

Drift and Raha • Femme, Complicity, Solidarity

“They Would Plant the Rose Garden Themselves”

Femme, Complicity, Solidarity, and the Rewiring of the Sensuous

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Abstract

This article theorizes how femme sociality and world-making provide a counterpoint to a politics that aims for neutrality or innocence, arguing that neutrality or innocence are hallmarks of different forms of patriarchy. Instead, the authors offer embracing complicity as a concept that structures practical ethics, and centered in abolitionism and nondisposability. Complicity is formulated as a mode of self-understanding that guides action, evading the social hierarchies demanded by a claim to innocence, uprooting (neo)liberal attitudes that look to evade friction by doling out punishment and exclusion. The proposal to embrace complicity is followed by a proposal for solidarity based on openness. Rather than being “right” or “solving problems,” a turn to the sensuous provides a form of world-making that can hold difference—without reducing life to the single organizational forms characteristic of liberalism. As a key part of this form of solidarity, the authors show how trans femmeness emphasizes possibilities for social and sensorial transformation. Practices of care and solidarity allows one to entangle with different forms of life. Instead of reforming the structures of oppression, femme practices encourage us to unlearn and uproot institutional forms that reproduce social and material oppressions, and to take agency in (re)constructing and nourishing one’s own worlds—to collectively plant the rose garden of struggle for liberation.

Keywords trans, transfeminism, ethics, social justice, abolition

This article theorizes how femme sociality and world-making provide a counterpoint to a politics that aims for neutrality or innocence, which we argue are hallmarks of different forms of patriarchy. Centered in abolitionist ethics of nondisposability, we propose instead embracing complicity as a practical concept contra innocence. We formulate complicity as a mode of self-understanding that guides action, evading the social hierarchies demanded by a claim to innocence, uprooting (neo)liberal attitudes that look to evade friction by doling out punishment

and exclusion. We follow an embrace of complicity with a proposal for solidarity based on openness. Rather than being “right” or “solving problems,” we turn to the sensuous for a form of world-making that can hold difference—without reducing life to the single organizational forms characteristic of liberalism.

We elaborate how trans femmeness emphasizes possibilities for social and sensorial transformation. Practices of care and solidarity allows one to entangle with different forms of life. Instead of reforming the structures of oppression, femme practices encourage us to unlearn and uproot institutional forms that reproduce social and material oppressions; and to take agency in (re)constructing and nourishing our own worlds—to plant the rose garden of struggle for liberation ourselves.

Femme Solidarities, in the Collective

We build femme worlds and lives through our friendships in the everyday, the projects and collectives we forge, join, and establish. At a social level, we check in on each other, on bodies and feelings, chemicals and processes, activities and relationships. We compare notes, experiences. We encourage self-expression in others, to experiment and try out looks, lives, desires. Through such actions, queer and trans and nonbinary femmes forge and reaffirm bonds, friendships, relations, reaching out to hold differences and commonalities together. We hold space to share, to eat together and cry with each other, to support and feel through the denigration and harm we (have) experience(d). We encourage each other to be agents of change and transformation. Femme agency emerges both at the level of one’s individual body and in a communal/collective context, but these are interlinked, the individual inextricable from the collective. We begin to scheme, to plot together, to organize from the smallest of levels (making art or food or clothes or zines) to the largest (building infrastructure and collectives). We lift

each other up, celebrate victories in making life in spite of racial capitalism, such as minor gains from institutions that bear power over us or that have harmed us. We hold up the joys of bodies, even if bodies are also sometimes hard to bear. We check in on healing; we build care teams to aid recoveries.

But femme life is not just about material transformation writ large in our local, personal, collective worlds. For us—the authors of this article—it’s also about deepening the affects and the aesthetics of femininity and of gendering, understanding the interplay/influence of material conditions upon them. In the face of both economic and cultural austerity—the latter represented in austerity-chic and spartan purity and moralizing²—femmes (femmes of color in particular) pursue/embrace/make play with (the idea of) opulence and luxury, and embellish the worlds we’ve made together. The variations in our aesthetics of self-presentation draw eyes toward us, showing what it is possible to embody otherwise.

Together, femmes shape space and relations for joy, fun, desire, sexuality. We work through difficult emotions around our sense of self, our bodies, our genders, our desires, casting off shame or turning it into an aspect of sexual agency. We bear, broach, and hold space for the knowledges and perspectives of each other as survivors, coming to terms with the violence, trials, and harms that we’ve lived through and lived through our bodies. We find means to move through difficult affects (dysphoria, neglect, trauma, injury, etc.), identifying their sources from medical, familial, therapeutic, and institutional contexts—situating these in the context of an

² Austerity-chic is exemplified in remodelling of public and commercial spaces for an “industrial” vibe, assuming one has never worked in an industrial space, has comfortable furnishings at home or at work, or has a home and workplace at all. These formerly industrial zones house the mocking commercialization of what used to be squat culture.

environment where resources belong and are allocated to a privileged few, while making real the need for professional support to work through these affects at times. We learn to navigate the boxes that we are relegated to, and also play with the effects of these manipulations.³ We learn from the femmes who've come and written before us, comparing persistent and dangerous desires, experiences, troubles, and passions. The emotional work we undertake opens up possibilities in our bodies and also in the social worlds we forge and share. We crack open spaces to flourish, prepare the ground on which to sow flora and link with fauna.

Femme entails the uprooting of structures that denigrate femininity. Femmeness makes a break with the problematic demands on normative (that is, white, cis- and heteronormative, abled, and skinny) femininity, which include demands of certain forms of service, sexualization, objectification, and also consumption. These normative demands are made by patriarchal agents, often husbands or fathers, bosses or managers, even the government; women and LGBT people can dish out these demands by being guardians of the norm, which may be the price for inclusion—policing other women, queers, femmes, and other feminized people, especially when complying with white European norms. Writing of the “rogue femininity” of femme, Elizabeth Marston proposes “that femme is dispossessed femininity.”⁴ To be in the flow of the norms of gender may literally mean you are property (of a husband or family) or that your femininity might be being sold with your labor power (one might be good at this because one's learned that it's expected with patriarchal work discipline, or because one chooses to play the norm for cash). You may have to sell your labor power to reproduce the world of the norm, cleaning it, feeding

³ Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 17.

