

The Ultimate Dancers



After a major crisis, the energy produced by dancing bodies inside clubs is stored and used as a local resource. The characters in this story are aware of the ambiguity of their work, but they are mostly driven by the pleasure and community-making when dancing. What's more, their routine hints at a society where friendship and communal living is a widespread practice.

I've just woken up. I still feel the muscle hangover after seventeen hours dancing in the club. R and V, who are still sleeping with the others, call it "the dancing spaceship." In the city it is widely known as "the bodies' power plant." I like to refer to it as "the club" because it holds memories of a past that we don't remember but can feel. In there, our bodies move in gestures that others danced long ago and large amounts of joyful energy. We sweat a shared history. Music is our home and we strike from work at work. Within the club we step into an ancestral time of rhythms, which repeat the freshness of a shared sensation in motion. It is individual but never entirely ours. On the dance floor the future moves backwards and the past moves forwards. We are very skilled at turning exhaustion into exuberance. While dancing, the energy produced by our shifting bodies is stored and distributed all over the city. Eventually, someone noticed that the energy produced from joy is far more powerful than anything else. So we are also a device, an easy source of power. But the pleasure of dancing overlooks the practical reasons for doing so. Inside the spaceship, body beats mind.

On the day I was hired, they had just mentioned that dancing before the major energy crisis was different. They highlighted that the energy of thousands of bodies was not only lost in the very instant, but also wasted forever over decades. K, who sees ghosts everywhere, feels all that unstored memory in our house. Months ago they eagerly tried to enter the energy tanks, but almost died in the attempt. Since then they no longer dance, their mood stiffens in offices with ergonomic chairs and over-caffeinated drinks. For the power station, we are essential, but we are fungible. The same is true for the club. That's how we all get in, replacing someone we don't know. Yet, there's something beautiful in knowing that your dance is leaving the club and your energy is spreading through the city. The heat of your body warms bodies you'll never meet. It is humbling, and also frightening, to be a resource. P, with their instructed manners, says this is an ironic balance: to be a resource of one's own needs.



Now they are living in another community. They sleep in group beds and no one pairs up with anyone else. Neither do we, but we don't need behavioural instruction manuals. They will never admit it, but P likes to work at the club to feel alone within the crowd. V says they suffer from the syndrome of the only child we never were. P also won't admit to being shaken by family albums in the few history archives left. They are against traditions but we are already a tradition.

P dances very well. They know how to hold many other bodies in theirs by borrowing gestures. They call it mirroring. Every time they say it, I get a wink. It is their way of pointing out that images in mirrors neither last nor belong to anyone. I smile back and talk about our dialects. It's my active-sweet way of annoying P. Everything that has to do with couples makes them nervous. My frustration surfaces when they don't want to understand that by style I mean temporary forms and not everlasting contents. There is a genuine fear in P of not thinking the right thing, a lingering wariness of individuals and vague meanings. Their paranoid attitude towards language still amuses me. The last T-shirt slogan that K got on the fourth-hand market looks like it was made for them: "Disbelieved Beliefs." I'm the closest thing P has to a partner but they will never admit this. They live in a world where number two does not exist, nor does number one. They say they work for the common good. P lies to themselves but not to us. They dance to find themselves and to release from ethics that both nourish and squeeze them so much. My reasons for dancing are polyrhythmic. Sometimes I go to relish the end of a world that never ends. At others, to get rid of my reality in a vague feeling of belonging. At others, to meet S or The Scene. At others, to release emotions without putting words to them. And sometimes I even go because energy supplies are running low.

When I got out of bed M laughed at me, calling me Trinity. They know that I'm by no means a fan of turn-of-the-century neo-Matrix-techno-aesthetics. I slept with my clothes on. I usually shower after work. K gets nervous about the energy transfer on the dance floor. They smell ghosts in our sweat. M licked my arm for a while claiming a lack of toxins. Then they whispered "twenty-seven kilometers" into my after-work earworms. They claim they can taste how far I have gone. What M doesn't know is that I know they snoop on my energy meter when I am sleeping. At the last assembly at P's house we got lost in overdue debates to nowhere about the distribution of toxicity and guilt with their home mates. What M thinks is a real waste, also of time, is their insistence on our working practices poisoning waters with substances. But it's all part of nature! They even say we like to sweat and pee more than we should. And we also like the sweat of other people, much to K's misfortune. On guilt, P and their household hackers are surer than we are: it's a self-absorbed feeling that only pretends to care about others. They do not know how to live with contradictory instructions. They find it hard to relate to those who are different from them and



side with those who are different like them. If they were energy dancers like us, they would go only to techno sessions. After their first shifts on the techno ship, R and V returned home with a new theory: the link between human temperament and music. On the dance floor it would be easier to interact with P's mates. Dancing always shortens distances. Differences await for us outside the club, when we get high on the ethics of language.

