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SANTA CRUZ

# eroto-system

A thesis paper submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

in

Digital Arts and New Media

by

Robbie Trocchia

June 2024

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Peter Biehl

Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate

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2024

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# Abstract

## *eroto-system* by Robbie Trocchia

*eroto-system* employs live performance, multichannel audiovisual installation, and sculptural elements activated by touch and physical presence. It presents a science fiction narrative surrounding a technology called *eroto-system* that absorbs erotic charge and converts it into an alternative source of energy. The live performance entails a guided demonstration of the two interactive components of the installation which are activated specifically through the bodies of audience members. This project examines how desire, pleasure, and embodiment have been reshaped by the technologies that mediate them. *eroto-system* speculates on possible futures for sexuality and, more specifically, our conceptions of selfhood and collectivity.

This document contains an introduction to the project, a theoretical essay exploring its conceptual foundations, a section describing the process of producing the interactive installation and live performance, and a conclusion reflecting on possibilities for the project's continued development. This document also provides several documentation images of the installation and performance as well as an Appendix that includes the performance script.

# Dedication

I dedicate this project to everyone who touched it, and let it touch them too.



# Acknowledgements

Thank you to my critters Hannah La Follette Ryan and Jack Levinson for your endless love and support.

Thank you to Annika Berry, Grace Yun, Matt Polzin, and Jeppe Ugelvig for your friendship and helpful edits.

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Thank you to my thesis committee for your support of this project: Mark Nash, Isaac Julien, Marianne Weems, and Ronaldo V. Wilson.

And last, but certainly not least, thank you to my production team who are listed below..

## **Production Team:**

Technical Coordinator: Colleen Jennings

Scenic Design & Fabrication: Patrick Stephenson

Projection Design: Rory Willats

3D Modeling & Production Support: Elliot Rex White

3D Printing: Kristopher Funk

Audio Engineering: Jordan Fickel

Software Engineering: Samir Ghosh

Costuming: Stephen Biga

# I. Introduction

*eroto-system* was conceived during the early months of lockdown in 2020 while I was living in Brooklyn. Like many people during the pandemic, I'd taken up new hobbies to pass the time. One day, I decided to watercolor an electric vehicle charging station where humans were charged via cables that plugged into their bottoms. My imagination took off from there, envisioning a world in which humans produced the same erotic energy that charged their internal batteries. I left the image in a pile of work I made during that time and the idea lingered in the back of my mind for a few years. It wasn't until I was an artist-in-residence at Espacio Lavadero in Granada, Spain that I returned to the idea as part of a work-in-progress performance and installation that I presented in June 2023. The 10-minute performance and touch-activated sound sculptures that I produced serve as the basis for *eroto-system*. It was in Granada that I began reflecting on how erotic energy travels through our digital world today, specifically its distribution on social networking apps like Grindr.<sup>1</sup> Even then, I was hesitant to frame the project as a representation of these apps or an allegory with a moral judgment on how they shape gay hookup culture. But it felt important that, in developing a speculative fiction surrounding technology and erotic energy, I consider how digital platforms like Grindr facilitate virtual and IRL connections which continue to shape queer sociality. After watching me perform and sonically activate the sculptures that I call "receivers," a group of local university

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<sup>1</sup> Grindr is a social networking app and dating and meeting service for the LGBTQ community, including gay and bisexual men, trans, and queer people. It uses a device's GPS to locate nearby users and displays their profile pictures in a grid.

students began touching them, providing me with evidence of the specifically interactive nature of the haptic experience that I had just created. During the fall 2023 quarter, I proposed to expand the piece as my MFA thesis project with interactivity as a crucial element.

In many ways, this emerging interest in interactive installation is unsurprising. Collaboration has become key to my creative practice in recent years which I believe is, at least partly, a result of the pandemic. If the pandemic taught us anything, it's that we are interconnected in numerous ways: by the air we breathe and the capital flows that we partake in, the decisions we make in our daily lives and the histories we've inherited. Capitalism's contradictions were laid bare as we became intensely aware of the interconnection that defines our world. While the government struggled to respond, mutual aid networks popped up to support the lives of those most vulnerable to state violence and neglect. This period is marked by both extreme solitude and also collective expressions of rage and discontent. During the early months of lockdown, while scrolling, I came across a post in which an artist expressed her belief that society might experience, as a result of the physical isolation of quarantine, a re-eroticization of touch. I took that to mean a renewed attention to and appreciation for the sensual pleasures of physical contact. During the first week of lockdown, I experienced what I can only describe as an increased capacity for sensory pleasure - the taste of chocolate, the smell of candles, the music that I listened to vibrated through and with my body. Suddenly, I was hyper-perceptive of the sensory stimuli that surrounded me. It was a brief experience but one that I won't forget.

I make this digression to suggest that my artistic practice was changed by this historical moment in the same way that our relationships to our bodies and our relationships to each other were also changed by it. I often wonder if my increasing tendency to involve other people in my artistic efforts was just an unconscious way of expressing this interconnection. Themes of desire, intimacy, and selfhood have always appeared in my work; art has allowed me to reflect on experiences of aloneness, connection, and interiority since before the pandemic. However, beginning in 2020, embodiment came into focus as a primary concern and my projects have since revolved around touch and physicality. As a speculative technology predicated on physical touch, *eroto-system* is a culmination of many of these interests. The technology's two major component parts "The Pumping Station" and "The Charging Station" constitute a cycle of producing and consuming erotic energy. They were developed through two separate experiments in registering the body. As my character, the demonstrator, describes in the performance script, "whereas the Pumping Station is typically fueled by collective practices of physical exertion, the Charging Station is a profoundly restful solitary activity." I intended for these two performative modes to express this tension between selfhood and collectivity that is at the heart of my research question: how are desire and intimacy shaped by the technologies that mediate them?

As many artists are wont to do, I approach this question obliquely. In "A Manual for Sensual Training: Theoretical Approaches," I offer the conceptual foundations of the project, primarily imaged through the Bersanian lens of Tom

Roach's Screen Love: Queer Intimacies in the Grindr Era with historical portraits of queer collectivity provided by Samuel R. Delany's various works of non-fiction and memoir. It feels ironic that, despite creating a work of science fiction, I was not actively reading Delany's sci-fi while developing this project though his spirit of literary innovation was a source of inspiration regardless. Ethan Philbrick's Group Works: Art, Politics, and Collective Ambivalence offers a useful reading of Delany's Heavenly Breakfast. *Pinko #3*, the December 2023 issue by the gay communist collective, also features in my analysis. In "*eroto system: Interactive Installation and Live Performance*," I detail the process of making the project, reflecting on the materials and methods that I used. This project was, by all intents and purposes, a team effort. In line with my efforts at expressing collectivity, the hands of many people helped me build it. In the Conclusion, I reflect on the project's success as well as what I might have done differently. I end by considering the project's intentionally modular design and the possibilities that this modularity offers for future iterations of the installation and performance. Finally, the Appendix contains the *eroto-system* performance script.

