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6 DONNA SUMMER'S "LOVE TO LOVE YOU BABY" (1975)

The following quotations, one from Donna Summer (1948–2012) and one from Giorgio Moroder (b. 1940), describe the same event, the composition of the iconic "Love to Love You, Baby" (1975), one of the earliest international disco sensations and a song whose electrosexual message sent crowds rioting.

> I had this idea at home one day, and I ran into the studio, and I said Giorgio, I have this idea. Would you—do you think you could write something to it? And I sort of sang it to him, and he kept saying it over, he says "love to love you, I love to love you . . ." He kept rubbing his chin and thinking like a little mad scientist, and then he went into the studio, and Giorgio had written this track.
>
> And I began to—he asked me to go in and start singing something, and I didn't have any words other than love to love you, baby. So I was improvising on the track live. And that really became "Love to Love You, Baby," the original track. . . . And then he went from there and produced something, and then I began to sing it. And then I began to play with the, there weren't that many words. So I played with the sound of the music, you know. (Singing) "I Love to Love . . ."
>
> You know, we didn't have the same technology we have today. So I had to do everything with my own voice.
>
> —Donna Summer[1]

> She started to moan, but it wasn't really, you know, the real one. So finally I said there's only one thing to do . . . not what you think [audience erupts]. So, first of all, I threw the husband out, because he was the main problem, so

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> we dimmed the lights and I let the tape run—it was one tape, but she sang it a few times, but then the moaning she started from the beginning to the ending in one go and the lights were down. I could barely see her face, and she probably couldn't see me—although I would have been a great inspiration. [audience laughter] . . .
> —Giorgio Moroder[2]

Today, "Love to Love You, Baby" is co-credited to Giorgio Moroder, Donna Summer, and assistant producer Pete Bellotte.[3] Both Summer and Moroder tell the story that Summer was the instigator behind the track's memorable sexual moaning—the quintessential feature compelling Casablanca Records executive and founder Neil Bogart to sign the singer, produce the song, and later insist on extending it from a three-minute radio reel to a seventeen-minute full-on immersive experience. Summer's mythologization as the "lady of love" and "sexy Cinderella" constructed an idealized image stemming from the popularity of "Love to Love," an ideal I equate with the electrosexual feminized voice from earlier decades. Unlike the earlier tracks from part I, the singer is credited and, indeed, she performed the song over and over again (when permitted by local authorities). Nevertheless, the unethical electroacoustic gap remains intact, since audiences collapsed any distance of the artist and her performance. Her reputation as an insatiable sexbot followed her throughout her career, even bleeding into her personal life.

Though Summer is given full credit for performing on the track (her backup singers are given credit only by first name in the liner notes accompanying the album), something about the rhetoric surrounding the myth of the song's creation discounts Summer's participation in the process. The storytellers echo one another, likely on account of having relayed this experience so many times, but each version contains a telling subtext of the work that goes into creating electrosexual music, a familiar hierarchy of labor in and out of the studio. In some respects, the stories Moroder and Summer respectively convey are unique to this song; still, similar narratives abound in singer–producer collaborations. At issue is the emphasis on Summer's role as a (mere) performer, who implicitly lacks the musical mastery required to compose such a successful track. Like so many other

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singers at that time (recall Ronnie Spector's remarks from the introduction to part II), Summer's performing presence is reduced to a voice and nothing more, while Moroder and Bogart claim the accolades of discovery. In this sense, Summer's story is comparable to the Robinson Crusoe tale from part I, with her in the role of Moroder's Friday. But despite Moroder trying to pillage what he could, Summer's work speaks for itself.

COMPOSING "LOVE TO LOVE"

Figure 6.1 transcribes the "Love to Love" hook Summer describes composing in her interview above with NPR's Terry Gross. Figure 6.2a transcribes the verse producer Moroder later harmonized with some melodic variation. We know from Summer herself that she composed the hook, as one of the song's studio vocalists, Lucy Neale, confirms.[4] It's uncertain who composed the verses' melody, but Neale recalls that when she and the other singers came into the studio, Moroder only had a few chords to work with, and that's what they ended up singing. These harmonies are transcribed in figure 6.2c. Neale suggests that Summer and Bellotte composed the verses together, though usually he would only compose the lyrics. In a later track, "I Feel Love," Bellotte acknowledges that they both wrote the lyrics together, while Moroder came up with the melody, but for "Love to Love," given the accounts above, it seems that Summer also wrote the melody for the verse.[5] Again, as Neale recounts, Moroder only had the harmonies, derived from the verse's descending tetrachord.

