

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Texture, Tactility, and Affect in Three Electroacoustic and Multimedia works

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3xt044fx>

Author

Miller, Caroline Louise

Publication Date

2019

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3xt044fx#supplemental>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Texture, Tactility, and Affect in Three Electroacoustic and Multimedia Works

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Caroline Louise Miller

Committee in Charge:

Professor Katharina Rosenberger, Chair
Professor Anthony Burr
Professor Amy Cimini
Professor Ricardo Dominguez
Professor Miller Puckette

2019

Copyright

Caroline Louise Miller, 2019

All Rights Reserved.

The Dissertation of Caroline Louise Miller is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California San Diego

2019

DEDICATION

I would like to thank:

My advisor Katharina Rosenberger for her intellect, support, conversation, honest critique, boundless curiosity, as well as for her vast knowledge of music, multimedia work, installation, film, architecture, and a multitude of interdisciplinary texts.

Amy Cimini, for her beautifully curated courses that opened my world up to affect theory, and helped me locate scholarly interests that resonate with my artistic interests. Also for the many conversations and critiques that have greatly sharpened and refined my writing over the years.

Miller Puckette, for the conversations and for supporting my teaching of History of Electronic Music.

Anthony Burr, for the discussions of studio production techniques, and for introducing me to J Dilla.

Ricardo Dominguez, for being an awesome outside committee member.

Jessica Flores, for providing so much technical support for musical events over the years, and going above and beyond to accommodate my (sometimes extravagant) event requests.

My close friends and collaborators Fernanda Navarro (may we continue co-organizing feminist concerts!) and Kyle Motl (may we keep making music together!), and everyone else I've collaborated with at UC San Diego over the years.

My partner Elliot Patros, for all the involved discussions about acoustics and digital signal processing; as well as impromptu "production analyses" of the latest hip hop/EDM albums. Also for the continued support over the years; for being there when things were tough.

My parents Jennifer and Steve, my sister Eleanor, my brother Sam, and my honorary brother Jay.

My late grandmother Cynthia Mitchell, for her ineffable power and her continued influence on my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Supplemental Files.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Vita.....	ix
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	x
Introduction.....	1
Texture, Tactility and Affect.....	8
Chapter 1: How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek.....	14
1.1: Synopsis.....	14
1.2: Positivity, Work, and Affective Discipline.....	16
1.3: Materials.....	28
Chapter 2: Subsong.....	40
2.1: Program Note.....	40
2.2: Analysis.....	40
2.2.1: 0:00–0:56.....	44
2.2.2: 0:56–1:55.....	45
2.2.3: 1:55–2:50.....	46
2.2.4: 2:50–3:59.....	47

2.2.5: 3:59–4:49.....	48
2.2.6: 4:49–6:57.....	49
Chapter 3: Vivarium.....	51
References.....	63

LIST OF SUPPLEMENTAL FILES

Miller_Subsong.wav

Miller_how_to_survive.pdf

Miller_how_to_survive.mp4

Miller_vivarium.mp4

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Protesters flee nearby gunshots.....	4
Figure 2: Vocalists recite texts and perform unison gestures.....	15
Figure 3: Vocalists cover their faces as the crank operator steals voices.....	15
Figure 4: Vocalists perform a hand dance, mirroring each other.....	16
Figure 5: Wellness industry literature.....	17
Figure 6: Fragmented and glitched texts by Peale.....	32
Figure 7: Vocalists frame their faces with their palms.....	34
Figure 8: Slicing into frozen-then-thawed pomegranates.....	60

VITA

Education

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2019 | Doctor of Philosophy, University of California San Diego |
| 2014 | Master of Arts, University of California San Diego |
| 2010 | Bachelor of Music, University of Missouri Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance |

SELECTED HONORS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2018 | Classical Commissioning Grant; Chamber Music America
Commissioned by SPLICE Ensemble (Brooklyn, NY). |
| 2018 | Grand Prize, ISB/David Walter Composition Competition, Solo Division;
International Society of Bassists. |
| 2018 | Selected Artist, Adoptions 2019 Project; Ensemble Adapter (Berlin,
Germany). |
| 2017 | Carolyn Applebaum Endowed Prize; UC San Diego Department of Music |
| 2017 | Featured/Funded Artist; SPOR Festival of Contemporary Music and
Sound Art (Aarhus, Denmark). |

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Music Composition

Research Areas: Electronic Music; Digital Media; Popular Music; Affect
Theory

CONTACT

Email: carolinelouisemillermusic@gmail.com
Website: carolinelouisemiller.com

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Texture, Tactility, and Affect in Three Electroacoustic and Multimedia Works

by

Caroline Louise Miller

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California San Diego, 2019

Katharina Rosenberger, Chair

How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek, Vivarium, and Subsong, with accompanying essays, investigate multiple, polyvalent, cumulative ways to engrave multimedia works with labor, touch, and affect. I frame a discussion of my three works through alliances with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Katrine Dirkinck-Holmfeld, and Brian Massumi.

Sedgwick configures tactile materials in terms of "texture" and "texxture," where two x's signify a material that is dense with freely offered information about how, substantively and historically, it came into being. Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld applies Sedgwick's tex[x]tures to the question of digital data, a highly manipulatable medium that doesn't

necessarily embed specific histories, to show its expressive, affective potentials. Brian Massumi, in “Autonomy of Affect,” discusses how contexts become *affective* in resonance with bodies. Working with these allies, my musical explorations of texture, tactility and affect range from corporate affective discipline via wellness industry media in late capitalism, to an exploration of the affect of abjection through a touch-guided dance with pomegranates, to the musical potentials of touch and labor performed in the digital production studio.

Introduction

Interrogating the disconnect between a tactile narrative of ease that dominates the digital media market, and the laborious, rough, cumulative processes through which bodies are imprinted by these technologies (and imprint them in return) is a project that might be meaningfully framed through the sense of touch. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, author of *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, writes:

Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object.¹

When we touch a substance, we invite an intrinsic and immediate understanding of our bodies as co-determined by other material forces with their own properties, limits, and resistances. Through touch I feel histories and gather information about the material itself, as well as bodies that touched this substance in the past. The wood of an ancient table in a state park – eaten through by insects, with layers upon layers of carvings, each with a different style, carved with different sorts of tools – offers to me a wealth of information. By touching this material I begin to unfold traces of things that will never be offered through institutionalized forms of knowledge. This carving was made hastily with a large knife, that one was painstakingly chiseled away: J & S 4ever.

As socialization, labor, and sensory experience have become increasingly tied to digital computing technologies worldwide, scholars and artists of many stripes have

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 14.

interrogated how these experiences are rooted in and performed by bodies. This can be understood as a project of resistance to mainstream (one branch of which is popularly dubbed Silicon Valley Futurist/ism²³⁴) narratives of digital media and accompanying systems of hardware that focus on qualities such as “ease” — in multiple dimensions, a lack of friction. Materially: glossy, flat, thin, compact, smooth, elegant, clean.

Conceptually and behaviorally: easy, fast, convenient, safe, effortlessly cool, intuitive, immersive, on-demand, personalized, pre-curated, connective, etc. These narratives of digital media have developed into a culture pushing changes in the textures of life, labor, and socialization itself, mostly without consent or input from people who will be affected. Concerns about this have become increasingly mainstream. News sources (see *The Guardian’s* report on the Cambridge Analytica facebook data breach,)⁵ have examined how these shifts register as *un-easy* for many users, underwriting economic displacement, increasing work hours, increasing surveillance, targeted fake news, and big data analysis.

One need only look as far as the marketing of smartphones, tablets, computers, and virtual reality systems to zero in on this culture of tactile advertisement. Campaigns by Apple use words like “Magical” and “Effortless”; and employ slogans like “Life is

² M.R. O’Connor, “The Fight for the Right to Drive,” *The New Yorker* (April 30, 2019), accessed May 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-fight-for-the-right-to-drive>

³ Joe Flaherty, “A Café designed for Silicon Valley’s Elite Futurists,” *Wired Magazine* (July 11, 2014), accessed May 2019. <https://www.wired.com/2014/07/a-cafe-designed-to-contemplate-the-collapse-of-our-civilization/>

⁴ Judy Wajcman, “Automation: is it really different this time?” Review Essay in *British Journal of Sociology* (February 2017), 21.

⁵ Carole Cadwalladr and Emma Graham-Harrison, “Revealed: 50 Million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach.” *The Guardian* (March 17, 2018). <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election>

easier on iPhone.” A glimpse of Microsoft’s website includes marketing for the “Surface Laptop,” which promises to be “sleek and light,” reflecting the nomadic work lifestyle enabled by smaller devices. This language invokes touch, yet elides the electrical, mechanical, flesh-and-blood forces at work in the formation of this matter. Delivering upon a tactile promise of expediency, these devices enable quick and constant exchanges of digital media, enacted upon slick surfaces. A form of labor, clicks and taps translate into “likes” and hearts, proliferating through networks to multiply. Movements are performed on silky and immaculate screens (though so many more broken or grimy – betraying evidence of contact with various bodies). The idea of “ease” and the experience of tapping around on that slick surface work together to elide my own understanding of where my actions are felt or located.

What about digital data itself; can it be touched? While we can at least trust the smoothness of a screen on the skin as physical, subject to critique of design and complaint and breakage and decay and experimentation and misuse, digital data is stored and deployed at scales that don’t register intuitively as physical material. In her essay *Affect Image: Touch Image*, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld names data “a highly manipulatable and malleable medium,”⁶ yet demonstrates how a digital image can enter into alliances with devices, networks, and sociopolitical moments to transmit affect. In particular, she analyzes the visual glitches from streamed video of the 2011 Syrian uprisings; these glitches reveal an extra layer of the material conditions of the situation. In the image below (figure 1), published on August 19th, 2011, protestors flee

⁶ Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, “Affect Image: Touch Image,” in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and Study of Culture*, ed. Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2015), 52.

as gunshots are heard nearby.⁷ The shaky video and low resolution make each passing person indefinite, a pixilated blur. Dirckink-Holmfeld discusses how the cheap phone camera, slow internet from an infrastructure under political stress, and youtube's compression algorithms (designed to facilitate quick delivery of consumable content), work together to fracture and layer these images of fear and strife with uncertainty. This uncertainty *amplifies* the affect of fear; in a situation of danger, one desires to clearly perceive their surroundings in order to assess the nature and location of the threat. Dirckinck-Holmfeld locates *the digital* as a layer that can enable or modulate an affect. Sitting at an intersection of digital media and political struggle, her article can be



Figure 1: Protesters flee nearby gunshots.

further understood as participating in a critical discourse that holds digital media tangible, and therefore accountable, for the multitude of effects and affects it propagates.