This project exists within a broader historical lineage of artistic production that spans performance art, interactive installation, and sculptural works. As Prof. Isaac Julien and Prof. Mark Nash pointed out, there is a clear connection between *eroto-system* and Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* from 1915-1923. Duchamp's work, which represented a break from his previous work in more conventional fine arts, also displays a keen interest in

sexuality and technology. The piece visually expresses a machinic processing of erotic perfume in a way that is similarly evocative of the production and consumption of energy in *eroto-system*. And, like my project, it is divided between two separate components that are spatially disparate but narratively connected. While conceptualizing the interactive elements of *eroto-system*, I looked to Carolee Schneemann's 1964 video *Meat Joy* in an effort to express a kindred sense of play and improvised movement. Since the inception of this project, I have been reflecting on Laurie Anderson's work, specifically how she makes instruments out of various objects and materials, including the human body. *Drum Dance* from 1986 and *The Handphone Table* from 1978 both use the body to trigger or channel sound. Another source of inspiration for the interactive element came from the work of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer whose installations depend on touch and the physical presence of audience members. I am similarly inspired by Zach Blas's 2015-2019 science fiction film installation *Contra-Internet* which reflects on Silicon Valley's visions of the future. I would be remiss to not mention artists Zackary Drucker and Wu Tsang whose work in the 2010s inspired my nascent explorations in performance and video. Seeing their raw, vulnerable, and humorous expressions of queer embodiment was a critical moment in my development as a young artist.

## II. A Manual for Sensual Training: Theoretical Approaches

In an early draft of the performance script for *eroto-system*, I assumed the role of the company's founder who, in the parlance of start-up culture, sees opportunity in the lack of touch decreed by pandemic-era lockdowns. As I continued writing the script, my fictionalization of *eroto-system* instead took shape around a guided demonstration of this new form of technology in a showroom setting, co-led by a staff member and the disembodied voice of the company. *eroto-system* hinges on an admittedly nebulous concept of erotic energy as a battery contained within each one of us. A psychoanalytic framework came together around Leo Bersani's theory that "humans are motivated by a desire to fill a psychic lack,"<sup>2</sup> not unlike our neurotic need to charge our batteries. In the months leading up to my presentation of *eroto-system*, I struggled to gain perspective on the ideas that I'd been meditating on, specifically how desire, intimacy, embodiment, selfhood, and collectivity have all been re-shaped by the advent of digital technologies. I recognized the difficulty of de-familiarizing what had become so exceedingly normal in my day-to-day existence -- I compulsively opened Grindr, as automatically as scratching an itch, except the itch couldn't quite be scratched, at least not in a way that fully satisfied me. Even as I formalized my methodology, I found that an auto-ethnographic approach didn't feel quite right and yet I couldn't seem to escape the reality that I was supposedly researching, a power grid that I couldn't unplug from.

My initial vision of *eroto-system*'s architecture was somewhere between a

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<sup>2</sup>Risen, "Leo Bersani, Literary Critic and Theorist on Gay Life, Days at 90."

factory, a club, and a gym (or as an undergrad who saw the installation described it, “a kinda gas station”). Each of these spaces are defined by cycles of production and consumption of various kinds of energy. They each fill a need or a desire (and often the line between “need” and “desire” is blurred and perhaps irrelevant altogether). In the performance script for *eroto-system*, the demonstrator implores the audience to use the Charging Station in order to “connect with the energy shared by thousands of *eroto-system* users, satiate your desirous hunger instantly, feed that aching lack.” I established this link between energy infrastructure and erotic fulfillment in order to destabilize notions of “enoughness” in a world defined by competition, exploitation, and a possessive, privatized individualism. What if “filling our cups” (sensually, spiritually, emotionally) was as easy as plugging ourselves in alongside the dead batteries of our devices? I conceived of the Pumping Station as a public utility structure where one could share the wealth of their energetic excess with other people, in what is not quite an act of labor but not exactly a leisure activity either. Perhaps it is closer to what Ethan Philbrick describes in Group Works: Art, Politics, and Collective Ambivalence as “unworking...a sharing, a composing, a writing, a performance, an experiment without ends.”<sup>3</sup> Despite firmly locating the narrative in the not-so-distant future in what could be a San Jose corporate campus, I always intended for *eroto-system* to reflect something more ambiguous through its various expressions of connective totality.

I found a useful blueprint for the conceptual architecture of the project in a

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<sup>3</sup> Philbrick, *Group Works: Art, Politics, and Collective Ambivalence*, 62.



recent work of theory titled Screen Love: Queer Intimacies in the Grindr Era by Tom Roach. Roach's text positions Grindr, and related m4m platforms, as harbingers of anti-normative conceptions of selfhood and collectivity. In a particularly cogent chapter, Roach provides an alternate model of theorist Guy Hocquenghem's gay communist utopia which, Roach suggests, maintains a phallocentrism that "bears resemblance to a fascist military unit."<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, Roach imagines

a man-machine assemblage that works something like a self-operating modular synthesizer. Each module/individual in this system has a dedicated function and yet contains versatile internal options. When patched together, singular modules generate new sound/relational combinations...they can be interchanged between and with others to create various forms of sonic/collective synthesis.<sup>5</sup>

Roach's model focuses on fungibility, a neoliberal logic baked into the Grindr grid's endless production of seemingly infinite flesh-squares. But instead of dismissing this fundamental interchangeability, Roach follows Bersani's lead in asking "what would it feel like if one's personhood were necessary only insofar as it contributed to a composition?"<sup>6</sup> *eroto-system* stages this model in the Pumping Station wherein each receiver triggers a single tonal frequency. It is only through the active engagement of a group of individuals that the entire composition can be sounded. Thus, sonic fullness, like political power, is dependent on a grouping of bodies.

Like Roach and Bersani, Samuel R. Delany speaks to the erotic energy that courses through accumulations of bodies in a way that manages to directly reference

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<sup>4</sup> Roach, *Screen Love: Queer Intimacies in the Grindr Era*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> Roach, 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

group sex practices while also speaking to political theories of the relation between selfhood and collectivity. One of the questions I pose in the final sequence of *eroto-system* comes from Delany's assertion that "the first direct sense of political power comes from the apprehension of massed bodies"<sup>7</sup> which he observed after visiting a gay bathhouse. As Roach clarifies in his chapter "Embodied Echoes and Virtual Affordances," digital networks like Grindr rarely function as political consciousness-raising tools in the same way that Delany's bathhouse experience did. And yet, Roach argues that there is important ethical potential in these apps. He likens the Grindr interface to the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt in arguing that these interfaces "[encourage] us to question an understanding of our life's uniqueness while not abandoning it...[allowing] us to recognize that while we might be special, we are also interchangeable."<sup>8</sup> Roach follows this thread of de-emphasizing individualism throughout his text, echoing Bersani's argument that "individuation is a metaphysical error."<sup>9</sup> This idea is central to queer theory, from Foucault to Bersani to Roach; they maintain that modernity has invested sexuality and psychological interiority with meaning which ultimately reifies the notion that the individual is the ideal subject of liberalism.

In *Bad Gays: A Homosexual History*, Huw Lemmey and Ben Miller posit that homosexuality, understood here as the project of white cis men, is a failure for a few reasons, chief among them being "its incessant focus on the bourgeois project of

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<sup>7</sup> Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village*, 268.

<sup>8</sup> Roach, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Bersani.