As Summer says, there weren't many words to the song, so she used her voice to emulate the kinds of technological transformations that in the early 2000s, when the interview took place, would have been commonplace in recording studios. It's not clear what exactly she sang in that session, since

Figure 6.1
"Ahhh Love to Love You, Baby" hook.

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Figure 6.2a
Melody of verses in Summer's "Love to Love You Baby" outlines a descending chromatic tetrachord every half bar, ending in a "turnaround bar" looping back to the hook (figure 6.1).

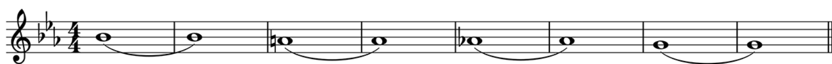

Figure 6.2b
Chromatic descending tetrachord, sustained ambient string background from "Love to Love You Baby" (11:40–12:40).

Figure 6.2c
Parallel chromatic descending tetrachords, backup singer chorus (in black) and sustained ambient string background (in gray) from "Love to Love You Baby" (11:40–12:40). E-flat and G sustained throughout.

Moroder and Summer's stories do not line up and neither were there any backup singers or instrumentalists. What becomes clear from Moroder's testimony, though, is that it is this improvisatory moaning and only the sexy moaning that he wanted attributed to her.

Isolating the strong beats of the verse melody (figure 6.2a) approximately every two bars outlines a descending chromatic tetrachord: G-flat, F, F-flat, E-flat. The motive ends with a "turnaround bar," where B-natural tonicizes the C that returns us to the hook of figure 6.1. The descending chromatic tetrachord returns in the bridge, transposed by the string orchestra (figure 6.2b)[6] and also by the backup vocals, such that together they form divergent yet harmonically complementary figures (figure 6.2c).[7] The backup singers enter in chorus to accompany the strings. Two voices sustain the outer tones—the upper E-flat and lower G—while a middle voice

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descends the chromatic tetrachord, this time transposed and slightly altered, B-flat, C, C-flat, B-flat. The superimposed string tetrachord appears in gray in figure 6.2c to visibly distinguish the vocal and string lines.

In the bridge, the tetrachord figure gives the illusion of descent, yet by the end of the bar we find ourselves, pitch-wise and also harmonically, back where we started with G and B-flat. Rearticulating the E-flat initiates a repeat of the bridge, as the track does numerous times. Alternatively, filling in C together with the existing G and B-flat at the end of the phrase would bring us back to the hook. In this way, the chromatic tetrachord in effect behaves like an unresolvable Shepard tone, immanently descending like an audible revolving barber's pole.

From this brief sketch, we can easily imagine how these two motives, the hook and the descending chromatic tetrachord—the very kernels Summer brought to Moroder, as recollected above—served as compositional fodder for the harmonic and melodic content of a large portion, if not all of the song. Summer came up with the melodies. Backing vocalist Lucy Neale—who sings on the bridge—explained to me in an interview quoted below that during the recording session in which she took part, Moroder only had the simple harmonic sequence (of figure 6.2c) to go on, as the improvised studio sessions with various instrumentalists thereafter had not yet been recorded. In this chapter I show that Donna Summer had an active role as a composer and an equal hand in the production process of the revolutionary "Love to Love" song, much more than the impressionable pawn her producers and record executives made her out to be.

MYTHOLOGIES OF THE DIVA

Casablanca Records founder Neil Bogart had a heavy hand in cultivating Summer's diva stature, sending her to Hollywood for a complete makeover and famously prompting radio stations to air the full-length track at midnight, with the slogan "seventeen minutes of love with Donna."[8] Radio play left open the acousmatic gap for individual sexual fantasy, but Bogart ensured that radio listeners closed the gap by transforming their electrosexual encounter into fantasies of Summer herself.

