts" (34). Each moment contains and is modulated by moments which came before, and to a timeless unconscious the past and present are indistinguishable. The presence slowly voids out of self, which floats ten centimetres above what used to be your body. You wade in the unknown, which feels something like death, but carries none of its accompanying dread. McKenzie Wark (2023) describes this temporal experience in rave environments as "fleshtime," the becoming-horizontal of time as the body slips into it. A friend of mine describes ketamine spatially. Where there are substances which act as uppers and downers, respectively heightening or lowering their user's energetic or mental state, ketamine acts *sideways*.

Paul Preciado (2012) describes the relationship between substance and subjectivity as being deeply interlinked in what he describes as this pharmacopornographic age. Out of a combination of "biomolecular," whether psychotropic or hormonal, and "multimedia technical protocols," in the form of a pornographic or desire-fueled mediatic environment, there derive agentic subjects shaped by those substances and "cybernetic prostheses" supplied to them (33). Substance shapes subjectivity. He speaks of "Prozac subjects, cannabis subjects, cocaine subjects, alcohol subjects, Ritalin subjects, cortisone subjects..." the list goes on (36). The body is described as a modifiable "somatic filter" through which sensorial reality passes. It trades in both inputs and outputs, shaping the relationship between the external world and the soma, as well as the relationship between soma and psyche: "our personalities arise from this very gap between body and reality" (237). As everyone, from wine moms to sweet-toothed kids to chemsex havers to Wellbutrin takers, knows, we are subject to substance, sometimes moving with or by its whims. Nights like this are melting pots for substances of all kinds as they circulate, they are ingested, they flow membrane to blood and blood to brain, up noses and down into urinals as the hours pass.

Uppers, or stimulants, like cocaine and mdma, take the brain's regulation system hostage. They inhibit the proteins responsible for clearing out excess dopamine in the brain, causing a subsequent buildup of that neurotransmitter<sup>8</sup> which regulates the interplay of motivation and reward (Nestler 2005, 5; Mustafa et al. 2020, 383). This results in affective euphoria, confidence, pleasure, arousal: the

feeling that one's desire could be and is being fulfilled. Cocaine feels like sublimating the logics of capitalism, through the nose and into the bloodstream of the "achievement subject," (Han 2017, 9) having internalised the paradox of infinite production and consumption. It appeals to you more and more, promising that the next time will be better; you are optimizable, more perfect, almost perfect, feeling good, good, but never *there*.

Downers or depressants, like alcohol and benzodiazepines such as xanax, inhibit the brain's excitatory signalling mechanisms, reducing the speed and acuity of information transmission in the brain. Alcohol, for example, functions by slowing the release of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, which helps to regulate voluntary movements, motivation, and memory (Sullivan, Harris, & Pfefferbaum 2010, 128). This can serve to slow reactivity, reduce fine motor and other movement-related capacities, and impede perceptive capacities. Stimuli become duller, our reactions to them are dampened: everything matters less, the world is further away, and we neither want to or can do anything about it. Alcohol works to suppress, to make tolerable; cocaine's messier and less productive little brother serves, too, to conceal capitalism's Real,<sup>9</sup> in brief moments of reparative reprieve that reach towards excess but remain trapped in the service of self-perpetuation, mitigating suffering to the point of forgetting its source.

Ketamine falls neatly into the category of neither upper nor downer: it is described as a dissociative anaesthetic with hallucinogenic effects. In the brain, it causes a surge of glutamate, the brain's major excitatory neurotransmitter, in the prefrontal cortex, a brain region typically associated with planning, personality, and moderating social behaviour. Experientially, ketamine is often described as eliciting sensory disturbances (i.e. the distortion of light, sound, and proprioception or the sensation of one's own body), disembodiment, and ego-transcendence, near-death experience, or the 'loss of the self' (Vlisides *et al.* 2018). Where alcohol and cocaine tag-team through suppression and sublimation towards the perpetuation of late capitalist subjectivity—or, perhaps more generously, allow us to cope and even thrive under its seemingly inescapable conditions—ketamine wallows in the unknowability of the other and risks an openness to that other which threatens self-containment, the narcissism requisite for keeping one's skin in the game of capitalist achievement.