‘sexuality’ itself.”<sup>10</sup> As they go on to explain, the gay liberation movement of the 70s became a watered-down version of its previously-radical enterprise. The rights-based discourse instead became a way for middle-class white gays to be accepted into mainstream society, a move that ultimately drains queer radicalism of its political potency and de-sexualizes its cultural mores in the process. In response to this historical trend, Roach claims that it is precisely “through impersonal sex practices [that] our bodies might attune to a common substance that expresses itself in infinitely diverse forms.”<sup>11</sup> These practices fly in the face of liberal individualism and its demands for mastery and Cartesian rationality. Roach goes on to argue for a sensual training that takes away the power of the ego; instead, he suggests that the “sense of the common emergent in the impersonal sexual encounter is a sense of a world beyond the self, indifferent to the self, a world in which one might locate oneself in various resemblances and reverberations.”<sup>12</sup> Roach describes this sensual training as “an exercise in entrustment and cooperative, consensual collaboration,”<sup>13</sup> a performative mode that I hoped to achieve through *eroto-system*’s interactive structure. M, who participated in the interactive section of the performance, confirms that my efforts were successful when he describes how “a group of strangers became quickly intimate, indicating a community-forming ability with the piece.”

I turn to Philbrick’s reading of Delany’s Heavenly Breakfast in order to consider the haptic qualities of our togetherness. Delany’s memoir of his time in an East

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<sup>10</sup> Lemmey and Miller, *Bad Gays: A Homosexual History*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Roach, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Roach, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Roach, 45.

Village commune gives a sense of the “aimless exploration of sonic relationality”<sup>14</sup> that defined life in the band/commune Heavenly Breakfast. The life that Delany describes is far-removed from the ways that creative energy is operationalized and professionalized in the artistic industries of today. Instead of completion, linearity, and orderliness, Heavenly Breakfast was marked by its disorder and incompleteness but also its lack of bodily boundaries. Philbrick quotes Delany: “When you and I live so closely that touch and smell are suddenly half of what we communicate, new laws govern the interchanges”<sup>15</sup> before going on to describe this “nonrepresentational, incoherent, and disorderly haptic entanglement of different I’s and you’s”<sup>16</sup> which actively resists coherence as a collective entity. As Philbrick argues, the impermanence of this arrangement is precisely what sets it apart from “inherited regimes of social organization.”<sup>17</sup> I engage with this tension between disorder and organization in *eroto-system* by introducing friction in the dialogue between the robotic voice of the company and the live demonstrator as they co-lead the demonstration. In two separate moments in the performance, the live demonstrator attempts to signal support for the company union before being interrupted by the voice demanding that the demonstrator move on to the next part of the demonstration. As my time at UCSC began with a UC graduate student strike (and is being bookended by a second strike in response to unlawful activity by the UC with regards to Palestine Solidarity encampments at UC campuses across the state), it felt

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<sup>14</sup> Philbrick, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Delany, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Philbrick, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

appropriate to thread this narrative of collective discontent through the piece.

Moreover, I looked to Grindr United as a model for labor organizing within the tech industry where inhospitable work conditions, alongside AI and other technological developments, threaten the value and integrity of human labor.

J, who also participated in the interactive section of the performance, describes *eroto-system* as a “current iteration of an ever-evolving technological system that may soon conveniently have no need to incorporate bodies at all.” A cynical perspective would suggest that, when implementing any technology, there is always the risk of erasing the human. It could be argued that *eroto-system* isolates and exploits human touch through technological intervention. Even the graffiti on the Pumping Station receivers isn’t actually the work of human hands—it’s machine-drawn. Perhaps what haunts this speculative future is the possibility that our embodied pleasure, like our labor, might somehow be replaced by technology. J interprets *eroto-system*’s primary use as a way “to restore the libido, whose reasons for disappearing went unexplained and therefore were suggested to be a kind of universal condition.” What does it mean for our desires for connection to be mediated and subsumed by these forms of technology (which, as we know, are actively surveilling, collecting, and harvesting our data)? It only made sense that I use AI, at least partially, to develop the language surrounding *eroto-system* (including sections of the demonstration dialogue and the scrolling text that appears on the projection screens) in order to give the impression that the technology had emerged from a similar corporate landscape. The script was an exercise in ventriloquizing tech executives “over the hill,” perhaps another way of

expressing my distaste for the bizarre nexus of tech innovation and woo-woo spirituality within certain subsets of Silicon Valley. In his essay “What Was Sexual Liberalism?”, Max Fox describes a 1923 satirical pamphlet by Soviet writer Andrei Platonov titled “Anti-Sexus” about a sex toy of the same name. As a satire on capitalist sexuality, the device speaks not to “pleasure, but its rationalization. Sex here is the literary form taken by the subordination of the living worker’s body to the imperatives of speed-up, fragmentation of the labor process, concentration, and mechanization that characterize the capitalist mode of production.”<sup>18</sup> This rationalization of sex under capitalism begs the question of how we might train ourselves differently as sensual beings so as to somatically resist these imperatives.

One of the unexpected surprises of the *eroto-system* performance occurred during the audience participation section. My intention for this sequence was to express a collective, remote connection to thousands of *eroto-system* users by channeling dozens of profile names that I had sourced from the app Scruff (a similar platform to Grindr). During the first performance, I became aware of the difference between my atomized approach (in which I physically engaged with a single receiver) and that of the audience members who were treating the experience in a more playful, collaborative way. While I was performing a zoned-in “trance state,” they were watching each other as they switched between different receivers and experimented with new ways of touching them. Ironically, my intention had been to create a collective experience and yet I was incidentally demonstrating a decidedly

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<sup>18</sup> Fox, “What Was Sexual Liberalism?”, 68.

individualized approach. This expressed something critical: that technology is encircled by its uses, not the other way around. Within a set structure, people are still able to find aberrant ways of engaging. There is a line between intended and unintended, even subversive, uses of technology. The undergrad who I mentioned at the beginning of this essay also included a question in their written comment: “what if someone used the vibrator as it was intended for during this showing?” Although I wasn’t confronted by that question while the work was on view (most people used the vibrating Charging Plugs as if they were massage guns), it expresses an anxiety at the heart of human relationships to technology. What if the thing is used in ways that are beyond the intentions or imagination of its creator? One only needs to look at the role of social media in the Arab Spring of the early 2010s to see how people can use technological innovations in any way they desire, facilitating revolution, for example. Roach’s text sets up a useful dialogue between resistant political strategy, which produced the uprising just mentioned, and immanentist political strategy, which he suggests is emergent in m4m media like Grindr. He introduces the concept of “growing sideways” to describe the “meandering, repetitive, circular, and unproductive”<sup>19</sup> sense of temporality on the app. Roach concedes that media borne of neoliberal logics will often affirm those same paradigms but perhaps they can also produce something else, in between the cracks. Ultimately, what would this sensual training look like and what relational freedoms does it offer? For Roach, they include

(a) freedom from a deep-seated, psychic sexual core, substantiated historically by linking erotic desire to self-truth; (b) freedom from a confessional imperative inextricable from

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<sup>19</sup> Roach, 166.

identitarian sexuality; (c) freedom from romantic myths shackling sex to love and marriage; and (d) freedom from corporate/workplace communicative norms that demand expressivity, transparency, articulacy, and team building.<sup>20</sup>

As I was conceptualizing *eroto-system*, I often wondered if I was just making something so that it could be broken by its users, or repurposed by them. Perhaps the entire technology was a repurposing of touch, an experiment without any particular hypothesis. I created a structure with hard and soft surfaces, art that you can touch and that can touch you too. I fabricated an instrument whose physical constraints opened opportunities for radically new things to happen. I like to think that the script can always be re-coded so I imagine an alternate ending of the performance in which the demonstrator is written up for misconduct by his supervisors, remaining subject to the hard-and-fast rules of the corporate apparatus. But, for now, the piece ends with a series of questions, most of which were culled from the texts referenced in this essay. They were posed to the audience in the same way they were posed to me as I read them, without expectation of a certain answer but implicating us all the same. Whatever answers lie ahead, they will not come from without, as though delivered to us from above by some transcendent power. They will come from within us; in fact, they're already here. All we need to do is feel around for them.

