ABSTRACT
In this paper I will make the case that the bodily change is a strategy for the destruction of the world. Radical romanticism, I will argue, is an ethical praxis of tactile engagement producing futures, without subsuming agential differences into a singular form. I will make the case that attention to cuteness and touch can turn into strategies for emergent practices beyond violent domination. I will discuss cuteness through the theorization of Tripti Pillai and Sianne Ngai. Then turn to a reading of Neelu Bhuman’s Love Letter/Prema Lekha, which I will let culminate through resonance with Sharon Patricia Holland’s engagement with quotidian racism, in a proposal for radical romanticism. This reading will shown to be the overture for the destruction of the world through an articulation of transsomatechnics via the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva. Somatechnics can be envisioned as strategy of ethics supported by María Lugones’ world travelling. The end of the world might emerge from brokenness as Nat Raha discusses.

Radical romanticism—producing every day dreams

To escape the confines of the every day, I propose a tactile engagement with ethics in order to come to a quotidian approach to change. Changing structures leads to changing bodies. To dream of new futures is a form of romanticism that turns radical when it becomes tactile engagement geared at ending structural domination.

The proposal for radical romanticism finds its origin in Neelu Bhuman’s short film Love Letter/Prema Lekha, which can be interpreted to offer a suggestion for a relational techné that aims at new futures. By exploring the cuteness in the film, an argument for changing quotidian power structures emerges. Changing power dynamics comes with tactile engagement and bodily change: a transsomatechnical process. In order to defend this view, this paper will first examine the entanglement between cuteness, power, and violence. It will then go on in the second part to focus on transsomatechnical conceptualisations in order to articulate that structural change is always bodily change.

Cuteness as violence

Neelu Bhuman’s experimental short film Love Letter/Prema Lekha (Bhuman 2016) presents a cute interaction between the protagonist and their lover. The film presents one person playfully and intimately engaging with their lover in a series of close ups suggesting a direct perspective of the maker. The audience is taken along with the perspective of the protagonist, serving as a window, showing the way the protagonist sees the lover in close up. The engagement of the protagonist suggests power, by freely manipulating the face of the lover. This powerful display of playful manipulation frames the lover as cute. However, an initial expectation of immediate mutuality stemming from the tactile engagement on screen is contrasted by the voice over, which narrates not about relation, but about self. Through the tactile play with the lover, the protagonist engages in dreams of another world. The relationality suggested by the imagery is destabilised by the multi-gendered dreams of the narrator. The movement outwards rebounds inwards. The title Love Letter/Prema Lekha suggests indeed that the emphasis lies within the poetics. As such, this letter operates by interrupting the reverie of romantic connection in order to dream of other forms of life. In contrast to romantic dreams where two become one, Love Letter/Prema Lekha seems to indicate the possibility of connection functioning as a destabilisation of oneself.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the possibilities of radical romantic dreaming through tactile connection, I will explore cuteness, thereby locating the process of attraction in dispositions and current relational structures. Having done so, I will return to Love Letter/Prema Lekha and discuss radical dreams in the everyday.

Through a reading of Vishal Bhardwaj’s film Omkara (Bhardwaj 2006), Tripti Pillai (Pillai 2016) makes the case that cuteness gestures towards a state of “ineptitude” or “crushability”. In this paper I will focus on cuteness as “violent instrument of
organisational breakdown” (Pillai 2016), while not being seduced by Pillai’s suggestion of cuteness without futurity. Instead I suggest that a cute laceration of the current organisation of life is necessary for disrupting violent futurity, and opens the possibility for the emergence of new forms without commodified violence.

Quoted in Pillai, Harris reminds us that

“[s]omething becomes cute not necessarily because of a quality it has but because of a quality it lacks, a certain neediness and inability to stand alone, as if it were an indigent starving, lonely and rejected because of a hideousness we find more touching than unsightly (Pillai 2016).

This hideousness is a placement outside of the norm through the absence of autonomy, revealing an agent through the lens of differential power relations and the possibility of violence. Pillai argues that it is exactly this potential violence that attracts agents and contracts the space between agent and the cute object with the threat of boundary transgression. Yet, I propose that this violence is foundational for an investigation of the negotiation of complex interactions between agents with a variety of differences of power and possibility. The cute, stemming from the acute—the cut, can be made to work for lacerating power structures operating in the present.