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Obviously, to become as successful as she was, Summer had to be outgoing, so her perceived image was not entirely fabricated. While in the cast of *Hair* in Munich, Germany, the acting warm-ups included what she describes as "touchy-feely exercises" and she even featured in the show's nude scene, which she saw as a "celebration of the freedom of nature."[9] Given these events, "Love to Love" was, at least initially for Summer, an expression of freedom, perhaps even a form of resistance to the domesticated image of women's sexuality during the postwar years. However, Casablanca's commodification of Summer's image—her body and her voice—obscured that message of sexual protest. As Summer explains, "Part of the problem was that Neil had created a completely new persona for me, which had absolutely nothing to do with who I really was," and yet she was bound to fill the role in order to continue performing, to meet the obligations of her contract.[10]

Bellotte relays one myth of how these events unfolded: "Bogart was having an orgy at his house, there was a lot of coke going on and, to use [Bogart's] own language, they were all 'f*cking to this track' and the crowd there had him replay the song over and over again."[11] A more realistic story is one told in Summer's autobiography. In January 1975, Moroder took the track with him to the annual music business conference *Marché International du Disque et de l'Edition Musicale* (MIDEM) in the South of France, where he met Neil Bogart, who proposed that the "Love to Love" demo be extended into a seventeen-minute track to cover the whole side of an album—just enough time to "get the job done."[12] In 1975, shortly after her first divorce, Summer left her life in Germany and returned to the US to work under the Casablanca Records label, a move Summer felt was a step backward from her theatrical success abroad.[13]

So that she could easily come to represent the message of the song, Summer had to embody the typical "one-dimensionality" ascribed to this new identity of a mindless and insatiable sexbot.[14] She needed to appear both miraculous and unique, as one-of-a-kind while also seeming somewhat simple and easy (to define). In interviews, Bellotte and Moroder stress how little effort Summer exerted in the process of recording, discounting her efforts as "natural talent." Although Summer came up with the lyrics

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and the melody to "Love to Love," Moroder took care to emphasize that Summer's vocals on the demo were improvised and that they were even recorded in one take, contradicting Summer's own recollection of the process as iterative. In Moroder's words:

> What was remarkable about her was that she would come into the studio to record a specific song at, say, four in the afternoon, she would then talk and talk and talk for a couple of hours, and all of a sudden she would look at her watch, say, "I've got to hurry," and go to the mic, sing the track and be gone.

Moroder drives the point home, claiming, "Donna was never involved in the production in any way whatsoever, and she'd never hear any of the songs until they were totally finished and mixed." All this is to say that when interviewed about her working process, he either does not mention or significantly downplays Summer's role, diminishing the fact that the iconic melody was her own original tune and that she enhanced this melody with skills she attained through persistent improvisatory and theatrical training. Tapping into commonplace rhetoric on the laziness of Black laborers, from Moroder's perspective Summer was sitting idly by while her music simply materialized—as if in her time spent in the studio she hadn't heard or produced anything, as if her hours *outside* the studio weren't spent propping up the stage they all had set for her.

Though Summer's public image seems effortless, in reality, work was immeasurable, and likewise, unrelenting. She recalls being "emotionally exhausted," at the height of disco, plagued by insomnia and headaches, and as having undergone a mental, emotional, and physical transformation. In the same *Rolling Stone* interview, she tells the story of an Italian tour where she was transported from one plane to another in a wheelchair.[15] But Summer's physical and emotional battles offstage could be superseded by her "sexy" public persona, and certainly gender and race play no small role in this appearance.[16]

Take, for example, a feature-length interview with Summer appearing in *Ebony* magazine in 1977.[17] The article, attempting to redeem Summer's image as a strong, independent, African-American woman, challenges several circulating rumors about the singer (including the widespread belief

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that she was a man in drag), focusing on Summer's aspirations toward becoming a career-driven professional while balancing her domestic responsibilities. Even in this article that attempts to dispel some of the clout upholding Summer's physical, psychic, and financial exploitation, the author succumbs to raunchy, physically objectifying descriptions of his interviewee in an attempt to supposedly redeem her from some imagined gendered transgression: "As she bends to put an Edith Piaf record on the turntable and her low-cut silk dress reveals the marvelous ripeness of her breasts and clings oh so gently to the curves of her behind, it seems ridiculous that she is defending herself against the absurdity that she may not be a woman at all."[18] Subjecting Summer to such scrutiny alongside a prolonged tangent into the details of how she lost her virginity to emphasize her sexual availability, the article leaves much to be desired in the way of affirmative action.