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<sup>20</sup> Roach, 173.



### III. *eroto-system*: Interactive Installation and Live Performance

This section describes the process of developing *eroto-system* in its dual functions as an interactive installation and live performance through a timeline of its production for the DANM MFA thesis exhibition “Embodiments” which opened on Friday, April 26, 2024 and was on view through Saturday, May 4, 2024. I divided this section into the constituent parts of the project, sharing reflections on the methods and materials I used in each as well as the collaborative relationships that supported me in bringing *eroto-system* to life.

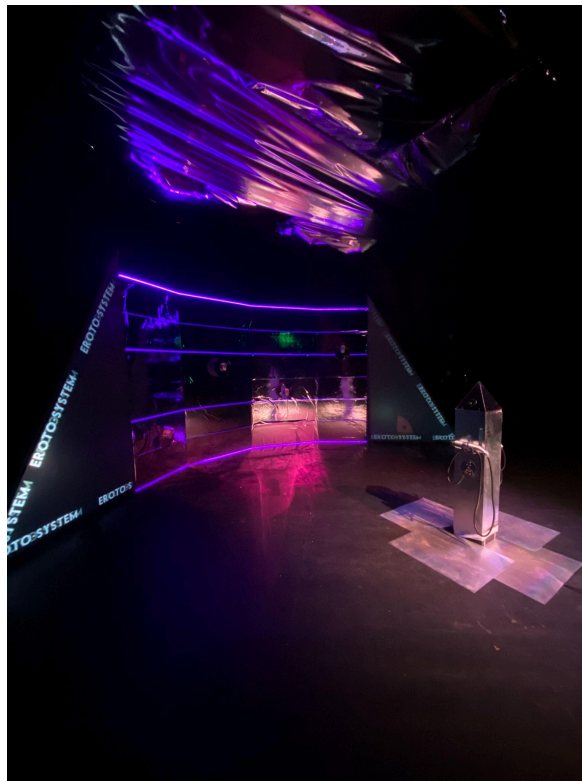


FIG. 1: Installation view of *eroto-system*

## Production Design

Production on the installation began in the Dark Lab of the Digital Arts Research Center in mid-March 2024. When entering the space, it occupies a quarter of the room in the far-right corner. Most of the materials used in the installation are reflective including Mylar, mirrored acrylic, and silver fabric. The reflective surfaces of these various materials allowed me to gesture at aesthetic tropes of retrofuturism and science-fiction narratives while also displaying the physical traces of people who touched the installation. I was inspired by Isaac Julien’s use of Mylar in his 2022 installation *Once Again...(Statues Never Die)* and the work of Paul Mpagi Sepuya whose photographs often include “the evidence and lasting presence of human encounter, fingerprints and smudges.”<sup>21</sup> The mirrors also “invited a sort of self-awareness” according to R, who participated in the interactive section of the performance. By absorbing past traces of human contact and reflecting the bodies of those engaging with the installation in real time, I aimed to provide the audience with a visual marker of their interconnection across time and space. Additionally, the installation’s reflectivity expresses the erotic power of the gaze, the exchange of looking and being looked at, and desire’s scopic drive.

### *The Mylar Ceiling*

Colleen Jennings, the Digital Arts Technical Coordinator, and I created the Mylar-wrapped “ceiling” of the installation using four 6.5x10 ft. frames that we

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<sup>21</sup>Brown, “Paul Mpagi Sepuya.”

attached together. After two attempts at raising this 13x20 ft. structure (which Colleen did using a scissor lift and at least a dozen cables), we successfully installed it about 11 ft. off the ground. I wanted the Mylar ceiling to more fully surround the audience and to implicate them by way of its reflective surface. In line with my vision of *eroto-system* as a public utility infrastructure, I began to associate the Mylar ceiling with solar-powered EV charging canopies (like the one recently installed in the Digital Arts Research Center parking lot).

### *The Pumping Station*

DANM '23 alum Patrick Stephenson helped me fabricate the two physical structures of the installation, the Pumping Station and the Charging Station. The Pumping Station is composed of 4 false walls that are drilled to the floor in a curved formation and stabilized from behind with jacks. I attached 7 horizontal lines of UV LED strip lights running across the wall and DANM colleague Elliot White assisted me in mounting two rolls of Mylar to this 9x13 ft. structure with spray adhesive. Patrick and I attached the 4 mirrored acrylic circular panels to flanges attached to plumbing pipes that run through holes in the walls and are stabilized on additional supports. Each mirrored acrylic panel contains 4 holes for the flange bolts and one hole for the contact mic cables which run through the plumbing pipes out of the back of the structure and into a multichannel audio interface. Two triangular projection screens frame the structure on either side and are also drilled to the floor. The installation contains 4 total speakers (2 placed on either side of the projection screens); each speaker channels the sound of one of the four receivers on the Pumping Station.

### *The Charging Station*

A 4-foot tall pedestal was used for the Charging Station. Elliot assisted me in sewing fabric in order to wrap the structure in a silver reflective Spandex-like material which resembled stainless steel. Patrick developed a pyramidal shape (which unintentionally references orgone pyramids) out of laser-cut mirrored acrylic to house the two webcams on top of the structure. The charging plugs are attached to cables that enter the structure on either side through small circular mirrored acrylic pieces. Each charging plug rests on two utility hooks that are mounted on the structure on either side above where the cables enter. A Mac mini is installed inside the structure with the two webcams connected. I had remote access to this computer from my MacBook where I was able to screen-grab video footage from the webcams to project onto the two screens during certain sequences. At the base of the Charging Station are 4 aluminum panels that visitors step on when interacting with the structure.

### Sound Design

For the sound design of the Pumping Station's receivers, I relied on familiar methods of processing the sound of bodily pressure via contact mics on Ableton. Each of the contact mics in the 4 receivers were processed through a resonator effect. DANM colleague Jordan Fickel assisted me in engineering the sound so that each receiver produces a different note but all are in the same key. After a conversation with Prof. of Music Matt Schumaker, I initially attempted to process the contact mic audio through an effect called envelope follower which captures a signal in order to

produce a specific tone. I decided to use the resonator effect instead because it gave me more control over how I shaped each receiver's signature sound. Although I didn't pursue Prof. Schumaker's suggestions ultimately, our conversation helped clarify my intentions for the sound design. By creating different tonal frequencies, I could compose an installation that is functionally incomplete without the participation of multiple people who excite the soft sculptures and collaboratively produce moments of harmony through a range of sonic textures. This notion of polyphony was a perfect way of describing the collective voice that I sought to create. I also recorded an automated voice-over, which represents the voice of the company, and processed it through a Spectral Resonator. This effect erratically modulates the voice through different pitches, giving it the impression of a robot that hasn't quite figured out the nuances of emotional affect.