⁷ Associated Press, "Raw Video: Protesters on Streets Across Syria," Youtube (Aug. 19, 2011). Accessed May 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0FjP_DP8Ho

I work largely with digital media, and also have a long-term preoccupation with touch, tactility, and material textures. Sedgwick and Dirckinck-Holmfeld's work, along with writings intersecting with affect theory, have helped me interrogate how the digital becomes affective and tactile, and more generally how *touch* might inform the process of creating a musical work. In three works created from 2016–2018, I embed traces of labor, touch, and affect at multiple contextual levels, using digital media in some cases to orchestrate and/or intensify tactile dimensions of music. In *How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek*, labor and rapid circulation of digital media appears as a theme and a musical dimension. *Subsong* explores ways for digital labor in the studio to become expressive. *Vivarium*, for two performers dissecting pomegranates, plays out as an exhibition of materiality of fruit and flesh, made through a tactile performance that is intensified with image, sound, smell, and taste. The following are some prominent modes of engagement throughout the process of making these works:

- (1) Using haptic and tactile sensations from creation to performance
- (2) Considering labor in the digital production studio as a musical dimension
- (3) Drawing materials from many different times and spaces; samples obtained through crowd-sourcing, via online sample-sharing platforms, and recording in many places (which have included stairwells, abandoned industrial spaces, in my shower, on a desert highway, to name a few...)
- (4) Using this heterogeneous collection of sources to create hyper-layered sound worlds in which alliances can form between dissimilar materials.

My electroacoustic works respond critically to acousmatic musical discourse by folding in affect and touch as primary modes of engagement. In *Composing Electronic Music: A New Aesthetic*, Curtis Roads talks about the *heterogeneity* of the “sound object”, which he sees as the building block of composition in acousmatic music. For Roads, the abstract and stable idea of a set of *notes* is replaced in acousmatic music with this “superset of heterogeneous sound objects,”⁸ which he derives from Pierre Schaeffer. “Sound objects” are heterogeneous because each has a unique set of properties that morph through time. Because of this, applying the same processes to them (e.g. a resonant lowpass filter) can yield wildly different results. Each sound is to be taken on a case-by-case basis and treated according to its sonic and spectral properties. As many scholars and artists have discussed and critiqued, Pierre Schaeffer’s acousmatic sound object is accompanied by an invocation to “reduced listening,” in which one attends to the intrinsic properties of a sound only, obscuring the source. The source is usually invoked as the physical trace of the thing that was recorded that anchors it in some kind of referential or semantic meaning — *This sound is a dog barking, this sound is waves at the beach*. However, Roads notes that reduced listening doesn’t define the realm of the acousmatic:

Today the term ‘acousmatic’ refers to compositions in which the external reference — or the hiding of it — is central to the meaning of the work... Acousmatic works tell stories. The sound of a door opening or closing, for example, might signal a new musical scene about to unfold... The meaning is sometimes veiled by various strategies, such as familiar sounds placed in unusual contexts.⁹

⁸ Curtis Roads, *Composing Electronic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 68.

⁹ Roads, *Composing Electronic Music*, 85.

From Roads' perspective, it is the organization of and invitation to shifting modes of listening, a spectrum of clarity and obscurity toward a sound's source, which characterizes acousmatic music, *not* simply an invitation to reduced listening.

Subsong and *How to Survive a 100-hour Workweek* draw on aspects of acousmatic practice; namely the use and treatment of heterogeneity as described by Roads. Instead of external references or sound objects, I mainly think of sources as *contexts expressed through sound*, carrying with them their intensities, histories and tactile potentials. My "acousmatic" works are equally entwined with influences from mashup and remix media culture, glitch art, and instrumental hip-hop, all three of which engage a kind of listening where source/context, labor, reference, and tactility hold special meaning. In digital glitch art, reference is both made to the failure of the digital means that enabled the work's creation; and those failures become the fabric of the art itself. Much instrumental hip-hop overtly incorporates traces of studio labor; for example, the pops and clicks at the edges of sampled loops are often prized rhythmic artifacts that index the producer's performance on sampler while laying down tracks. Mashup and remix media relies in part on the producer and listener's knowledge of the original tracks used, often to cultivate amusement or a sense of novelty — old materials, new context.

Thus, while Pierre Schaeffer's "reduced listening" is a mode that seems useful at times, I am not interested in treating materials as abstracted from their histories. Instead I embrace sonic contexts and histories as containing a tactile dimension — a materiality — by which one doesn't simply correctly *name* or *categorize* a sound and its cause, but through which one can feel, infer, examine, imagine, or dream all sorts of

properties about that sounding body, its environment, and its history.

In this materialistic listening, ratios of known and unknown, fact and fiction, are modulated by a field constituted by my body, my experience, the environment around me, the political field around me. In creating “hyper-layered, heterogeneous sound worlds,” I engage in this materialistic listening and rub sources against one another to see what dreams and affects crystallize. This could be called “composing by feel;” along with conceptual work, I’m also feeling for ebbs and flows of intensity. At an ideal mixing amplitude, these intensities can be noticeably registered on the skin and orchestrated to produce pleasure. A common technique used by EDM producers to cultivate this kind of pleasure (both in the studio and on the dance floor) is through dramatically changing spectral content at an important structural moment – most famously experienced in a bass drop that follows “risers”, gestural orchestrations of increasingly high frequencies or brightening spectra.

Levels of intensity are transmitted by physical and acoustic properties, but also through contexts activated through sounds. Brian Massumi in “The Autonomy of Affect” writes about the interplay of contexts with the body – how contexts are actually felt as affects before they are consciously registered. This will be further discussed in the following section.

Texture, Tactility, and Affect

I think of texture in my work as something that is *touched*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provides a useful framework for thinking through material textures in the

introduction to *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. She configures texture as having one or two x's. In Sedgwick's words,

Texxture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being. A brick or metal work pot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify texxture in this sense. But there is also the texture—one x this time—that defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information; there is texture, usually glossy if not positively tacky, that insists instead on the polarity between substance and surface, texture that signifies the willed erasure of its history.¹⁰

Sedgwick's texture and texxture can be described as a spectrum of tactility by which the skin may garner information about a material's properties and making, through an immediacy that produces an intrinsic understanding of processes and bodies that touched the substance in the past. She doesn't limit this tactile sense to physical contact alone, invoking the "brush-brush of corduroy trousers or the crunch of extra-crispy chicken" as auditory experiences of tactility.

Sedgwick's writing has figured into a directed exploration of how to employ tactile texture musically, and through digital production. With it, I have analyzed tracks by artists Flying Lotus, J.A.C.K., James Blake, J Dilla, and others that overtly orchestrate the traces of studio labor, using "sounds of the studio" as musical material. *How to survive a 100-hour workweek* and particularly *Subsong* directly engage with digital texxture; or orchestrate shifts between gradients of texture and texxture.

"Tactile" refers to being perceptible by or connected with the sense of touch. In *Vivarium*, tactility blatantly functions as the primary means to create, perform, and transmit affects to an audience, as it features two pairs of hands, magnified to be

¹⁰ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 14.

massive, dissecting and performing with pomegranates in a touch-guided dance.

Tactility is cross modal with visual and sonic aspects, as the audience watches the activities unfold and hears the squishing and crackling of close-miked fruit. Visuals and sounds in *Vivarium* are inseparable from touch. In an ideal performance the audience is even served small cups of pomegranate seeds to eat, if desired, during the performance, drawing in the olfactory as well.

How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek and *Subsong* work more closely with tactile *sound*. Sharp transient sounds or low, loud pulses can vibrate the skin, organs, and face. Luis Manuel-Garcia, in his article “Beats, Flesh, and Grain: Sonic Tactility and Affect in Electronic Dance Music”, observes several additional facets of sonic tactility, discussing use of samples that refer to the human body (snapping, clapping, and breathing), as well as Pierre Schaeffer’s “grain,” in which a string of attacks in rapid succession registers as haptic – think rubbing a stick on a guiro, relating the vibration on your fingers to the sonic result.¹¹ Tactile elements Manuel-Garcia describes as common in EDM practices are present and salient in my own work. I also use changes in vibrations over my skin to fine tune mixes when I am in the studio. Tactility works closely with *Texxture*; think of how an old recording betrays its age through filtering and crackling. The quality of that recording – the frequencies that are erased or extra-present by today’s standards – make a distinct tactile sensation in comparison to a full-spectrum, transient-rich¹², digitally-produced recording of the 2010’s. The impactful sharpness of those “cold” digital transients as compared with the blurrier quality of transients in the

¹¹ Luis Manuel-Garcia, “Beats, Flesh, and Grain: Sonic Tactility and Affect in Electronic Dance Music,” *Sound Studies* 1:1 (2016), 59-76.

¹² Transients are sharp impactful sounds with a fast attack – like a snare or kick drum.

older recording, produce an cue, *on our skin*, of the situatedness of those respective recordings. High-resolution digital recordings can feel physically more impactful for transient sounds, as the tightness of an attack is partially constrained by sample-rate and bit-rate.¹³ This is only one way in which digitalness makes itself felt.

My use of the term *affect* closely aligns with how Brian Massumi understands the term in his paper “The Autonomy of Affect.” He explains *affect* as a pre-cognition intensity that is quantitative. The skin registers this quantity *before* it is qualified and consciously perceived. It is transmitted by a stimulus at the boundaries of the body and quickly amplified or attenuated through the culturally conditioned body *feeding back* into that intensity, again, before the event is interpreted consciously. Galvanic skin response is commonly cited as a way to measure this quantity, occurring before measurable cognitive arousal. Brian Massumi explains how this is possible:

The body doesn’t just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations, it infolds *contexts*, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. Intensity is asocial, but not presocial – it *includes* social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic. How could this be so? Only if past actions and contexts were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body, respectively, directive spirit and dumb matter. Only if past actions and contexts were conserved and repeated, autonomically *reactivated*, but not accomplished; begun, but not completed.¹⁴

Actions, thoughts, and contexts are imprinted into the flesh of the body, stored as potentials that can be reactivated by and combined with other levels of intensity. When activated, Massumi calls these potentials *tendencies*, and notes that there is a

¹³ To my shock, I realized this listening to Daft Punk in John Whitley’s “Magic Bus,” a van designed for listening to high-res audio.

¹⁴ Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 31 (1995), 90–91.

measurable, missing half-second between the body first feeling an intensity and the conscious interpretation/expression of that intensity. It is in that gap that these many *tendencies* vie for actualization to expression, to consciousness. This gap is a field of potential, where the signifying order is disconnected from intensity and new logics can emerge; "...a lived paradox, where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect..."¹⁵ Ultimately, only one of these pressing *tendencies* plays out to action and expression, consciousness willing it into being. Yet this in-between state of possibility can be *felt*, even if not consciously expressed. Affect, for Massumi, could be a link that aids in analyzing the inexplicable, or grasping at the part of experience that falls outside what can easily be described with words.

Affects (intensities), by definition, *touch* – whether they arrive through air on waves of light or sound, or whether they are transmitted through the immediacy of skin to surface. The visual is usually invoked as having separation from our bodies, yet a color at too bright a shade causes our eyes pain. Sound (slightly less so) is often construed as intangible, yet many of us intentionally seek out spaces where our entire bodies are vibrated by bass. The sense of touch, then, is broadly useful for speaking of affect because of the contact it assumes. Thinking through affect, Sedgwick's material tex(x)tures, embedding or eliding histories, can be enlisted for a detailed analysis of intensities from places that have been traditionally configured as intangible – light, sound, thoughts and ideas, digital data etcetera.

How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek, Vivarium, and Subsong, with their

¹⁵ Ibid, 91.

accompanying essays, are an investigation of multiple, polyvalent, cumulative ways to engrave multimedia works with labor, touch, and affect, and/or locate tex(x)tured spaces within digital production via analysis. I see this work as participating in a community of scholarship and artistry that recognizes the urgency of producing knowledge on embodied experience.

