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Episode 17: Defiance

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Show Intro

Boingy bouncy electronic instrumental music plays underneath.

Julia: 17. Defiance. I'm Julia Melfi—a New York Neo-Futurist. While our on-going, ever-changing, late-night show, *The Infinite Wrench*, is on hold for the foreseeable future, we wanted a place to keep making art for you. And thus, *Hit Play* was born!

If you're already a fan of The New York Neo-Futurists, or any of our sibling companies, hi! We can't wait to be fancy and greet you with a European cheek kiss. If this is totally new to you—welcome to it!

We play by four rules: We are who we are, we're doing what we're doing, we are where we are, and the time is now. Simply put: we tell stories, and those stories are our own. Everything that you hear is actually happening. So if we tell you we're recording right after eating a lemon wedge, we're really recording right after eating a lemon wedge. Like me.

Sounds of Julia sucking on a lemon and shuddering.

Some of the plays in this episode may contain sensitive topics. For more specific content warnings, check the timecodes in the show notes.

Julia: And now, Katie will Run the Numbers!

Katie: Hi, I'm Katie, a New York Neo-Futurist. In this episode we're bringing you 4 plays by Anooj Bhandari, Shelton Lindsay featuring Michael John Improta, Joey Rizzolo, and me—Katie Kay Chelena featuring Julia Melfi.

That brings us to 73 audio experiments on *Hit Play*. Enjoy!

Music winds down.

Play 1: The Double Down, or a case for not having to tell you how to say my name (1:29)

Anooj: The Double Down, or a case for not having to tell you how to say my name. **GO!**

Gentle musical underscore. Certain words as indicated are bleeped out with a high tone.

Anooj: There's a right way to say my name, and I'm not going to say it on this podcast episode. You might have already heard it, and I admit, of name's you've maybe never heard but are likely to successfully be able to sound out, my name is one of them, but that's neither here nor there. What I'm interested in, at this moment, is thinking about how this particular "now" is perhaps the least I've ever thought about my personhood in terms of the sound of my own name.

I currently hear it less than I'm used to hearing it and I say it less because I'm not introducing myself to anybody new. I am used to my name being a conflict. I'm used to saying it two or three times in my own head with different emphasis on different letters before saying it out loud, and then feeling residual discomfort formed by the distance between what I said and what I meant to say vs. wanted to say vs. should have maybe said. I double down on my own name, say it multiple times in different ways, just like other people do with names, yes, but also with certain words like... chai. I think we're at a learning moment with the double down... folks may be realizing that when you say Chai Tea, it's actually just saying Tea Tea or as I prefer it, Chai Chai, but when somebody says Chai Tea, those two names take different forms; the former being the exotic, the difference or the different, that thing with spice, perhaps, and the latter, the familiar, the thing one can hold onto so that their order is still grounded in sense of routine and sameness and knowing exactly what you're going to get.

When I say *bleep bleep*, I practice saying my own name, I double down, name the same thing twice and label one the exotic and one the familiar without either being exactly what they need to be. And when I'm alone, I realize I do this way more for the convenience of others than for my own sake.

I've been making a lot of chai lately. Over the past eight months I've drunk two to four cups a day and made somewhere over a hundred cups for other people. The repetition is exciting to me because when I have ingredients like *bleep* and *bleep* and *bleep* and *bleep*, the whole thing

isn't really about measuring, but rather about sensing; about smelling and tasting; about putting in some of each thing until satisfaction because there's no real right way to make it except attaching one's own joy to it.

I remember back to this little get together a couple years ago, this homie with a very Judeo-Christian name asking me how to pronounce mine. And so I told him, and then I offered the double down, told him, "but I usually hear *bleep* and *bleep*, and the differences are so slight that I just let them go," and you know what he said? He called me out for not "doing the work," for not acting in the name of justice for myself by getting others to be on board with calling me by my quote-unquote real name. And I wish that I could go back to that moment, as my quiet mouth rebuilt some space between my spice and my rawness to simply say this: My justice and my joy will never be the way my name sounds on your tongue. This is not about doubling down, or correcting a mistake. It's about getting somebody's personhood right being something beyond a name and into listening and tasting and smelling carefully for the people who don't need a space between the exotic and the known to seek something they can claim. To say you don't get to call out my justice without shuffling your feet on the tightrope between the exotic and the palpable and having to smell out the *bleep* from the *bleep* from the *bleep* from the *bleep* along the way, and that there's a difference between knowing all the sounds, and knowing what it feels like to have your name be a secret you choose to offer to those who earn it, and if you feel me, I mean really, feel me, you won't have to hear it a second time. And after, I would stand up, and maybe, just maybe, I would have made him a cup of chai.

Music ends.

Play 2: I've gained that Covid 15 (5:35)

Shelton: I've gained that Covid 15. **GO!**

Shelton raps over Michael's beatboxing.