## Projection Design

DANM '23 alum Rory Willats developed the projection design using Isadora. Through a series of conversations, we settled on the idea that the video would provide an annotative function by providing additional text and "instructional" clips. I provided him with this visual material as well as the various forms of text that are included in the videos. I found the font for the *eroto-system* logo online — I wanted the "o" to visually echo the circular mirrored acrylic panels and the "m," the triangular projection screens. It was important that there be floating text throughout the performance to resemble corporate advertising techniques. The logo runs along the perimeter of both triangles in several moments throughout the piece and there are

two separate sequences in which “PUMP” and “CHARGE” scan horizontally across both projection screens. I used the AI system ChatGPT to generate content including Terms & Conditions, disclaimers, insurance policy, assembly instructions, and company lore. This text is split across the two projection screens, scrolling vertically down. The layered video sequences were created with image opacities. The rotating concentric circles of imagery also harken back to the circle motif in the structure. In the “Grindr oracle” sequence, I channel the profile names of dozens of the app’s users. Rory created a glitch effect on the normally smooth-running logo text, as if to give the impression of system overload. We also included a section in which diagrammatic imagery, almost like the inside of the machine, appears as I describe the inner workings of the technology. During the instructional video sequences, short clips of my body touching both elements of the installation play on a single screen. In the performance, I go behind the other projection screen to cast a silhouette of my body in various sensual poses. The final sequence includes the webcam live feeds; each webcam is projected onto one of the screens. A series of questions, sourced from my readings in queer theory, are overlaid on these live feed images in a direct address to the audience members whose faces we see projected. I refer to the sequence that connects the end and the beginning of the performance loop as the “open sequence.” On the video screens, the *eroto-system* logo runs along the perimeter interspersed with some of the clips and imagery that play throughout the performance. Our aim was to give the sense that, even when the performance soundtrack isn’t playing, this system is still running.

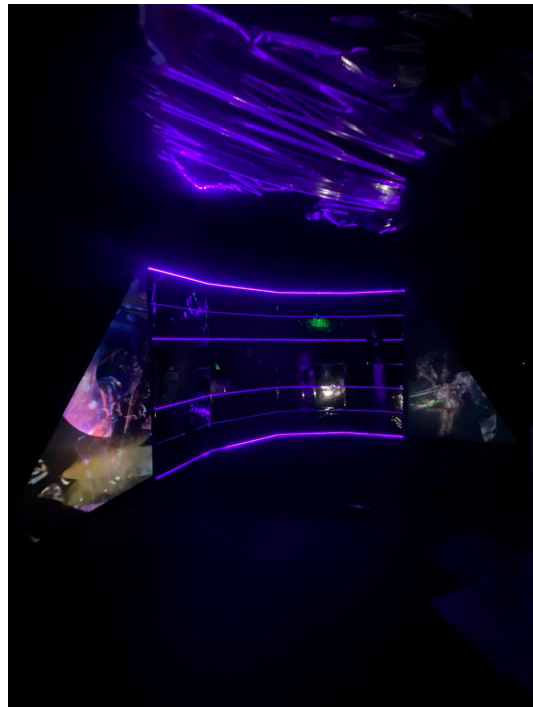


FIG. 2: Installation view of Projection Screen 2

FIG. 3: Installation view of *eroto-system*

## Sculptural Elements

### *The Receivers*

I designed the receivers using Adobe Illustrator. I vectorized images of graffiti that I photographed around Santa Cruz and the Bay Area, mostly in restrooms and on other public utility structures like benches and garbage cans. My intention was to create a futuristic-style of graffiti with symbols that indicated that the hands of the public had been on this structure. This form of mark-making was important to include in the installation as it supported my attempts to mediate a collective “voice.” The laser-cutter etched these images and created holes for the flange bolts and contact mic cables. I experimented with placement of the contact mics directly on the mirrored

acrylic panels in order to maximize the amount of physical contact between the mics and the physical surface. I decided to use the same foam pieces that I created in Granada last June. I wrapped them in new pieces of silver reflective fabric then hot glued them to the surface of the mirrored acrylic panels, effectively covering the contact mics and the flange bolts.

FIG. 4: Receiver panels designed on Illustrator with vectorized images of found graffiti



### *The Charging Plugs*

Elliot helped me model the charging plug design on Blender. DANM colleague Kristopher Funk helped me 3D print them. We made numerous attempts to get the shape right for the vibrators to fit inside the charging plugs. For the design, I consulted various models of EV charging plugs that have entered the market in recent years. They were printed on a Bambu 3D printer using a silver reflective filament. Each charging plug was printed in two pieces then attached together with duct tape and metalized Mylar tape. I put a small amount of hot glue in each in order to provide



grip and secure the vibrators inside the charging plugs.



FIG. 5: Production still, performer using the vibrating Charging Plug

## Software Engineering

Samir Ghosh, a PhD candidate in Computational Media, wrote code for Intiface Central which is a set of applications for controlling haptic and sensor hardware. In this case, I connected to the two Lovense vibrators<sup>22</sup> in the charging plugs via Intiface. Intiface runs on a Mac mini installed inside the Charging Station. The two webcams are connected to this Mac and displayed on a web app that Samir designed. When the webcams register human faces, the vibrators turn on for about 5 seconds. I had remote access to this Mac mini from my computer which is located behind the Pumping Station wall. Near the end of the performance loop, these webcam images

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<sup>22</sup> Lovense is a Singapore-based sex tech company founded in 2010 that specializes in remotely controlled sex toys and pleasure products.

are briefly projected on the projection screens. Because of the crop of the web app images, visitors who are using the Charging Station during these sequences are unable to look at the webcams to turn on the vibrators at the same time that they look at their image on the projection screens. In this way, I was able to create a tension between looking at oneself (via the mirrored surfaces of the Charging Station) and looking at one's own image (as it is projected on the screens). Samir's contribution allowed me to use teledildonics as a tool by instrumentalizing our image to activate the device that pleases us.

### Script Development

The performance script was written in a spirit of playful absurdity. The formal structure of the performance is framed by a showroom-style guided demonstration of the *eroto-system* technology. It is led by an automated voice of the company and myself as the live demonstrator. As the demonstrator, my character is gushing, out-of-time, and quick-witted. The automated voice, in contrast, is cold, detached, and robotic. The script introduces moments of friction where the automated voice and the demonstrator interrupt one another. Notably, the demonstrator makes several attempts to communicate to the audience that the *eroto-system* staff is currently unionizing before being cut off by the voice. I sourced additional text for the script and videos from the AI system ChatGPT, the MSM dating app Scruff, and the works of queer theory that I reference in this document.

I began a practice of developing sequences of "found poetry" by searching for specific terms in the search function on Scruff. By searching for specific words like

*desire, intimacy, and self*, I was able to locate Scruff users whose profile names contained those words. I compiled both compelling and banal examples of profile names into fragmented sections of text. As profile names are how people identify themselves to others on the app (alongside their pictures), I believe this information provided me with the most potent examples of users' varied subjectivities and desires. The repetitive nature of the words expresses the platform's users as a collective formation. In line with this effort to express collectivity in the installation, I also looked to public works of graffiti as another visual expression of the collective's fingerprints.

## Performance

In this section, I will describe my two performances of *eroto-system* which took place at 3:30 pm and 5:30 pm during the opening of the exhibition on Friday, April 26. I refer to my role as a performer using "I" and "the demonstrator" interchangeably. During rehearsal, Prof. Marianne Weems suggested that I physically highlight the tension between the demonstrator and the company voice as this friction helps to animate the performance.