The [...] cute [...] call[s] forth not only specific subjective capacities for feeling and acting, but also specific ways of relating to other subjects and the larger social arrangements these ways of relating presuppose. In doing so they are compelling reminders of the general fact of social difference and conflict [of taste …] the asymmetry of power on which cuteness depends is another compelling reminder [...] But the fact that the cute object seems capable of making demands on us regardless [...] suggests that “cute” designates not just the site of a static power differential but also the site of a surprisingly complex power struggle (Ngai 2012, 11).

Cuteness thus emanates insight into power relations and highlighting complexities within these power negotiations, produces a source through which to theorize power beyond more direct and wholesale applications such as static notions of “identity” can seem to suggest (Mohanty 1995, 85). Cuteness flags the interplay between agents that is negotiated through power relations, which are structural and simultaneously personal in nature. They are structural as they emerge from dispositions mediating perception, embedded cognition, and action-initiation when theorized through ethics. However, this interplay is concurrently personal as these dispositions are also formed by the agents, within the contextual navigation open to the agent in a process over time.

Pillai suggests “the protective impulse that cuteness mobilizes in us thrives on our knowledge of our own ability to crush and destroy the thing we feel compelled to cuddle almost, but not quite, to the point of permanent damage or destruction”(Pillai 2016). This protective impulse may be personal, but the perceived power to cuddle or destroy is certainly made possible by structural support networks. The acknowledgement of this power made visible in the agent is further complicated through a dual nature of the working of the power of cute.

The protective stimulus is complicated by a second feeling of an angry recognition of “being exploited or deceived” (Angier in: Ngai 2012, 24) by this object for which there was little to no regard, which was assumed to be easily destroyed. Ngai argues “aggression is central to our understanding of objects as cute”(Ngai 2012, 23). Simultaneously, this aggression is suggestive of our initial openness to (this object of) cute manipulation. Furthermore, it is the recognition of the circularity that the agent needs to be open that leads to their becoming aggressive, which lends cuteness the power of negotiation within the agent and therefore also between agents.

This negotiation is unequivocally a form of ethical interaction, contrasting with Ngai’s conception. Ngai offers “cute” as explicitly non-moral:

Nor does the judgement of cute have any of the links to morality—indirect or direct—repeatedly ascribed to the beautiful. In vivid contrast to beauty’s continuing associations with fairness, symmetry, or proportion, the experience of cute depends entirely on the subject’s affective response to an imbalance of power between herself and the subject (Ngai 2012, 54).

Kantian loyalties fence in this analysis of cute. Ngai performs a universalising move, associating “fairness, symmetry and proportion” with moral appraisal, and thus blocking power differentiation as a starting point for an appraisal of morality—or rather ethics.5 Ngai’s investment in moral symmetry through universality makes the category of “cute” inept, and thereby possibly cute in itself. In contrast to Ngai, I propose that the category of the cute is very much suitable for theorizing the ethical with.

Instead of functioning through a desired symmetry, possibly leading to commodification—as I will discuss below—relationships are marked by power imbalances.6 However, this need not flag an absence of ethics, but could be indicative of cute attraction within an ethic. Anni Liu suggests that

[...]

power imbalances can be routine in a long-term relationship, but using them to your advantage is not. For example: If we are less emotionally invested in our partners, we may end up with the upper hand in the relationship while the other person feels powerless (Liu 2016).

Not only does Liu take power imbalances to be constitutive in romantic investments by naming them “routine”, but also draws attention to the necessity
of negotiating these imbalances—whether they be of structural nature: masculine/feminine, black/poc/white, crip/able, along with their various passing privileges—or carry a personal and intimate component: the amount of emotional investment. Cute attributions are simultaneously ethical and personal as they are expressive of an entanglement of power relations at the intimate level.

I will return to Neelu Bhuman’s short film Love Letter/Prema Lekha (Bhuman 2016) to explore possibilities within such entanglements, and offer a suggestion for theorizing these as radical romanticism.