⁴ Marston, “Rogue Femininity,” 205.

its children, caring for it, especially as a migrant, Black or Brown, feminized person.⁵ To be dispossessed, in this case, is to be locked out of the capitalist relations that cohere in and through gender norms. You might be locked out of the family or the labor market, locked out of the gender binary or literally incarcerated through it, locked out of your house or the place you were born, or all of these.⁶

Femme is the turnaround when one didn't get broken into the norm, or maybe got broken by the norm, and claims conscious nonalignment with it. This means that most of the time you cannot bring these norms with you anymore, in part because you've been disqualified by the norm. In this split from the norm, femme femininities become unrecognizable and illegitimate, as they no longer draw on the tropes of servitude and objectification in a manner that is recognizable to the norm. On the one hand is "femme invisibility"—of one's sexuality, and often also of one's labor or care work—on the other hand, femme femininities are not *for* the norm, but in defiance of it. Yet as Marston writes, in acts of passing one might choose to play the norm,⁸ for whatever reasons we may have—be it for safety, for money, for a roof, or for fun. At best, playing the norm is an act of agency, and one where we know our complicity in a norm that limits us. And yet we are with friends, colleagues, frenemies, who consciously or unconsciously draw upon hegemonic empowerment, who get carried away on undesired social possibilities because they can and claim space without checking their responsibility or responsiveness. We

⁵ Vergès, *Decolonial Feminism*, 81-82.

⁶ For a discussion on the dynamics of violence that trans and gender non-conforming people experience in the prison system, see Stanley and Smith, *Captive Genders*.

⁸ Marston, "Rogue Femininity," 206-7.

acknowledge that resisting the norm also gives space for power grabs, which require their own careful engagements.

In breaking out of servitude, one ends up in a context where servitude is no longer service industry, but similar acts and work might be transformed into a form of care. Caring for other dispossessed people—other queer and trans folks, other marginalized people, the people that we build friendship and life without outside of the norm, is hopefully a more agential position, although it may also be in the form of undervalued, waged labor. Care is about supporting each other's survival, potentially toward flourishing. Defiance of the norm can take the highly pleasurable form of having worked through a lot of one's complicities because giving up was not on the table. We didn't want to give up care, even though care showed itself first as servitude.

Femmes at the Threshold of Institutions

This emotional work forms an underground sociality that contrasts the demands of the public realm. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney propose, the political space of citizenship and participation in institutions is the space of antisociality and counterrelationality: “[Policy is] designed to separate you from others, in the interest of a universality reduced to private property that is not yours, that is the fiction of your own advantage.”⁹ Sociality is submerged under the perfecting demands of production. The standards of perfection and purification that structure the public realm of the citizen by means of institutions strip away blossoming varieties of life. Institutions are not just regulated to close out outsiders—they are the contemporary city walls against the unruly relationalities that are not subject to the forces that have constituted the citizens(?) inside(s). Institutions can monopolise social relations, presenting a limited, seemingly

⁹ Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 77.

desirable set of relational modes, which are enclosed within them. Institutions are made to keep citizens in, to participate in the order that is sustained by violence. Fortress Europe and its escalation, Brexit Britain, are not interventions in a political situation—closure is a foundation of European hegemony. “Managers maintain the institutions that shape the coloniality of power and thus reproduce its perceptual space.”¹⁰ This closure is partly structured by epistemologies that cannot see an outside to the institutional frame. Such dominating epistemologies, whether normative or nonnormative claim to be constituted by the demarcation that cuts the nonnormative off from the possibility of relation.

In the context of this epistemic and social closure, which is fundamental to the history and dominating functions of Europe, femme fronts relationality as attentiveness, as care, as way to openness. Femmes labor for openness while tending to refuse the demands of institutions that would close our worlds, sitting with what can seem like the impossibility of immediate and direct relationality. In these contexts, we try to refuse the abandonment and disposability of other marginalized people, as both an abolitionist praxis and given our own experiences of abandonment and disposability. In a political climate that is structured by xenophobia and rights discourses, with disposability clearly visible on a national level in the United Kingdom through austerity and the coronavirus pandemic, the foundational operations of institutions are laid bare, closing out some while closing others into their ranks.¹¹ Our labor and active practices toward

¹⁰ van der Drift, “Management and Rights, 99.

¹¹ In her PhD dissertation, “Queer Capital: Marxism in Queer Theory and Post-1950 Poetics,” Nat Raha argues that the economic policies and practices of austerity undermine life chances of marginalized and minoritized LGBTQ people, while LGBTQ rights are proffered as the solution to our social problems.

open forms of life make us hesitant to give up the sociality that we forged in these contexts, including the context of minimal rights. Entering institutions as full citizens demands complying with bureaucratic forms of power that work against the solidarities that emerge in social space. Thus, we hesitate at the threshold of the institution upon which we are dependent for income, for work, for hiding in. We learn to recognize the problems and patterns that occur in institutional contexts (which include the family, workplaces, where we study, and where we receive medical attention—not to be easily equated with care) and also in communities and in our social relations, problems that may reinforce the denigration of femmes or of our work or of our love, which might exploit us.¹² But we also trace our own complicities in the dynamics of the contexts we find ourselves in: Where do we slip into closing off, where do we exalt the forms that we live in over the insights that other logics bring? In this essay, we bring this into focus and elaborate how femmes' (from trans femme) attentiveness aids the observation and analysis of such dynamics of complicity, and how femme practices encourage us take action, face frictions, and work through problems in a way that opens up worlds to the rest of us who may need them.

We think through complicity because it allows us to link contextual understanding with actions. Typically, complicity is understood to mean “participation in evil action”—for instance, Charlotte Knowles and Felipa Melo Lopes discuss women who are following patriarchal attitudes toward clothes as complicit in their own oppression.¹³ However, looking at complicity from a nonnormative ethical perspective, some of the actions deemed evil, morally wrong,

¹² In their essay, ‘A Modest Proposal for a Fair Trade Emotional Labor Economy’, Piepzn-Samarasinha discusses the gendered forms of denigration that femmes experience in community and social movement organising. See *Care Work*, 136-48.

¹³ Knowles and Lopes, “How to Dress like a Feminist,” 2.

socially transgressive, or legally objectionable are partly what we might want to participate in. Oscillating between both meanings—that of objectionable action as well as activities objected to by going norms—give us a way to evade the traps of liberal ethics. A focus on complicity counters the social technologies of liberalism (which at times structure critical theory) that demand innocence, offer inclusion, and rely on empowered intervention. Rather than the modernist focus on limiting conditions that can lead to disembedding, to focus on complicity offers *technes*—modes of relating—that allow embrace of embedded indeterminacy, sensuousness, making and holding space for difference.

Speaking of complicity, Moten writes: “I long for complicity. I don’t want to stand out from the general complicity as if I were a bell, or a free and perfect moral agent, as if there were some space outside this shit where only special folks ungather one by one. That place in the sun was always *the* political fantasy, and now they say, to the folks to whom they refuse membership, that if you don’t *want* to join, you ain’t shit.”¹⁴ Femmes are at the heart of such a situation, but not as disembedded critics. The free and perfect moral agent is the mirror of the objective thinker, which we can recognize as the scholar around whom the academic institution is built. As Isabelle Stengers reminds us, this is the position that instigated the witch hunts.¹⁵ The space of moral and epistemological perfection is untouchable, and always elsewhere; its lack of relation makes it prone to indifference because it is fundamentally unsocial. Femmes evade the elevation and sit with our social entanglements, as the everyday mess that we wade through. We think through complicity, rather than, for instance, Michael Rothberg’s proposal to think through

¹⁴ Moten, “Is Alone Together How It Feels to Be Free?”