The show begins with me walking into the installation as I'm still putting on the silver reflective bodysuit. I address the crowd directly, immediately welcoming them into this exercise in world-building. The voiceover drones on as we digress together through the superficially commercial (an ad for silver bodysuits), the somehow-sexually-charged procedural (short instructional videos), and the promise of a public participation portion. As the demonstrator, I sensually and casually touch the

soft receivers of the Pumping Station and the vibrating plugs of the Charging Station. I am, alternately, a dutiful staff member tidying and tightening, an irritable underling advocating on behalf of the union, and a slightly overzealous performer who encourages audience participation. After multiple detours of preemptively acknowledging audience doubts, apologizing for the graffiti, and mentioning the Twink Starter Assembly Team's central role in the union campaign, we finally arrive at the Pumping Station demonstration. As this audience participation section begins, the demonstrator states, "the longer you pump, the more common it becomes to enter a trance-like state, a collective reverie connecting you to your fellow pumpers," presaging the trance that he is about to enter. Immediately, the demonstrator's pre-recorded voice comes through the speakers as the "Grindr oracle," listing these profile names in an increasingly hysterical tone: "selfmade selfsucker selfstarter...rdy 2 pleasure, intense pleasure, pleasuregetter, soft pleasures easy going, wanna come over?...eye contact, lot of contact, body contact, contactsport, contactpig...hung thick, hung fit top EroticHunk, erotic liberation...open to possibilities, open relations, openlymarried, open to life, open my door..." According to an audience member, it was unclear whether my voice was live or pre-recorded (I pre-recorded it because this is the only sequence in the performance in which my bodysuit is fully zipped up and covering my face so I doubted my ability to project loud enough for people to hear the words). Following this audience participation section, I offer additional context for the founding of *eroto-system* which locates the "present" of the performance in some not-so-distant future and describes a technology whose very foundations are

infused with the sexual practices of gay men in the first quarter of the 21st century. Following a second attempt by the demonstrator to signal support for the union which the corporate voice interrupts, we move into the Charging Station section. After the instructional clips play, I invite the audience to begin moving through the cycle with me: “Take this opportunity to charge your battery then get pumping!” I initially intended to verbally address the audience members with the queer theory-inspired questions that appear on the screens; however, during the performances, I found that my attempts to invite audience members into the space kept me occupied and that the text on the screens were legible in a way that might have made my verbal enunciations redundant. In both performances, people came up to the installation and began engaging with it, in ways that ranged from trepidatious to excited. This sequence blends into the “after” of the performance which officially ends when the voiceover drones “this user session has now ended.” I thank the audience, who have already begun talking amongst themselves, and leave the stage.



FIG. 6: Performance documentation of *eroto-system*



FIG. 7: Performance still, performer demonstrating the Pumping Station



FIG. 8: Performance still, performer demonstrating the Charging Station

## Interactivity

As I describe in the introduction, I was inspired to center interactivity in this project after my presentation at Espacio Lavadero. My first attempt at involving audience participation in performance was during Winter 2023 Open Studios when I presented my rendition of the story of Samson. That work took the form of an endurance performance at the end of which audience members were invited to cut off one of my seven braids of hair. I had initially hoped to involve a group of performers in *eroto-system* who would help me in demonstrating the technology to an audience. Instead, I decided to rely on my skills as a performer and hope that a few audience members would be comfortable participating in the interactive “demonstration” section.

As mentioned by R (who I previously quoted), after I asked for volunteers, “there was a notable hesitation. It’s interesting how the world of *eroto-system* was, in that moment, in clear tension with the realities of our world.” As they go on to explain, this tension manifests in the way that queer erotics “is itself at odds with the capitalist workplace” and “aligned with revolutionary movements against the capitalist status quo.” While I had anticipated slight discomfort from audience members, R’s comment highlighted the difference between the world I was occupying in *eroto-system* as a liberated, sexually free being, and that of the ‘real world’ participants, whose physical discomfort was perhaps an embodied expression of the more repressive tendencies of capitalist culture. And yet M “felt a lot of play and joy in the experience, laughingly swapping with the other volunteers to try out the

different ways of interacting with the eroto-system.” That the participants swapped with each other and tried the different receivers (which are mounted at different heights relative to the body) was an exciting surprise for me. M comments that “the piece also inspired an immediate connection with strangers, like the careless joy of dancing with strangers at a club.” During the week of the exhibition, I observed similar moments of joy and playfulness amongst visitors after the work’s interactive qualities were demonstrated (usually by me). Beyond communicating my conceptual approaches to the project (which generated many interesting conversations with visitors), I was pleased to see that *eroto-system* offered audiences the simple, pure joy of interaction with art, unmediated by its extra-textual content. After engaging with the work, a friend suggested that it be installed at an airport which signaled to me that its success can be based, at least in part, on its openness to public engagement.

FIG. 9: Documentation of audience participation during the Pumping Station demonstration







FIG. 10: Documentation of visitor interaction with the Charging Station

## IV. Conclusion

After two performances of *eroto-system* on the opening day of the DANM MFA thesis exhibition, I had initially planned to play the performance soundtrack on a loop during the week of the exhibition. However, I decided to not run the soundtrack on a loop as I felt that it absorbed the attention in the room, away from the work of DANM colleagues Jordan Fickel and Saul Villegas whose projects were also on display in the Dark Lab. Instead, the ambient sounds of the Pumping Station receivers could be heard constantly which I preferred as a way of signaling that the system was turned on and available for interaction. In retrospect, I would have liked to include a D10 LCD screen playing the performance documentation with headphones in order to provide this additional narrative content. Although documentation doesn't quite reproduce the "feeling" of live performance, it can still offer audiences an opportunity to experience the narrative that I had created around this fictional technology. I was often in the room while people were engaging with the work so I was able to explain the interactive qualities and the theoretical concerns of the project alongside brief explanations of the performance.

As the demonstrator explains in the performance, *eroto-system* is a modular structure which is both a fictional part of the narrative and also a literal intention in its display. My hope is that these different sculptural elements can be exhibited at different scales and in different spaces in the future (with varying numbers of receivers or charging plugs). A week before my Oral Defense of this thesis, I decided to film one final performance of *eroto-system* in order to create a single-channel video

(using this footage and additional material from the piece) that can be displayed alongside the installation. This project brought up generative questions for my artistic practice in terms of how my work functions in ephemeral live performance settings versus durational exhibition contexts. My work doesn't need to exist within this strict binary per se but I intend to continue creating work that can exist in both formats. In the case of the installation, I am not always able to be present in order to explain to audiences how to interact with the work nor is it always possible for a docent to share this information. My hope is that, by including video of the live performance in future installations, audiences will be directed to engage with it by way of this performative demonstration.

The week after the MFA thesis exhibition opened, *eroto-system* was awarded the Cocha-Gunderson Prize in Speculative Futures by The Humanities Institute at UCSC. I conclude by considering possibilities for the project's continued development in the coming year. In my proposal for this project, I proposed two elements of the Pumping Station that didn't quite come to pass in the final version. One, I imagined that the receivers might affect one another's sonic textures more directly (i.e. by touching this one, I would shift the parameters of the effects chains that your receiver is being processed through and vice versa). Two, I suggested that the technology would be capable of absorbing the touch of audience members so that the installation might serve as an (aural) repository of physical contact. In the next iteration, I plan to experiment with Max, a visual programming language for music, to find technical solutions for these ideas.

A friend recently pointed out to me that, since the inception of this project in Spain last year, I often expressed that I wasn't sure what I was doing or trying to "say" with it. Perhaps the greatest learning lesson of this experience was that uncertainty is precisely where the richness of artistic expression lies. After all, if I knew exactly where I was going, there would be nothing new to discover. Throughout it all, I gained critical skills in managing my most ambitious project yet while learning the value of creating art in a spirit of "serious play," as Prof. Weems puts it. I'm confident that there is still much for me to learn from the process of creating *eroto-system* but only time will tell what the future holds for this "groundbreaking technology."