**Love letter/prema lekha as radical everyday/dream**

The first thing we see is the lightly glossy white person’s lips. Smile. Not a very young smile. Skin, teeth have seen life. There is no suggestion of a pristine newness in this meeting.

Cut. The smile gets cut. New shot, finger moves up. A brown finger: teasing, caressing. An intimate game. Reaching, feeling, biting, caressing, kissing. Play. Anonymous intimacy. Fingers, lips.

Two languages voiced over. Telugu, and English in a diasporic accent. A translation and re-articulation of Audre Lorde’s prologue to Zami (Lorde 2001). Words that layer the tactile dialogue on screen. A movement beyond the duality of genders; a movement beyond the solidity of the past through everyday pleasures. On screen the intimacy continues, takes the mouth by its lips, makes it listen to the touch. The glittery lips respond to a ring, the remnants of nail polish.

Both. Together. Negotiating and surpassing gender in voice and text, action and reception. Bhuman claims that we are more than we are here, but the invitation to playful intimacy only works as there is no “master’s voice” (Lorde 1996).

Connecting across structural power differences, the option to detach and take critical distance seems immediately present. Negative engagement makes limits and boundaries visible and opens them up to further scrutiny. However, as Liu has problematized, these politics of distance can strengthen power differences.

Another option is suggested by Bhuman’s film. The film offers no solution, but shows in this engagement there is space for exploration without normative invasion. It is lyrical, and it is romantic: as it suggests possibilities beyond the present, but it is not idealistic: it is tactile engagement in the present, transgressing relational dyads allowing the emergence of new forms.

The possibility to read a cute functioning in this film is the explicit moment that “[…] the cute index—[es] the uncertain status of performing between labor and play” (Ngai 2012, 13). This negotiation is situated in the complex interactions of different and contrasting, interweaving structural identities that play out in different zones and at different moments between and within the two agents. It is play as loving interaction, while simultaneously demanding labour by not subjecting this play to the demands of normative structures and an uncomplicated working of differential power relations.

Furthermore, Ngai leads us to see that it is cuteness that simultaneously provides the attraction to bridge the cut:

Cuteness, an adoration of the commodity in which I want to be as intimate with or physically close to it as possible, thus has a certain utopian edge, speaking to a desire to inhabit a concrete, qualitative world of use as opposed to one of abstract exchange. There is thus a sense in which the fetishism of cuteness is as much a way of resisting the logic of commodification—predicated on the absolute commensurability of everything—as it is a symptomatic reflection of it (Ngai 2012, 13).

What we can see happening here, is that the fetishisation is not only problematic, as it reduces a person to a location others assign to it (Rodríguez 2014, 143), but that it opens up the space for negotiating one’s actions within the workings of the power differences. It is in the words of Juana María Rodríguez “to dare to perform, what already had come to define [you]” (Rodríguez 2014, 143). Rodríguez, thinking through racialised fetishisation, uses Robyn Wiegman to hammer the point home.

I simply want to say yes. Yes to gender. Yes to gender as a social system, as a division of labour, as a structure of inequality; as a mode of dis/identification; as on occasion for sex; yes to gender as a habit of thought, as a terrain of recognition; as a source of shame, as a practice of pleasure, as a language of being; yes in short to gender as a means to describe, inhabit, embody, critique, violate, and resist (Wiegman 2007, 228).

Negotiation through acknowledgement is a way to fully recognise the structures of inequality that make these power differences work as a platform for the operation of cute-attributions. It’s an awareness of negotiating this in play, that works to escape a confining form of postulated, but absent equality. This false equality claim works to commodify bodies in a perpetuation of ascribed similarity and absolute commensurability, as is the demand of liberal capitalist diversity discourse. However, while play is the starting point to work through the power-differences that are at stake and real, and not collapse into forms of renewed patriarchy, some further work needs to be done.