¹⁵ Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains,” 48.

implication, for its emphasis on action, to replace the focus on subjectivity or understanding.¹⁶ Action is important because—against innocence—we underline that there is no form of action that allows for a frictionless space and that friction is not stemming from misunderstanding or lack of (proper) knowledge per se. The claim to frictionless space is the foundation for modern Eurocentric politics and ethics and, as we propose in this article, it is only by claiming our complicity that we can hold space for what we don't understand, for forms we do not participate in, and for indeterminacy in our own ethical relations to the world. We are not proposing that a focus on complicity can solve problems, but it can support holding friction without demanding subjugation or claiming misunderstanding of one party. Friction can, for instance, stem from difference, from being implicated in the world, and from noncompatible needs and the contradictions that inform our socialities.

Complicity and Friction, in and between Institutions and Collectives

We think about complicity because we live in worlds that link into us in many ways, not all of them voluntary, consensual, or desired. On the one hand, we enter into worlds that are imposed on us, such as the economically hostile environment forces us into jobs we might not want.¹⁷ In this world, we may meet demands that we display professional behavior we might not consent to (for instance, to greet all customers, with courtesy and a smile, while one is mistreated by one's boss, or to participate in the professionalization of trans studies), or be instructed to align with institutional demands that we cannot always stop (we might resist Prevent screenings, or

¹⁶ Rothberg, *Implicated Subject*, 13.

¹⁷ To create and maintain a “Hostile Environment” is the current UK government policy toward migrants, “illegal” immigrants in particular. See for a substantial discussion, see el-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain*.

mandatory attendance monitoring for visas, but teachers still need to grade students—even if from a pedagogical perspective we find it irrelevant or even harmful).¹⁸ When we work on uprooting structures that enclose us in harmful ways, we need to attend to the way these structures also find form within us and in our collectives. Uprooting is not only reviewing situations from a critical distance but entails and occurs through making different forms of life. In these forms of life otherwise, we find pleasure and joy where we meet, love, have sex, organize, and make sense of what matters.

These different worlds—the hegemonic and those we fabricate with each other—are not separated cleanly, nor are the worlds we make for ourselves free from friction. In the worlds we create collectively, we might find ourselves in situations where we are part of a problem, or we are the problem for someone else; and sometimes we may be the problem for ourselves. While resisting imposed worlds, we may find ourselves walked over by the bravado of comrades, or we might escape into a collective in which we are enjoying ourselves, but hear that others find the collective cliquy, unreachable, or out of touch. The issue of complicity presents itself both in institutional settings and in situations where we act collectively.

When dealing with problems in institutions, in organizations, and in organizing, dominant approaches—often led by white liberals—have us ask *how* we transgressed a (perhaps imaginary) law so we can admit to our guilt and promise that we will do better in the future. **{Au: Rephrased for grammar, does this reflect your intended meaning?}** Dominant approaches figure that there is, or can be, a space of frictionless meeting, if only the rules are worked out well, which may take the form of norms. White liberal approaches come with the belief that the

¹⁸ Prevent is a national Governmental program in the UK that purportedly aims to stop ‘radicalization’ and is designed to counter ‘extremism’. It is known to disproportionately target Muslims, and Black and Brown people that. The program received broad condemnation for its racist functioning.

navigation of organized spaces can be translated into norms, which can be scrutinized and critically engaged, and that critical scrutiny is the method to make these worlds “fair.” Scrutiny is the means by which norms reform toward inclusivity.¹⁹ Surveillance is at the heart of criticality. To be included means you are right, not wrong (anymore).

The pursuit of a frictionless environment finds its nexus in claims to “innocence” in a context where the institutions of racial capitalism are key to (re)producing duress. As Gloria Wekker importantly articulates in the Dutch context, white Dutch national, public appeals to innocence are based on the erasure of Dutch colonial history and the violence perpetrated by the Dutch empire well into the twentieth century.²⁰ Wekker identifies innocence as a social, cultural, and historical affective response to the challenges to ignorance of this history. This ignorance turns to smug ignorance, as Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving identify, when available social power is used to (aggressively) deny claims that challenge dominant perceptions.²¹ Innocence is thus “strongly connected to privilege, entitlement and violence that are deeply disavowed.”²² Relatedly, Jackie Wang underlines the importance to anti-racist and abolitionist movements to not get caught up in appeals to innocence in resisting anti-Black police and state violence.²⁴ Such claims unhelpfully lead to appeals of virtuousness that avoid addressing conditions of duress. Wang emphasizes the role of innocence to reaffirm systemic anti-Blackness, within which Black men (in particular) are assumed to be already guilty by the state, the police, and a racist public. Other men, women, queer and trans, and disabled people of color may also face an assumption of

¹⁹ Cf. Raz, “Moral Change and Social Relativism, 155-157.”

²⁰ Wekker, *White Innocence*, 13-16.

²¹ Essed and Hoving, “Innocence, Smug Ignorance, Resentment, 11.”

²² Wekker, *White Innocence*, 18.

²⁴ Wang, *Carceral Capitalism*, 261-266.

guilt. Through these structural assumptions of guilt, it can be discerned that the state of innocence is not an internal sense expressing virtuous behavior, but a structural condition that indicates hegemonic positionality. One is assumed innocent because one is bestowed with social power.

This leads us to formulate that, in institutional contexts, innocence may also emerge as the bourgeois feminine complement to masculine transgressions. The gendered dynamics of innocence and transgression tend toward a refusal of accountability to those (set up to be) closed out from the normative space that binary whiteness protects. Innocence coheres heteronormative feminine virtues, because a claim to innocence signals the willingness to guard dominant norms, by showing that the claimant is willing to subject to them. In these contexts, masculine transgressions of dominant norms signal who is relieved from scrutiny, and thus hold the space for nonconsensual change of organizational forms by other means of violence. Deviation from the norm by those that are not empowered by heteronormative masculinity “invites” punishment to keep the normative space closed. When there is public awareness of these dynamics, liberal approaches hope that there can be an institutional space structured by norms that can be inclusive enough to allow for internal accountability. In this restructure, institutions endeavor to be free from having to consider different, outside perspectives.²⁵ Liberal spaces protect and contain a single order that refuses to engage with different ways of being in the world besides their own.²⁶ Inclusion, therefore, requires that marginalized people adhere to norms and the logics of the existing space, and in this manner, inclusion protects the functioning of white patriarchal

²⁵ Abbas, “Voice Lessons.”