Chapter 1: How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek:

Musical Theater on Labor and the Lifestyle Industry in Late Capitalism

Media Access: <https://vimeo.com/236249143>

Documented at Stanford University, Dinkelspiel Auditorium, October 19th, 2016

Iota: Hillary Jean Young, Soprano

Speck: Jonathan Nussman, Baritone

Atom: Ashley Cutright, Mezzo-Soprano

Crank Operator: Constantin Basica

Video editing: Caroline Louise Miller

Lighting Design: Jessica Flores and David Espiritu

Technical Director: Jason Ponce

1.1: Synopsis

Three burnt-out workers (Iota, Speck, and Atom) struggle to stay afloat in a futuristic, toxic workplace in which negative emotions are not tolerated. A fourth worker, The Operator, controls a crank that churns out loud and distracting snippets of inspirational advice. In a dreamlike sequence, the three workers sing, coordinate movements, and recite words of positivity and productivity (see figure 2), becoming increasingly disillusioned, until they lapse into silence, covering their faces (see figure 3.) The Operator gains the power to steal and control their voices, making their fragmented words loop, stutter, and glitch through the space. Iota eventually breaks the spell with an eruption of bottled-up rage — marking a dramatic rupture. Red lighting casts the vocalists as dark silhouettes. The crank ceases to work, and the soundscape is enveloped by ecstatic swarming music and waves of noise. Speck and Atom join Iota in a Trio that includes a sung round and a repeated, spoken mantra of

failure, struggle, and sickness. They mirror each other's movements fluidly and cooperatively, in contrast to the forced movements of the beginning (see figure 4.) The three, now in a vulnerable state of escaping the toxic workplace, repeat the mantra with a range of emotional tenors, from solidarity, to fear, to despair, to rage, to conviction, to uncertainty.



Figure 2: Vocalists recite texts of Norman Vincent Peale and perform unison gestures.



Figure 3: Vocalists cover their faces as the crank operator steals their voices.



Figure 4: Vocalists perform a hand dance, mirroring each other.

1.2: Positivity, Work, and Affective Discipline

At some point in 2015, I began to actively resent standing in lines at the grocery store, due to the multitude of lifestyle magazines with photo-shopped people, food, and even pets conveying an impossible vitality. The primary themes that unite these images are suggestions, framed as commands, of how to live a “healthier” life. Splashy snippets of text exclaim, “Tame your irrational fears!”; “Protect your brain health”; “Fall in love with your life!”; “Conquer your crazy schedule”; “Shape up now”; and my personal favorite; “Quitting the Bitch Pill: Birth Control Changed Me.” (see figure 5.)

These feature almost entirely white women on their front covers, and overwhelmingly market to a fairly affluent demographic, or at least people that can afford meditation retreats. The “healthy, productive woman,” according to these images, is white (or can be read as westernized), has the socioeconomic means to cultivate comfort and wellbeing, and displays in her demeanor strength and cheerfulness.



Figure 5: Wellness Industry Literature

Grocery store anger aside, the abundance of similar lifestyle literature on the internet percolated into my active awareness. I developed a fascination. In this internet-binge of lifestyle-positivity lit, countless articles discussed “employee self-care,” such as taking a walk during the allotted time for lunch break, as a means to heighten productivity. A term has even been around — “Corporate Wellness” — that describes a slew of programs designed to reward, punish, or otherwise incentivize employees to adopt particular behaviors, usually with a loosely veiled motivation toward increasing profits.^{16 17} To immediately grasp what I’m talking about, browse Forbes Magazine for a hot minute.

Around the same time, I encountered an article by Rob Horning, editor of online magazine *The New Inquiry* (which publishes monthly issues mainly discussing topics on labor politics), called “Liquid Authenticity.” Horning unpacks the concept of *Liquidity*

¹⁶ Alan Kohll, “25 Ways To Cut Employee Stress and Boost Productivity,” *Forbes*, Feb. 22, 2017. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2017/02/22/25-ways-to-cut-employee-stress-and-boost-productivity/#5f8e4f7120f9>

¹⁷ Henry Albrecht, “3 Reasons Corporate Wellness Failed: and How to Change the Game,” *Forbes* (14 December 2017). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesfounders/2017/12/14/3-reasons-corporate-wellness-failed-and-how-to-change-the-game/>

and *Authenticity* as elucidated by Frédéric Lordon in *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*. Horning's summarization is that under neoliberalism, employees in many industries are required to exhibit desire for the *work itself*, to cultivate an affect of joy in the workplace. Horning pulls this quote from Lordon:

The strength of the neoliberal form of the employment relation lies precisely in the re-internalization of the objects of desire, not merely as desire for money but as desire for other things, for new, intransitive satisfactions, satisfactions inherent in the work activities themselves. Put otherwise, neoliberal employment aims at enchantment and rejoicing: it sets out to enrich the relation with joyful affects.¹⁸

Horning explains that in a certain neoliberal model of labor, fulfilling the material requirements of the job isn't enough; one must appear to work for love. In many cases, this love must be performed according to an employer's judgment; and not only that — the employee is compelled to perform *authenticity*, that is, produce the appearance that this love is self-motivated and pure — not pretend. The “intransitive satisfactions” that Lordon invokes relate to a generalized nonspecific desire: the drive to persist in one's existence by pursuing things that increase one's power. The employing body may therefore desire (and, with any leverage, demand) employees to direct more of their own intransitive desires, their life force, into enriching the relation as a whole. In a Starbucks job interview, friends report, one is asked things like “describe the last time you did something nice for a stranger.” This kind of questioning can be considered a bid for that authenticity: “show us who you really are *and what motivates you*”. When this ethos is combined with the ever-changing demands of market forces, particularly in regards to holding multiple part-time jobs and the gigging economy, workers find they

¹⁸ Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital*, (Verso, 2014): 60.

must produce an “authentic self” in many directions simultaneously, creating a contradiction between “being real” and being flexible.¹⁹

For Lordon and Horning, this demand for authenticity is attached to the idea of *liquidity*, a “refusal of durable commitment”²⁰ and “fantasy about never having to take the other into consideration.”²¹ *Liquidity* is explained as the means by which desire detaches itself from being situated, thereby enhancing its own flexibility. In materialistic terms, we can think of temporary part-time jobs, contract work where people can be hired and fired at whim, and app-based gigs²² in which most material burdens are shifted onto independent contractors, as an enhanced liquidity of the desire of employers. With this leverage, Lordon argues, employing bodies can demand workers’ desires to increasingly align with their own. Horning explains this situation as impossible, placing strain on workers as they try to produce a desired emotional disposition in shifting directions while fearing termination for failing to be properly authentic. Expecting authenticity at work becomes a culture whereby even in offering permanent, stable work positions, employers can expect a heightened alignment of employee desires with their own.

Though Spinoza lies mostly undiscussed by Horning, one finds him within Lordon’s quote: “...neoliberal employment...sets out to enrich the relation with joyful affects.”²³ This refers to Spinoza’s concept of “joy” and “sadness” as an encounter that

¹⁹ Rob Horning, “Liquid Authenticity,” *The New Inquiry*, Aug. 19, 2014. Accessed May 2019. <https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/liquid-authenticity/>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Uber, Lyft, TaskRabbit, etc.

²³ Horning, *Liquid Authenticity*.

either enhances or diminishes a particular body's capacity to act. I turn to Deleuze's lecture "On Spinoza" for clarification. For Spinoza, good and evil, joy and sadness, are understood not in absolute moral terms, but materialistically: as "good encounters, bad encounters, increases and diminutions of power"²⁴ upon a body. Deleuze unpacks Spinoza's understanding of what a body is:

"...the individuality of a body is defined by the following: it's when a certain composite or complex relation (I insist on that point, quite composite, very complex) of movement and rest is preserved through all the changes which affect the parts of the body. It's the permanence of a relation of movement and rest through all the changes which affect all the parts, taken to infinity, of the body under consideration. You understand that a body is necessarily composite to infinity. My eye, for example, my eye and the relative constancy of my eye are defined by a certain relation of movement and rest through all the modifications of the diverse parts of my eye; but my eye itself, which already has an infinity of parts, is one part among the parts of my body, the eye in its turn is a part of the face and the face, in its turn, is a part of my body, etc....thus you have all sorts of relations which will be combined with one another to form an individuality of such and such degree. But at each one of these levels or degrees, individuality will be defined by a certain relation composed of movement and rest."²⁵

Bodies don't refer necessarily to human or living bodies, but as relations or systems that have a dynamic of movement and rest with internal consistency. Good encounters or bad encounters, affects of joy or sadness, respectively perfect those internal dynamics, or deteriorate them. Deleuze enjoys consumption examples here, and imagines eating arsenic. His body is induced to form relations with the poison – literally chemical reactions – in which the arsenic feeds upon the material of his body, satisfying itself (joy) while destroying him (sadness.) Bodies are described as infinitely composite, they

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "On Spinoza," *Lectures By Gilles Deleuze* (Blog), Feb 2007. Accessed May 2019. <http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com/2007/02/on-spinoza.html>

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, "On Spinoza."

scale up and down. A cell is a body; so is the eye or the heart, so is an entire human, a family or a society, or the universe itself. We can understand a relation of neoliberal employment as a body, and the drive to cultivate joyful affects and authentic desire in the workplace as the means by which that body pursues the enhancement of its own power, a capacity to act. An increase in power for a neoliberal employment relation could manifest as increasing profits, widening profit margins, increased social standing, increased influence within the wider market, the ability to subsume and engulf competing enterprises through mergers, etcetera. Cultivating joy in the workplace, through affective discipline, is one technique by which this body more fully absorbs and accesses the desires—the energies—of its workforce toward these ends.

In the following few pages, I discuss several different manifestations of this corporate affective discipline through a range of work scenarios and kinds of labor. Resistance and agency also make an appearance, within a discussion of Silicon Valley factory floors, a space largely neglected from labor discourse.

Returning to internet-positivity fluff, an example article “25 Ways to Cut Employee Stress and Boost Productivity” introduces a litany of ways to modify a corporate work environment to cultivate these joyful affects, prescribing exercise, bright colors, decaffeinated coffee, healthy snacks, inspirational quotes, compliments, and even mini dance workouts in the name of enhancing productivity.²⁶ Intensities, stimuli, are prescribed and circulated through the workspace, meeting with the bodies of workers, with the aim of enriching the relation of labor. Within the invocation to be

²⁶ Kohll, “25 Ways to Cut Employee Stress and Boost Productivity.”

authentically joyful at work is the recognition that employees themselves form part of that affective fabric. This is included within the realm of Corporate Wellness discourse, often taking the form of critique and advertising an alternative: “This method merely frustrates your employees, but you want to cultivate more employee engagement! Therefore, try these other methods instead. You’ll reap the rewards of heightened productivity.”²⁷

How I evaluate this depends upon whether I think neoliberal capitalism is trash. In one view, this seems a mutually beneficial relation – wouldn’t employees enjoy and benefit from a workplace that is “fun?” Partially, I guess, and maybe that is why it’s effective. Many Silicon Valley tech offices, for example, have experimented with a wide variety of models that organize people and space in nontraditional ways, generally aimed at enhancing positive affects. Github, for example, famously features a room designed exactly like the Oval Office for its lobby, has a “speakeasy” bar on site, and espoused a mostly non-hierarchical work model until 2015.²⁸ Numerous other companies feature fancy amenities: Facebook has rooftop gardens, Faurecia has “home-cooked” French food prepared out of corporate community gardens, Dropbox has a grand piano and legos in its boardrooms.