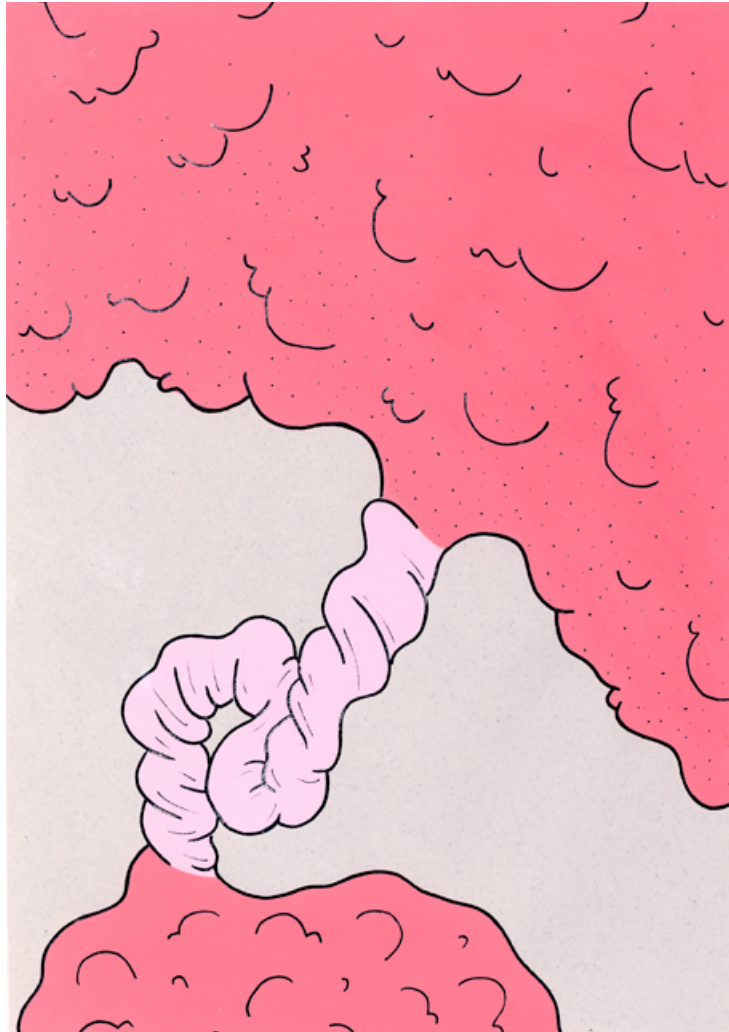
Whenever we dance we always come back with a little revelation to share at home. All the words we don't use at work step on our little hungry mouths at breakfast. I myself came back very excited last week. After licking S's forearm during a break and sharing kisses with a few unnamed dancers, I realised that our bodies turn fresh water salty. V also got excited about the idea and accidentally spat their third coffee of the morning in my face to say: we are estuaries! M told us it was too early to be so cheesy by drawing a heart with their hands and went to the bathroom to flush salt water and processed serotonin. P, who came to stay with us after their sleepless shift, looked askance at the T-shirt I wear as pyjamas: "watch me dance." It was given to me by K after one of their many visits to the retro-nostalgia dealers. I shielded P's criticism by saying that dancing is an endeavor that asks us to watch others dance. P whispered into their glass of magnesium water "so is leaving the ego in the wardrobe." With a gentle look I sent them a telepathic warning: "right thinking misses life."

R walked into the kitchen in their self-made dancing costume. For a second, I wondered whether they were going to or coming back from work. Their sweat-proof glitter make-up was undamaged. They yawned "good morning" at four o'clock in the afternoon. I caught blurred images of us dancing together during my last minutes in the club, me reluctantly dressed in black and them dress-code free. R joined the later gqom shift, which was shorter than the techno shift. The dress-code is only mandatory for techno sessions. It is true that it stimulates a feeling of belonging, it syncs us better with the music and we are also more in tune with its long history. V came to the conclusion that repetitive bodies endure repetitive rhythms better. Before I left the club R and I broke the rules again by dancing one style within another. It is our way of showing that we don't belong to any particular sound but to music. We both like the anticipatory memory of techno, but also moving in the uncertainty of many other rhythms. With the last jump of make-believe drum 'n' bass I gave them a hug and went to take back my daytime identity at the locker. On my way out, one of the bouncers smiled seriously at me. If allowed, I would love to dance with them too, rewinding into the sexless eroticism of acid house. Even if I bend the rules from time to time, they can't complain. My body delivers a lot of energy and supplies effective empathy.