Violent cuteness leaves space for attraction as the perpetuation of difference. It becomes radical romanticism when this attraction protects difference within the formation of new forms of life: as radical ethics. These new forms are radical only insofar as they do not rest on either the submergence of one of the actors into the life world of the other, or on the
cuteness as the opening of the wound: the cut. Cuteness functions as the acute separation within attraction, whereby the power to contain difference lies in its violence. The opening of the gap that will not close need not—in contrast to romanticism—lead to a happiness between “flower-pot and cat” as Arendt so scathingly suggests (Pillai 2016). Instead, cute laceration enables attraction without collapsing into each other, not reducing the other violently to a projected encapsulation—whether that is a literal copying as in an (again denigrating) urge to merge, or a heterosexist mono-ethical relationship, whereby the good of one is essentially reduced to the aims of the other.

What the analysis of cuteness suggests within a radically romantic proposal is that violence is not absent within intimate interrelations that are marked by difference, but that this violence needs to be displaced from the purely intra-subjective: the violence of one “subject” to another as seems inevitable since Hegel’s Lord and Bondsman (Lugones 2003, 97) and the concrete enactment by white settlers and slavery. Hegel articulated the emergence of identity through the application of delineated negativity as formative violence. In this formulation the one that is subjected to violence, the bondsman, is the one that forms a nuanced identity. Identity is thus located in the violence structured by another. However, this dynamic can shift to the recognition of violence that is located within an agent, as Liu already suggested. This manoeuvre doesn’t dream violence as absent, but gives it a different direction, and thereby a different momentum: one of potential instead of invasion. As Rodríguez articulates:

Saying yes to gender, yes to the ways gendered articulation of race functions as fetishistic attachment for ourselves and others, entails refusing to pretend that we can exist outside its regulatory power, and insisting instead on confronting the pleasures and harms that it instantiates (Rodríguez 2014, 144).

Rodríguez demands to look violence in the eye, instead of pretending safe engagement can be symmetrically constituted.

Radical romanticism is found in Bhuman’s film as the interplay between smiles, kisses, and the negotiations of intimate transgressions. A bite gets fingers clasping the mouth shut in return. However, this intimate gesture of playful chastising is not the end. Touch continues the relation as navigation in the present.

Bhuman’s film accentuates power structures in everyday dreams. Recalling Liu’s remark that power differences are routine in relationships, we can see those power differences emerge as what Sharon Patricia Holland terms the quotidian appearance of racism (Holland 2012, 95). Bhuman’s images connect Audre Lorde’s words by suggesting shifting through power differences as tactile engagement in the present, negotiating power in proximity. Holland suggests: “The touch […] manifests itself as psychic life of difference, transforming two categories of being […] into a charged space of pleasure and possibility” (Holland 2012, 96). The touch, as Holland further remarks, is not just violent—similarly to the cute interplay between the lovers on screen—but also “so compelling […] that the prevailing narrative of race is undone and a multitude of possibilities find fruition” (Holland 2012, 103). Indeed, Pillai insisted that cute laceration functions as organisational breakdown.

However, the cute cut needs to be followed with touch in order to open up space for possibility.

Radical romanticism does not retreat into an objective and objectifying distance, tracing the possibilities of commensurability, a space for the negative appraisal of limits and criticism, but in contrast focuses on engagement, proximity; not sameness in space, but sameness of space, spaces that are shared across different worlds in order to make room for intimacy. Pillai posits that cuteness returns the agent to the violence in themselves. In addition, the disruptive possibilities of cuteness lie in the continued and negotiated differentiation, and not in the violent reduction to one-sided sameness.

While cuteness operates within power structures, once the violence within is turned against its own smooth operation, there is only the touch and the dream, but not a codification of relation available. It is therefore urgent to question whether new codes or relation emerge, or how it is possible to adapt to the absence of these codes.

The destruction of the world

The violence of cuteness has been disseminated as a function of desire within structures of power. Rerouted against itself, however, this violence might offer an ending of the world. Denise Ferreira da Silva indicates such an end as the dissolution of both the integer universal subject and the reflected commodification of the world (Da Silva 2014, 91). Da Silva makes the case that ending the play of desire catalyses the dissolution of power structures. Desiring subjects demand satisfaction on their own terms and can therefore not enter mutual relations. As argued above, the dissolution of categories structuring power in the rebound of cuteness indicates a possible strategy for the dissolution of violent relations. Disrupting the structures of desirability might then culminate in an end of the world. In contrast to play structured by desire, da Silva conceptualises the traversing, transversal, and transsubstantiation of bodies (Da Silva 2014, 92) drawing on the philosophical literature of Octavia Butler. I will extend da Silva’s
conceptions and discuss Butler’s work within the discussion of changing relations in order to come to an understanding of changing bodies underlying such transformations.