At the risk of advertising, it is generally known that such spaces are designed to keep employees at work longer (as needs for relaxation, exercise, and healthy food can now be met in the office) and aid in producing an after-hours company culture. These

²⁷ Central point paraphrased. Albrecht, “3 Reasons Corporate Wellness Failed – and How to Change the Game.”

²⁸ Richard M. Burton, Dorthe Dojbak Hakonsson, Jackson Nickerson, et al, “Github, exploring the space between boss-less and hierarchal forms of organizing,” *Journal of Organization Design* 6 no. 1 (Nov. 7, 2017).

amenities and the accompanying social bonding, which can certainly bring pleasure and a sense of community to workers, can also be understood as a strategy by which the neoliberal employment relation may enrich its power. A common consensus about high-paid Silicon-valley work culture is that work-life balance is nonexistent, that participation in and admiration for the many perks and amenities is a requirement to thrive within that environment.

If we take Marx's assumption that the relation between employer and employee is fundamentally antagonistic and exploitative and synthesize it with Spinoza, an employee's capacity to act, to cultivate power (materially, in the form of higher wages, bargaining power, or especially more free time), is likely deteriorated by this relation. This is because classically, labor organization is fueled by collective grievances. Through sharing stories and documentation of injustices, employees recognize their common condition of being exploited and band together. Amenities and perks partially obscure exploitation by making work more appealing or attaching a veneer of glamour and prestige, which can then be claimed as part of one's individual identity.

In low-paying jobs where affective labor is involved, many workers see *performing authenticity* as a skill of deception required of them, as an obvious form of oppression, and feel the strain of this affective performance. To zoom in again on Silicon Valley, what about the factory floors, where material goods are manufactured? In "Constructing Working Selves: Silicon Valley Assemblers Meet the New Work Order," Glynda Hull discusses the "digital divide" in high-tech labor, whereby high-paying jobs and entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley are glamorized, and work becomes mission; yet

the people who perform the labor of creating physical components are absent from the discourse. She traces how the “New Work Order” of Silicon Valley plays out materially for factory workers, studying workers’ constructed subject positions and formations of resistance to a “self-directed work teams program” at Teamco’s manufacturing facility. These programs, (SDWT) were designed to force employee engagement from workers in highly precarious positions. Hull describes the problem:

In the heart of Silicon Valley, a prestigious company bent on continuously increasing its market share and its profit margin, decided that its multicultural, largely temporary, relatively low-paid workers should become team-players. These workers were directed, in addition to their assembly work, to begin to collaborate with each other on “self-directed work teams,” to find ways to solve problems, to increase the company’s productivity, and to improve the quality of their work. They were even expected to prepare presentations about their collaborative efforts, complete with overheads, data, and findings, that they would perform before management; they were expected as well to compete, team against team, for company bonuses.²⁹

Hull describes these programs as a bid for investment in the “New Work Order,” a narrative of tech work as a “grand endeavor, a value system, a way of being.”³⁰

Workers were observed and interviewed by Hull through the implementation of the SDWT programs at Teamco. Hull notes that they didn’t passively accept the bid for investment foisted upon them. Instead they found hundreds of ways to interpret and willfully misinterpret additional tasks they were asked to do along with their regular responsibilities, in ways that drew upon personal and cultural histories, and notions of identity outside the workspace. In an interview with Hull, a Vietnamese employee, Loi,

²⁹ Glynda Hull, “Constructing Working Selves: Silicon Valley Assemblers Meet the New Work Order.” *Anthropology of Work Review*, Vol. XXII, no. 1 (2000), 19.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

discusses a “pressure to study” deployed by the Vietcong as part of the conditions that caused people to flee to America – citing the resentment of Vietnamese workers toward the SDWT program as due to an unpleasant resonance with those histories of oppression. Hull also discusses how workers re-appropriated new skills required of them (namely heightened bureaucratic literacy) to help themselves – for example, documenting slow days of work, in writing, as due to circumstances that weren’t their fault, and advocating for more work security and higher pay by confronting upper management in writing. Hull discusses these collective and individual acts of resistance as actions of agency. Workers fashion individual and collective desires and identities at work, using resources at hand, that diverge from the desires of the employing body.

These stories are a reminder that it is possible to redirect resources and skills required by an employing body seeking to enhance its power. Yet even with the knowledge you are pretending, even with the resistive solidarity of co-workers, performing authenticity shapes the body, as it entrains behaviors, mannerisms, thought patterns that entangle one’s polyvalent desires with the desires of the employing body. Complaining with co-workers about conditions of employment functions to attenuate and heal patterns carved by affective labor discipline, as a new body composed of this resistive community emerges. No wonder Corporate Wellness programs focus on cultivating “positivity” in the workplace. Perhaps they hope to mitigate the slow work patterns, redirections of energy, minor acts of sabotage, and movements toward unionization that accompany workers discussing their grievances. The demand for employees to embody desire for work then functions doubly: it’s an attempt to digest

the energy of workers more completely, to extract more potential energy, and it also diminishes the probability of a struggle that would deteriorate the neoliberal labor relation. It achieves the latter by dampening affects of collective dissatisfaction that could be leveraged against the employing body. A spirit of individualism is also cultivated, often seen in the common wisdom etiquette (or writing in employment contracts) that discussing salaries with others is a social faux pas at best, grounds for termination at worst.

Speaking from my own experience and with friends, women in particular are expected to outwardly embody desire for work. These expectations appear from many sides, perhaps from an employer but also from people one interacts with when working. As a sound technician gigging for events, I was frequently chided by men for not smiling on the job, was asked to “have a little more fun” while sitting at the mixer, and got comments like, “well you’re all business, aren’t you!” A friend in finance had a job offer rescinded because she negotiated hard; her level of enthusiasm was placed in question. Women are often expected to be motherly, warm, and lenient toward students. The list goes on.

Wrapping back around to grocery-store magazine covers, the image of the empowered-woman-in-control-of-her-life is a mechanism by which this demand for flexible authenticity in our roles as producers is marketed back to us. Instead of creating a less toxic work model, the burden of dealing with exploitative labor conditions largely falls on individuals. Acts of “self-care” undertaken even *outside* the workplace — whether exercise, diet, posture, breathing, sleep, relaxation — can become a mechanism

for corporate profit, not only through the consumption of products and services, but through cultivating a bodily discipline that ensures I can work harder, that I develop the capacity to more convincingly perform authenticity and desire at work. Freelancers are not exempt; one's affective performance may unfold on social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter toward a network of potential opportunities. I present vitality, joyful busyness, fruitful moments of relaxation, or even a well-placed "real talk, I'm stressed!" post, precisely because I am aware that potential employing forces can extract more value from someone who is "happy, healthy, and authentic."

Happy, healthy, and authentic carry gendered behaviors with them, as women generally are expected to plaster on a smile to soothe their male counterparts, maintain a physically appealing appearance, and perform outward expressions of emotion in socially acceptable ways. If I look too serious for too long, or my eyes are bloodshot, or I turn too far inward at the work site; all three (happiness, health, and authenticity) can be placed in question. These can reduce others' opinion of me as a productive human, regardless of how well I do my job. Fear and shame are the actual mechanisms that compel this performance of positivity. The commands on the covers of the magazines contain a threat, as many imperatives do. The logic that follows "Design your dream life" is not the neutral "or don't," it's the threatening "or else...[insert consequence here.]"

All this can be paralyzing. What direction can I move to resist, if acts of pleasure and health I undertake can be harnessed by capital in so many directions? Yet being crushed is not an option either; my failure to embody positivity and health could cost

me survival, both financially and emotionally. Refusing health also doesn't fly as a sustainable means of resistance, because at some point it becomes toxic to my body (though there are indefinite logics at play that can find aspects of ill health, normatively understood, as a source of joy and power.)

This question: "How to Resist?" along with the described frustrations and rages, fed into *How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek*. The materials I gathered to make the first half of this work find diverse resonances with the happiness industry, corporate discipline and wellness, overwork and exhaustion, digital labor and media oversaturation. They do so through shifting contexts and historical references. The second half of the work deals with resistance: a struggle to understand what it looks like, the precarity of experimenting with it. From a glitchy rupture 10 minutes into the work, I cultivate an affect of *abundance*, layering and orchestrating sonic sources that activate joy and pleasure for me.

1.3: Materials

How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek began with conversations with Leslie Leytham about a vocal and electronics piece drawing upon these themes. Somewhere in our talks, Leslie pointed me to the 1975 documentary *Grey Gardens*, which depicts the life of two formerly rich women, the aunt and cousin of Jackie Kennedy (Edith Bouvier "big Edie" Beale and Edith "little Edie" Beale), hanging out at their decaying estate. The two recluses spend their days doing a bunch of seemingly aimless activities. They try on old glamorous clothes, play with their cats, listen to the radio, put on old records, sing

and dance, and argue with each other. One scene in particular struck me: the two women lay in bed listening to Reverend Norman Vincent Peale sermonizing on the radio. As Peale delivers a sermon intersecting work discipline, positivity, and appeals to Christian values, Big and Little Edie deliver a series of snarky comments and double entendres. It's a beautiful friction—Big Edie with her glamorous aura, surrounded by trash, while Peale's polished voice communicating work ethic, reason, and hard-edged positivity, blares through the radio.³¹

[Radio: Norman Vincent Peale]

NVP: To get on top of things and to stay there.

Edie: Does that mean women too?

NVP: For if you do not do this, it is very likely that things will get on top of you.

Edie: Isn't he terrific?

NVP: And since I always believe in a simple formula that is workable; I have a formula for you now. First: try, really try.

Edie: Try; really try.

NVP: Second: think, really think.

Edie: Cute. Think; really think.

³¹ David and Albert Maysles, Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer et al. *Grey Gardens*. Directed by David and Albert Maysles (1975; Chicago: Home Vision Entertainment, 2001), Digital Release.

NVP: And third: believe, really believe."³²

The camera focuses on Big Edie's face. She seems mostly comfortable, skeptical and unenthused, bored. Peale's voice comes and goes; the two Edies switch off the radio and go back to bantering and trying on hats. It's a reassuring reflection of how mundane it sometimes feels to consume politicized media, how that activity is threaded through the day-to-day. A reminder of those moments where you make up a meaningless, useless activity, like flinging your sandals across the room or hot-gluing pennies together. It's narrowing in on a particular aspect of life that is difficult to capitalize upon.