R sat next to me in their post-spaceship fasting mood. On my way I stopped at a restaurant to order several miso-flavored,



over-vitamins takeaway meals. At home almost everyone has lost their work ID cards. R thanked me for the food, joking about how absent-mindedness improves dancing. I reported that this time not only did they not try to make me pay for the extra food, but they also thanked me for our social work. M showed up in the last sentences of the conversation, ready to leave for the factory in their favourite T-shirt. The line “utopia is a feeling” repeated so many times that you get dizzy trying to follow the small print in fluorescent. If there are UK Garage sessions at the power station, M doesn’t mind not resting from the previous



shift. They pointed to their T-shirt and we cheered on behalf of dancing. We didn’t need anyone to say again how invigorating it is to find people who understand our work and don’t consider it a hedonistic diversion. We are often blamed for utopian privilege. But our utopia is social work: it is the effort of a few that benefits many. P stepped into our domestic chatter to say that ignorance is a political position.

V asked about S. They also met while dancing, during the speech reduction patches. S still hasn’t tried to get rid of language. They like to talk during breaks, sharing with whomever they can their theory of the power plant actually being an untapped laboratory for surfaces research. There is always a fellow dancer ready to listen to how rhythms bounce off walls, floors, glass bottles, our



skin, and even the fabric of our history-making clothes. S is as obsessed with surfaces as they are with cleanliness or UK Garage. How they can get out of the factory without getting their clothes dirty is still a mystery. M put on their coat and backpack, making sure that if S showed up tonight, they would spill beer on the floor to see their cute annoyed face. When they left the house we could still feel a trilling “yes tonight” from the street. S and I met in the toilet queue. Wiping an invisible stain on their trousers, they said that alcohol should be banned so our shoes don’t stick to the floor. When offering my bottle of water, they would drink without hesitation, unknowingly toasting our starting relationship and upcoming conversations about The Scene and The Professionals. P believes that our wider experience renders us arrogant. They also say that our sense of ownership over the community contradicts community values. And they always say this with a particular accent that sounds very much like community arrogance.

S is one of those rare exceptions to the unspoken rule. In general, the less we know about each other, the closer we feel. At home we are not fools and we also know that the less we talk, the more we dance. The more energy we produce, the more rest days we have. The more rest days we have, the more we want to dance again. R says that we are a starving self-eating being. It was easy to reconnect with S. Although they are very playful, drum ‘n’ bass shifts are not very crowded. No matter the supplements you take, you also need to be fit. Dancing in those sessions is like opening a secret. That’s how I felt when I saw S in the middle of the dance floor, moving the way I move. We would later discover that we feel a similar nostalgia for times we did not live. S and I gave The Scene its name during a long break in the snack area. In a techno shift, we would label The Professionals.

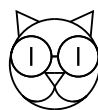
What is The Scene, R asked, amused, hunting for tofu cubes in the soup. P answered with my definition. The Scene are the dance partners you never talk to or get too intimate with but miss when they are not there. As P does not know S yet, it was my turn to answer about The Professionals. I glanced at P and said, out of the blue, that we could be one of them. I continued, focusing on R and V, who always welcome any reflection on the spaceship no matter the ethics of my comments. They are good looking, they dress as others try to dress, they make the rules they themselves follow and they dance non-stop but move slightly. V laughed when I added that furtive and somewhat jealous glances reward their restrained and elegant attitudes. R emerged from their soup and blurted out looking at V, they are the Perfect Followers we talked about last night, the intruders from within! With their abstract impulses, R started to stumble over their own ideas: the ultimate image, the image without images, the reality performing representation, the genuine fake, the spaceship’s makers ... And just as P was about to start doing what they like best, tidying up other people’s ideas, the voice of K came out of the kitchen pipes. “I’ve made it! I got into the energy tanks!”



This story is inspired by many conversations and ideas with friends, mostly before, during, and after dancing together. Like dance steps, ideas are never entirely our own.

BIO

Sonia Fernández Pan writes, makes (in)dependent projects, and dances anonymously. Friendly conversations, desires, and entropy are part of their way of doing things with others. Fernández Pan is host of the podcast series “Promise no Promises” at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW and has recently published *Edit* (Caniche, 2022), a book of written remixes inspired by the logics and ethics of dancing together.



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