Butler centres touch in the operation of change, contributing to a further level of understanding Bhuman’s playful imagery. The tactile thus remains the pivotal point of this essay, and we find in Butler’s Parable of the Sower the adage “all that you touch is change” (Butler 1993). This adage functions as ethos for survival and transformation in an apocalyptic world. Butler reflects on the formation of a new form of life in this world through empathy. Hyper empathy dissolves the boundaries between the sensations of bodies. This enables the insight that in addition to touch lending the possibility of dissolution of the categorisations demanded by the operations of cute, touch equally comes with the option of dissolving the categorisations under which the touched body functions. Transsubstantion is made possible in the tactile encounter. Touch changes techne and category.

A second insight Butler offers can be summarised as transsomatechnics: the insight that it is bodily change that leads to a changed form of life. This enquiry is pursued in another set of works of Octavia Butler; the xenogenesis trilogy (Butler 1987; Butler 1988; Butler 1989). Narrated through three different bodies, these works emphasise Butler’s claim that bodily change is central to a changed understanding of the world, and that this change is the motor through which a world can change. Bodily change comprises a change in ethics and a change in epistemology. By explicitly offering three different bodily processes that are mutating as well as coming with their own logics, Butler suggests an insight analogous to da Silva: the world is a Plenum and not a whole.

Transsomatechnics is the contraction of somatechnics and trans. Somatechnics articulates social relations as taking place in the body, and offers the possibility of bridging overarching epistemic notions and contextual practices. Stryker and Sullivan conceptualise this bodily immersion as the “mutually generative relation between bodies of flesh, bodies of knowledge, and bodies politic—or, in short, as somatechnics” (Stryker and Sullivan 2009, 51). As Elaine Marie Carbonell Laforteza argues “somatechnics is the more relevant methodology with which to analyse the bodily negotiations of power that constitute colonial relations” (Laforteza 2015, 5). In order to conceptualise change as tactile intervention, resulting in ways of relating that are not predicated on current dominant structures, either metaphysical or ethical, the concept offers the possibility of thinking through radical change (Pugliese and Stryker 2009, 2). Similarly, dispositional approaches to ethics allow for bodily connection of the individual agent with collective forms of life, as structures of meaning and evaluation, while not capitulating the agent to static norms without contextual navigation. This shifts epistemic-theoretical approaches to an emphasis of ethics and interactions in forms of life, tying in with a project of radical romanticism. Holland argues for such a shift in perspective, articulating a move from legal or theoretical approaches to agential interaction. “When we pay attention to the erotic life of racism, we move onto another playing field altogether where we must abandon positions that hold white and black being in such static relation” (Holland 2012, 114). Somatechnical approaches accommodate shifts from normative categorisations to changing forms of life.

Trans, in the spin Marquis Bey lends it, can be conceptualised as “disruptive orientations indexed imperfectly by bodies” (Bey 2017, 278). Modes of relation in this hemisphere are currently gendered, thus trans can be said also to relate to the realm of gendering. Combined with somatechnics a view of disruptive orientations articulated through changing bodies starts to emerge. These bodies-in-action, societal norms and incorporated technologies converge in the possibility of changing interactions: “to foreground the constitutive […] power of ‘trans’; the matter of transsomatechnics, if you like”(Sullivan 2009, 283). This transsomatechnics of becoming, of change, extends beyond the high-tech of novel inventions (Preciado 2013, 352) to the low-tech somatic practice of dispositional ethics. This ethical navigation of the agent entails bodily change (van der Drift, forthcoming). A transsomatechnical reading offers, underlined by Butler, the insight that changing bodies disrupt social codes: “all that you touch is change”. It is not only the techne of the touch that changes, but touch itself is a tactile traversing of changing bodies: the tactile extensions of trans.