There is no shortage of evidence that Summer was overexerted, overworked, and underpaid. It is no wonder she identified with the sex workers for whom the lyrics of her many songs advocate a shared vulnerability owing to her unabating physical and emotional labor. Her sexual availability, paired with her perceived celebrity and financial worth, appear to reinforce the stereotype of the "working girl" on a larger scale. It was easy to launch this myth of Summer's frivolity, a dual facet of both her natural talent and erotic allure, since the story mapped onto concurrently running tropes about disco music's creators and audience, as well as centuries-long racist notions of Black women's hypersexuality.[19]

EASY LISTENING THE HARD WAY

Critics of disco, namely rock and classical music fans, stressed the monotony of the disco aesthetic: it is *easy* and *fun* to dance to disco precisely because of its "four-on-the-floor" beat and the supposedly predictable structure of the songs. As Brian Ward snarks, "Just about anyone seemed capable of piecing together a passable disco-by-numbers record."[20] Commonly equated with simplicity, disco's musical and textual repetition becomes transposed onto the identity of the performer who is characterized as leisurely and

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unlaboring. Reinforcement of this leisurely attitude came to define disco in opposition to other forms of music, which is quite a serious accusation when the musical genre is attributed to African-American women performers with a mostly gay fan base.

Summer's "Love to Love" was on heavy rotation in dance clubs (spending four weeks at #1 on the *Billboard* Dance Club Songs chart in 1976),[21] which, in the United States, had long been populated by people at the social margins—predominantly Black and Latino gay men.[22] Like the performer, the music's audience members were pigeonholed, and mainstream musicians and social critics alike adopted negative racializing, gendered, and sexualizing stigmas commonly attached to these communities to describe the music. Such descriptions conflated musical aesthetics with stereotypes derived from idealized perceptions of actual people. These wider perceptions led to a series of hatefully motivated incidents, such as the "disco sucks" slogan of the 1979 Disco Demolition Night, when thousands of people stormed Chicago's Comiskey Park, wreaking havoc on the baseball field and burning tens of thousands of records in protestation of disco.[23] In the words of musicologist Mitchell Morris, "All the world knows by now that 'disco sucks' was a response of thinly disguised homophobia."[24]

Both rock and disco employ an electrified aesthetic, but when this music, marked by homosexual, African-American or Latino men and women, came to top the charts—like when in 1976 "Love to Love You Baby" hit number 2 on the *Billboard* Hot 100—straight, mostly white, male rock critics took to distancing themselves from the demographics, which, again, became conflated with the music's aesthetic qualities.[25] For these critics of disco, unlike the dance club focus on recorded tracks, rock thrived from the *live* evolving energy of a skilled soloist. Musicologist Judith A. Peraino writes of how "recorded repertories" served to advance virtual "homomusical communities" where individuals could entertain sexual notions that would not have been accepted in public spaces dominated by heteronormative expectations. Dance music, on account of its club-based culture, rarely featured musicians in a live performing role, since those who did "play" the music—disc jockeys—were evidently dismissed by critics and reduced to

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a mere playback mechanism. Here, again, we see another method of prioritizing medium ("the recorded character of the recording") above musical content and musical agents.

However, even readings sympathetic to queer culture sometimes end up replicating harmful racial stereotypes. In Peraino's words: "Recordings (on vinyl, tape, or compact disc) can be considered a stand-in for the performer, who is the real focus of attention and object of desire, even fantasy."[26] And extending this fantasy, a decade earlier, Brian Currid illuminated how queer club-goers became fueled by their identification with the sexually liberated diva to act out fantasies of performing the diva together with other dancers.[27] Though Currid's analysis importantly theorized dance clubs as sequestered queer safe havens, his hypothesis of the invisible cyber-diva reinforces the disco singer's iconic status as an immaterial sexual deviant whose digital form has no semblance in the physical world. However optimistic, and necessary as an uplifting queer (white) narrative, Currid inadvertently reprises a trope that affirms the "othered" or alienated "robo-diva"—a performer who no longer embodies the physical presence of a Black woman but rather becomes projected as an alternative and (negatively stigmatized) deviant sexuality that she does not even claim (homosexuality). That is, by way of her gender, the diva is necessarily excluded from having a perspective in this kind of analysis, enforcing divisive boundaries that do not fairly represent either Black women's sexualities, whether straight, gay, or otherwise, or listening practices of gay men, who may not identify with the music in this way and who may even be conscientious to the ways such narratives replicate the derisive tropes of "robo-diva R&B."[28]