A chapter in drug researcher Karl Jansen's book *Ketamine: Dreams and Realities* (2004) explores the relationship between the experiences of ketamine, which flirt with the limits of subjectivity, and certain discoveries in quantum physics research. At the risk of engaging in total quackery, I take seriously Jansen's claim that in the lived *weirdness* of ketamine there are hints of what he calls the "participatory universe," or the timeless-and-spaceless interconnectedness of things demonstrated by experiments on "quantum weirdness" or Einstein's "spooky action at a distance" (138). These experiments study the interconnected and simultaneous behaviour of particles much too far apart to be communicating with one another through known means.<sup>10</sup> Drawing from Spinoza's notion of the One, or the claim that "God is in everything," (140) Jansen argues for something called "transpersonal psychology," or the possibility of accessing a consciousness that is constituted collectively rather than individually (145). Like the communication between the far-apart particles on the fringes of quantum physics, this transpersonal psychology abides by a separate set of rules than those that typically govern space and time. Arguing for the connection between ketamine and this "transpersonal psychology," Jansen draws from experiential trip reports of telepathy, connection with the dead, and hearing or seeing things far out of the range of the possible

Taking Jansen's claim seriously does not necessarily entail buying into the perhaps apophenic logic of quantum physics's connection to the parapsychology of ketamine. It could mean, however, considering the possibility for the collective eliciting of *something weird*. Karen Barad describes the "quantum weirdness" of particles, as they behave in ways that disrupt our regular understandings of space, time, continuity, and discontinuity, as a kind of "queerness"—the disruption or "un/doing" of identity as such (Barad 2010, 247). As electrons jump in ways that disrupt the notion of motion being continuous in space, the stability of our perceived reality is destabilised. However, it is this very disruption which "makes for the stability of existence itself" (Barad 2010, 248). At the very center of perceptual reality are tiny objects which break all the rules by which reality is meant to operate—*weird*.

The body on ketamine experiences *weirdness* as waves of movement, the transformation of space, the elongation and compression of time, the feeling of creating something momentary and incomprehensible together. The *weird* is "a signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now obsolete" (Fisher 2016, 13), it gestures towards the yet-to-be-known, at times obscene, at times banal. It joins things, which would otherwise have been separate, together: big milk-drinking children and too-small bicycles, bus stops and the key-etching of much-too-earnest poetry, a room of otherwise fairly

lost ravers with a cause that has yet to be named. It proffers *sidewaysness* as an alternate relation to the already over-elaborated upness of capitalist sublimation and downness of depressed suppression. It does not go so far as to propose a new identity after-the-weird, but hints at the participatory through the shared, and at the possibility of *something else* in risking with the Other.

*It's 3 am,*

when we share a kiss. As basically every lesbian romance film ever can attest, when two women kiss, death is imminent. If we take Jacques Lacan's famous line to heart and find that "woman does not exist" (Lacan & Fink 1999, 7), then the death of a woman is tautological. The words *dead woman*, as Elizabeth Bronfen (1992) argues, are a pleonasm, describing her in more words than are necessary (63). Nore, when we first met, was not supposed to be my girlfriend, but rather my hypnotist. The first few times we saw each other, this was strictly the arrangement. She brought me under, into some alternate psychic state, and slowly, together, we built a house in my head. It has many floors, most of which are located far far underground. It has a library containing all the books I've ever read, it has a doll workshop, a theatre, a bath house which flows hot or cold according to the cycles of the moon. If becoming-woman is anything like becoming-in-describable, we are both far out on our way there. The project we have embarked on is radically intersubjective, and difficult to experientially describe. Sometimes, when she and I kiss, I am something like dead—or at least not entirely here.

There is a certain project to kissing which can easily leave you to find yourself swimming in the big unknown. This project is the impossible task of knowing the other: predicting their movements, having prescience over their desires. Kissing, like womanhood, requires a certain voiding of self from self. More productively, it reintegrates that voided self into the intersubjective space. More so than happening between pairs of lips, kissing takes place in the ether within, above, around, circling those lips. Intersubjective space is the realm of language, the shared, the referential. It is experienced mutually or refers mutually to the same sign, be it a word, a signal, or a too-exploratory tongue. Some kissing fails to take this into consideration, and so suffers from a failure to sufficiently void oneself from oneself. This is perhaps why some of the best kissing takes place between women—we're always already not there.

