

PREFACE

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you're invited

a playlist for errant ethnographers

now playing: "i'm coming out," diana ross, 1980

"i'm coming out / i want the world to know / got to let it show"

come sip with us

we pregame with riggs and rubin and lorde and fresh mint and lavender tea, spiked for some with honey and others with rum. we take turns crowding in the too-small mirror, brushing waves forward and slicking edges back. unscented shea butter smooths over our rough elbows and frayed nerves—it's been such a long time. reluctant and resolute, we pawn the sweet solitude of books and cats and apps for the heady promise of a good time.

now playing: "you make me feel (mighty real)," sylvester, 1978

"i feel real / when you touch me"

come stand with us

this is when the doubts creep in, standing in line outside the club with a hundred other queermos freezing in their saturday night best. i shift my weight from one foot to the other, envious of the bulky jacket we all told

you to leave in the trunk. self-satisfied but not smug, you let us all huddle around your fluffy mustard faux fur, a goosepimpled nest of relation, swaying almost imperceptibly in anticipation.

now playing: “woman is a word,” empress of, 2016

“i’m only a woman if woman is a word”

come strut with us

finally in, we are wordless and intent on the first circuit around the club. like a school of fish or thought, we wind around the perimeter of the dance floor and past both bars, drinking in the vibe as we pour ourselves into it. looking at everyone and no one in particular, we surveil our kin and commit the mood to memory. this, too, is fieldwork.

now playing: “ima read,” zebra katz featuring njena reddd foxxx, 2012

“school’s in—ima read that bitch / ima write a dissertation to excuse my shit”

come shake with us

before we can make it back to the bar to lean and preen, a subterranean bass lick hits and scatters us onto the dance floor, limbs akimbo. hips sway a bit too hard, knees creak and pop and settle in. we flock into a formation that is ancient but not ahistorical, flexing and vibrating our asses to the collective beat. we read the fuck out of each other. this is epistemology.

now playing: “CINDERELLA parts i and ii,” chika, 2021

“what she doin’ at a party like this?”

come swoon with us

in line again, this time for the bathroom. you nudge me excitedly and tell me not to look. i look. they're unkempt and nervous and fucking perfect, just like you. i wave them over, feigning familiarity to act like we were kin before this moment, this night, this life produced us as such. they slide between us with only a nanosecond's hesitation, meeting your twinkle with their own. what do you call a flock of wingwomen?

now playing: “everybody everybody,” black box, 1990

“own my own / so free / sad and free”

come scream with us

like ants in a sudden downpour, we burrow back to the dance floor, ready for rupture. this is it—the rite has begun. the bassline hits and an infectious “owww” ad lib calls us to ceremony. stylized and deliberate improvisation gives way to collectivized movement—anthems are no good for solos. it seems like we are lip syncing ’til the DJ cuts the music out and “everybodyyy!” crescendos naked and triumphant against the dank walls, echoing our release in a way that eludes representation.

now playing: “MONTERO (call me by your name),” lil nas x, 2021

“if eve ain’t in your garden / you know that you’re kin”

come sweat with us

lubricated joints carve shapes in space; repetition gives us a container for play. i hit my favorite high-knee triple step and a loose bouncy cipher forms around me and another aging club kid. i don't recognize their face, but i know their steps. a telltale right-toe wiggle invites me to mirror, and my breath catches as we lock damp hands and hit the kid 'n play duet spin in rhythm. *it's been so long*. breaking the meniscus of my own desire, i turn outward to the onlookers and grab two folks into dance with us, while you

do the same. the circle breaks into a crowd. i scan the faces for yours, worried for a moment until i see your dazed smile and sweaty torso pinned to the wall by thighs too thick for description.

now playing: “both hands (live),” ani difranco, 1997

“i am writing graffiti on your body / i am drawing the story of how hard we tried”

come suck with us

you grab your (now somehow sticky?!) jacket with your right hand and interlace their warm thick fingers with your left. [i know we look very buttoned up scurrying down the halls between the AQA business meeting and presidential sessions, and queer seems almost totally abstracted from sex by this point, but “almost” is the key word here—we still like to fuck.] stall door, train door, bedroom door. jaw held shut and then gaping ajar. scuffed knees, smudged lipstick, the flat scent of silicone, accidental elbow to the eye—are you okay?

is this okay?

now playing: “chanel,” frank ocean, 2017

“my guy pretty like a girl / and he got fight stories to tell”

come slip away with us

we may not be able to escape representation, but we can escape. together. let’s keep the party going at the after-hours spot or hit the twenty-four-hour donut shop that has vegan crullers. then we could watch the sunrise behind the condos that used to be homes. or we could just sit back to back on the el and read theory out loud to each other ’til the sun comes up.

listen at <https://apple.co/3Gf7mdx>