

## *The Empleasurement Effect* (or, pleasure shared is potential expanded)

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**empleasurement** (effect) | ɪmˈpleɪzəmənt |  
noun [mass noun]

“the Empleasurement Effect”

1. to be in a process or state of the pleasurable feeling of expansive potential: being emplaced by a good vibe; *raving brought her great emplaced*
  2. a feminist desire to be through a pleasurable embodied knowing
  3. experiencing emplaced: a deep cellular intimacy with the shared pleasures of low-frequency sound, collectively experienced
  4. a fully embodied experience of expansion and delightful potential brought forth by vibratory sensation in the company of others
  5. an affirmation of your current state of being by the presence of open-hearted others
- // emplaced entails pleasure and the erotic as reasoned knowledge; hovers in and between sexual and sensual; allows for jouissance to occur, opens to *potentia*.

The thrill of anticipation grows as we draw closer to the party and the bass grows louder. We flock towards the sound system and immerse ourselves in sound vibration. As each track is cued by the DJ, we wait for the bass to drop. We are saturated in skin penetrating low-frequencies, willingly allowing them to permeate every cell in our body—we are one with the vibration of amplified music. Desiring new feels and novel experience, we connect easily with others around us vibing on the same tip, creating culture. The aim is to feel good; the purpose is pleasure. Good vibes increasing, we expand in feeling and we expand in potential, we are *emplaced*.

Emplaced is not a selfish hedonistic pleasure, but an ethical one: a tool for creating community and a sensory information feed integral to well-being. Sara Ahmed argues that “[p]leasure is expansive ... opening bodies to worlds through an opening up of the body to others”.<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde suggests, shared joy “forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference”.<sup>2</sup> Instead of turning inward, we allow for connection and personal expansion. As sound system operator, event facilitator, DJ, we perform our role of generating joy and pleasure, using the matter of sound as a connective force capable of bringing people together and helping to develop collaborative and meaningful relationships that can last one night or a lifetime. Sound system lovers profanely worship this vibrational communion, rebelling against our age of separation.

The matter of sound aligns with a feminist politics of location. As Rosi Braidotti states: “[t]he first and foremost of locations in reality is one’s own embodiment”.<sup>3</sup> The visceral experience of immersion in powerful vibratory fields inescapably amplifies our sense of being in-body. Counter to the claim that technology disembodies, the sound system is a technological enhancer of

embodiment. Furthered by Kodwo Eshun as '*hyperembodiment*', Eshun insists that "machines *don't* distance you from your emotions, in fact quite the opposite. Sound machines make you feel *more* intensely, along a broader band of emotional spectra".<sup>4</sup> Joyously, deeply vibrating, I propose that the sound system is a 'bioaesthetic technology of pleasure'.<sup>5</sup> The experience of the body is deepened through low-frequency sound, as the potential of the body is extended and expanded through machinic relationship.

In front of the sound system we practice *hyperembodiment*. As our molecules vibrate and take up more space, the cells of our bodies expand. As the bass drops heavily, skin lifts off fascia, lifting away from muscles, granting space around bones for movement that is impossible in un-amplified life. The body's freedom comes from within yet is held within a history of resistance that imbues sound system culture. 'Body-ful', we connect to an empowered self. We grant embodied knowledge worth, trusting the feeling of yeses and noes before thinking them. This is knowledge that can be *felt* before it is disseminated into language, knowledge without words—bodily 'reason'. Pleasure is a measure we can use to understand our boundaries of engagement and consent, and to discover what really turns us on: who and what do we turn towards?

Alice O'Grady argues that in the dance party experiencing a new or different embodied 'self' "cannot be 'unfelt' and thus transforms its participants as they take their experience with them back into their daily lives".<sup>6</sup> A 'self', as a mind-body assemblage, is always already in interaction with, and changed by, the world around it—where self can never be the same self again or is always at variance with itself. The self in its totality is a 'function' or a process, as Elizabeth Grosz asserts, reflecting the patterns imbued through "the body's own formal pattern and inner constitution on one hand and, on the other, the influence of 'external' factors, such as other bodies".<sup>7</sup> In the sound system space we are in relation to other human bodies and the body or matter of sound; we are shaped by intra-action (to use a Baradian term), and the co-joining that boundary dissolving vibration affords.<sup>8</sup> Our pleasure affects those around us and vice versa, we affectively expand each other. In front of the sound system, enhanced by a state of empleasement we can experience an expansive feeling of potential: 'what else?'

Empleasement, accessible with a bass heavy sound system, clarifies the subversion of sound system cultures. Recognising the feminism of low-frequency sound empowers the potential trajectories of sound system event intent. As facilitators and participants ('y' intended) we are 'empleasured activists'; non-conformers are welcomed.<sup>9</sup> The raves of my youth, held in disused buildings and natural amphitheatres stacked high with speakers, were a chosen alternative to a drunk culture entertained by sing-a-long reminiscences and comfortable states of sameness. As ravers, in contrast, we were/are present/future oriented. Delighted by the pleasures of vibration and people, we experiment with movement, resonant connections with others and multiple possibilities of selves. Enlivened by the feeling of potential, we allow our imaginings to expand beyond the limits of everyday culture. In communal experimentation and intra-action, together we are formed *otherwise* to what lies outside this sanctuary. Everybody Sound System is re/imagining our formative beginnings of self that took/take place in the dance party.

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 164.

<sup>2</sup> Audre Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power (1986)', in *Pleasure Activism*, ed. adrienne maree brown (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019), 27–35, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject'. *Hypatia* 8, no. 1 (1993), 1–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810298>, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Paul C. Jasen, *Low End Theory: Bass, Bodies and the Materiality of Sonic Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 172. Jasen argues that low frequency sound is a 'bio-aesthetic technology'.

<sup>6</sup> Alice O'Grady, 'Spaces of Play: The Spatial Dimensions of Underground Club Culture and Locating the Subjunctive'. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, no. 1 (2012), 86-106, 95.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Refer Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 120-54.

Barad states: "The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual "interaction", which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the "components" of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful".

<sup>9</sup> 'Partycipant' is a neologism I coined to emphasis the entanglement of participants as being more than individuals doing their own thing, but instead being 'party to', and of course, here for the party.