²⁶ Van {van} der Drift, “Management and Rights, 103.”

capitalism.²⁷ This is why requests for inclusion on the basis of innocence and unjust victimization backfire by enforcing the power of dominant norms and narratives, which cannot adapt to alternative experiences and insights. Inclusion does not function as a *disciplinary* genre of patriarchy, but instead leaves content (of literature, films, seminars) open for patriarchy to retreat into a control of structure, which keeps content immobilized in inflexible organizational forms. Authority in these structures works through fragmentation rather than command, and dealing with the fall out of this fragmentation is relegated to the shop floor. The content-free approach of organizations works to ignore duress while at the same supporting claims towards diversity. It is in such moments that a claim to innocence by the white heteronormative feminine signals its defense of dominant norms, while challenges to these aggressive statements of innocence are seen as violent and in need of policing.²⁸

We might, however, also face the reproduction of norms and the activation of white innocence in queer and trans—and femme—spaces.²⁹ This may occur from drawing on preexisting social networks (perhaps built on preexisting exclusions such as whiteness, or made within institutional contexts), or through organizing exclusively online (reproducing inaccessibility and cliqueness, ignoring the situatedness of groups). The unchallenged emergence of certain norms may lead institutional logics into a collective—such as when there is an impetus

²⁷ Raha, “Limits of Trans Liberalism.”

²⁸ See, for instance, Vergès’s analysis of white feminism’s complicity in colonial projects and the institution of slavery, and the defense of these positions by governmental feminists (*Decolonial Feminism*, 16–42).

²⁹ Transmisogyny is one particular dynamic of constricted norms that is often addressed in transfeminist writing and that the authors have challenged and are working to undo in queer and trans organising. See Raha, “Transfeminine Brokenness” for a detailed discussion.

to rush into actions, declaring a crisis (when those facing the brunt of the problem have long since known of it), throwing only money at it, or acting in a way that betrays the desire to be the person or people who “fix” the problem or “solve” the identified crisis—that is, the desire to be a white savior.

We experience how liberalism’s single order works to hedge against what—from their perspective—seems to be chaos and an overwhelming variety of ways of worlding. This takes the form of hedging against a presumed failure of sitting with the materiality of our lives by striving for the elevated perfection of criticality. Liberal defenses by denial and purification have been used against us, our lives, friends, and spaces where we gather. Thinking with complicity—rather than being framed in an affective binary of guilt/innocence, especially when situating ourselves within an understanding and narration grounded in decoloniality—allows for a conversation that gauges and works with frictions and engages seriously with the need to redistribute resources and power from their enclosures in institutions. Even if we are marginally positioned within these spaces, this allows for us to engage with how we might practice solidarity as a mode of undercommoning from the inside, where undercommoning means to get together outside of the institution’s capture. Therefore, when we have to go to work in institutions, and when we make social organizations and life together, we start by holding space for openness, holding the socialities within, by claiming to be part of the problem—part of the conflicts against duress and domination. We are not better than anyone, we are simply the rest. As Mariama Kaba and Kai Cheng Thom each discuss, claiming complicity and participation may lead toward a set of abolitionist practices that do not rely on the victim-perpetrator schema.³⁰

³⁰ Kaba, *We Do This 'Till We Free Us*, 44-8.; Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love*, 84-95.

Similarly, Moten and Harney propose that embracing complicity disrupts the individuation imposed by organizations and allows a collective mode of approaching duress.³¹

Claiming to be part of the problem, wherever you might find yourself in the context, keeps the problem collective and demands collective involvement—rather than to divest the problem into an individualist scheme where friction is simultaneously general (your actions as expression of your positionality in relation to my actions as translation of my positionality) and individualized, as if friction is a direct expression of the interrelation between two people. Claiming to be part of the problem disallows the liberal space of innocence, because, to invoke Miss Major and Arthur Rimbaud, we’re still here.³² The liberal scheme draws on the elevation of social positions, claiming structures are general and actions are direct expressions of structures. In moralist inversions of the structures of duress, it is claimed that the general position, the signifier, offers a space of privileged insight. Both perspectives understand social positions through a categorical lens. But while Blackness and transness can show the way to liberation, as Marquis Bey, Moten, and C. Riley Snorton all contend, it is not because of the inclusion in a generalized category, but because of sociality and resistance that has survived and formed under duress.³³ In contrast, when friction is individualized, it returns us to the mechanics of the institution: the institution exists to individualize and empower those up the hierarchy. To use individualization in moments of friction as the tool to disarm socialities is a way to hedge the institution against critique. The well-known trope of claiming it is a “bad apple” that is harassing, for example, students (or arrestees, or incarcerated people, or femmes on the street),

³¹ Moten and Harney, *All Incomplete*, 133.

³² Opheilan (dir.), *MAJOR!*.

³³ Moten, “Conversation with Fred Moten”; Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*; Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*.

ensures that structures of duress, precarity, overwork, and power imbalance do not need to be addressed. Complicity reminds us to acknowledge interrelations as already contextual, and that they lean on social forms that are either tolerated, endorsed, or developed in a collective. This tolerance-endorsement might have provided the structure for the actions of the bad apple.³⁴ This is not to say that nonnormative forms are free from hegemonic social structures, but a collective responsibility for the practices that are present in a group, including the responsibility to change them, might spotlight another way of engaging friction, rather than forms of accountability that are oftentimes individualized. This shift from individual accountability, with its resonance of calculable and individualized wrongs, to collective responsibility is made possible by the eager claim to complicity.³⁵ To give an example, Gloria Anzaldúa maps out how she entered an argument about whiteness/normativity in a feminist conference with all of her knowledge and politics. While trying to engage, the situation shifted in such a way that she found herself to be the problem.³⁶ By trying to mediate and hold space for dialogue between hegemonically operating white women and women of color with accomplices, Anzaldúa became implicated in structures that she's been organizing against. These pressures are a recurring problem in certain feminist conferences that Anzaldúa describes.³⁷ Anzaldúa has the courage to admit that her

³⁴ Ivan Reitman's popular film *Ghostbusters* (1984) starts off with the supposedly humorous character of Dr. Peter Venkman, played by Bill Murray, who is harassing students in a textbook example of this problem.

³⁵ We wish to thank Layal Ftouni for proposing to think through responsibility rather than accountability alone.

³⁶ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 143-149.

³⁷ This is a similar dynamic to one that we've witnessed in European trans studies: a well-intended call for papers for a conference, sometimes but also often not led by trans scholars, will encourage contributions addressing trans politics emerging from grassroots, left, radical, or

efforts to sustain dialogue lead to becoming implicated in the problem—even if she didn't feel like she had another choice. From within whiteness, this step is often evaded, or translated into guilt, claims to innocence, or self-centeredness.