The transsomatechnical operation of bodily change returns to this world that has not yet ended. The body acts with unfinished somatechnes. When soma ceases indicating a standardised category of relation after the violent interruption of cuteness, techne structuring existing relations start to dissolve. Clear technes means clear modes of relating, but when these modes of relating get disrupted because the somatic categorisations dissolve, the techne of relation equally obscure. Emphasising trans within the changed modes of being da Silva offers indicates how the violent interruption of wholeness leads to a trans-ending of categorial being. In the disruption of the play of desire, it emerges that trans is not categorised sufficiently to fit a stable techne of relation. It falls short, and returns the cute desires exposing the violence within the structure. Subsequently, this means living in broken categories. In this brokenness, this unwholesome being, new forms of life can emerge
that scatter as a plenum, which is a step to ending the overarching totality of the world.

A somatechnical approach suggests actions are forming ethical dispositions as well as making a claim to ethical truth—the state of the world how it comes across for agents from their being active (van der drift, forthcoming). Dispositions are shaping forms of life, situating agents in relation to each other and their surroundings. These forms of life are shared as technes of relation, but are not stable and unchangeable. Transsomatic technics situates radical romantic dreaming in the everyday as a strategy for changing forms of life by providing bodily grounding for new focal points, beyond the inscription of existing norms. The techne of touch can thus be understood as an indeterminate affirmation of relation. Touch relates, and becomes a radical romantic tactic for the emergence of forms.

An alteration of dispositions leads to new ethical truth, and offers the possibility to discontinue social reproduction of current forms:

Dispositions are basic because the replication of ethical life lies in the replication of dispositions. [...] if the ethical life that we have is to be effectively criticized and changed, then it can be done so only in ways that can be understood as appropriately modifying the dispositions that we have (B. Williams, 2006, 75).

To discontinue a certain form of life is to form different dispositions. Bernard Williams argues that the disruption of dispositions is constitutive of ethical reflection:

If we accept that there can be knowledge at [...] unreflective level; if we accept the obvious truth that reflection characteristically disturbs, unseats, or replaces those traditional concepts; and if we agree that, at least as things are, the reflective level is not in a position to give us knowledge we did not have before—then we reach the notably un-Socratic conclusion that, in ethics, reflection can destroy knowledge (B. Williams, 1985, 148).

In a normative frame, an agent uses reflection to constitute a self that is controlling its environment (Da Silva, 2014, 91). Dispositional reproduction is ethical autocopiosis, which functions as centripetal force claiming agents within a single field of power (Sharma, 2015, 164). It determines what “feels good to the organism and feels bad to it, and thereby what it feels like to be that organism (the only entity for which these feelings exist)” (Wynter, 2001, 50). These feelings, situated as ethic, are necessarily social as these are technes, constitutive of a collective form of life. These feelings emerge not from an essence but from modes of relation.

In contrast, in the current reading the violence in cuteness rebounds back to the agent, in order to unseat the imposing knowledge stemming from controlling technes of power. The technes of relation that structure the agent dissolve, relinquishing control and the constitution of the wholesome subject, opening the agent up to new forms.

In this move towards nonnormative forms, agents are destroying the ethical knowledge that creates (a part of) normative ethics. Forming new dispositions without collapsing into a new violence of imposed sameness and difference, as radical romanticism suggests, claims from the engaged agents an openness to understand themselves in different forms of life, theorised by María Lugones as world-travelling (Lugones, 2003, 77).

Change is a relative and comparative process happening in contrast. Lugones conceptualises “worlds” instead of forms of life and argues that:

Lugones proposes a conception of multiplicity that is lived at many levels both inside the agent, around the agent, and between agents. “The shift between being one person to being a different person is that I can travel [between worlds]” (Lugones, 2003, 89). This mode of transversality includes transsubstantiation but moreover claims further space for a plenum, which starts within the agent. Lugones makes the case that within one person there can be a difference in truths, as truths about who one is. In contradistinction to the monological field of normative ethics, Lugones makes space for connected multilogical worlds of nonnormativity. Dispositional differentiation is thus suggestive of a multiplicity of simultaneous ethical truths, rather than a single field of power issuing its monological “universal” meaning.