The snippet of Peale's sermon became the first piece of text in the score and worked as a seed toward gathering additional materials. In composing the text of the first half of the work, I wove through excerpts from his 1952 book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, a pseudo-psychology text which disciplines and pathologizes the "productive" citizen's relationship with negative ("unproductive") emotions. Among constant appeals to rationality and the suppression of negative feelings, Peale relates economic productivity or lack thereof to cleanliness of thought, to sin, and to a constant control over mental, physical, and emotional faculties. The text is steeped in the language of affect, as Peale discusses negative affects as deleterious to the body; "Chemical reactions in the body are set up by emotional outbursts that result in feelings of ill-health. Should

³² Dialogue Transcript of *Grey Gardens*, http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/g/grey-gardens-script-transcript-beale.html

these be continued either violently or in a simmering state over a period of time, the general condition of the body will deteriorate.”³³

Peale consistently ties together vitality, health, and productivity with a suppression of negative emotions. Strangely, but again maybe not, Peale’s text itself is steeped in negative affects; laced through with austerity and contempt toward his subjects – the threatening “do it or else” of positivity rhetoric on flagrant display. In one particular passage, an affect of disgust on Peale’s part is registered toward a patient:

I emphasized that it was important he conceal nothing and that he completely empty himself of whatever fears, resentments, or guilt feelings might be in his mind. "I assure you that our interview will be held in strictest confidence. All your company wants is to have you back, the same highly efficient person you were." In due course the trouble came out. He had committed a series of sins and these had involved him in a complicated maze of lies. He was living in fear of exposure, and all in all it was a most pathetic mass of inner confusion. It came little short of mental filth.³⁴

Peale’s patient can only become productive again once he confesses, cleanses himself of negativity. Peale describes how the “company” takes this man back into its fold, using language of redemption and forgiveness, a corporate prodigal-son tale.

Excerpts of text from Peale’s book and sermon I formed into stuttering patterns, repetitive anxiety loops, abrupt outbursts, and frozen syllables, as the three characters try but fail to embody positivity (see figure 6). The words are mostly recited, but occasionally sung, in melodic contours that mimic vocal contours used by positivity

³³ Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (First ed. 1956, The Quality Book Club, 2006, Ebook), 199.

³⁴ Ibid, 198.

vloggers³⁵ and podcasters; starting low then rising overall, with an occasional cadence downward on the last syllable. Accompanying the text are two additional layers. There are gestures (to be executed in unison, though each performer has a repertoire that deviates slightly), and a mountain of media snippets that are edited together and fed through a handmade wooden crank at variable looping speeds.

Media snippets fed through the crank are ripped from a huge number of sources, with a variety of contexts and historical resonances. Prominent in the mix are Peale himself, Judy Garland singing “Get Happy” in the 1950 film *Summer Stock*, a snippet of Ronald Reagan delivering a speech about the free market, and clips from a variety of lifestyle youtube vloggers discussing positivity, work habits, climbing the corporate ladder, and “How to Survive a 100-hour Workweek,” These are discussed in both practical and spiritual terms. There are also clips of upbeat background music ripped from these lifestyle videos.

[illegible]

Figure 6: Fragmented and glitched texts by Peale. The red circle on the electronics stave indicates the crank operator to freeze at a position.

³⁵ Video Bloggers.

Peale's words and today's lifestyle literature find resonance with each other through time. Both configure positivity as a spiritual practice that solidifies worker engagement and efficiency in the production of profits; Peale through God, positivity lit through the language of self-help, wellness, mindfulness. Judy Garland's presence in the mix via "Get Happy" points toward the strenuous paradox of performing positivity while trying to survive overwork and addiction in the Hollywood film industry. Scanning through this material with the crank is akin to the distraction of shuffling through hundreds of bits of information per day, if every bit were disciplining your body in a similar direction.

Inside the wooden crank that controls the snippets is an arduino³⁶ with a potentiometer³⁷ soldered to it. The position of the crank handle controls the speed at which the layered snippets are scanned through. At 0° as indicated in the score (handle facing away from the operator), the file will simply play through, unfolding a composed mashup. When pulled inward, snippets begin looping, frozen wherever the file lands. The further inward the crank's handle is pulled, the shorter the loops, until at 180° the sound becomes a timbre, vibrating at 30 millisecond loops or about 33 hertz. The Operator has freedom at moments to improvise with the crank, and often catches a short loop synchronous to frozen syllables in the vocal parts (see figure 6). This creates a momentary unison – all workers glitching together. Frozen spots are frequently accompanied by unison struck poses mostly drawn from musical theater choreography of the 1930's–1950's – large gestures with the arms spread wide, or palms framing either

³⁶ Broadly, an open source platform for DIY electronics. I used an arduino chip that can convert analog signals from a sensor into digital data, sent to the computer via USB connection and parsed in Max 6.

³⁷ An analog sensor that is a rotating knob with a fixed distance (doesn't rotate infinitely.)

side of the face (see figure 7). In musical numbers and particularly tap-dancing scenes of that era,³⁸ movements are performed in virtuosic unison. In musical numbers featuring women, the hands are often held close to the face to draw attention to a bright smile.³⁹ In “The Trolley Song” from *Meet Me From St. Louis* (1944), Judy Garland places her hand around her throat, a motion of choking, to indicate she is left speechless by love.



Figure 7: Vocalists frame their faces with their palms.

Several of these gendered musical theater movements are used, in reference to the particular ways in which the wellness industry, as well as media culture at large, has targeted and disciplined women into performing positivity, as prescribed by Western (perhaps more specifically American) paradigms of labor and psychoanalysis.

I imagined the crank as a precursor to our sleek digital devices in a fictional alternate-past where physical motions of digital labor used to be more visible and strenuous. For example, a lever with a lot of resistance would have to be pulled to send an email, making us aware of exactly how many hours we spent working. In the world of this piece, crank operation is a physically fatiguing job that entails disciplining other

³⁸ See: “Good Mornin’” and “Moses Supposes” from *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952).

³⁹ See: “Lady Loves” from *I Love Melvin* (1953); “The Trolley Song” from *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944).

employees with a relentless bombardment of sonic positivity, entraining their thoughts into repetitive looped mantras: “Stay productive,” “Climb the corporate ladder,” “Get happy,” “Chase your cares away,” and fragments... “stay-stay-stay-stay-stay”; “judge-judge-judgement day.”

In the second half of *How to Survive a 100-Hour Workweek*, after the rupture described in the synopsis, I worked toward cultivating what I would describe as *abundance*, as much as I can gather for myself and more, reaching increasingly toward a threshold of joy and pleasure.

I cultivated this abundance in the studio by mixing multiple layered recordings into an enormous, noisy, continuous texture, structured via the carrier signal of Sibelius Symphony No. 2, movement IV. The dynamic flow of the theme in the strings section organizes sweeping, eerie sci-fi calls, chirps and guttural pulsations of Weddell seals hunting in the Antarctic; the particulate sound of wood burning; 5-voice counterpoint played by an amateur organist; an amateur marching band passing by, and briefly a field recording of a sorority cheering and chanting together. These are all sounds that activate intense joy for me—to refer back to Massumi, contexts stored in my body through a field of personal-cultural-environmental histories, re-activated and infolded again, continuously amplifying the intensities of the sounds themselves. These sounds and their accompanying associations are broadly connected with vitality, desire, and love in Western culture, forming part of that field. Fire: passion, revolution, destruction, rebirth—but also the sound of peaceful nights spent camping in the desert. A thread that runs through all the chosen samples is bodies sounding together, even water vapor

escaping wood as it is burnt, which I imagine more like glowing bits of ash each with their own voice, coalescing into hissing, crackling, sizzling.

Layering fire sounds, overblown brass, and a fin de siècle era symphony indexes toward the apocalyptic. I wanted the Antarctic seals there too, but at first couldn't describe why easily; their otherness to the situation when understood in conceptual terms caused hesitation. However, exclusion of sound sources on a conceptual basis has never been a good enough reason. Affectively, the seals' presence in the mix heightened the sensation of abundance, infusing empathy with this swarm of fierce aquatic bodies whose lives register as alien. This empathy can be understood as physically sensing, through sound, a common drive to strengthen our own constituent relations, to pursue joy. The seals' hunting calls come in piercing gestures that sound like sweeping a lowpass filter; moving from bright and sharp to dark and melancholy as high frequencies are rolled off, like old analog electronic effects. In one expressive vocalization, a seal produces discrete pulses through this downward movement, gradually slowing the pulse rate as the sound is darkened. Timbrally, each seal-call contains within it a rapid oscillation that registers as a tactile vibration. It is strange and joyful to hear fireworks falling to earth or 1950's sound effects used for laser guns and spaceships emanating from an animal in its day-to-day expression of desire. Maybe the sensation I feel upon hearing their calls is via the momentary space of possibility, the lived paradox that Brian Massumi describes as occurring in the missing 0.5 seconds before I draw to conscious expression what I'm sensing. A sense of possibility heightened by strong competing tendencies, semantically divergent interpretations.

The bridge toward this mass of sound is a hauntingly beautiful recording of a karaoke-singer taken from outside a bar in Vietnam, echoing into the night. With that limited information, the sound contains a joyful affect; the night air is warm, the singer is an amateur, performing for pleasure; the person recording found the sound interesting enough to devote a moment to listening, the distance from the singer creates reverberation that softens the voice. Layered with this section are sparse, close-miked recordings of Iota, Speck, and Atom repeating positivity mantras, occasionally glitched by the Crank Operator. The performers stand silent with eyes and mouths covered. The distant, haunting voice of the karaoke singer functions as near-silence compared with the onslaught of materials in the beginning.

The rupture happens – glitchy materials that are loud and abrupt. Iota, Speck, and Atom sing and chant within the soundscape of fire, organ, brass, Sibelius, and seals. Together, they speak seven iterations of a mantra that plays on multiple directions and shades of failure, finding polyvalent ways to understand “choking.”

To Choke:

Gag: A physical reaction something unpleasant, trying to expel that thing. A piece of cloth put over a person’s mouth to prevent them from speaking.

Retch: Reaction to something external that disagrees, or an action that tries but fails to expel a toxic thing, a sound and movement of vomiting without vomit.

Fight for breath: A fight for one’s life, a struggle.

Underachieve: Fail to live up to someone’s (including one’s own) goals.

Underperform: Fail to perform to expectations, especially in high-pressure situations.

Disappoint: Fail to meet someone’s expectations.

Lose: Fail to win a game, cease to have something.

Collapse: Fall down, give way, fold in.

Fall Apart: Disintegrate.

Choke, keep choking.

Layering an electronic soundscape that evokes abundance and joy with the “To Choke” mantra, evoking many negative associations (normatively speaking), willfully spawns divergent interpretations and paths through this section. Are these workers coming to terms with burnout by finally speaking the truth of it? Are they being crushed, or are they collectively resisting? Are they escaping or giving in? Each iteration of the mantra adopts different vocal styles and inflections, further shifting how affects combine; constructive or destructive interference. It is whispered without pitch, shouted fiercely, spoken dreamily, muffled by being chanted into the floor. On each round of the mantra, the phrase “Fight for Breath” is emphasized, with either *fight* or *breath* accented depending on the style of speaking. The workers move through various gestures and positions, fluid now. While chanting, they mirror each other’s hand movements in an improvised dance. They face toward each other, they face away from each other and shout the mantra into the distance. They strike poses from the first section and help each other break out of those poses. They crawl on the floor, tired and struggling. They stand up and call out toward the audience.

The joyful layered soundscape interplays with the spoken words and movements, more layered intensities that may draw up a web of personal/cultural affective contexts remembered in one’s flesh. Crawling: vulnerability and sickness, or trying to fit in small spaces; Shouting: conflict and power, or communicating from a far distance; Chanting: protest and ritual, or playful clapping-and-singing games; Hand

dance: meditation and cooperation; and endless inflections on all these themes. These shifting contexts, layered with the overarching affect of abundance, activate different emotions, associations, and interpretations, and serve as a way to feel through possibilities of resistance, failure, and healing, without having to produce a fixed solution or a final conclusion.