Such a conference is but an example of how pervasively duress shows up uninvited through forbidding structures, a logic that is recognizable in trans and queer lives. There is no withdrawing into a form of life which allows avoiding structural problems. The kind of problems faced in trans life—from the interwoven pressures of racism, xenophobia, ableism, misogyny to mutual frictions caused by structural stress, precarity—inhibit clear and collective ways of coping, which in itself defies the frictionless and problem-free, policy-based hopes of liberalism. To embrace complicity is a way to interrupt the space-making practices that are required by the normative dynamics of binary gendering. In these spaces, transgression and agency go hand in hand, as well as victimization and passivity. Due to the passive nature of the “victim,” or so the story goes, an external force is required to intervene and protect.

community perspectives, acknowledging their significance for trans life, practices and theory. However, a conference may unfold with immediate problems: for instance, a lack of accessibility or breaks between sessions; cis researchers studying trans subjects failing to situate themselves, meanwhile objectifying trans people's experiences and knowledge and presenting this to a trans audience; institutions hosting the conferences demanding identity documents from participants; or explicit incidences of racism. Positive responses from such incidents—which are exhausting and detrimental to scholars who are harmed, or who need to make callouts during these conferences—include organizers learning, reflecting and shifting their orientations within their complicities; less positive responses include organizers continuing to use their institutional privileges to further their careers, capitalizing on supposedly successful conferences. Such incidents have actively harmed the development of trans studies in Europe. For discussion of one example, see “STRIKE!”

Innocence introduces force, and force demands allegiance, which is why a performance of innocence as harmlessness is necessary. It is an enactment of the promise of renewing the bond with the institutionalized force. The entire model of individualization retains the structure that requires perpetrators, police, and judgements. Centering complicity as sociality, as conspiracy, dashes the liberal hope for a normatively clear, frictionless space.³⁸ For liberals, such a frictionless space promotes adherence to a single order and jobs for management: hierarchy and control are required elements, which introduce duress for some and a smooth ride for those in charge.

At this stage, we want to remind ourselves that there is a difference between people who are closed out by nonnormative collectives—for instance, by racism—and the hurt this causes, and people that find themselves at the heart of collective and (perhaps inadvertently) close themselves off to certain perspectives, experiences of duress, or modes of solidarity. The claim to complicity from either side of the break functions very differently—complicity in practices that make people leave invites a different manner of reflection than complicity with those same practices when one is closed out. Evoking Thom, this does not mean that we side with a liberal vision, which claims a truth that lies in the middle.³⁹ Rather, we sit with the point that, in social justice work, we are collectively responsible for the way we interact, even if it means that we cannot always solve the problems emerging directly in specific interactions. The hurt of being closed out by what was assumed to be a place where one could perhaps flourish and find companionship is real after all. Stepping away from single orders and into the fray of social life requires embracing that we act, that actions make patterns, and that these patterns might not be

³⁸ Moten and Harney, *All Incomplete*. 133.

³⁹ Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love*, 20.

all open and free. To face that is to face how we can show up for each other in the way we make and hold space.

Tensions Threading Fabrics of Worlds—Complicity and Solidarity

In layered and complex communities—where we are faced with the problem that contradictions do not lead to a capitalist breakdown, and that with a lack of skills, contradictions can lead to breakdowns of communities—the sensuous is one of the spaces for subtending direct contradictions and frictions (we expand on this below). Friction is not so much the lack of smooth pathways, but can indicate the points where worlds do not overlap.⁴⁰ Individual members of a group, who work from the idea that their views match the needs, interests, and directions of the group and articulate these *as if* they emerge from the group as a whole, create a submerged structure of in-group indifference.⁴¹ Meanwhile, other members of the group may be aware that their needs are deviating from this particular perspective—sometimes because of their overlaps

⁴⁰ Lugones, *Pilgrimages*, 140.

⁴¹ This idea results from similar categorical epistemology as discussed above, which relies on a generalized claim of incorporation of social pressures and regulative normativity: a gay man has the same logical form as gay men, because pressures and norms shape the pattern that is lived out. This claim relies on an Enlightenment metaphysics that proposes knowledge (and thus structure) is ahead of action, that action is therefore submissive to knowledge, and that knowledge is contained in a single order from which there is no escape. See for discussion of this point Van der Drift, “Management and Rights.”, 108. For a theory of oppression, a totalizing account might be impressive. However, such a conflation of the social with the general leads to a demobilization, rather than activation, of one’s agency, because it does not support resistance, as María Lugones reminds us (*Pilgrimages*, 55).

with other groups, or because they come with different histories and needs.⁴² The sensuous complexity of the multiple worlds highlights that needs are neither particular nor translatable as commensurable group requirements.

In these circumstances, complicity leads the way in which we can understand solidarity. We want to discuss how (trans) femmeness approaches collectivity and its attendant problems. This partly means thinking about how to deal with finding oneself the problem, but without lapsing into guilt, defending ignorance, or hoping for a world in which innocence is an option.

We therefore sit with two sides of thinking through complicity. First, it is about finding the right relation to what your position is in the world.⁴³ In white responses to structures of duress, one's relation to one's position in the world is often interrelated with guilt, but it is more interesting than that. It entails attending to where one is, and what one can do from that place. From that contextualization, one can find when one is responsible for stepping in, for creating/supporting collective resistance, or contributing ideas to the collective domain. The right relation is not quite the same as positionality. Where positionality refers to a structural situatedness, the right relation is directed and a direction, and applying agency from where one is. From here, femme relational approaches work to hold space open, to try not to conflate various layers of life with a general structure, in part by being attentive. Such attentiveness aims at finding the right relation to one's surroundings.

Finding the right relation entails questioning roles and practices in a communal context. Focusing on practices connects embodied action with (liberating) imaginaries, rather than hiding

⁴² Lugones, *Pilgrimages*, 140. Lugones discusses these different positions in terms of “transparent” or “thick.”

⁴³ Van der Drift, “Nonnormative Ethics.”, 181.

actions under structuring rules, pretending that the rule is the problem and denying translation of rules into actions. An embodied approach that links action, knowledge, and forms has been termed a “somatechnical” approach.⁴⁴ *Somatechnics* stems partly from *techne*: a reliance on ways of relating that are held communally. In this context, that means placing one’s being amidst the modes of relating that support the collective. While rules rely on general and generalizing terms that remain constant across different contexts or situations, relations in flux and keep differences situated. Norms as rules of interaction evade nongeneralised differences. *Techne*, instead, require contextual translation, whereby differences not only remain intact but can even flourish. Attention to context, and to structural and generalized pressures, enables thinking about complicity, delineating power relations that might be constraining or troubling for collectives. This discussion is sometimes known through its focal point of positional privilege, but it is wider—it comes with dominating imaginaries, sensorial disconnection, and misreading of actions. Finding the right relation might mean letting go of certain commitments and extending generosity to different approaches and views, rather than aiming to contain the collective in a single form. Understanding complicity here underlines how one can be part of a general sense of impeded agency, whether it is one’s own limited perspective or holding space for another’s experience of being limited. Questioning modes of relation reframes limitations with a perspective toward action, rather than assuming that one’s actions are the expression of a general structure of duress. This means that the elevation of criticality that comes with an attitude of attendant hierarchy is transposed into an emphasis on context with an anarchic tendency. In this context, generosity is a mode of solidarity that is mindful of difference. Here lies the key

⁴⁴ Sullivan, *Somatechnics*, 187.

difference to normative inclusion, which scrutinizes the margins and subsequently demands adaptation.