Luce Irigaray's *When Our Lips Speak Together* (1980) is a strange, yearning, half-essay, half-poem, addressed presumably to a woman with whom the author longs to share a kiss. In Rita Monticelli's (2019) reading, the lyrical text expresses a desire for the possibility of a 'feminine language,' an existence beyond the last names of men and an imprisonment in their worlds of pleasure (47). Through Irigaray, lips that speak to one another in close contact, in secrecy, perhaps in the back corners of a dancefloor, seed the possibility for new modes of communication, alternate possibilities for subjectification. This language, though, could suggest a more radical project than the outdated feminist dream of political lesbianism. To her lover, Irigaray supplies: "Stay right here, and you won't be absorbed into the old scenarios, the redundant phrases, the familiar gestures, bodies already encoded in a system" (70). What Irigaray seduces her reader into is less an 'alternate' language, liberated from patriarchy, but rather a making-illegible, a defamiliarization, the movement into a womanhood that is outside the symbolic as such.

The last time we were in this space together, Nore and I found ourselves in a cold basement in the midst of renovations, at the bottom of a long flight of stairs. In search of fresh air, we took a few steps too many, and now we are here. We kiss. We think about being *not* here, in this cold basement. But neither of us seems to be able to make any decisive motion towards that. We realize that, for quite some time now, neither of us has been able to speak in the first person. "We", "we", "we", laugh at the situation, which has somehow collapsed us into one fairly useless person together. Our kissing leaves us speechless, but not in *that* kind of way. We have ascended into the intersubjective space together, merged through pore and orifice, settling on something in between confusion and satisfaction. If "what transgresses the subject is a pleasure that likewise transgresses language" (Mackendricks 1999, 148), perhaps the new 'feminine language' is one in the interstices of subject and meaning, perhaps it is more languid than actionable, perhaps it produces nothing but little stupid smiles in cold basements.

*It's 4 am,*

and it is *loud*. The set that will guide the next few hours of sound and movement is well underway. Limbs swing at each other, into spaces just occupied, movements overlapping, repetitive. Very few people are touching, the floor is spacious and the dancers weathered enough to allow for each of our little techno bubbles to envelop us. The moment is lasting, durational. Zi!, the closing DJ of the night, begins with more positive disposition tracks,<sup>11</sup> drawing from house as well as breakbeat genres. Having drawn dancers closer in, she introduces weirder tracks, moving into darker genres and switching into the 4/4 or four-on-the-floor beat, emblematic of techno, playing with groove, repetition, and speed.<sup>12</sup> They intersperse this

intensity with what they describe as “reward” tracks, which momentarily bring positive, easy-listening moments into the darker areas of the night. This allows diving deeper into the weird, Zi! describes, and, likewise, feeling higher into the positive breaks. They feel the party as a “ball of energy,” in which they use their sets to tell stories and build energetic directionality.<sup>13</sup> Their set feels like being transported into intensities, being washed over with energy as it takes its form vibrationally, affectively, and spatially.

Sounds repeat, repeat, and merge anew. This repetition, the strain it places on ears and dancing bodies, the maximality, “all wrest music out of a reasoned, ordered plane and thrust it back into the world of objects and raw materials” (Demers 2010, 92). This in turn reinforces the materiality of bodies, their attempts at mitigating and embracing suffering, their modularity, repetitions, their samenesses. In Gilles Deleuze’s (2001) account of Spinoza’s *The Ethics*, the body is described twofold. Firstly, the body is rhythmic, involved in those relations of movement and rest, start and stop, speed and slowness which cohere its materiality into form, however transiently or lastingly as sustaining or repetition allow. Secondly, the body is defined in terms of its relation to other bodies, the affective resonances it is entangled within, its capacity to affect and be affected. Deleuze draws a connection between the dual nature of the body, and the composition of music. Like in musical composition, in bodily being “it is by speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else” (123). It is these two mechanisms which wrest the body into individuation from the *One*, the universal substance of all qualities and all knowing, which serves as the starting place of Spinoza’s system.

Earlier on in the night, I had touched on the idea that the itching we feel to enter these spaces of affective attunement, weirdness, techno-trance, is an itching towards *action*. *Action* is self-affection, or the derivation of joy from a knowledge of what is internal to us, perhaps self-knowledge, the ‘adequate idea,’ or the idea of God (Deleuze 2001, 42-43). God, here, is not a distinct being, knowable in its essence, but rather that *One*, the material out of which all else is derived. A knowledge of God, then, is a knowledge of whatever is common to all substance, to all material, living and nonliving. This knowledge “generates love towards the immutable and eternal,” which will move to occupy the mind, more and more, stronger and stronger (Spinoza 2020, 304).<sup>14</sup> A channel to the source, so to speak, *action* taps into that universal *something* which has been described variously as

Vibrancy, Continuity, the ‘Oceanic Feeling.’<sup>15</sup> This *something* vibrates, penetrates, or rushes into discrete existence occasionally and sometimes without warning, a reminder of the outside, the prior, the universal, the beyond. What can we say of the collective experience of techno as *action*, or the movement towards *something*?