Lugones offers that moving between different “worlds” can be non-competitive playful travelling, while seeing other worlds in a loving, rather than antagonistic way, as “one cannot cross boundaries with [antagonism]” (Lugones, 2003, 95). The playfulness that Lugones advances embraces uncertainty as “openness to surprise” (Lugones, 2003, 95). This means being open to discover oneself as having different properties of truth in different worlds, and needs openness to surprise as one is not certain who one will turn out to be. The practice of playful travelling between worlds and lovingly accepting different truths is thus constitutive of a discontinuation of monological social reproduction. As Lugones suggests there might be overlaps, fusion, straying between worlds, and playful travelling. Playfulness and loving perception not only offer the possibility of shifting worlds, but also to create new forms of life. Lugones defends this multiplicity of forms both as
ethical as well as epistemological: “the oppressed know themselves in realities in which they are able to form intentions that are not among the alternatives that are possible in the world in which they are brutalized and oppressed” (Lugones, 2003, 59).

However, not all is well at the end of the world. While nonnormative life worlds offer simultaneously a refuge, a reality, and a differential mode of ethical acting, we should be careful to interpret these existences as the possibility of disengagement into a blissful new way of being. To fall out of accepted somatic categories, and thus live without available techne of relation means that one might fall apart.

Nat Raha articulates Transfeminine Brokenness as the troubled possibility of utopian constitution of different worlds—as troubling the escape—troubling the reproduction as interruption (Raha, 2017). Raha argues brokenness is a structural condition pervasive in trans femne existence, questioning the possibility of otherworldly healing. While a trans somatechnical movement in-between dominant patterns might offer an escape (Bey, 2017) this movement can constitute a break that might not get healed. Dispositional disruption of reproduction cannot be equated with healed existence. Trans.substan.tion functions by navigating one’s form of life away from normative singularity, but cannot immediately alter material conditions. Liveable existence can remain at an impossible distance—the dream of a healed elsewhere. Raha offers: “It is to politicize our sense of feeling as a part of social and material injustice that must be transformed; and to centre this physical and psychic attenuation in a historicized understanding of our experience” (Raha, 2017, 636). While trans emerges within a history, brokenness also sensitizes a trans body to lack of relations, lack of technes and lack of codings in which to find embrace, not capture. Raha’s conceptualisation suggests somatechnics is a tactical engagement with unfinished techne, broken bodies, but with the strategic dreams of traversing through new forms. In addition to Raha’s understanding of brokenness, the analysis of violent cuteness scrutinizes disruptive affects, while constituting a project of radical romanticism—to dream and aim for forms of life not yet present, beyond the reproduction of current dispositions, in tactile proximity, navigating the daily affair of dispositional production. Disrupting dispositional reproduction means interrupting the epistemological as well as the ethical mode of current forms of life. Trans dispositional interruption is a centrifugal strategy for disrupting the singular order of relations. Disrupting that means unequivocally, destroying the world, as we know it.

Notes

i. Here I follow Bernard Williams’ understanding that morality is a narrow subset of ethics (B. Williams, 1985, 11), and in particular that morality is a post Cartesian rationality-focused and very particular way of thinking about social expectations, while ethics can be seen as a broader discussion on forms of life and their respective evaluations. Sianne Ngai typically falls in the first category, because of Kantian alignments.

ii. I do not want to propose these as one-way, power imbalances can fluctuate and reverse depending on situations and contexts.

iii. Thanking Atlanta Ina Beyer for great conversation culminating in this insight.

iv. Thanking Nat Raha for underlining the concreteness of this point.

v. Da Silva explains Plenum as follows in a footnote: “For Leibniz, “everything is a plenum, which makes all matter interconnected”: In a plenum every motion has some effect on distant bodies, in proportion to heir distance. For each body is affected, not only by those in contact with it, and in some way feels the effects of everything that happens to them, but also, through them, it feels the effects of those in contact with the bodies with which it is itself immediately in contact. From this it follows that this communication extends to any distance whatsoever. As a result, every body is affected by everything that happens in the universe, to such an extent that he who sees all can read in each thing what happens everywhere, and even what has happened or will happen, by observing in the present what is remote in time as well as in space.

G. W. Leibniz, Philosophical Essays (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), p. 221.”

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