# Appendix

This appendix contains one section: *eroto-system*: Script for Live Performance.

## *eroto-system*: Script for the Live Performance

*Automated voiceover text is in italics and the text performed live is regular.*

**[Stage directions bolded in brackets]**

**[Robbie begins on the floor next to the Charging Station, languidly using the vibrating nozzle all over his body while the audience walks in through the doors. Dozens of eroto-system logos are floating on the two triangular-framed projection screens. These screens will provide an annotative function by including the text being read by the voiceover (and possibly as a prompter for Robbie) and a blend of AI-generated narrative content surrounding the fictional company, Scruff found poetry sequences, and fragments of theoretical musings on relations between selfhood and collectivity. They will also include short instructional clips and slow, languid shots of a performer in a bodysuit interacting with the installation]**

*eroto-system user session starting now. Begin demonstration.*

**[Robbie puts the nozzle down but continues lying on the ground languidly]**

Hello everyone, welcome to eroto-system. Here, on the grid, you can call me r. I'll be leading you through today's demonstration.

**[Robbie stands up, tidies the two charging cables which are messily strewn about and begins moving around the space, stretching against the wall, adjusting the pipes and wiping the mirrored acrylic receiver panels on the Pumping Station]**

*eroto-system is a groundbreaking technology designed to harness the power of human sensuality in new and exciting ways. By capturing and channeling erotic energy, eroto-system offers a range of potential applications, from enhancing intimacy and pleasure to promoting wellness and self-discovery. Throughout this demonstration, we will explore the key features and functionalities of eroto-system, including its advanced sensor technology, intuitive user interface, and potential applications in various settings. So sit back, relax, and let us guide you through the world of eroto-system.*

Let's begin with the basics. eroto-system is the world's first autotrophic energy system, a sophisticated network of completely self-generated, self-sustaining energy flows

**[Robbie is standing next to both parts of the installation throughout this sequence, demonstrating both. Close-up images of the two components play on the screens]**

*produced and consumed by the vibrant, pulsing erotic force within every single one of us.*

eroto-system runs on the fuel of our desire and when our batteries are low, it fills us up in return. You see, eroto-system depends on the mutual sharing of our erotic resources.

*It absorbs our physical touch, capacity for pleasure, latent desires, orgasmic force, and converts it into energy that fills us when we feel empty. Our own jouissance provides us with the sensual sustenance that we need. We feed it when we're turned on and fully charged and it feeds us when we're hungry and longing.*

eroto-system contains two major component parts, the Pumping Station and the Charging Station, which channel this seamless and powerful flow

of energy in a cyclic structure. My demonstration will require the patient participation of all of you in both of these components.

**[Screens show scrolling images of AI-generated text including Terms & Conditions, Disclaimers, Insurance Policy, Company Lore, etc]**

*The Pumping Station contains multiple absorptive elements called receivers and a hidden system of pumps and erogenous equipment. These receivers are the orifices of eroto-system.*

Feed the system by touching the receivers.

*eroto-system depends on the receiver's ability to extract the total range of erotic frequencies.*

Touch gently, touch roughly, pump softly, punch violently, push lustfully, press lazily.

*The receivers require an oxymoronic combination of friction and lubricity. In order for the energy to be sufficiently absorbed, there must be both physical friction and a certain slipperiness between body and machine,*

reality and illusion.

*The Charging Station consists of two charging cables which deliver energy to the body via the charging plug's vibrational force. These chargers are eroto-system's life-giving teats, they channel sustainably harvested, nourishing erotic energy when your battery is feeling low.*

Connect with the energy shared by thousands of eroto-system users, satiate your desirous hunger instantly, feed that aching lack.



*The Charging Station asks simply for your presence — remember, you turn it on.*

At this point, you may be thinking, what the hell are you talking about? Do you really believe you can convince me that some bogus piece of tech, a plush little button, can suck out my precious libido in a virtual dialysis only for it to be magically transformed into some replenishing vibe juice that will quench my erotic cravings through a sex toy on power boost?? And to you I say, yes.

**[Audience member helps Robbie zip up his silver reflective bodysuit. Screens begin close-up images of bodysuit]**

*For those of you participating in the demonstration, rest assured that brief exposure to UV light does not pose significant health risks. The UV rays facilitate the flow of energy and bodysuits protect from the increased risks of longer-term exposure*

although, of course, many eroto-system users can't help but show a little skin, many of you are the same I'm sure.

*eroto-system offers brand-name bodysuits as well as in-house tailoring services. Ask your demonstrator after today's program for further details.*

Unfortunately, they cannot go in the washing machine but I suggest using cleaning spray after repeated use — these bodysuits get pretty sweaty is all I'll say. Okay, the time has come: I'm going to demonstrate how to use the Pumping Station: we will learn how to channel our bodily passions through its receivers and pump up its reserves of erotic power!

**[Screens play close-up images of the Pumping Station]**

*Welcome to the Pumping Station, a stainless-steel reinforced, chrome-plated modular structure outfitted with various receivers. eroto-system offers several models that are customizable to your personal preference.*

My managers have asked that you kindly ignore the graffiti. This particular model was developed over several months in an experiment on the campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz and it bears the libidinous marks of many. I'd like to think that these scribbles signify the potential of the public utility that is eroto-system.

*The receivers respond to the pressure of your physical force but also to the immaterial substance of that force.*

**[Robbie touches one of the receivers in the ways described very slowly and sensually]**

How you hitch your hip, or press your palm, or force your face, or sink your shoulder into it shapes how the energy is received in its transfer and the quality of the connection. Which isn't to say that there is a good way or a bad way to pump. Just that there are different ways of doing the same thing.

*In a few moments, we will ask for a few volunteers to help demonstrate proper usage of the Pumping Station but first we'd like to share an opportunity with you all.*

Before that, I should let you in on one important caveat about the Pumping Station which is that it requires something like how baking sourdough requires a yeast starter or how kombucha requires a mother.

**[Screens being playing layered videos of performers in bodysuit in fast motion "assembling" the Pumping Station]**

*For today's audience, we're offering discounted rates for our Twink Starter Team, a group of eroto-system contractors who are transported to your location to assemble your Pumping Station and get it started. They are typically bussed in from warehouse raves afte —*

the Twinks have been a crucial part of our recent union campaign for higher pay although management hasn't been coming to the bargaining table in good fait-

*please proceed to the first audience participation portion of today's program.*

Oh, I'm so sorry everyone, it looks like I need to get on with the demonstration. I'll do my best to weave in the most significant threads of the eroto-system philosophy throughout my presentation. So who are our volunteers? I need 3 individuals to assist me in guiding our viewers through best practices when using the Pumping Station.

**[Robbie invites 3 audience members, most likely friends that have been planted!]**

I will ask that you watch this short instructional video to ensure the safety and security of all participants.

**[The screens play an instructional video of Robbie demonstrating various ways of pumping the receivers]**

*Hello and welcome to the Pumping Station. This short video will provide essential information for using your machine. In a few moments, your guide will turn on Receiver Mode through a switch located on the back of the structure. Once this is turned on, users can begin pumping. This machine was designed to accommodate a range of abilities and for*

*movement from several possible positions including on the floor, sitting down, or standing, solo, with a partner or a small group. The goal is maximum comfort and maximum pleasure. As you practice pumping, you'll come to find preferred positions and your own sense of rhythm. Of course, eroto-system is best enjoyed in the company of others. Many eroto-system users have reported heightened feelings of connection and belonging through extended use of the Pumping Station. We appreciate your participation in today's demonstration and we hope to see you on the grid soon!*

Ok, thank you all for watching that short video. I hope that was helpful. So it might feel awkward at first. After all, this is your first time trying it and you may notice slight discomfort. But the longer you pump, the more common it becomes to enter a trance-like state, a collective reverie connecting you to your fellow pumpers. Can one of you zip me up? We're a little short-staffed today.