Techno works through rhythm, perhaps most simply as repetition and speed, making immense, loud, total objects through the fast-paced absencing and presencing of sound. It can be experienced as an intensity in the rhythmic and affective fields, those very fields we have discussed as constitutive of the body. Rhythm is the field of movement which, while not immediately producing the body, generates it as effect. Like the synchronized movements of a school of fish, the movements of rhythm are the repeated events which make possible the expression of the *thing*: the thousands of individual fish appear as one, the body concretises into individuality. The heartbeat, breath as involuntary contraction of the diaphragm, the coincidence of facial expression, electrical impulse, diffusion, circulation—these rhythmically constitute the body as living organic mass. The diurnal rhythms of the sun, or, more often, those of the crying baby, the timestamp machine, the alarm clock, the stirrings of existential dread, determine our cycles of awakesness, our productivity, our presence. The *crisis ordinariness*<sup>16</sup> of late capitalism rhythmically inserts the financial crash into the all-too-stable myth of perpetual growth, and so too breathes that crisis into the rhythms of the everyday (Berlant 2011).

The rhythms of techno abide by an alternate set of rules than those rhythms which make sense of the body, regulate it and its place in the world. Techno takes the infinitesimally small, the synthetic drum, the drone, the distortion, and reproduces and accelerates these into largeness, presentness, overwhelm. It brings bodies into durational and repetitive moments which rehearse their very place of origin, the universal substance of which they are derived. Its speed intensifies these effects, as speed “implies that bodies, including collective bodies, are defined not as closed, determinate systems, formed, or identifiable merely by their constituent parts or organs” (Goodman 2012, 201). This in turn stresses the constructedness of the body, its uneasy formation through rhythm and affective relations, calling attention to its porosity and changeability. Techno suggests the possibility of alternate material arrangements, rhythmic constructions. It harkens back to that universal material from which all becomes individual, making the miniscule massive, then collapsing back into nonidentity. In each beat a day passes, but so too a pulse throbs, a market crashes, a birth, a death, we experience the cyclic simultaneity of these all.

As techno works to highlight that universal materiality out of which discreteness, the body, is rhythmically formed, it also serves to highlight the entanglement, the affective intensities, which relate between bodies. Affective relations highlight samenesses and differences, which in turn bring their counterparts, *joy* and *sadness*. *Action*, again, is that affective relation which is self-derived, or which results from a knowledge of the fundamental identity or sameness of all material, all bodies. What does techno do to bodies in relation—or, better, what does *action* feel like?

Sometimes it feels like the becoming-dense of the air that surrounds you, a filling-in of the spaces in between. Sound washes over you, shaking through all the solids, liquids, and empty spaces that make up a dancefloor. Sometimes it feels like a wave of change; a sound joins the mix, a little acid, a new rhythm. Or a new set of dancers move to the front of the floor, injecting a novel energy to the movements of the crowd, always pushing and pulling, aligning anew. Sometimes it is in the feeling that a sound is *very old*, that it taps into something that has been going on in and between bodies for a long time. It reaches from somewhere you cannot place and lodges itself in your inner ear, inhabits the now briefly, and disappears as quickly as it arrived. It can feel like *tapping in*, or *tapping out*. It is certainly collective, but it does not feel like an integral of distinct parts: whatever we are moving towards is something underneath or beyond the individual, the radical rather than the liberal totality.