Negative reports of electronic dance musics, including disco, appear to have been driven by the same racially motivated reception of hip-hop sampling; namely the argument that invoking technology as a means for musical production was not actually *musical*, only a kind of lazy redundancy or passively replicated sound, and inauthentic.[29] Indeed, though the stigma persists, many of disco's musicians and engineers combatted the static image marketed by disco executives, making it their job to force "dead" music to come alive by way of various production effects, including the cut 'n' mix, segue, and montage.[30] Despite being portrayed among

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(white) rock fans and elitist classical listeners alike as simplistic and easy to come by, in actuality, just like the electronic music of earlier decades, the cutting-edge technology behind disco was hardly "systematic."[31] Making music that sounded endlessly driving and repetitive took a lot of effort, as we see from the cumulative form arising in the brief analysis of the pitch content in the previous section.

Additionally, part of the reason disco production was so expensive was the sheer number of people it involved. Aside from the production team credited on the album—Bellotte (producer); Moroder (arranger, mix-down engineer); Michael Thatcher (string and horn arrangements); Reinhold Mack and Hans Menzel (recording engineers)—before anything could be mixed, additional instrumental and vocal tracks had to be recorded by "Molly" Moll, Nick Woodland, Pete Bellotte (guitars); Dave King (bass), Mike Thatcher, Giorgio Moroder (keyboards); Martin Harrison (drums); Franz Deuber (string section); Bernie Brocks, Giorgio Moroder (percussion); Lucy Neale, Betsy Allen, Gitta Walther (backup singers).[32]

In the seventeen-minute version, from which all subsequent singles were then edited down, even the disco groove was not easy to create. Bellotte recalls that they initially tried a generic drum machine for the basic beat, but the sound was so horrible they couldn't feature it on the album. The engineers were required to seek out prerecorded drum samples onto which a live drummer was then dubbed—and this later became common practice in many styles of music. The practice was especially widespread in the 1970s among Jamaican Dub producers.[33] In the US, such dubbing became a staple through disco and James "Tip" Wirrick, musical director and guitarist for the disco celebrity Sylvester, remembers that "In those days . . . you would literally scour records and the airwaves for any section of one to two bars of just drums . . ."—a now commonplace practice thanks to hip hop.[34]

And though Robby Wedel had figured out how to sync multiple tracks through the Moog synthesizer, there was still quite a bit of human performance involved. After recording and splicing the tracks, all the takes had to line up, and since the beat track was only so long, engineers were forced to begin recording maybe twenty or thirty times before being able

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to complete a single take of the entire song. Reinhold Mack recalls, "The whole thing is, in a way, a live performance. . . . Part of it is the journey of getting there."[35] And Moroder attests: "All this talk of machines and industry makes me laugh. Even if you use synthesisers and sequencers and drum machines, you have to set them up, to choose exactly what you are going to make them do. It is nonsense to say that we make all our music automatically." This description resonates with ongoing arguments still today regarding algorithms and computerized automation.

Several studio musicians at Giorgio Moroder's Musicland were brought in to play individual tracks, and these tracks were then subjected to the experimental recording techniques of engineers Reinhold Mack and Hans Menzel. Whether in the violin-heavy bridge or the bass-driven breakdown, even microphone and amp positioning became crucial to the recording process, since these determined various timbres, reverb, and other supposedly "synthetic/synthesized" effects.[36] Dismissal of dance music as leisure music not only affects creators but also stigmatizes disco's audiences, whose affinity for this music is likewise cast by critics as an aesthetic predisposition toward the simplistic and synthetic—regardless of the actual tastes of listeners who might enjoy many genres, even those that critics deride as conflicting according to aesthetics and/or demographics.

With all of the work that went into producing the "Love to Love" track and all these cooks in the kitchen, it surely took a lot of work to secure Donna Summer as the sole representative for the sexually allusive components of the track.