**[Robbie and the 3 participants begin pumping the receivers, playing off of one another's movements but each incorporating their own physical gestures. ]**

*eroto-system produces sonic reverberations of the energy flows it receives, the aural textures of each of your specific energetic fields overlap and shape one another like wave interference, a sound only we can make together.*

I've been known to speak in tongues so please forgive me in advance...now, let's pump it!

**[This sequence includes a pre-recorded musical composition (based on the 4 tonal frequencies triggered by the mic'd receivers) that increases in volume over the 5 minutes of improvisational movement. Robbie will begin "channeling the Grindr oracle", a running text of**

**found poetry sourced from the profile names of users on Scruff. He reads them in an increasingly frenetic manner.]**

To desire and feel desired. Is this desire? curse of desire? dad with desire  
Looking 4 desire, hidden desires, desiremachine, seeking casual intimacy,  
pleasure & intimacy, mount intimacy selfmade selfsucker selfstarter  
selfless, self aware, selfish bi top, self-reinventing, self-defeating,  
selfmachine, love my self, shadow of self, king of my self, pleasure  
prince, pleasure paradise, pleasure piggy, oral pleasure, guilty pleasure,  
rdy 2 pleasure, intense pleasure, pleasuregetter, soft pleasures easy going,  
wanna come over? come over rn ez2bkind, cuddles, swallow u? touching  
now, 4 ur touch, sensual touch intimate touch, touching you, touching  
me, TouchSlut, kind touch, touchable!, two hand touch, <3 your touch,  
touch lab, magic touch, sensual touch, loving touch, let me touch it, out  
of touch, touchme, touch the sky, touch and play, touchrelax, touchthis,  
touch&go, touchy, get in touch, touchstone, touchwood, touchy feely, a  
simple touch, touch & feel, soft touch, top touch, touch rugby, eye  
contact, lot of contact, body contact, contactsport, contactpig, bit of  
contact, warm contact, first contact, read before contact, fur, body  
contact, kissing, hung fun normal, hung top, hung jock, hung muscle,  
hung@heart, hung & hungry hung up, hung thick, hung fit top  
EroticHunk, erotic liberation, erotic electronic, erotic mass, erotic scan,  
eroticwinter, open mind, open book, open & looking open to whatever,  
open to all, open me up, openspace, fit and open, front door is open, eyes  
wide open, open up say ahh, very open say hello! open to possibilities,  
open relations, openlymarried, open to life, open my door, open for  
anything, open to ideas, open to suggestions, please o please

**[Robbie comes out of trance]**

I'm sorry about that, I was channeling the oracle — talk about taking a huge load. Anyway, thank you all for your participation, I really appreciate it. Now, something that I should be open about is that the

founding principles of eroto-system, its conceptual foundation really, is based on a very specific set of practices related to, well, gay sex, at least what it looked like in the first quarter of the 21st century. You see, the founders of eroto-system were a bunch of lonely queers who'd lost the end of their 20s to a global pandemic and were reaching the middle of their 30s, when they thought, you know what we need,

*eroto-system, a global network, a new power grid powered by power bottoms like you,*

we can exchange our erotic excess, store its precious reserves and, most importantly, share its vast wealth.

*eroto-system is the energy infrastructure of the future, delivering you the highest-quality erotic charge to eradicate that inner absence so you can say, begone! to that pesky sense that you're lacking something essential at all times. So pump it and plug in!*

After so much time alone with no one to touch but ourselves, eroto-system emerged as an answer: we re-eroticized contact and erected a pipeline of the people's passions. And it is precisely this collective success that we aim to uplift as a union in our efforts to advocate fo-

*please proceed to the second audience participation portion of today's program.*

Ok, moving on. You would think that by doing these demonstrations daily, I'd have my timing down by now. There's just so much to share with you about this truly innovative technology but the time has come to demonstrate the Charging Station.

*The Charging Station was developed using state-of-the-art technology. It is constructed with polycarbonate glass and an intricate internal system*

*which include terminal blocks, surge protection, high-speed fuses, cooling units, and two charging plugs connected to the power supply by tear-resistant cables with temperature sensors.*

As I mentioned at the beginning, the Charging Station delivers energy by way of vibrational force. This is a very important note so please pay attention.

*Out of an abundance of caution, eroto-system forbids the use of the charging plug on the neck or head.*

Basically, anything above and including the throat chakra is off-limits and should be avoided at all costs.

*All other parts of the body, erogenous zones and otherwise, are completely safe.*

The eroto-system motto is: put it where it feels good and the rejuvenating energy will be delivered even faster. Now, I'd like to give everyone a chance to experience this remarkably user-centered experience. First, please watch this short instructional video explaining basic procedures in using the Charging Station.

*Hello and welcome to the Charging Station. This short video will provide essential information for using your machine. As the Charging Station is connected to your home power supply, it is ready to charge at any given moment. It asks simply for your presence. Whether you look at yourself in its mirrored surfaces with pleasure or pity is of no concern to the Charging Station. Be with yourself and feel it replenish you. The charging plugs are designed to deliver high-quality erotic charge to wherever you feel most lacking. eroto-system aims to deliver a deeply relaxing and healing experience of vibratory solitude. When charging is complete, please pump out any excess energy to complete the circuit.*

Thank you all for watching that video. Whereas the Pumping Station is typically fueled by collective practices of physical exertion, the Charging Station is a profoundly restful solitary activity. It gives you a chance to recharge your battery. I'm going to invite everyone here today to join me in moving through this circuit. Take this opportunity to charge your battery then get pumping!

**[As the musical sequence (composed using a contact mic attached to a vibrator with its increasing intensity levels) begins to play, Robbie begins reading a queer theory-inspired, guided meditation-style reverie on selfhood and collectivity that is composed mostly as a series of questions. He reads them in a spaced-out manner, as if finally powering down to the same position where he started. These questions will float slowly across the screens.]**

What if individuation is a metaphysical error? What if we are just the same in our difference, and different in our sameness? What if our connection was devoid of possessiveness? What if we learned how to close the distance between ourselves and others? What if you joined me here? What if the walls between us crumbled and disappeared? What if the only thing that drove us was a desire for raw connection? What if we were interchangeable? What does desire look like in the world that we've inherited? What does it look like in the world that we're building? What would it mean for us to scatter ourselves? What if the grid dissolved and we found ourselves in an orgiastic mass? What if our sense of political power comes from our massed bodies? What could we manage to build with all those bodiless biceps, headless torsos, and trunkless legs? What if we practiced self-dissolution, self-dispersal, self-repetition? How can I give myself away more freely? Do you agree to that loss of boundaries? Do you renounce self-ownership? Are our repeated failures to connect just sketches for new forms of connection? Can we take down the fence, eradicate the boundary between you and I? What if the other wasn't some



mystery to be solved or territory to dominate? What if we released the illusion of control? What if lack was just infinite space for more fullness?

*This user session has now ended. eroto-system thanks you for joining us on the grid today. We hope to see you soon. Goodbye.*

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