François Gauthier (2003) describes the rave in terms of the Bataillean *fête* (71), a moment of excess during which the self transgresses into a larger body, or what for Bataille (1986) is *continuity*. *Continuity* is like death, but sexier. It is the bottom of the deep gulf that separates one subjectivity from another, it is the precise moment when one cell splits into two, it is the *something* which we all came from and to which we will all one day return (Bataille, 12-15). In the *fête*, the orders determining the sacred, the productive, the reasonable are overturned. In order's place there comes profanity, consumption, the obscene. The techno rave takes what is tiny and makes it enormous, it gives access to something like God, but only in the most debauched sense, the God that lies in the disintegration of selves into the One. It takes place outside of productive time, continuing on and on into and past the break of day. It holds its excesses in the loudness, in its duration and in its repetition. It proposes alternate rhythms towards the (de)construction of the body, it proposes alternate modes of affective relation through collective

movement, outside-selfness, continuity. It reaches towards the sublime, as the beautiful is too easy, and, anyway, won't scratch the itch for destruction. 'Once the needle touches vinyl, there is no future—repetition has made it obsolete. The revolution of techno has been the creation of music that develops itself in its own interstices, the interstices of the present. The parasites of chronology narrative, beginning, middle and end are all gone. Listening is pure, pure opening' (Joos 1997, 11-12).

I draw this quote from a text included in a compilation entitled *Festive Ritual*, the release of which coincided with a photography exhibition of the same name, documenting the Montréal underground rave scene in the late 90's. The compilation and exhibition are an archive of a moment in the city's history where, thanks to the prevalence of corruption and organised crime, rents were low, storefronts were empty, and grime reigned supreme. The stakes were low and the dream of upward mobility would have been a distant fantasy. I describe this context not so as to romanticize the past, but so as to point to the similar precipice upon which the scene now finds itself. The flow of foreign capital has now swept the streets and erected those colourful modular monuments, emblematic of an age of gentrification. Condos sit empty, rents skyrocket, the few stragglers still able to live on unemployment are pushed further to the East if they are franco-anarchists, further to the North if they are queer. Like the post-referendum era of the late 90's, this moment finds itself in the 'post' of failed social movements, haunted by Occupy, the Maple Spring of 2012, the anti-austerity movement of 2014-2015. We are low on hope. This climate adds a sense of urgency to the scene, which seeks for alternate modes of community and consciousness in the momentary "interstices of the present" for which techno allows.

*It's 5 am,*

and the atmosphere explodes suddenly into something new. The lights shift bright and red, an LED board behind the DJ booth which had been spelling out funny little phrases ("hi mom") throughout the night switches themes, and suddenly explodes into a pulsating brightness, lighting up with the acronym PLUR. PLUR stands for Peace, Love, Unity, Respect—it is a perhaps outdated (read: cringe) carry-over from 90's rave culture which still makes its way occasionally into raver vernacular. Everyone laughs when the letters appear on the LED board up front, peace and love signs jokingly pop up across the dance floor. Some make a soundplay of PLUR and the French "pleure," feigning tears in pierrot fashion. Some overly cynical reactions betray a genuine affinity for the acronym. PLUR popped up in the early 90's, in the early days of raving on Turtle Island/in North

America, and is widely attributed to Frankie Bones, an organizer of some of the earlier large-scale raves which this side of the Atlantic had seen. Then, it was a call to stop the fighting, cliquery, and sexual violence which had spread through the early scene (Sterling 2016). Now, it is a longing cry to a world whose problems we wish were so simple as a lack of Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect.

A penchant for militantism and a love for the riot make it difficult for me to argue for the merits of Peace. Love and Unity seem a utopian project in our contemporary context. Respect seems to posit two stable subjects interacting with one another non-porously, according to a quite particular set of social rules. But maybe I've written PLUR off too soon. Didn't getting to that space of communal movement, affective attunement, perhaps *action*, require first a kind of comfort that is found in Peace and Respect? It is difficult to feel into the interstices and vibrations between bodies when mosh-happy techno bros and overly talkative partygoers are in your midst. It is difficult to propose this without writing the night into a safe sterility. Love and Unity, too, are not a far cry from the affects I have described throughout this night: a movement towards the One, whatever is shared between all material and body, a movement towards the other, despite its possibly shattering consequences.

Arun Saldanha (2007) describes the way bodies act and interact together in dance environments as a "viscosity," or "how an aggregate of bodies sticks together" (Saldanha 2007, 50). Saldanha's ethnography of the Goa trance scene uses a Deleuzian and Spinozist framework to understand how bodies, specifically white bodies in his case study, make departures out of discrete embodiment and into a sort of psychedelic collectivity. In the Goa trance scene described, whiteness is socially prerequisite for participation in these moments, and, as such, any latent political-utopic possibilities in these spaces are neutralized back into exclusion and identity. Saldanha identifies a similar movement towards unity, but diagnoses an excluded group from the universality of PLUR—locals and domestic tourists, Indians, anyone not meeting the aesthetic and racial qualifications for collective transcendence (77-78, 89). The scenes described fall short of their unificatory potential as they ultimately reproduce hierarchy and identity within the alterity of dance spaces. This perhaps cautionary tale does not preclude that other scenes, genres, styles, times, or places could produce alternate "viscosities" allowing for alternate social-material-bodily arrangements, possibly moving towards the unity to which PLUR aspires.