From this contextual approach, an understanding of nonhierarchical complicity centers on being open to alliances, friction, and arguments, because one is ready to question the organization of practices. The imaginary that can be associated with such ways of being in collectives is a readiness to say: I stand here and I'm open to the tension that goes on. Tension does not need to be denied, because it is part of the current structure of relation. From this point on there is the possibility of enhancing openness either within the collectives or between collectives. The advantage of embracing such complicity without guilt is that it gives room for experiment, play, embellishment, and new senses of joy. Friction in these instances highlights not so much the tension between hegemony or normativity and nonnormativity but the points where collectives close off from certain connections. Working with and through such tensions, as in instances of queer, trans, and/or femme world-making, is less a set of critical actions that clears up misunderstandings in the existing order (e.g., rushing into organizing to “solve” a crisis) as it is a sensuous opening to ways of worlding. Working through tensions is not a miracle cure that clears up every friction, but it leaves space for stepping back and letting go, as well as finding new forms of relationality. Complicity lends the perspective that one does not need to aim to be holding the “true” analysis, but that mutual understanding is partial, practical, and situated.

Thinking and living through trans femme entails embracing new forms of life that are not absorbed into the norm per se. However, there are practices (including nonnormative ones) we are involved in that still may create problems, practices that sometimes still feel good to us. Such practices may need to be retuned without a total overthrow—certainly some elements and tones

must become conscious. This is about how one *does* practice, including how practices become embodied and how that embodiment serves to shield closedness and duress from view (for instance, in dominant bodies coming together to constitute social groups). The practice of reflection is equally situated in this view. This can create the conditions of embodied disconnection or separation for those marginalized by these practices by reifying emotional and sensorial differences, epistemic differences, experiential differences, or different histories.⁴⁵ Sometimes, the disconnect in marginalized bodies occurs from being out of sync with, or overwhelmed by, one's context or surroundings. In complex collectives, these differences cannot necessarily be solved, but such disconnection leads to friction. However, such disconnect may open toward how—to invoke Denise Ferreira da Silva—we can be different without reproducing separability, the problem in ethics that is open to be solved hopefully by our generations.⁴⁶ Sometimes, such friction can be extra hurtful, for instance, because the collective was a “first home,” or the collective that made things possible, or it was a space of safety that feels shattered. Being open to acknowledging such complicities in these moments is a starting point for addressing difficult tensions—they are not solved simply by an analysis of social hierarchy (even if that can play a role) or by attributions of innocence and guilt. The latter are unhelpful elements in the emotional sensorium. Connection across social differences can be exhilarating and inspiring, grow understanding and complexity, and keep spaces open when a logic of homogeneity would close them.

⁴⁵ Raha, “Transfeminine Brokenness,” 632–33.

⁴⁶ Ferreira da Silva, “On Difference without Separability, 57, 65.” See Raha and van der Drift, *Trans Femme Futures*, Chapters 3 and 5, for an extensive discussion of this question.

Care in Collective Worlds—Receiving Labor, Offering Generosity

Heterogenous collectives may gather and organize upon ground held by relations of care. In reflecting upon these relations of care, we can consider the relationship of agency to openness and vulnerability. To give care may demand time, energy, attentiveness, will or willingness, and preferably also empathy and affective engagement; and offering care needn't be thought of as in direct opposition to receiving care, as in practice these are interrelated. As witnessed especially in 2020 during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, people may join collectives because they are ready to be supportive, yet in joining and offering care, may have relied on private structures for their own care, refraining from asking the collective for support. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha describes how many people want to give care, but don't want to express vulnerability by receiving care.⁴⁷ In a moment of social crisis, those who “step in” to support others⁴⁸ themselves refrain from expressing vulnerability—which in turn requires a degree of openness. An openness to expressing one's vulnerability ought to be considered agential—the opposite of this idea is that disabled people or trans people are not agents when it comes to our (health) care needs, with ableism bringing toxic feelings of sympathy and othering. The drive to support others, while either refusing or seemingly not needing to receive care, reproduces a

⁴⁷ Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*; see also Withers, “Cracks in My Universe.” Both authors address their experiences of collective care among disabled people, who in turn may struggle with internalised ableism, while discussing the relationship between vulnerability and ableism.

⁴⁸ During the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many regular jobs shut down, many people were able to offer up free time and labor for mutual aid and care work; however, essential workers in health, social care, and cleaning sectors were of course pushed to the limits, facing high risks of coronavirus infection in their workplaces and while travelling to work. The influx of offers of free time and labor largely dried up with the “return to normal” or “new normal,” while a situation of extensive care needs continued to a considerable degree.

dynamic of philanthropy—“I am ‘generous’ with the wealth/capital/labour/skills I have accumulated (or hoarded) and will do good or fund activities to reproduce the world as I see it” (from an uncritical colonial, bourgeois imperialist position).⁴⁹ This can reassure the racial and gendered divisions of labor under capitalism that structure care—where marginalized Black, Indigenous, Brown, feminized, disabled, trans, queer and/or migrant people typically bear the burden of much of the world’s care work in waged and institutional relations, and also in social relations.⁵⁰ Affluent white people (those who have resources) in organizations or collectives may immediately run to “solve” the problems (that is, throw money/time at these problems while not addressing their structural causes) that are visible from their world, reproducing a dynamic of white supremacy. Meanwhile, marginalized folks find ourselves dislocated and disconnected in the world that works for the privileged, while fighting and struggling to maintain our worlds, our bodies, our lives. While the conditions in which marginalized people have higher care needs emerge from structural dynamics and social separability, the practices and aptitudes we manifest for support demonstrate the need for and possibilities of openness—although consent is also crucial for openness to not lead to exploitation and harm.⁵¹ Building relations, creating and supporting resistance from one’s context, entails acknowledging our interdependency, learning to extend our lives outwards, while unlearning the neoliberal expectations of self-sufficiency (itself a myth of racial capitalism that depends upon unequal divisions of labor globally, the

⁴⁹ For discussions of the violence of philanthropy, functioning through non-reciprocal care relations, historically and in the present, see Chapman and Withers, *Violent History of Benevolence*; Spade, *Mutual Aid*, 21–29.

⁵⁰ Vergès, *Decolonial Feminism*, 1-3; Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 32–68.