SEXUAL VENTRILOQUISM

Because of her training in classical music and as a musical theater belter, Summer recalls being uncomfortable singing in the soft, breathy vocal style of "Love to Love," a song she never dreamed would gain any public traction.[37] Pop scholar Jon Stratton hears Summer's breathiness as a disguise. Not only is the sexual cooing foreign to Summer's own usual performance, but the kind of timbres she uses code her performance within dominant hearings of white women's sexual performances.[38] Stratton traces Summer's

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rehearsed strategy through African-American gospel (though her uncharacteristic breathy singing is contrasted to gospel's typical belting) to Ray Charles's "What'd I say" (rather more overtly sexual in comparison to Summer who doesn't invoke the quintessential scream) but, surprisingly, he does not draw comparisons with familiar icons of Black women's sexuality like Josephine Baker. Rather, Stratton aligns Summer's work with a white sexual history somewhat removed from her own notion of subjecthood and self, arguing that Summer dons a white persona, to tease out something akin to whiteface.

Stratton suggests Summer took inspiration for the role from either Marilyn Monroe or Brigitte Bardot: "By thinking of herself as the most hypersexualized white woman in then-recent history," Summer unconsciously removes herself from popular imaginings of Black promiscuity (the lewd primitive Jezebel or the Mammy—subservient to the family in every way, especially the master of the house), "acting, [and] thus alleviating some of the guilt she felt as a Christian."[39] As if, for Summer, whiteness were aligned with a more forgivable sexual identity, Stratton apparently identifies white sexual expressions in music as less risqué than Black sexual expressions, reverting to a centuries-old racist dichotomy between the hypersexualization of Black performers and white supremacist rhetoric that valorizes sexual deprivation in white women. In Stratton's words:

> [Donna] Summer did not imagine herself as Monroe experiencing sexual pleasure but as Monroe acting the experience of sexual pleasure. At no point in this chain is there any claim to there being an actual sexual experience. What we have is Summer's idea of what Monroe would have sounded like performing sexual pleasure; that is, the representation of sexual pleasure on the long version of "Love To Love You Baby" is Summer's idea of what the woman who was thought by many, perhaps we should add men, to be the most sensual woman in America would have sounded like experiencing sexual pleasure.[40]

Certainly, Stratton's account resonates, in part, with Summer's experiences. But rather than attribute sole responsibility to Summer, as if *she wanted it*, in Summer's account, it was her producers who insisted she emulate these actresses, and, she adds, "I even dared, as a black woman, to portray the

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famous *Seven Year Itch* Marilyn Monroe pose, which continued to perpetuate my sexual image, to Neil's [Bogart's] delight."[41] In many interviews, and her autobiography, Summer repeatedly stresses coercion as the fuel for her sexually available reputation.

Like most of Summer's reception owing largely to "Love to Love," Stratton's analysis focusses on the extended passage of moaning Summer performs at the song's unusual "break."[42] For hip-hop scholar Mark Katz the break is "often called the 'get-down part,' in other words, the most danceable part of a song."[43] Stratton points out in his analysis that Summer's moaning enters as new material and therefore serves as a formal "break" from what happened earlier in the song, and yet Summer's subdued, breathy vocal quality couched in percussion-less instrumentals departs from the anticipated climactic arrival typical of most breaks. Rather than a singular arrival, the song taps into newfound public awareness of women's ability to experience multiple orgasms, music, too, adapting at that time to a "new possibility of end-less female sexual pleasure."[44] Robert Fink similarly alludes to the anticlimactic nature of Summer's endless moaning, comparing this moment in the song to minimalist art music from Philip Glass and Steve Reich, as freeing in its mutation and metastasizing of the classical tension-release via cyclical repetition.[45] An interesting reversal here is that rather than note Summer's performance as an expression of abnormal sexuality, Fink pathologizes a teleology that is decidedly associated by critics of disco and minimalism alike with "straight white masculinity."[46]

Fink identifies the singular building drive to climax as the historically valorized goal of teleologically directed "desire" in phenomenologies of both music and erotics. Whereas electronic dance music has been derided by fans of both rock and Western Art Music alike for its anti-teleological stasis, Fink shows how disco and minimalism do not deny the "tension-release arc," but that such unabating repetition "reconfigure(s) a fundamental phenomenological aspect of the Western listening experience: the sense that the music has a coherent *teleology*. . . . The feeling that the music is 'going somewhere.'"[47] In Fink's definition: "a complete tension-release arc might be much smaller than the piece, perhaps as small as the four-bar rhythmic cycle (three bars of groove plus a final 'turnaround' bar that leads back to the beginning again)