Indulging in the suspension of cynicism here, I propose we view PLUR as an example of *emergence*, through adrienne marie brown's *emergent strategies* (2017). These are the small-scale creation and propagation of the kinds of solidarities and subjectivities we want on a larger scale. Actually, brown's work collapses the distinction between the small and the large scales of activist work, viewing individual action as fractally affecting all that surrounds, creating ripples of change. *Emergent strategy* nudges towards the new, it views the self as a microcosm of the world, and proposes the transformative possibilities of self-work, interpersonal work, and community work.

The collective rave subjectivity could act as a place of practice and exploration for the kinds of disidentifications, confusions, destructions, and re-starts that will be required in order for the world to radically transform from its current racial-cisheteropatriarchal-capitalist order. Those meaning-making systems that make sense of the self so too make sense of the world: borders, nations, gender, whiteness, the ownership of property, everything those systems exclude. This is what Tony Sampson (2016) describes as a "scattering," the collective movement towards an affective unruliness that disrupts neoliberal subjectification, disentangling us from the affective powers of capitalism (66, 71). The disruption of the self, following from *emergent strategies*, could double as a disruption of the world. From dancefloor ethics to dancefloor, from dancefloor to organising practice, from organising practice to ecstatic moments of revolt. PLUR makes space for swaying in the weird and the unknown, for *action*, introducing possibilities for a new-or-non-subjectivity, a rehearsal for the *something* we hope is to come.

*It's 6 am,*

and the night, as planned, is coming to a close. The last track plays, silence for a second, then the crowd bursts into cheers and applause. It is rare that I find myself on dancefloors so full, spatially and of energy, at the closing of a night. Thank-yous and acknowledgements from the organizers make their rounds—this is something particular to the endings of raves in the underground scene—extending to DJs, sound techs, harm reduction, lighting and decoration crews, the attendees and dancers, acknowledging the collective and participatory nature of these kinds of events. Nightlife scenes are manifold; they are collectivities, workplaces, ethical worlds, spaces of traversal and preservation, among others (Straw 2015). We have seen these facets of the event take form throughout this telling, with each actor and moving piece taking part in the emergence of the night, and this many-armed organism is recognised by organisers and attendees alike.

The lights come on, the crowd mills about for a bit. We express gratitude, we laugh together at the odd little things we have experienced. Do you remember that very short person in a gas mask, who only ever danced facing away from the front, then disappeared as quickly as they arrived? The (very) old woman? Did you have a read of the *missed connections* notebook in the hallway outside? We move outwards, finding our coats and the little objects we have spread about throughout the night. Out the front door, early dawn has begun to light up the horizon to the North, Montreal's East. Some chance encounters depart together. Others speak breathily outside, having a last smoke before heading home to sleep the morning away. My girlfriend and I ride our bikes home mostly in silence together. Both of us know that *something* has happened here tonight.<sup>17</sup>

## Now That We're Home...

We have asked many questions in the storytelling of this night. What happens in a dark, loud, crowded room, when experience meets its fringes? Where does the self go when it joins the community? What does this mean for the world outside, so reliant on a stable and bordered self in order to uphold its teleology of progress, its processes of exclusion, its myths of (inter)subjectivity? Our goal has been to explore the possibilities for reading theory into feeling and feeling into theory. To find out a little more about what happens when the rhythms that construct the self are thrown askew, when the self joins to something beyond. To grasp the implications of this experience on the collective, the continuous, and perhaps on the political.

In the end, I hope we have learned something, at least, about how to throw a good party. Maybe, too, about the field of affects that surrounds us, generates and is generated through experience, shared or otherwise. I have written here for the project of archiving, for the pleasure of fingertip against keyboard, as a token of appreciation. To synthesize knowledge, as it takes its form in the theoretical text, with non-knowledge, as it takes its form in the shapes of bodies moving, the transgression of the self through the collective, the flow of encounter and subsequent rupture. To attempt transmitting the *something* that we feel in, around, between bodies. Maybe in telling this story I have gotten near to that *something*, or maybe I have just pushed it further out of reach. As Elizabeth Bronfen (2013)

says of the night and the stories we tell about it: Telling stories is meant to turn away the night so that forms can take shape from chaos. And yet, just as the ordinary night incessantly takes back the day, so chaos promises to recapture the forms that have emerged from it (394).