⁵¹ Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*. We discuss the relationship between care and separability in detail in Raha and Vvan der Drift, *Trans Femme Futures*, Chapter 2.

exploitation of people, labor, land, natural “resources” and more, all of which are rooted in colonial dispossession) and the practices that may entrench these expectations.⁵²

Group work in a large communal structure is not always for everybody. A lot of time is spent talking to create space for decision making—to make such spaces work as a whole relies on femme labor in the background. The space of talking is purportedly about decisions, but the collective that can hold such decisions is made in the “little work” of femme labor. As Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, “Our organizing skills . . . are incredible, and often not respected as much as masculine leaders’, or indeed seen as skills.”⁵³ When that disappears, communal structures tend not to hold up, letting go of the bodies they support.⁵⁴ Collectives focus on exchanging information or insights, but they work together to make relations hold. To arrive with opinions about decisions is not how everybody works, and is definitely not how groups work. Giving can be about giving attention, rather than sharing insights, and receiving is equally about receiving words as it is about receiving a listening ear.

If femme labor or care is not present or driven out, organizations may cohere into a more centralized structure. This can be frustrating because it is *the* classic thing, and it is sometimes

⁵² For discussions of dispossession and racial capitalism, see Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 873-876, and Singh, “On Race, Violence and ‘So-Called Primitive Accumulation’”, 49-50; for a sketch of racial divisions of labour, see Vergès, *Decolonial Feminism*, 55-58. At the time of writing—summer 2021—the myth of self-sufficiency is alive and well in the United Kingdom, where staying free from contracting coronavirus has been deemed a “personal responsibility” detached from government failures to prevent mass infection alongside decades of underfunding the National Health Service.

⁵³ Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 139.

⁵⁴ Raha, “Transfeminine Brokenness,” 638–639.

better if a group disbands and ceases to be. Sociality helps to both band together to disband collectives. A femme sociality can support unlearning hegemony, while opening ourselves up to the other forms that surround us. Unlearning indicates two different things that are grouped under one term. The first unlearning is a preparation of being ready against the pushy demands of hegemony, of whiteness, of patriarchy. The second unlearning leans on knowing what we know from where we are—even if we know it will not guide us now in an opening up, it is the curiosity to mingle what we know to do with what we didn't experience (yet). This opening up makes sociality happen, and it doesn't lean on the demands of unity as similarity that structures hegemony and that pushed us out in the first place. Lugones explains this working of hegemony as being in a world where “his sense is the only sense,” which we step away from.⁵⁵ Moving away from this logic of purity, which is always a logic of control, we step into a sense of losing what we bring, stalling it, to pick it up later perhaps. We are not looking for a replacement of what we know but allowing the holes in our experience to support sociality. It is not about having the right kind of knowledge instead of ignorance, but about supplying the right kind of openness to let in what we don't know. Sometimes knowing what we don't know is a longitudinal problem: we have to walk into it a few times, and that means we need some support from people to make sense of these issues. Embracing that is an act of resistance, as Lugones lays out when she names it a “social commentary.”⁵⁶ Such commentary is only possible in a sociality that is open to a different sense. Solving everything from where one is lacks a certain span both in its combining of collective knowledges and longitudinal experiences.

⁵⁵ Lugones, *Pilgrimages*, 143.

⁵⁶ Lugones, *Pilgrimages*, 146.

The practices that can emerge from femmeness do not lean on a single order of being in the world: femmeness is neither singly logical, sensorial, or affective. This allows for different connections to be made and to grow into sets of practices, even if one is just learning the ropes. The refusal to reduce worlding to a single sense (e.g., the visual or the logical) allows worlding to become luxurious. Maintaining a singular emphasis in connecting to the world may embrace a scarcity frame—purifying practices restrict the cross-pollination of worlds, creating competition between explanations, understanding, and points of view. When one’s world consists of a single logic, one is asked to give up all one has; but in a world saturated with an abundance of connections, such generosity is merely a way to renew one’s sense of connection. In preparing to give up a way of knowing, or not, it (almost) doesn’t matter what logic I bring—in the moment I start to impose it, I become the problem. The moment one is ready to dissolve a single order, complicity becomes complexity, and the space can be held differently.

Retuning Intuitions and Rewiring the Sensuous

Neoliberalism emerged as a politics of indifference that relies on increasing authoritarian structures that reinforce commodifying institutional logics.⁵⁷ In this hostile environment (xenophobic politics are always a mirror of how states treat residents and citizens), care may be practiced with an attentiveness to differences and different ways of worlding. Breaking out of the singular logics that structure complicities in exclusion lays open the complexity of the pluriverse. In a sensuous materialism (informed by José Esteban Muñoz), Joshua Chambers-Letson writes, “Commensurability, necessary for market exchange, flattens the sensuous and detailed nature of life as it is actually lived.”⁵⁸ Writing about the sensuous awareness of world-making in their

⁵⁷ The Care Collective, *Care Manifesto*, 18.

⁵⁸ Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 145.

serious and playful forms, Chambers-Letson reminds us that knowledge concerns both risk and play, and is not limited to the articulable. Femme embellishment taps into these playful and serious sensuous sets of awareness to nudge one to reopen oneself to the world.

In part, whiteness is reproduced because white people do not often think that they need to learn a different structure in which to be, and thus an idea of so-called common sense leads to actions that reproduce dominant structures. The responsibility that comes with sensitizing toward various ways of worlding requires the difficult acknowledgement that one's intuition about how to do things is perhaps the wrong intuition. This brings the discussion to the rewiring of the sensory, which entails a retuning of the intuitive. This rewiring is (in part) conscious, involving presence and gentleness—and it undoes the essentialist idea that intuition is a singular thing. Yet intuition is an important part of not being alienated from oneself too. One does not “have” an intuition, but intuition emerges from one's connection to environments, connecting with sociality to how one reaches out and interplays with the surrounding world. Even when operating within hegemony, one can make material differences: how and who one reaches out to and supports, addressing if a relation is closing or opening, and being attentive to who one loses in the process.

Thus, when one feels that one's intuition says something is wrong, something *is* wrong, but sometimes that something is one's intuition—our sensing is not indifferent to duress and at times aligns with it, even if it is not the only thing it does. Sometimes this alignment is direct and brings institutional practices or the institution itself into spaces where people have tried to keep it out or to work against it. This happens, for instance, in the demand that relations are mapped out on the terms of institutions. Such moments can be countered intuitively—such as knowing when there is no place to go. In a drive that emerges as hunger—which shows up in spaces where relationality is stripped away—intuition works to pull one through and bring one to another

place.⁶⁰ This hunger can also show in spaces where one is absent in the presence of others, where one is unseen. This can be a hunger to be alive, a hunger for a different life, for a different sociality that opens up another sense of the world—which is what transness is, lived in and through the body and the world(s). Transness is not the rebellion against what is preordained by God or nature (as if we are restaging the Enlightenment), but transness is a different hunger. As Ambalaver Sivanandan would perhaps agree, it is a hunger for a life perhaps not lived yet, which we are rehearsing in the underground.⁶¹ As Stuart Hall reminds us, this strategy of “principled, militant, intransigent in opposition: yet gentle in personal relationship—is reserved for comrades and friends with whom [one] has become linked and bound in struggle, ‘below ground.’”⁶² The openness that senses the world in a different way is where complicity kicks in, where we are with each other, where we do not abandon each other to the demands of the institution, but intuitively feel our way out.