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that is the primary building block of disco, house, and techno, or the four-to-six-fold repetitions of measure-long modules in a typical minimalist process piece."[48] One such example of this reconfigured tension-release arc occurs in the successive combination of figures 6.1 and 6.2a. Together, these two motives, the verse and the hook, relay a complete tension-release cycle and a quintessential teleological drive on a diminutive scale, but one that does not really reach any determinable goal or "climax." Indeed, Fink's analysis revolves around and builds to what he identifies as a momentous key change much later in the song:

> After eight minutes at one pitch level, the music lurches up a whole step from C to D. . . . This is not a modulation in the traditional tonal sense—the bass moves right back down again. But it does represent the first time in the entire song that the harmonies have not been either the simple presentation of a chord based on C, or an obvious circle of fifths turnaround leading right back to C. Over the course of the next "variation" (8:30–10:45), this C-D bass oscillation recurs as the music for the first time explores other sonorities than Cm_7 and its functional preparation.[49]

In other words, outside of this moment, the melodic, harmonic, and in essence structural framing of the entire seventeen-minute track rests on the two opening figures, the hook and the verse that Summer composed prior to meeting up with Moroder.

Most notably, in this break we hear the only major harmonic departure from Cm7 and its functional preparation—and even this departure lasts only moments.[50] Fink frames his analysis around this moment and its structural surroundings in the song's break, which he characterizes as "a remarkable instance of controlled musical improvisation"—this we know from Summer and Moroder's accounts—as well as "a stretch of careful, gradual process leading to a clear teleological release that sounds, in this case, like exactly what it is supposed to be—a sexual orgasm."[51] And, this, my friends, is key. "Sounds . . . like," but to whom?

Fink's justification for the analysis is to appeal to listeners who might prioritize certain kinds of music over disco and minimalism on account of their perceived repetitiveness, which these critics dismiss as somehow absent

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the teleologically driven desire such listeners value as a facet of "good" music. Fink, therefore, seeks to demonstrate how "It is possible for music to sound entirely different than Beethoven [i.e., Western classical] or Little Richard [i.e., rock] and still do cultural work by affirming the construction of desire."[52] This may very well be true, but it's not immediately clear—and maybe this is my cultural distance both as a woman of color (who also admittedly has sex with women) and as someone approaching this music a decade-and-a-half later—why we should expect to hear desire in music. Is desire a quintessential feature of *all* music? Such an assumption leans desperately close to the presumption that equates music with pleasure, beneficial health properties, or even music as (mere) entertainment with no further purpose or function.[53]

Absent this requirement to arouse, an alternative hearing would be that Summer's "soft-core" virtual elation does not necessarily move people to dance or even entice any physical movement in its listeners. Though sexually allusive, Summer's sexy digression sounds more like an "anti-break," a moment that distracts and detracts from dancing both in its musical qualities—including downplayed rhythmic impetus—as well as the overt and perhaps exaggerated sexual urging, its over-the-top performance arguably more of a put off than a turn on, especially for listeners clued in to the forced performativity of it all. Club dancers may feel awkward hearing the overt sexualization in the dark or find themselves in competition with her unending vocalized ecstasy and thus alienated from their own terminating bodily experiences. Stratton identifies Summer's orgasmic moaning as near musical extension to her broad melodic range, thereby idealizing the "lack" of visible sexual evidence (which we might construe in a Lacanian framing) as an open-ended invitation to explore the imaginative extremes of listeners' own sexual fantasies. His hearing in effect enables a stereotype of hypersexual availability to be transposed from this singular performance onto multiple performers, who are perceived to embody similar musical and performative characteristics. Such hearings, including Currid's and even Fink's, frame desire as implicitly goal-directed, even if the goal is never achieved because they assume a misogynist cycle of sexual performance → sexual availability → sexual consummation, as a teleological narrative that *ought* to end in the consummation of an act, even when

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no such act occurs. This Lacanian lack—this "gap" between what we perceive to hear and what may have actually happened or what is happening as we listen—returns us once more to the constraints of the electroacoustic game. And, again, the joke is on her.