## Notes

**1.** A flashbulb memory is a particularly vivid memory, often of an emotionally significant event. While often more detailed than most memories, flashbulb memories are particularly prone to alteration: their vividness does not correlate with higher accuracy. This is true of all memory, which is fundamentally fallible; memory is not stored but rather reconstructed with each passing recall.

**2.** *Fort-da* is an approximation of the German “go away” and “there,” and is a phenomenon proposed in Sigmund Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as an illustration of the death drive. Freud observes his grandson casting off and reeling back his toys, narrating this activity with “fort” and “da” as he absences and presences the toy from himself. It is a game of self-denial and re-union with his desired object, a play with the pleasure of not-thereness. Time, in this night, plays this same game, jumping away from us, becoming unknowable, then flashing momentarily back into our field of vision.

**3.** The sinthome is a thread holding together each subject’s particular arrangement of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. This is a subject’s relationship to language, its history, its traumas, its incompleteness. A sinthome can be twisted and tangled, leading to a disjuncture between the self and the world around it. Part of the role of a Lananian psychoanalyst is to untangle this sinthome.

**4.** The line of *action* and its relation to *something* re-appears throughout this night, and will be explored here variously and towards its possibly radical political potential. I hope to get somewhere near to the *something* we are all trying to describe, always maintaining the impossibility of *grasping it*.

**5.** The lighting and deco on this night were created by the Tiohtià:ke (Montreal)-based artist Space Graft.

**6.** Apocalypse tunes like this: <https://soundcloud.com/chilldous/yey3ee5acg23>.

**7.** In absence of the exact remix played that night, imagine this but much faster than its original speed with a high-paced beat overlaid: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aG5C32aATKc>.

**8.** Neurotransmitters are the brain’s ‘chemical messengers’: they flow from neuron to neuron, activating and deactivating pathways and regions responsible for all the brain’s activities. Excitatory neurotransmitters like glutamate and dopamine increase activation, while inhibitory neurotransmitters such as GABA and serotonin decrease activation.

9. See Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, in the chapter "Capitalism and the Real," where capitalism's Real is described as "a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality" (18). Capitalist realism produces a "pervasive atmosphere" which upholds capitalism's order and makes it feel natural and inescapable. This serves to suppress the Real, upholding the myths of perpetual growth, production, and perfection.

10. For a more in-depth and accessible explanation of these experiments, see <https://www.quantamagazine.org/physicists-are-closing-the-bell-test-loophole-20170207/>.

11. Like this: <https://soundcloud.com/axelcrow91/octave-one-feat-ann-saunderson>

12. Like this: <https://soundcloud.com/index-marcel-fengler/thomas-hessler-push-imf08?in=index-marcel-fengler/sets/imf08-thomas-hessler-push-ep-1>

13. This set was mixed by Tiohtià:ke (Montreal)-based DJ Zil, one of the two members of the Missed Collections collective, along with Turtle Nex. They provided me with the tracklist for their set and described their mixing practice on this night.

14. The Spinoza of this reading is perhaps an altogether too Deleuze-coded one—as my MA thesis reader Nathan Brown has said... "Poor Spinoza!" While 'knowledge' for Spinoza may have more to do with the cultivation of reason rather than, say, dancing to techno into the wee hours, I maintain an interest in the mystic Spinoza to whom Deleuze, but also perhaps Freud through French mystic Romain Rolland, owe some of their weirdness.

15. See Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Georges Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, and Sigmund Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents*. I place these together here not to posit a total sameness between these concepts, but rather to explore the similarities between what they are moving towards in terms of experiential or even ontological ground.

16. See Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, where "crisis ordinariness" explains how crisis is built into the everyday. Trauma forms the subject, and is uptaken into its ways of navigating the world. The impossibility of achieving the American Dream is built into its promise of perfection. The financial crash is built into the market which grows uncontrollably in a world with finite resources.

17. Acknowledgement: It is only with the help of my girlfriend at the time of this writing, Desirée Nore Duchesne, that this story could meet keyboard. Our conversations and re-hashings, theoretical and otherwise, formed the night in our collective memory, which I have attempted to transmit here.