Chapter 2: Subsong

Texture/Texxture and Tactility in Digitally Produced Spaces

Media: https://soundcloud.com/caroline_louise/subsong-2017

2.1: Program Note

Subsong bridges practices of future bass, instrumental hip-hop, and musique concrete to create a journey through a gloomy sonic netherworld, marked by digital ruptures and cavernous underground bunkers. Among other samples, I used field recordings of myself singing, snapping, and clapping inside a cement cube on Laguna Mountain, east of San Diego, California. While orchestrating acoustic tactility, Subsong also embeds studio labor in the mix through sharp ruptures in digital space, highlighting the presence of human and machine bodies at work as a musical layer. The term "sub song" refers to a form of musical play in juvenile songbirds; young birds are known to sing fragments to themselves as experimentations or improvisations. Snippets of myself singing are of the day-to-day improvisations one performs while washing the dishes, going on a walk, taking a shower. Introspective, and for no particular function other than the impulse.

2.2: Analysis

I discuss Subsong here in materialistic terms: as a document of my digital studio production practice. My primary concerns while creating it were:

(1) Orchestrating tactility – organizing sharp transients, deep bass sounds, sounds smoothed by reverb or filters (or not), fleshy sounds (breathing, snapping, singing), and gradients and interplays between all. Referring to Luis Manuel-Garcia and his invocation of Pierre Schaeffer’s “grain,”⁴⁰ I also use sounds with a rapid string of attacks that evoke the tactility of vibration on a ridged object: for example playing a guiro, or driving over a rumble strip.

(2) Digital Texture and Texxture – Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s writing on material textures has figured strongly into my thinking on studio production, where gradients of smooth (texture) and rough (texxture) can make salient, through touch, the histories of a material: how it came to be the way it is, other bodies and forces that have touched it in the past. Sedgwick reminds us that tactility encompasses all the senses. Thinking tactility through the lens of affect; touches, sounds, sights, smells, and tastes form a field of intensities that physically meet at the boundaries of one’s body in various ways, offering rich information, most of which slips between the cracks of (or is flatly refused by) logical and semantic systems of meaning.

In writing this work, I felt my way through the mix, choosing, placing, and processing sounds for their tactile, tex(x)tural, affective qualities. Spatial cues like distance and reverberation figure into the tex(x)tural information we gather about a

⁴⁰ See introduction.

sound's context, invoking the size, shape, and material (metal, cement, wood etc.) of a space. For example, filtering sounds can suggest different modes of presence; a dry⁴¹ sound lowpassed with a mid-range center frequency may register as "submerged in a liquid." Rather than theorizing *space* as a separate dimension of this work, discussions in this essay find sound and space working together to create a multitude of impressions – affective, tex(x)tural acoustics.

For example, an interesting quality of transient and full-spectrum sounds, like snapping or clapping, is that they tend to make salient more properties about their environments than a simple sound like a continuous sine wave. A sine wave is difficult for humans and listening machines alike to localize – by virtue of its *literal smoothness* (a lack of spectral information), its interactions with surroundings generally fail to yield as much information as would be produced by a sound carrying more information, literally, in the form of a complex pattern of vibration. A sine wave is not recommended for functions where localization is required, such as a car horn; exactly because of its refusal to divulge information about its situatedness in regards to space and human listener – we could think of this as Sedgwick's one-x texture played out acoustically.

Asymmetry, imperfection, internal variation are features that may yield extra information about a sound's real or imagined history, carrying layers of context that provoke responses from the bodies they meet. This is Sedgwick's two-x texxture translated onto patterns of air pressure. Sonic complexity may unfold near instantaneously, or over a longer timeframe. Yet, even a sine wave, in its lifespan,

⁴¹ With little to no reverberation.

accumulates qualities of the space it sounds within, gaining complexity through its interaction with bodies. Upon sensing a sine wave, we can imagine perfect undulations in an electric current being amplified perfectly – yet a sine wave with a little distortion makes sensible an additional layer of context: noise, the limitation of the machine that produced it.

As a sound unfolds in a space, it will begin to yield a response from that space in the form of resonances and attenuations. Synthesizing with Massumi, a resonance with the context of a space heightens its intensity, affect – literally constructive interference that makes a particular part of the sound louder. The material history and situatedness of a space can cause affinities with certain kinds of sounds, or conversely diminish and deaden, a sound's intensity. I the listener, the feeler, also exist in that nexus of resonance and attenuation. My history plays a role in how I receive that affect, what I amplify or attenuate before conscious interpretation.

Sounds imprinted in materials – whether through grooves in vinyl or digital magnetic patterns on a computer's hard drive, retain qualities of the medium when re-activated; a new hiss, some extra spectral content or subtractions of spectral content, pops and crackles. Sound may be roughened and/or smoothed over time, just as an old stone can be polished, chipped, and polished again, embedding imperfections in gloss. A digital phenomenon like aliasing, in which sounds that exceed half the sample rate wrap back around to create low-frequency artifacts (perhaps achieved through recording dolphin calls at 44,100 samples per second) can be understood as an example

way in which digital material *reveals* its limits and properties. These limits, always present, are made *expressive* to us by particular, situated interactions.

In Subsong, digital studio labor is made sensible as a musical dimension. I adopt some classic studio “mistakes”⁴² as part of the material for this, for example in the sculpting of reverb tails into envelopes that can only be achieved through digital means; a dry sound can suddenly obtain a tail that rapidly gains amplitude before cutting off, or a reverberant sound can have its tail prematurely attenuated. Each sound in the mix is subjected to a huge number of different filtering, reverberation, and layering process, taking on different contexts, sometimes rapidly. The voice in particular moves through moments of digital processing, distortion, and clarity – which can be thought as levels of smoothness/ transparency or roughness/opaqueness in the digital layer.

My discussion is broken up according to sections in the work, each of which organizes tactility and tex(x)ture in different ways. I have chosen only particular moments (and sometimes moments within one layer out of many), where these concerns are most present, to analyze.

2.2.1: 0:00–0:56

The first sound is that of layered recordings of myself singing in a strange reverberant space, a small, almost-perfect cement cube, on Laguna Mountain. This space not only smoothed the sound with reverb, but also “hollowed out” my singing

⁴² These “mistakes” are now widely accepted aesthetic choices in studio-produced popular musics.

through phasing⁴³. An unusual reverb to stumble upon one's day-to-day life, I spent an afternoon in that space recording different activities, including snapping, clapping, and hitting metal objects with a stick. In *Subsong*, this recording is punctuated at 00:05 with a loud, dry strike on something that sounds like the wooden body of a guitar. In interplay with the voice, these strikes become more frequent, each with a different level of amplitude and digitally added reverb. Starting around 00:34, I "flood in" and "suck away" the tails of the digital reverb, indicating the reverb as digitally added. This also works to saturate and clarify sonic space in alternation; other things in the mix become subtly masked by the flood of extra sound, and snap into momentary focus when the tails disappear. An unexpected but pleasing side effect: these orchestrated reverb tails produce subtle otoacoustic emissions in a studio listening scenario (located at a fixed distance from stereo speakers.) Layered with this texture, granular, bright-spectrum sounds accumulate; rubbing, fizzing, and bell-like. When I was mixing, these seemed to resonate somewhere in my throat. Brittle sounds fizz out into wide panning space nearing 00:55, but are low-passed a bit (the very highest edges taken off) at the transition to the next section.

2.2.2: 0:56-1:55

The briefest beat passes, with pitch-shifted filtered vocals filling the space. Then a full spectrum texture floods in, high frequencies restored. This section is marked by

⁴³ Phasing: when copies of the same sound wave (in this case multiple reflections from the sides of the cube) combine with each other out of sync, they are out of phase. This results in the attenuation of particular frequencies, producing this "hollow" sound.

rapid shifts between spectral niches and levels of saturation, achieved through different kinds of filtering and reverb, organized in rhythmic blocks. Layers of sounds work through shifting roles – in one block, the bass may be dull and distant while the highest layers are sharp and crisp. In the next block, filtering qualities may shift. For example, from 01:35-01:40, the shuffling, crackling sounds up top are mostly dry and crisp, while the voice is so bandpassed it barely registers as such. Abruptly changing, from 01:40-01:44, the voice is filtered to sound like it's coming through an old telephone, while the crackling sounds are now low-passed, losing their bite. From 01:44-01:48, reverb abruptly inundates the space. At 01:48, reverb is removed, while the bass and drum elements attain a crunchy, squelchy quality; high-frequency content bleeding further into the sound's sustain.

2.2.3: 1:55 – 2:50

At 1:55, the voice is quickly muffled with a low-pass filter around the same time the regular pulse drops out. Crackling gestures occasionally cut through. At 2:00, I included the sound of touching the stereo microphone on my zoom, producing some binaural sensations that have an indefinite quality and yet feel extremely close, the claustrophobic sensation of something you are wearing on your head transducing an acoustic sound from the outside. The muffled filtration of voices, in which the breath becomes attenuated, and the sound of brushing the mic, produce an impression of listening through a substrate other than air – perhaps underwater, where sounds can be hard to localize and the intake of breath necessarily is absent from singing. At 2:06,

space slowly opens up as more voices join in, first on the right. From 2:16–2:22, I used a combination of panning, reverb, and the addition of non-filtered voices (breath audible) to make the space itself breathe – not only expanding in size but reducing pressure, moving from water to air. The transition produces an affect of relief, as the mild pressure of listening underwater (a zone I can only remain in temporarily) gives way to air, a space I exist in longer. At 2:40, a recording of a public announcement on a train or maybe an airport briefly cuts through. The tinny, filtered quality of the voice instantly activates a slew of sensations and associations – the familiarity of being in a crowded public space where instructions are given by an authority, a momentary sense of shuffle, panic, checking to make sure I didn’t miss my flight or my stop. It disappears quickly, and in its wake, layers of singing are eviscerated.

2.2.4: 2:50–3:59

A series of rapid, glitchy pulses, layered with deep rumbling, marks the transition to the next section, and invokes a feeling of descending to a lower level of underground, maybe a bunker or a cave. This is layered with a field recording of me curiously snapping my fingers inside that cement cube on Laguna Mountain, changing my location in reference to the stereo microphone pair. Spatial depth can be sensed through changes in the snaps’ reverberant quality; phasing from reflections. These are sculpted through proximity to the mic or proximity to a wall. Periodically, a dropping bass gesture or low drum carves a notch in the spectral space, momentarily suppressing other spectral content. This mimics sidechain compression, where transient attacks on

one track, often drums, rhythmically sculpt the envelope on another track, often synths, by attenuating the sound at the front of the attack. From 3:17–3:19, a low kick drum ushers in the sound of touching the mic, producing a momentary “ringing” in the ears, comparable to the sound of blood rushing to your ears when you stand up with low blood sugar. This auditory experience returns one to the acoustics of one’s own body, before clearing out to flood back in a depth of space.