SUCCEEDING "LOVE TO LOVE"

Donna Summer has expressed concern about her influential role as a diva, the roots of her iconic image mostly having to do with clothing (or lack thereof)—the white dress designed by Bill Gibb in which Summer appeared on the "Love to Love You Baby" album cover, and, of course, her iconic sound: her undeniably sexual moaning in the song. The dress became a symbol of her sexual prowess, clearly inspiring Rihanna's "good girl" image in the video for her single "Umbrella" from the album *Good Girl Gone Bad*. Robin James observes that the "good girl" in this video dons a "white dress, fresh face, warm strings, major mode," an image juxtaposed with the "bad girl," evinced by a "minor mode, heavy synths, black fetish-gear-like clothes, heavy makeup, Æon Flux hair, and showers of sparks," an image reminiscent of Summer's *film noir* inspired track "Bad Girls" (1979), which, like "Love to Love You Baby," was also produced by Moroder and Bellotte with Casablanca Records.

When Summer approached Bogart in 1979 to release the single "Bad Girls"—the first of many songs in which she personified a sex worker—she was flat out refused by the executive who insisted the track was "too rock . . . and not dance enough" for her. Given the typical rock/disco opposition, Bogart's decision was clearly motivated by racially coded genre policing, an aspect punctuated by the fact that he attempted to secure Cher for the recording.[54] In Summer's words: "Although I grew up on and loved R&B music, I was much more of a pop-rock, folk-oriented artist. But my skin was brown, so I was automatically packaged as an R&B act."[55] Despite all this, Summer aspired to evolve as a musician and perform styles of music beyond disco. She eventually went directly to Moroder and the track was recorded. But, in 1980, after several run-ins of this sort, including financial misrepresentation, Summer broke contract with Casablanca. Her next

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album *The Wanderer* (perhaps fodder for Rønsholdt's "die Wanderin" from chapter 5)—the inaugural album launching Geffen Records—cemented her expanded range as it was subsequently recognized by a Grammy nomination for Best Female Rock Vocal Performance for the song "Cold Love."

Even with her diverse talents, Summer was not fairly compensated for her music. Breaking contract with Casablanca Records caused her to lose out on royalties. She was already embroiled in a ten-million-dollar lawsuit accusing Neil Bogart and his wife Joyce (Summer's manager under the label) of financial fraud and misrepresentation, arguing that "the Bogarts jointly made managerial decisions primarily to benefit Casablanca rather than herself."[56] But this sort of fiscal undercutting was par for the course in Moroder's studio. Backing vocalist Lucy Neale referred to several such incidents:

> Dave King, the bass player, came up with that iconic bass line, and after the song was a hit, he tried to sue Giorgio for some of the composer rights because he considered his inventing that bass line as part of the composition. He did not prevail, but I understand where he was coming from. . . . Once the instrumental tracks were laid down, we laid down our layers of backing vocals. . . . We got our 100 [Deutsche Marks] for that title [Silver Convention's "Fly, Robin, Fly"] and for "Love to Love You" and every other title we sang back up on. Never mind that they sold millions!![57]

Though King may not have had a case against Moroder, R&B band The O'Jays maybe would have, considering how closely the baseline from "Love to Love" resembles their 1973 hit "For the Love of Money," which achieved #3 on the U.S. *Billboard* R&B chart.

As we will see when I return to "Love to Love" in chapter 10, for listeners in the 1970s, the 1990s, and today, the song carries a dose of sex, yes, but sex is not timeless, and the song necessarily encapsulates other musical and cultural representations at various registers. Most importantly for our purposes, the form of desire "Love to Love You Baby" captures does not implicitly collapse into gendered and racialized stereotypes confirmed by the cycle: sexual performance → sexual availability → sexual consummation; rather, this happens only in reception. Of course, that so

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many listeners hear "Love to Love You Baby" as sexually suggestive indicates a consensus of sorts. But whose hearings are being privileged in these analyses? In other words, who hears the music as arousing? And, most importantly, what kind of sexuality is being performed? Despite the critical emphasis on moaning, the moaning part of "Love to Love You Baby" is not the part that other Black artists, including TLC and Beyoncé, have chosen to sample. Indeed, as pervasive as women's sexualized moaning has been throughout the hundred-year history of recorded music, moaning on its own is hardly *representative* of the cultural weight of any particular song. In the next chapters I turn to examples of electrosexual music conceived deliberately in contrast, perhaps antagonistically, to what I termed in part I electroacoustics of "the feminized voice."

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Sex Sounds

Vectors of Difference in Electronic Music

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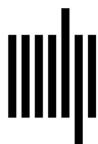

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