Shelton: Like a yoyo thrown down to the end of its tether
my weight's always fluctuated like it's the weather
In Scotland, took the freshman 15 and made that a 20
Putting pounds down like I was buying a Bentley

Moved to the States a decade later, portions doubled in size
Make a super-sized Shelton plus a portion of fries
In between those moments, weight comes and goes
What am I waiting for? Who the fuck knows?

Sometimes my weight's really gone and stressed me out
But now I'm not so worried about what I'm lugging about

Chorus. Warped backing vocals from Michael on "Covid 15"

I've gained that, I've gained that, I've gained that Covid 15
I've gained that, I've gained that, I've gained that Covid 15

I wake, up making cookies, my new wake and bake
And I'm no baking rookie, leaving none on my plate
For lunch I'm like a Hobbit still in the Shire
Sweatpants on, though I haven't actually perspired
For dinner, give me bacon cooked in butter and served on a steak
And while you're at it add a smoothie—nah make that a shake.

Chorus. Warped backing vocals from Michael on "Covid 15"

I've gained that, I've gained that, I've gained that Covid 15
I've gained that, I've gained that, I've gained that Covid 15

Now I don't mean the illness, but fuck it who knows?
Cause we can't get tests in the US, that's just how it goes
Maybe i've got antibodies but I ain't' anti-body.
I could have a home gym, but knitting's my hobby
Waistline growing fast than the number of the unemployed
From living on my computer, being an android.

Chorus. Warped backing vocals from Michael on "Covid 15"

I've gained that, I've gained that, I've gained that Covid 15
I've gained that, I've gained that, I've gained that Covid 15

I'm like a bear getting ready for winter
So it's spring, who cares? Time has splintered
Seeing posts about all the ways to lose weight
Just love yourself, you're self is great!
Any body's a beach body cause a shape is a shape
So eat that extra cookie and celebrate!

Gonna love my new folds and call them my own
Cause though I live in an apartment, my body's my home.

Music warps out on final line with distorted "yeah yeahs"

Play 3: Confidence (7:33)

Joey: Confidence. **GO!**

Hurried footsteps. A distant door closes. Footsteps approach. Rustling. The text is softly spoken in urgency into the mic.

Joey: Okay. Hi, okay. I'm going to tell you a true story. I have a friend – let's call him Walter. That's not his name – his name is Billy – but I'm going to call him Walter for anonymity. Walter has a friend, a woman. Let's call her Delores. I actually don't know her name, but let's call her Delores. Delores was married to a man. Let's call him Arlo. Arlo, whose name I don't know, I'm just calling him Arlo, liked to frighten Delores, his wife, by jumping at her while her guard was down. This was not an act of cruelty, but it was more than a game. It was a fetish. It was a bizarre, unquenchable paraphilia wherein he derived sexual excitement by frightening his wife. This meant that he would not only jump out to startle her, he would do so fully naked, pouncing at Delores with a fully engorged penis. She did not know about this fetish when she married him and she found the stress of being ambushed unawares increasingly difficult to tolerate. To ameliorate this stress, Delores started to anticipate Arlo's misguided attempts at lovemaking. Arlo, whose sexual excitement relied upon his quarry's surprise, responded by laying more complicated traps, going so far as to call in sick to work, drive his car around the block to make Delores think he was going to work, and then hiding in wait for hours before springing forth, stark naked, stone hard.

They are divorced now.

"Arlo" is the ex-husband of "Delores" who is friends with my friend Walter. I don't know Arlo. I do not actually know his name – I'm calling him Arlo but I don't know, maybe it is Arlo. And yet, I know something incredibly intimate about his nature – something of which I suspect many who are close to him remain ignorant. After all, Delores made it to the altar without suspecting a thing.

I feel like I shouldn't have this knowledge. Perhaps you feel like you shouldn't have this knowledge. And yet, here you are, listening to the intimate details of a complete stranger's fetish. I say "complete stranger" but...well...if, by chance, Arlo, you are listening...

Hello. I'm Joey. I'd apologize for this but for the fact that I'm not really sorry. Look, Arlo: whatever private confidence you shared with Delores was probably nullified in your divorce. Walter did break a confidence with Delores when he told me, but I made no such promises to Walter and so I'm here telling everybody.

And Arlo, look: I know how karma works. And I wonder what details of my own private self I've divulged to others, who in turn broke our confidence and shared them with strangers. If those secrets got to the right – or wrong – stranger, it's possible my most private self has already been exposed on some other podcast. Or this one. I don't know. Sometimes really obvious shit escapes me.

Arlo, listen: some secrets are only harmful because they are secrets. So I'm making a plea, to anyone listening: let's help Arlo out. Let's spread out the pain of karmic retribution, let's let a little air out of a balloon already stretched far too thin.