Zooming in on the most reverberant layers, the snapping sounds engage in a dark, playful hide-and-seek with other transient sounds; tapping, knocking, and a distant sound of old pipes creaking or dripping. This is strongly invoked at the contrast between similar rhythmic gestures at 3:39 and 3:45. At 3:39, a faraway pipe creaks in response to a moment of reverberant silence; giving the feeling that the singer momentarily paused to sense the space, and is answered by the vast network of dripping metallic decay. At 3:45, the singer pauses again, waiting, but receives back only the fading reflections of her voice. Rhythmic orchestrations of snaps and creaks at 3:53, in which additional reverb tails are not blended smoothly into the spatial context, begin to call into the question the properties of the underground space, adding overt sounds of digital studio labor.

2.2.5: 3:59–4:49

Two vocal layers, suddenly closer and with audible breath, blossom out of the mix at 4:00, marking movement to the next section. At 4:13, I placed a spatial shock—the reverb-drenched bunker gives way to three seconds of total digital silence. This is

ushered in where a finger snap is expected, but the snap is drowned out by a crispy glitch sound. This abrupt return of the listener to only the space they are listening within, threads that space (and a multitude of potential listening spaces: headphones in a coffee shop, a concert hall with noisy chairs, etc.) through the mix by design. Texture is felt through this interplay of the listening space, the labor in the production studio made sensible, and the variety of sources in the surrounding mix, contexts stacked up high. The reverberant underground floods in again at 4:16, now heard as the result of studio labor, the producer's body in the mix. From 4:34–4:49, glittery, granular sounds accumulate again, increasingly present and sparkling, making spectral contrast with the previously dark reverberant space.

2.2.6: 4:49–6:57

A feature of this section is the use of digital distortion on many of the sounds. In particular, I added (and tweaked parameters of) distortion to sounds that would yield swarms of miniscule, crackling punctuations in response, or, for very short sounds, attain a “crunchy” quality. Snaps, claps, and intakes of breath are mixed to be extremely dry, sharpening their impacts, while low drum sounds and vocals move through gradients of wet and dry. At 5:42, another moment of digital silence appears, this time after an intake of breath.

The breath creates anticipation to sound, to the next vocal phrase. This is answered at 5:45, as clips of singing that have been heard throughout the piece wash in, layered, each with a patina of distortion. Voices are furthered fractured and obscured

by swarming glitchy particles that mask parts of the spectrum. From 6:30 to the end, certain frequencies in the vocals resonate through the distortion, fusing together to form a metallic, robotic quality. At 6:42, another snippet of singing is momentarily heard through a more transparent lens — polished with only a light film of nicks and scratches, in response to its warped twin.

Chapter 3: Vivarium

Dreams, Abjection, and Tactile Performance with Pomegranates

Media: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mumHlwgxVes>

Pomegranates resemble abstracted balls of animal flesh; the purplish-red arils⁴⁴ and viscous juices invoke blood, and lie in dense clusters between delicate layers of whitish tissue, encased in a tough pink and brown skin. A serrated knife drawn through a fresh pomegranate produces a loud squeak with an underlying crunch. Split open, the pomegranate emits a crisp crackling sound, and each aril bursts with the slightest pressure, making a soft pop.

The comparison of the pomegranate to flesh and blood is old territory. Pomegranates in myth, text, and art operate as bodies of desire, ingestion, and abjection; and are often associated with sexual reproduction. In ancient Greek mythology, the pomegranate is inter-implicated with sexual violence, seduction and courtship, cycles of fertility and infertility, and death; as part of these myths, pomegranate trees frequently grow where blood is spilled, as vegetal re-incarnations of the slaughtered.⁴⁵ The fruit appears in the story of Persephone as a substance of temptation and infertility, and ancient Greek medical texts variously prescribe the seeds and rind as a contraceptive agent⁴⁶ or as an aid for conception and childbirth.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Arils are the little pockets of juice inside a membrane, surrounding the seeds.

⁴⁵ Efthymios G. Lazongas, "Side: the personification of the pomegranate." In *Personification in the Greek World*, Ed. Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin, Ashgate publishing (2005). 100.

⁴⁶ John M. Riddle. *Eve's herbs: a history of contraception and abortion in the West* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 41.

⁴⁷ Lazongas, "Side," *Personification*, 104.

The pomegranate as an analog to human flesh appears in art. In Salvador Dali's 1944 painting *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate before Awakening*, a hovering, opened pomegranate evokes an embryonic cluster of cells that splits to give rise to a fish, out of whose mouth leaps a tiger, out of whose mouth comes a smaller tiger, between whose paws is a rifle that nearly touches a sleeping woman's skin. Beside the sleeping woman is a whole pomegranate with a bee hovering nearby, drawn to the fruit. Each organism compulsively expels the next. Insides threaten to become outsides; the bayonet at the end of the arc threatens to puncture the skin on the sleeping woman's bicep. The analog of the pomegranate to the human body binds the woman, the pomegranate, the animals, and the rifle into a loop of expulsion. The eyes of the fish appear blank yet traumatized, and the posture of the first tiger seems convulsive – an involuntary retching as it gags on the second tiger's tail.

This fluidity between materials – plant life, food, animal life, partly conceived through the pomegranate's resemblance to flesh and blood – resonates with a world of dreams that involve food, flesh, death, and decay. The affect of abjection plays out in my dreams as a sense of unease and revulsion brought on by the erosion of normative boundaries that establish certain spaces, behaviors, and minglings of flesh. In one nightmare I am following an unearthly singing that seems to emanate from the pipes of an old building. As I get closer to the source, the singing becomes gradually higher in pitch. Without warning, I wander into a boiler room, a cement space with white pipes and steam, and find a creature resembling a human girl sitting in a large vat. Her head sprouts tentacles and wires that arch back gracefully as extensions of her flesh. I

understand that her singing is the cause for the water in the vat boiling, and I am revolted that she would be boiling herself alive. I inch closer to the vat, drawn forth by a morbid curiosity, and when I look into it, I see half-disintegrated human body parts floating amidst stew ingredients like pasta, onions, and carrots.

The affect of abjection, as discussed by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1980), is useful in describing the feelings invoked by this dream. For Kristeva, abjection is marked by a loss of subjectivity; the perceived boundaries that separate “I” from “other” are eroded, resulting in unease or disgust as “I” attempt to reclaim that subjectivity. This experience is often illustrated in the extreme by invoking a corpse outside of sacred or scientific spaces. Abjection may also be brought on by food; Kristeva uses the example of the delicate skin that forms on the surface of milk, which invokes the fragile boundaries of our own bodies; “...harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring,” this film produces gagging, sweating, dizziness, and nausea, and these bodily reactions go hand-in-hand with a loss of subjectivity and an attempt to reclaim it: “...since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me’...I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*.”⁴⁸ Kristeva illustrates that the abject is neither subject nor object; there is no “me” and “other” in this encounter with the milk-skin. Therefore some remnant of “I” must be expelled in the attempt to re-affirm the boundaries of one’s own body, and this motion is felt through retching convulsions – an action in which one literally aims to turn oneself inside out. Kristeva’s violent rejection of the

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). 2-3.

milk-skin is in part the result of an identification with it; the fact that milk, a thick fluid of fats, proteins and water, can grow a skin, produces a recognition of our common status as organic matter, susceptible to permeation and decay.

In my nightmare, a violation of boundaries between human flesh and food triggered an abrupt ejection from the space; I woke up, I *expelled myself*, but unease and horror lingered. Instead of willfully forgetting this dream, however, I recalled it again and again, actively reliving horror, trying to shut it from my mind only to return again in fascination and disgust, yet afraid to sleep for fear of returning to that space. These sorts of abject memories and dreams, along with texts, imagery, and impressions that continuously both draw and repel me, go hand-in-hand with making *Vivarium*. The pomegranate, with its resemblance to human flesh, and with its status as food, is a medium that continually suggests possibilities of play with boundaries of the “clean and proper” body (of the subject), heading toward the abject—a disruptive body that transgresses its own boundaries, that engages in improper exchanges with the outside.

Kristeva explains the “clean and proper” body as connected with the maternal and paternal⁴⁹—connecting abjection to the horror upon which a paternal symbolic order of laws, symbols, and reason form themselves, through exclusion of the abject maternal body. For Kristeva, the maternal body is abject because it challenges our status as subjects; reminding us of the time when the boundaries of our bodies were permeable to the bodies of our mothers. In *Amending the Abject Body*, Deborah Caslav Covino discusses the abject mother, paraphrasing Kelly Oliver:

⁴⁹ Kristeva is coming from a psychoanalytical framework drawing from, and in dialogue with, Freud and Lacan.

The abject mother is an archaic mother because she is, as Kelly Oliver says, 'pre-identity, presubject, preobject' and in that way, utterly noncompliant with the clean and proper bodies regulated by the symbolic order: 'Kristeva gives [in *Powers of Horror*] a [further] example of the revolutionary effect of the repressed maternal in language. [Here,] the authority of our religion, morality, politics, and language comes through the repression of horror [of the abject body]. . . . Our culture is founded on this horror'. As Oliver says, 'The Symbolic can maintain itself only by maintaining its borders; and the abject points to the fragility of those borders.'⁵⁰

Covino/Oliver/Kristeva explain that abjection is inter-implicated with a repression of "the maternal" (as understood by patriarchal psychoanalytical models), structuring how we maintain subjectivity, systems, and laws: through exclusion and rejection of that which threatens the perceived individuality of a body, its status as a subject. The archaic mother that Covino discusses poses an existential threat to her children precisely because she represents the time before the child recognized itself as an individual, calling into question its subjecthood. Covino describes the Paternal Order's fear that the mother's body is a "devouring body," able to consume and subsume that which is delineated.⁵¹ For Kristeva, these ideas and affects have structured oppression and abjection of women at large, reducing them to the "maternal function"⁵² and demanding the production of particular kinds of "clean and proper" bodies in response. "Clean" versions of the maternal invoked by Oliver and Kristeva include the "sublime maternal" (which, Oliver points out, takes part in a specifically heterosexual, Western

⁵⁰ Deborah Covino, voicing Kelly Oliver and Kristeva, *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture* (SUNY Press, 2004), 22.

⁵¹ Ibid, 22.

⁵² Ibid, 21.

psychoanalytical discourse)⁵³, in which the mother acquires a divine aspect in order that she might be loved by man, rather than simply inspiring revulsion. This is seen prominently in the narrative of the Virgin Mary. There is also the semiotic maternal, the maternal which takes part in imposing order and meaning on the life of an infant,⁵⁴ participating in the symbolic order at some level and therefore less threatening.

My fascination with the abject, manifesting in grotesque dreams that seem to always be at my heels, certainly stems in part from perceiving what “clean and proper” behavior particular to my subject position is expected. Becoming an abject body is precarious and often not a choice; others are the abjected whether they want it or not (Kristeva would say the condition of being a woman *is* partly that of being an abject body; cultural misogyny is clearly an expression of disgust). Dreams and art might be thought of as relatively safe spaces in which abjection, an *immense vitality* configured as threat, can be explored. The choice to use pomegranates, with their resemblance to mammalian flesh and blood, immediately raises questions connected with violence, power, birth, death. Whose body is being dissected? What new bodies are being formed? Life or death? Do these bodies implicate oneself, an other, a group, a concept? Using pomegranates instead of other fleshy fruits is transgressive. Whereas a kiwano melon resembles an alien creature with its green innards, or maybe a sea cucumber, easy to objectify, a pomegranate feels closer to human flesh.

⁵³ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 60-62.

⁵⁴ Covino, *Amending the Abject Body*, 22.