## References

- Anderson, B. (2009) "Affective atmospheres," *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2(2), pp. 77–81. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Bataille, G. (1986). *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Reprint edition. Translated by M. Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers.
- Barad, K. (2010). "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come," *Derrida Today*, 3(2), pp. 240–268. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2010.0206> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bersani, L. (2013). "I Can Dream, Can't I?," *Critical Inquiry*, 40(1), pp. 25–39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/673225> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Bronfen, E. (1992). *Over Her Dead Body*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bronfen, E. (2013). *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, and Film*. Illustrated edition. Translated by D. Brenner. New York: Columbia University Press.
- brown, adrienne maree (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Reprint edition. Chico, CA: AK Press.
- Deleuze, G. (2001). *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by R. Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers.
- Demers, J. (2010). *Listening through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fisher, M. (2016). *The Weird and the Eerie*. Third edition. London: Repeater Books.
- Garcia, L.-M. (2020). "Feeling the vibe: sound, vibration, and affective attunement in electronic dance music scenes," *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 29(1), pp. 21–39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2020.1733434> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Gauthier, F. (2003). "Rapturous ruptures: The 'instituant' religious experience of rave," in J. Graham (ed.) *Rave Culture and Religion*. New York: Routledge, pp. 81–100. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203507964-13> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].

- Gibbs, A. (2007). "Writing as Method: Attunement, Resonance, and Rhythm," in B.T. Knudsen and C. Stage (eds) *Affective Methodologies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 222–236. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137483195\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137483195_11) [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Goodman, S. (2012). *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Illustrated edition. Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2017). *The Agony of Eros*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1980). "When Our Lips Speak Together," *Signs*, 6(1), pp. 69–79. Translated by C. Burke.
- Joos, J.-E. (1997). "Opening on the Surface," in N.B. Saâdoune, E. Galland, and C. Hayeurand (eds) *Festive Ritual*. Montreal: Marcano.
- Lacan, J. (1976). "Le Sinthome: Jacques Lacan's Seminar XXIII, 1975–76," *Omniscar?*, 6. Edited by J.-A. Miller. Translated by L. Thurston.
- Lacan, J. and Fink, B. (1999). *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore*. Encore edition. Edited by J.A. Miller. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by G. Moore and S. Elden. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mackendrick, K. (1999). *Counterpleasures*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Monticelli, R. (2019). "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess': Genealogies, Re-Visions of the Body, and Feminist Figurations," in L.M. Crisafulli and G. Golinelli (eds) *Women's Voices and Genealogies in Literary Studies in English*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 41–56.
- Moore, M. (2016). "Nightlife as Form," *Theater*, 46(1), pp. 49–63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1215/01610775-3322730> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Mustafa, N.S. et al. (2020). "MDMA and the Brain: A Short Review on the Role of Neurotransmitters in Neurotoxicity," *Basic and Clinical Neuroscience*, 11(4), pp. 381–388. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.32598/bcn.9.10.485> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Nestler, E.J. (2005). "The Neurobiology of Cocaine Addiction," *Science & Practice Perspectives*, 3(1), pp. 4–10.
- Preciado, P. (2012). *Testo Junkie*. Translated by B. Benderson. New York: The Feminist Press.

- Saldanha, A. (2007). *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sampson, T. (2016). "Various joyful encounters with the dystopias of affective capitalism," *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization*, 16(4), pp. 51–74.
- Spinoza, B. de. (2020). *Spinoza's Ethics*. Translated by G. Eliot and C. Carlisle. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sterling, S.T. (2016). "Frankie Bones on the Origins of Plur," *Insomniac*.
- Stewart, K. (2007). *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Straw, W. (2015). "Some Things a Scene Might Be: Postface," *Cultural Studies*, 29(3), pp. 476–485. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.937947> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Sullivan, E.V., Harris, R.A. and Pfefferbaum, A. (2010). "Alcohol's Effects on Brain and Behavior," *Alcohol Research & Health*, 33(1–2), pp. 127–143.
- Vlisides, P.E. *et al.* (2018). "Subanaesthetic ketamine and altered states of consciousness in humans," *British Journal of Anaesthesia*, 121(1), pp. 249–259. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bja.2018.03.011> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022].
- Wark, M. (2023). *Raving*. Durham: Duke University Press.