Tell me a secret. It doesn't have to be a confession. It doesn't have to be a crime. It just has to be a secret. Something you would never tell anybody. Something that I will tell everybody. You'll give me a secret, I'll give you a fake name. Email your confessions to joey@nynf.org and we will find a way to share it, here, on this podcast. I won't tell anyone who you are, but I will tell everyone who you really are. You can send it to me from an anonymous account if you like, but...

Someone in the background yells "Hey!"

Joey: Shit! Gotta go!

Sound of Joey running away and the distant door closing.

Play 4: Get Me (Em)Bodied (11:49)

Katie: Get Me (Em)Bodied. **GO!**

Katie: Act One. The Departure.

I. Love. Moving my body!

Music underscore with an early 2000's Beyonce vibes a la GET ME BODIED or FREEKUM DRESS.

I love feeling strong and powerful and sexy and capable. If you asked me where my soul lives, I would probably say in my hips. I've been known to demand a group stretch break in professional settings. But at the end of March, when I lost all my jobs and New York City screeched to a halt, my soul decided to take a nice month-long vacation from my body. The last flight out of LaGuardia: a one-way trip to Dissociation Town, and I hopped aboard.

Music cuts abruptly.

Act Two. The Returning.

A couple weeks ago, I found myself on my bedroom floor, laying flat on my back. I took a deep breath, and I stretched. Slowly. Gently. Just to feel where my body was. It was exhausted from being tense for a month straight. The next day I dusted off my yoga mat, then I took myself out on more walks, then somehow I found myself dancing again, then—a friend sold me a cherry-red recycled bike. And y'all, that first ride was...

Background noises of summer sounds you might hear biking through NYC, wind whooshing, Katie takes a breath.

Like my breath filled my body like ships' sails and carried me forward, like my heart beat the drum of life again instead of fear, like my hips unlocked and remembered their sway and then...

Music cuts out. Media blitz, glitchy, overlapped, underneath Katie reading headline.
“Adele shows off stunning weight loss transformation”

Act Three. The Barrage.

Low static underscore.

Right as I arrived back in my body, the barrage began. Now, I’m used to being fat and hot, but the shift in trending topics from deadly virus to weight loss mania still made my head spin. Even in a global pandemic, people fear getting a lil thick almost as much as they fear actual illness. Suddenly, my check ins with my family included numbers on the scale and diet plans. My suggested videos on youtube included more “weight loss workouts” and less “mindful movement meditations.” My thin friends bemoaned that they had gotten “Corona Thick,” like it’s a bad thing, vowing to whip their bodies back into shape, lest they looked like... What, me? And so the very thing grounding me through all of this—moving my body for the sake of strength and joy—became fraught.

Static cuts out.

Honestly, I wasn’t sure what to make of this. I didn’t know how to wrap this up and act like I had an answer to this tension. So I asked Julia for some help.

Act Four. The Body We Share.

Julia: Hey Katie.

Katie: Hey Julia. When I was writing this, you said something that I can’t stop thinking about.

Julia: I said that the “lose that quarantine weight” mentality is its own kind of dissociation.

Katie: And instead of using movement to punish our bodies...

Julia: ...when our bodies are working so hard to be kind to us...

Katie: ...why not return the kindness by working to be as present and alive in our bodies as possible?

Julia: What makes you feel embodied?

Katie: Dancing around with string lights on in my bedroom. You?

Julia: Biking.

Katie: Let’s get embodied. You, listening, you can do it too. You can dance in your room, you can go on a bike ride, or simply touch your belly and breathe deep, and repeat after me:

Early 2000s Beyonce beats come back in to underscore

Thank you body for fighting hard.

Thank you body for staying soft.

Thank you body for carrying me through this.

You’re working hard to be good to me.

I’m gonna work hard to be good to you.

Music plays out

Show Outro (15:59)

Boingy bouncy electronic instrumental music plays underneath.

Julia: Thanks for Hitting Play and then listening to *Hit Play*. If you liked what you heard, subscribe to the show and tell a friend! If you want to support the New York Neo-Futurists in other ways, consider making a donation at nynf.org, or joining our Patreon—Patreon.com/NYNF. Patreon membership gives you access to bonus content like video plays and livestreams. And if this episode gets over 1,000 downloads, we'll order one of our Patreon supporters a pizza on us. We'd really appreciate any support in these difficult times. Contributing to our Patreon helps us continue to pay our artists.

Take care of yourself, give yourself some ballpoint pen tats, and share it with us on Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook.

This episode featured work by: Anooj Bhandari, Shelton Lindsay featuring Michael John Improta, Joey Rizzolo, and Katie Chelena featuring me, Julia Melfi. Our logo was designed by Shelton Lindsay. And our sound is designed by Anthony Sertel Dean. *Hit Play* is produced by Anthony Sertel Dean, Léah Miller, and me, Julia Melfi. Take Care!

Music fades out!