I rejected critique (whereby violence might be revealed, symbolized, analyzed) as a mode for this project early on, finding it more satisfying to move through *Vivarium* as one can move through dreams—fluidly, with clear relations between bodies, emotions, and systems of meaning in jeopardy. For example, in a recent dream I was brainwashed by a small cult of well-intentioned people and transformed into a crustacean⁵⁵ through a series of horrifying medical procedures, one body part, one organ at a time. When I looked at my hands, they were swollen and disintegrating, my new claws partially bursting forth. Within the dream, I felt disoriented, joyful, serene, frightened, and disgusted at the same time. Upon waking up, I recalled the horror of the dream as joy, even as I shuddered and checked to make sure I didn't have claws; abjection mixed with something else. I would point to this as an example of those moments in which we have heightened perception of what Brian Massumi would call "the escape of affect," the spill-over of intensities that are never fully captured via expression.

The escape of affect *cannot but be perceived, alongside* the perceptions that are its capture. This side-perception may be punctual, localized in an event (such as the sudden realization that happiness and sadness are something besides what they are.) When it is punctual, it is usually described in negative terms, typically as a form of *shock* (the sudden interruption of functions of actual connection.) But it is also continuous, like a background perception that accompanies every event, however quotidian. When the continuity of affect escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations. For it is nothing less than *the perception of one's own vitality*, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as "freedom.")⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See *The Lobster*, film by Yorgos Lanthimos.

⁵⁶ Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 97.

For Massumi, the perception of the “escape of affect” is most heightened when emotion is the primary form of capturing an affect in expression. Emotion is the most compacted capture of affect, and is thus disorienting. The tendency, activated by affect, which finds its way to expression, always contains within it a reminder of the trace of affect that escaped. This trace, which remains unactualized, is perceived as possibility, life, the promise of free will. Without that which escapes us, populating the field of possibility, there is only entropy and death.⁵⁷ For Massumi, emotion is disorienting precisely *because* it carries with it a strong perception of the trace, rendering even in “negative” emotional states the sensation of this field of vitality.

Kristeva and Massumi resonate here, as they both speak about parts of experience that elude the symbolic order. *Vivarium* avoids fixed relationships or moralizing structures between human and fruit flesh – manifesting instead as a kaleidoscopic dance in which quantities like tension, resistance, and rate of movement seem to be constantly co-produced by interactions and alliances between substances. Through this dance, I aimed to frustrate boundaries of subject, object, abject, and power into increasing ambiguity.

In a theatrical setting, our activities are viewed on a scrim 24 feet across. A camera with a macro-lens, trained on the pomegranates, is used so that an audience can take in small, up-close, textural details. The shifting soundscape is captured through two small-diaphragm condenser microphones with a very low noise floor, able to amplify extremely soft sounds. In an ideal setting, the audience is served a small cup of

⁵⁷ Ibid, 96.

pomegranate seeds to eat, if desired, during the performance. According to Massumi, and in line with basic experience, tactile sensation may be experienced through the visual or auditory – affect is not specific to any sensory mode, resulting in expressions that cross senses. Eating the seeds contributes a strong synthesis of smell, taste, and touch.

The first gesture, a knife drawn through the pomegranate skin, is a moment where most power seems to lie in the dissectors' hands. Yet the resistance of the fruit's tough skin causes our fingers to tense as we struggle to hold each pomegranate in place without cutting ourselves. Previously frozen pomegranates, in a state of decay, are sliced open for contrast; crimson juice cascades across the table (see figure 1.) As the pomegranates are broken into smaller and smaller pieces, we are forced to change our methods to maintain our own tactile satisfaction. Our hands become purple with juice, and covered with bits of pith, and our status as separate entities becomes blurred through multiple sensory lenses. Visibly, it is harder to distinguish our hands from the fruit. Skin coated with pomegranate juice adds a layer of "slimy" to every haptic sensation. My skin and nerves are less perceptive to changes in texture, yet are now in constant contact with the substance they touch. Sonically, sliminess tends to make transient attacks, which demarcate discrete events, sound slushier and more homogeneous, another sensory testament to the melding of once-separate bodies. Our faces also become spattered with small crimson droplets of juice – we smell and taste it.



Figure 8: Slicing into frozen-then-thawed pomegranates

As insides become outsides, we strive to maintain a tactile relation to the fruit; the various knives, tweezers, and probes afford exertions of pressure, rates of movement, and gestural activities. The fruit feeds back into the tactile through its resistance, which can be heard as crackling and popping, seen in the shaking hands and taut tendons of performers, and felt through each tool as a struggle followed by a release of pressure. When resistances can no longer be satisfactorily sensed through tools, the performers move to using their hands. In this final stage, performers are asked to inhabit a state in which they focus intensely on the feel of the pomegranates on the skin, letting tactile desire and curiosity guide movement. This drives their movements into a dance through a landscape of jagged, spongy, and viscous substances. The four hands and ten fingers freely coalesce into a nest of worms, a mouth, or an octopus. The instructions on the html score ask the performers to undulate between “aquatic

organisms, territorial invertebrates, predators/prey, and symmetrical choreographed gestures.”

This is meant as a total abandonment of any analytical and objectifying associations that are evoked in the first few stages, in favor of a transgressive identification with and desire for the partially disintegrated pomegranates. Subject/object boundaries (maintenance of the clean and proper body) that are hinted at by the medical use of knives and dissection instruments disappear.

The performers also attempt to feel (and show) the hands as fluidly morphing into other entities that work together to chew, digest, and process the flesh-like material, like a time-lapse of masses of sea stars and worms feeding on dead matter on the ocean floor.⁵⁸ This heaving mass of invertebrates, when sped up, makes salient a desire animated by purposeful, methodical, and greedy movements that (for me, at least) provoke extreme revulsion. They are one body with the body of the flesh they tunnel through. Embodying these invertebrate behaviors, the performers’ hands crawl and burrow. Pomegranate juice sticks to the hands, turning them purple. The pith, arils and seeds form undulating heaps that are animated by the movements of the hands; often fingers and pomegranate flesh seem to be one heaving mass. The soundscape turns from precise punctuations, such as the knife being drawn through the skin and the crack of the pomegranate splitting, into squishing, soft, crackling accretions of sound. The hands periodically withdraw back into human hands, scavenging the

⁵⁸ BBC, “Life – Timelapse of swarming monster worms and sea stars – BBC One,” Youtube, Nov. 25, 2009. Accessed April 2018.

remains for tactile curiosities and delights. Then they entwine and slither, twitching, out of the scene, dragging bits of detritus behind.

REFERENCES

- Associated Press. "Raw Video: Protesters on Streets Across Syria." Youtube, August 19, 2011. Accessed May 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0FjP_DP8Ho
- BBC. "Life – Timelapse of swarming monster worms and sea stars – BBC One," Youtube, Nov. 25, 2009. Accessed April 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG17TsgV_qI&t=113s
- Burton, Richard M., Dorthe Døjbak Håkonsson, Jackson Nickerson, Phanish Puranam, Maciej Workiewicz, and Todd Zenger. "GitHub: exploring the space between boss-less and hierarchical forms of organizing." *Journal of Organization Design* 6, no. 1 (2017): 10.
- Cadwalladr, Carole and Emma Graham-Harrison. "Revealed: 50 Million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach." *The Guardian*, March 17, 2018. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election>
- Covino, Deborah Caslav. *Amending the abject body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture*. SUNY Press, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "On Spinoza." From Lectures at the University of Paris 8, 1978–1981. *Lectures by Deleuze* (blog), February 2007. Accessed April 2019. <http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com/2007/02/on-spinoza.html>.
- Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Katrine. "Affect Image, Touch Image." In *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, ed. Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup, 50–57. Walter de Gryter GmbH, 2015.
- Flaherty, Joe. "A Café Designed for Silicon Valley's Elite Futurists." *Wired Magazine*, July 11, 2014. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.wired.com/2014/07/a-cafe-designed-to-contemplate-the-collapse-of-our-civilization/>
- Henry Albrecht, "3 Reasons Corporate Wellness Failed: and How to Change the Game," *Forbes*, December 14, 2017. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesfounders/2017/12/14/3-reasons-corporate-wellness-failed-and-how-to-change-the-game/#5b8aac8b4c12>
- Horning, Rob. "Liquid Authenticity." *The New Inquiry* (blog), August 19, 2014. Accessed http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/g/grey-gardens-script-transcript-beale.html. Accessed May 2019.

Hull, Glynda. "Constructing working selves: Silicon Valley assemblers meet the new work order." *Anthropology of Work Review* 22, no. 1 (2001): 17-22. *Anthrosource*, PDF download.

Jacdelj. "Moses supposes (from 'Singin' in the rain')." Youtube, April 14, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFAIZttXfvE>

Jarvis, Helen and Andy C. Pratt. "Bringing it all back home: The extensification and 'overflowing' of work; The case of San Francisco's new media households." *Geoforum* 37 (2006), 331-339. *Sciencedirect*, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.06.002

Kohll, Alan. "25 Ways To Cut Employee Stress and Boost Productivity." *Forbes*, February 22, 2017. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2017/02/22/25-ways-to-cut-employee-stress-and-boost-productivity/#788a3e6420f9>

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Lazongas, Efthymios G. "Side: the personification of the pomegranate." In *Personification in the Greek World*, Ed. Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin. Ashgate publishing (2005).

Lordon, Frédéric. *Willing Slaves of Capital*. London: Verso, 2014.

Manuel-Garcia, Luis. "Beats, flesh and grain: sonic tactility and affect in electronic dance music." *Sound Studies* 1:1 (2016), 59-76. *Taylor and Francis Online*, doi: 10.1080/20551940.2015.1079072

Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique*, No. 31 (1995): 83-109. *Jstor*, doi:10.2307/1354446.

Maysles, David, Albert Maysles, Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer, Susan Froemke, Edith Bouvier Beale, and Edie Beale. *Grey Gardens*. Directed by Albert and David Maysles. 1975; Chicago, Illinois: Home Vision Entertainment, 2001. Digital Release.

Maysles, David, Albert Maysles, Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer, Susan Froemke, Edith Bouvier Beale, and Edie Beale. *Grey Gardens*. Dialogue Transcript.

O'Connor, M.R. "The Fight for the Right to Drive." *The New Yorker*, April 30, 2019. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-fight-for-the-right-to-drive>

- Oliver, Kelly. *Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998.
- Ozabbavo27. "1080p HD 'Good Morning' – Singin' in the Rain (1952)." Youtube, July 19, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GB2yiIoEtXw>
- Peale, Norman Vincent. *The Power of Positive Thinking*. 1956; The Quality Book Club, 2006. Ebook.
- Riddle, John M. *Eve's herbs: a history of contraception and abortion in the West*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Roads, Curtis. *Composing Electronic Music: a New Aesthetic*. USA: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Warner Archive Instant. "I Love Melvin (1953)– Lady Loves – Debbie Reynolds." Youtube, Dec. 29, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMBJ5QTP5v8>
- Warner Archive Instant. "Meet Me in St. Louis (1944) – The Trolley Song" Youtube, Nov. 29, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL3EIVwZ60w>
- Wajcman, Judy. "Automation: is it really different this time?" *The British journal of sociology* 68, no. 1 (2017): 119-127. *Wiley Online Library*, doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12239