To retune one’s intuition may be conceived as one aspect of a rewiring of the sensuous that femmeness inaugurates, in and through the worlds femmes create and remake. Through institutional critique and decoloniality, embracing the lines of attention and flight that come with queer and trans femme desires—from one’s gaydar; to the desire to be strapped up and fucked or to fuck in certain ways; to finding new ways to hold friendships; to the drive to abolish patriarchal and racist conservative institutions such as the nuclear family or gender clinic;

⁶⁰ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 127–28.

⁶¹ Addressing the experience of second-generation Black and Brown migrants facing repressive material and social conditions maintained by the state in 1980s Britain, Sivanandan calls a different hunger “the hunger to retain the freedom, the lifestyle, the dignity which they have carved out from the stone of their lives” (*A Different Hunger*, epigraph).

⁶² Stuart Hall, Introduction to Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*, x.

through the worlds and ways of life we forge and hold together; to the ways we collectivize our care labor for the remaking of our ensouled bodyminds and somatechnics, refusing the disposability of marginalized bodyminds; to the politicized aesthetics and joy we derive from our deep recognition and embrace of rogue, abject and/or high femininity. We come to know the politics in our queer desires that draw out attention otherwise.⁶³ We mobilize all of these to dethrone racial capitalism in our everyday lives, on the streets, and sometimes in our labor relations. As we learn from Sean Bonney and Kirsten Ross, during the height of the 1871 Paris Commune, Rimbaud proposed the necessity for poets to “cultivate” one’s soul through “a long, immense, and logical derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness.”⁶⁴ Rimbaud endeavored in this historical moment to undo the grip of empire on souls through the senses. In this spirit, we propose that anticolonial femmes are in the work of rewiring our senses anew—rewired in and through our ensouled bodyminds (unlearning allegiances to the Cartesian body/mind separation), situated and in relation to the worlds we make together and that we need and desire.⁶⁵ This rewiring can be supported by hormones, as Eva Hayward, speaking of taking Premarin, describes how one’s “proprioceptive sense is as radically changed as external presentation.”⁶⁶ While a change of soma under medicalized and Cartesian frames is conceived as the only cure for the transsexual mind, Hayward underlines how the “expressive potential of the body, its capacity to respond to the world, is substantively modified, transforming the sensuous

⁶³ Lang/Levitsky, “Our Own Words.”

⁶⁴ Rimbaud quoted in Bonney, “Comets and Barricades”; for a discussion of Rimbaud and the Paris Commune, see also Ross, *Emergence of Social Space*; and Raha, *Queer Capital*, 55–59.

⁶⁵ Van der Drift, “Nonnormative Ethics, 185-187.”

⁶⁶ Hayward, “Spider City Sex,” 229.

exchange of self and environment.”⁶⁷ Undoing and unfeeling embodied norms and (cisnormative) ways of bodying, which were perhaps never intuitive, comes through body-conscious and chemical transformation, provided one finds presence in a world that understands these implications for material relations and exchange with one’s surroundings. Femme is a mode of relational solidarity that doesn’t claim possession—questioning that sense of having, that enlightenment desire to possess.⁶⁸ Practices of decoloniality entail undermining how we have been schooled to know through our bodyminds in forms that would reassure orders and material relations of racial capitalism.

With multilayered openings to ways of worlding, from the intellectual to the intuitive and sensorial, it is not about what to claim, but how to relate and how to be/make that are stake. We desire luxuriousness and abundance, good food, to embellish ever-opening relationality and embrace world traveling (à la Lugones)—in the face of organized scarcity and dispossession under racial capitalism, which only understands luxuriousness and abundance as the accumulation and hoarding of material wealth. We modify the demand from the 2018 Women’s Strike—“Bread and Roses for All, and Hormones Too”⁶⁹—planting new shoots for food and flowers, even if our gardens grow on top of concrete or amid high-rise buildings. We grow into lives we were warded off from, we make gardens with the friends we were once taught to avoid. Indeed, we desire and love each other, other queers and other trans people, in the face of our

⁶⁷ Hayward, “Spider City Sex,” 229.

⁶⁸ Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 21. On the Enlightenment desire to possess, see Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 16.

⁶⁹ “Bread and Roses for All.”

denigration and abjection from norms and institutions, we love amid the refusal of their logics of value (and social capital). Hard is this love but we love hard.

Participants in nonnormative forms of life become skilled in holding different worlds simultaneously. Lugones termed this “world-travelling” and rested this idea on the building and moving between different worlds to elaborate sense-making.⁷⁰ Femmeness holds spaces where sensing can be opened up to different layers in that world and between worlds, without claiming a singular way to make sense. Trans femme worlding is a collective practice that does not claim a stable world—we reach out beyond the mire of the present, the “prison house” of the “here and now,”⁷¹ proposing the future *is* now. “That is,” in words of Lola Olufemi, “the future is not in front of us, it is everywhere simultaneously. We only have to turn around.”⁷² Why wait for inclusion in a neoliberal form that one doesn’t really want—given it primarily wants us on board to aid the enactment of its own logics, with diversity window dressing—when it is possible and necessary to shape forms of living in the present that reflect life in a way one wants to live it. Here, in practice, we try out forms of life that enhance solidarity and that may bring some worlds closer, if not together. Sometimes practices or collectives fail, and we learn from their mistakes. The emphasis on practice means that it is not a way of knowing that is at stake, but a way of making worlds that in turn support changes in ensouled bodyminds, where reflection follows the action; we learn through moving across worlds with care and attentiveness to different positions and hirstories.⁷³

⁷⁰ Lugones, *Pilgrimages*, 91-93.

⁷¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

⁷² Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, 35.

⁷³ “Hirstory” is an alternate conception of history, that works to unearth and cognise the significance of gender non-conforming people within the historical record. For a discussion of the concept, see Raha and Baars, “The Place of the Transfagbidyke is in the Revolution”, 176-179.

The practices of embracing complicity and complexity as generous, attentive care link to the abolition of structures of duress in their punitive form. Carceral technologies function to keep a single order in its place through their suppression of rebellion and redistribution and their expansion of racial criminalization. We see hegemony as the impetus to dominate through practices that disconnect; we understand social justice work as relating to undoing structures of separation—which does not mean we have to form a single collective in which everybody fits. Practices of holding space for different worlds, responses to each other that are not based in hierarchy, unity, or functionality, require rethinking how forms of life can be held when they are not policed. A generous opening of forms embraces different manners of sense-making, bringing a reprieve from the exhausting demands amid the divisions of labor and life, of land and bodies, under capital. Within femme worlds, solidarity holds out the possibility of rewiring the senses of our ensouled bodies, retuning our intuitions into the frequencies of our complicities; different flowers come into bloom.

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